



NEWSLETTER

SPRING/SUMMER 2020

Welcome from our new chairman – Michael Chartier

Since becoming Chair of the Friends of Lewes I have been impressed by the desire of the Executive and other FoL committees to ensure that we should continue to function and champion the needs of our community, although regrettably under very different conditions and circumstances.

We are all familiar with the normal range of activities including various talks and the Heritage Open Days. Many of these events are also dependent on our relationship with other bodies and partners including Lewes Town Council, Lewes District Council and many individuals. We will seek to reintroduce all of these activities as soon as possible when public safety is no longer an issue, as well as looking at possible new ways of delivering value and information. In the meantime, I hope this newsletter is helpful.

I would like to take this opportunity to reassure you that my colleagues and I recognise the importance of our membership and with this in mind we will endeavour to keep you informed through this difficult time. To that end, one of our trustees, Jane Slater, will be contacting our members over the next few weeks to keep FoL in touch with you.

Succession Planning Update from Neil Merchant

In the last newsletter, I explained how we were approaching the challenge of finding a new chair, secretary and trustees to fill our various vacancies. Since then, we have successfully recruited **Michael Chartier** as our Chair, **Diana Freestone**, who was our minutes secretary, as our Secretary and **Fiona Kay**, **Jane Slater** and **Martin Ackland** as trustees. **Barbara Merchant**, who has managed our website and Facebook presence for several years has also just joined the EC, having additionally just taken on the newly created Communications and PR role.

This mostly completes our immediate work, though we now need a replacement minutes secretary, and we will be looking for future trustees to replace those who may be retiring next year.

Michael Chartier will be well-known to you as an active former town mayor and local councillor over many years. The other new recruits' brief bios follow:

Martin Ackland, Trustee

I was born in Hillingdon, Middlesex and, after a short period teaching English in Italy, I have lived and worked in London most of my adult life. Two years ago my wife and I made the bold decision to leave our five daughters to their own devices in the big city and move to Lewes. It has proved to be an excellent decision. Lewes has embraced us and we have embraced Lewes.

I am a partner in a Solicitors' practice based in the City of London though currently, due to the Covid 19 emergency, I and all my colleagues are working from homes all over the country. My speciality is real estate with an emphasis on development work in the care home sector. In my career I have represented clients of all sizes from individuals to multi-national corporations in many different economic sectors.

It has long been my plan to retire from full time lawyering during 2021. When the opportunity to join Friends of Lewes as a Trustee presented itself, I thought it might give me a chance both to get more involved with and to give something back to the community which has given my wife and me such a warm welcome. I am also hopeful that some of the skills I have acquired over the years will be useful to the organisation.

Diana Freestone, Secretary

Originally from Kingston upon Thames I moved to Plumpton Green in 1986 to set up a Financial Services Division for American Express where I worked for 24 years. After leaving Amex my business career has involved lecturing in management, customer service and managing apprenticeship programmes at Sussex Downs and Plumpton Colleges. I am now semi-retired but continue to be involved in tertiary education moderating teacher training and childcare qualifications.

In 2018 my son and his family bought my house in Plumpton enabling my husband and me to move to a more manageable property in the centre of Lewes. I am currently a volunteer gardener at Standen NT and The Depot and, as well as gardening, my interests also include the environment, recycling, special education and local, social and family history.

Fiona Kay, Trustee

I have lived in Lewes for some 27 years and have always loved living here. I worked full time as a teacher at Lewes Old Grammar Junior School and latterly at St Christopher's' School Hove. Sadly, for medical reasons I had to change careers, followed my passion, and opened a Cheese shop. Cheese Please was under my ownership for 12 years until I decided to take a step back towards retirement and worked the Friday food Market instead. Much to my delight Cheese Please has risen again on the High Street.

Once retired, I wanted to give more back to the town that I love and joined The Lewes Rotary Club in 2015 and was elected to Friends of Lewes Executive Committee this year. I have expressed an interest in helping support the High Street and will join a small team to see what we can do to maintain our presence with a high proportion of independent retailers and support them.

Barbara Merchant, Trustee

Originally from Hong Kong, I was educated in the UK and worked in research information at the Universities of London and Sussex. I provided print and electronic resources for researchers in subjects such as medical genetics, and in science policy. Later this extended to providing information about the institutions, via websites, and other PR.

Some 13 years ago we moved to Lewes, and immediately felt at home in this vibrant town with its attractive historic buildings. We joined the Friends of Lewes, and when the Lewes History Group was formed, I offered to create and maintain its website – and took on the FoL website soon after. I also volunteer with the Edward Reeves Archive, and have a long involvement with the Brighton Early Music Festival.

A year ago, I joined FoL's Membership Services Committee, and in the recent reorganisation I took on further communications and PR responsibilities. By attending FoL EC meetings I hope to gain a fuller picture of our activities, which will help to identify opportunities for publicity and to raise FoL's profile more generally.

Jane Slater, Trustee

I grew up in Northumberland on a farm and after attending the local primary school continued my education in Durham City before training as an Occupational Therapist. My first job was in Edinburgh where I met my husband, an Architect, from Aberdeen. We had two sons and I lived in Edinburgh until he died in 2000.



Having offered to help the St Columbas Hospice in Edinburgh where my husband died, I was asked to be a Director of the Hospice Trading Company helping with fundraising events and expanding the range of goods for sale both in the Hospice Shop and online.

My sons had both moved from Edinburgh and were living and working in the South of England so in 2015 and I moved to Lewes to be nearer to my eldest son and his family.

There are many parallels you can draw between Lewes and Edinburgh. Both places have very many historic and fascinating buildings which must be preserved for future generations and there is a pride in the cultural aspects of life and a desire to maintain the beauty of the town and surroundings

As a newly elected Trustee of Friends of Lewes I would like to thank those who have played an important part in supporting the excellent work of the Friends in the past and wish dedicate my time to assist in the work to be undertaken by the Friends in the future.

Thank you for the confidence you've shown in our work by electing these new officers and trustees: this marks the start of a new chapter in the Friends of Lewes' history.

Planning Committee Update from Chris Kneale

Although the Planning Committee has been unable to meet in person due to Covid-19 restrictions it continues to review all planning applications submitted for development in Lewes. Over the last few years local planning authorities have moved from a paper-based planning application system to a fully digital online system. Once validated the details of the application and plans submitted can be viewed and downloaded from the South Downs National Park planning website. Comments on planning applications can also be submitted to the website online.

The Planning Committee adopted this mode of online working some time ago which has allowed it to continue its work without interruption during lockdown. Although it cannot meet in person the committee still meets each month via a conference call to discuss those applications it feels the Society should comment on. Representations are submitted online where they become immediately visible to the planning officer dealing with the application and to the wider public.

Trees Committee Update from Audrey Jarvis

The Trees Committee have been working closely with Lewes District Council to collaborate on finding new sites to plant trees around Lewes. We had a very good start to the year by planting a mixed hedge of 400 Hawthorn and Hornbeam whips at the edge of Bell Lane Recreation Ground. This will not only support greater biodiversity but may also alleviate the flooding in that area. The working party included members of FoL Trees Committee, Lewes District Council, Transition Town Lewes and many willing helpers from 6th Lewes Beavers! It has been a pleasure to watch this hedge burst into life over the Spring.



In February, members of the Trees Committee joined the Meadow Minders group at the Railway Land Nature Reserve to plant a young Oak tree, (and help to clear a lot of brambles!). This Oak is special to one of our committee because it was grown at home from an acorn. We are very grateful to the Railway Land for giving it such a good home. It is doing well and is now almost in full leaf.



Because of the pre-lockdown guidance on social distancing, we had to organise our late March working party on Mount Harry Road extremely carefully. The trees were delivered, and we were planning to go ahead until the revised restrictions prevented us from making the essential on-the-day CAT scans of the site. Thanks to a kind Mount Harry resident, the trees, (a Grey Alder and a native Crab Apple), are being looked after and watered, and will be planted as soon as possible!

On March 8th, seven members of our Trees Committee attended the Lewes Trees Summit at the Linklater Pavilion. After a brief talk about Lewes Urban Arboretum we shared ideas advice with the 100+ other participants, who included representatives from: Lewes Town Council, Lewes District Council, East Sussex County Councils, South Downs National Park, local arboriculturalists and foresters, woodland owners and interested Lewes residents. The purpose of the day was to plan how we might work together to plant more trees, more effectively. Post-lockdown, we look forward to making progress with all the ideas for possible collaborative action!

Luckily, before the lockdown restrictions were in full force, we had time to make tree maintenance visits to the 51 trees which we have already planted around Lewes. They have been weeded, mulched, pruned and the stakes removed as appropriate. We are indebted to all the Lewes residents who have undertaken to water them during any dry periods this season. If you have a young tree growing near you, please consider giving it a good long drink – it will reward you for many years to come!

Finally, we continue to share daily posts showing Lewes trees on our Facebook page, Lewes Urban Arboretum, and on Twitter @LewesUrban. If you have any photographs of trees that you would like to share with us, we would love to see them! You may contact us via arboretum@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

Progress towards our 2020 goals

Goal 2:

To work with others to promote and protect the vitality of businesses in and around our High St, preserve its range of buildings and businesses, and safeguard its community value in the face of commercial change and problematic traffic management.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a serious effect on our ability to move this goal forward. Collaborative work is almost impossible as district council staff are either furloughed or focused on pandemic response work, meetings are difficult or impossible, and of course the prolonged enforced shop closures are imposing further severe economic pressures on our retailers.

Fiona Kay has this to say:

As a retired Lewes High Street business owner, I empathise with our retailers during this present situation, and going forward. I opened my business at the start of a double dip recession and know how important it is for people to support their independent retailers. This also includes the regular Friday Food Market and monthly Farmers Market.

Many of the independents are being very creative, some producing foods for local delivery, and others being proactive using the online sales channels. Sadly, there are others, who for social distancing reasons are not able to trade. No one at present knows what the future will be, but Lewes has always been proud of its high proportion of independent retailers. In order to maintain this situation, the message is very clear to me, and I hope to you:

PLEASE SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL INDEPENDENT RETAILERS

Goal 5:

To **increase tree canopy cover** in Lewes, from the current 11.5% to the minimum recommendation for urban environments of 20%. We will do this by building on our successful projects to date and supporting other local groups with similar aims. See Report from Trees Committee.

Goal 6:

To improve our environment, increase biodiversity and mitigate the risks resulting from climate change by **collaborating with other Lewes-based groups** with such aims.

In addition to the collaborations mentioned in the Trees Committee Report, members of FoL have also been pleased to work with, or support, several other Lewes-based groups. **Wildflower Lewes** received a donation of £600 from Friends of Lewes to buy Yellow Rattle seeds for sowing into plugs to plant out across their “green stepping-stones” in Lewes. The Yellow Rattle roots seek out the roots of grasses nearby and suppress their growth, allowing other wildflowers to flourish. We also helped with the Wildflower Lewes stall on Seedy Saturday in February at the Town Hall, where children and families sowed wildflower seeds to take home and nurture so they can be planted in the Autumn.

Lewes Swift Supporters asked us at the Societies Fair if we could publicise their efforts to increase swift numbers in Lewes. We published an article on our website to promote “Lewes Swift Watch”, which encourages Lewes-based people to report their observations of swifts to their Facebook group, Twitter account @LewesSwifts or by e-mail to lewesswifts@gmail.com

Litter Free Lewes and **Nevill Residents' Association** have both been supported on their litter picks by Friends of Lewes.

Greenhavens Network share all our news about the natural environment. They asked for a copy of our notes from the October FoL talk by Aimee Felus from ChaMP, (Chalk Management Partnership), so that they could publish the interesting details on their website.

You can see all our 2020 goals [on our website](#).

Help wanted

The pandemic is turning our thoughts to what our “new normal” might be, and that could well include putting our talks online. If you could help in any way with this, do please get in touch via enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk