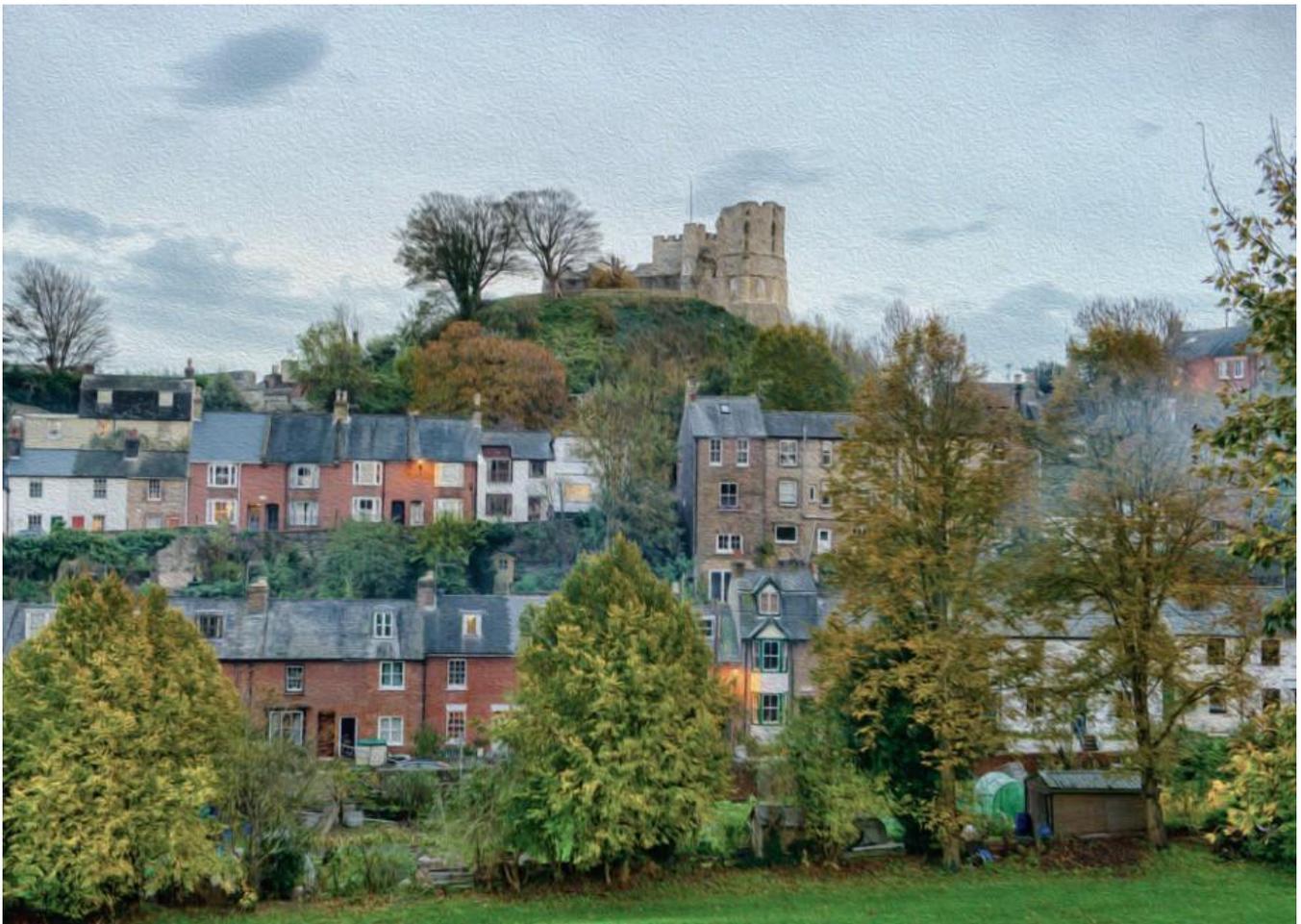




KEEPING OUR TOWN SPECIAL

Annual Report 2020



Picture by Nick Robinson

Dear Members

In a year of change and loss, the Executive Committee (Exec.) of the Friends of Lewes Civic Society have been striving to keep in touch with you and take on the challenges and opportunities of technologies that will enable us to do this, at the same time as trying to preserve the familiar feel and standing goals of the organisation. So, at the same time as setting up regular "Coffee Time Talks" using zoom, as part of the membership offering not available before pandemic, one Exec. member (Jane Slater) somewhat heroically took on the challenge of using the rather more familiar method of phoning every single one of you to make contact and see how you were doing. See page 10 of the report below for Marcus Taylor's piece on our goal "Increase engagement with the local community".

One of the big changes has been the retirement of both Robert Cheesman, a very hardworking and knowledgeable Chair of Friends of Lewes for over a quarter of a century, and Marcus Taylor, our Secretary; Marcus remains the Chair of the Membership Services Committee, and his knowledge and expertise will be greatly valued there. Only recently Marcus has been able to compile a fascinating list of speakers and topics at talks and events put on by Friends of Lewes over the last 10 years, ranging across from pieces on specific people (e.g. Gideon Mantel, Charles Dickens), from specific people on their own feelings about Lewes (e.g. Rupert Clubb from ESCC, Dawn Whittaker from the Fire Service), to topics on water management, tree cover, alternative energy in a heritage setting, building materials of Lewes (from our own Marcus Taylor through zoom) and some more "lively" topics such as "The turbulent history of pub life in Lewes". Truly something for everyone I hope you would agree.

It is impossible to sum up Robert Cheesman's contribution to the Friends of Lewes in just a short paragraph and do this justice, so I hope that you will search your own memories of his time as our Chair to augment my short offering here. Robert has truly been the face of the Friends of Lewes during his tenure and has recently been awarded a national honour, the British Empire Medal, for his services to the community in Lewes through this and other examples. He has tirelessly represented us on many different bodies, from railway related committees to the sounding board of the North Street Quarter development which he has chaired in recent years and has always been meticulous in his reporting back and his noting of events, to good effect when the Society has needed to call on these extensive personal records. Robert is much remembered and will always be a part of the fabric of Friends of Lewes for his long and important work on our behalf.

A new face on the Exec. is Diana Freestone, our new and very capable Secretary whose support I very much value. As a new Chair a good secretary is absolutely essential, and I am really grateful for all that Diana is doing.

Our Treasurer, Mike Stepney, is also retiring at the coming AGM and will be much missed. Many thanks are due to Mike for all his work on behalf of the Friends, and we will be welcoming a new Treasurer, Melanie Gregory, after the AGM. Please see page 11 of this report for details of our finances this year, set out by Mike.

Planning remains a very important aspect of our work as a civic society and on pages 6-8 below you will find a very comprehensive summary of recent work and plans for further actions to do with conservation, the future of the high street and a wide variety of development issues across the town. Many thanks to all of those serving on the Planning Committee for taking the lead on this work for the society and in particular to Chris Kneale the Chair, Peter Earl the co-author of this section of our annual report and Roger Maskew who is our new lead with regard to the North Street Quarter, representing us on the sounding board for the development.

As you read further in this year's annual report on page 9 you will find an excellent summary of the wide array of work being undertaken by the members involved with our environment and biodiversity goal, and our work with other organisations in Lewes to this end, often headed up by the very hard-working Audrey Jarvis, who is Chair of the Trees Committee, with its excellent Lewes Urban Arboretum project, as well as being our new Vice Chair.

Friends of Lewes has long been involved with Heritage Open Days in Lewes, (see page 10) and with the news that Judith Davies, who has led the Heritage Open Days for over a decade, is retiring from this role we are very grateful to Peter Earl from the Exec. who has agreed to lead on this. We are looking for members to come forward to assist, please get in touch as detailed on page 10 if you would be interested.

A new “post” on the Executive Committee is that of Communications and Website Manager, taken on with the patience and good humour essential for the post in the face of many members attempting to learn more about IT, as well as a great deal of personal expertise, by Barbara Merchant. Have a look at friends-of-lewes.org.uk if you possibly can to see what Barbara has already achieved.

Recently we have been approached by the Lewes Flood Action group regarding passing on their work on this important aspect of Lewes life, and Exec member Bronagh Liddicoat has very kindly volunteered to take the lead for us on this. See page 13 for more details.

Sadly we have lost some wonderful members of the Society this year with the passing of Jim Franks and his wife Maureen, and of David Tufnell. You will find a tribute to Jim, and Maureen, on page 12 and it is planned to commemorate David in a future newsletter.

Finally, I would like to thank other members of the Exec. not specifically mentioned in this piece so far for their hard work on your behalf; Neil Merchant who has so ably chaired the succession planning committee, Roger Beasley, and Martin Ackland, Paul Mockford our very diligent membership secretary and all the members of the various committees whose work makes the society tick.

We have weathered some very challenging and unexpected times together over the past 12 months and it is good to look to the future with such an excellent team of people to take us forward. We have been trying hard to be more in touch with you, our members, than ever before, so please get in touch with us to tell us how we are doing and what you would like to see happening next.

We are definitely listening!

Ruth

Ruth O’Keeffe
Chair, Friends of Lewes Civic Society



THE FRIENDS OF LEWES
The Lewes Civic Society
Lewes Town Council Offices, Town Hall, High Street
LEWES, East Sussex BN7 2QS
Registered Charity No 258756

Web site: www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk email address: enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

Personnel on 31st December 2020

President: John Davey

Vice-Presidents: Peter Mettyear & Maria Caulfield MP

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Officers:	Chair	Ruth O’Keeffe
	Vice-Chair	Audrey Jarvis
	Secretary	Diana Freestone (Co-opted Member)
	Treasurer	Mike Stepney

Elected Members on March 2019

Robert Cheesman (Chair)
Marcus Taylor (Secretary)
Roger Beasley
Audrey Jarvis
Phil Green
Roger Maskew
Peter Earl

Elected Members on March 2020

Neil Merchant
Roger Beasley
Phil Green
Roger Maskew
Peter Earl
Chris Kneale
Jane Slater
Fiona Kay

Coopted Members on March 2020

Martin Ackland, Bronagh Liddicoat,
Barbara Marchant (Communications & Website Manager)

The Mayor Lewes has the right to attend Executive Committee meetings.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Chris Kneale (Chair)
John Kennett
Bronagh Liddicoat
Roger Maskew
Frances Tufnell
Nick Wiseman
Carolyn Beckingham (Minutes Secretary)

SUCCESSION PLANNING COMMITTEE

Neil Merchant (Chair)
Phil Green
Ruth O’Keeffe
Mike Stepney
Diana Freestone

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS COMMITTEE

David Attwood, Paul Benjamin, Judith Davis
Peter Mettyear, Mike Swift, David Hutchinson

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES COMMITTEE

Marcus Taylor (Chair)
Neil Merchant
Barbara Merchant
Paul Mockford (Membership Secretary)
Jane Slater

TREES COMMITTEE

Audrey Jarvis (Chair)
Phil Green
James Newmarch
David Saunders
Chris Bibb
Duncan Armstrong
Matthew Stuart
Dan Wynn
Advisers: Dean Bell, Nick Jones, Peter Thurman,
Keith Sacre

STRUCTURE GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT

Who we are

The Friends of Lewes, founded in 1952, is the Lewes Civic Society, a registered charity with 399 members as of 31st December 2020. After two years of increases this was a net decrease of 14 on the previous year and the Executive Committee will be working on ways to attract new members during 2021. Membership is open to all, on payment of the relevant subscription. Although wholly independent we are allied to the national organisation, Civic Voice, a national umbrella body for similar groups.

Our Mission is to conserve and enhance key aspects of the town: its history, distinctive buildings and the natural environment, and its social, cultural and economic well-being – we aim to keep Lewes special.

How we are run

Constitution

The Charity is established for the public benefit to pursue the following in the area comprising the Town of Lewes and its immediate surrounding area to promote:

- High standards of planning and design in or affecting Lewes and ensure that new development is sensitively sited in relation to the surrounding environment.
- The conservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest, and the physical and natural environment
- Enhancement of the built environment in, and the social, cultural and economic well-being.
- Free access to the public realm.

To stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character.

To co-operate with public authorities and other bodies in fulfilling these objectives in the area.

Committees

The officers and elected members of Friends of Lewes Executive Committee are the Charity Trustees. Officers are elected at the Annual General Meeting each year and half of the ten elected members retire each year but are eligible for re-election. Four members can be coopted to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee meets monthly and appoints sub-committees which includes the Planning Committee which examines all planning applications affecting Lewes and surrounding areas, the Trees Committee, Membership Committee, the Succession Planning Committee and the Heritage Open Days Committee. Despite the corona virus pandemic preventing physical meetings, the business of the Society has successfully continued via virtual meetings.

Meetings and talks

We hold an Annual General Meeting providing formal opportunity to allow members to put their views forward. In addition, we arrange talks on a wide range of topics relating to Lewes and these events are listed in the Diary. During 2020 the covid pandemic prevented the physical AGM taking place. Members were advised by email and via post of the Agenda and invited to vote either by email or post with the outcome being that all proposals were adopted. Two of the scheduled talks were able to take place physically in January and February (see page 10) and more are planned in 2021 which will take place virtually until restrictions for physical meetings are lifted.

Communications

We keep members up to date via our Facebook page as well as the website and regular emails. We publish regular Newsletters and an Annual Report and during 2020 launched a series of successful Zoom Coffee Time Talks see Jane Slater's update on page 11.

Our Goals and Objectives:

1. To bring further benefits to the town by placing increased emphasis on influencing relevant policy makers at national, regional and local levels (for example on, planning, transport, housing, highways, parking). These policy makers include the South Downs National Park Authority, East Sussex County Council, Lewes-Eastbourne District Council, Lewes Town Council and others.
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.
3. To preserve the integrity of the Conservation Areas in Lewes through our vigilance and close liaison with local highways and planning authorities.
4. To bring about reduced carbon emissions by engaging with developers and encouraging them to adopt carbon neutral and other ecologically sound innovations in construction practices in new builds and renovations.
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.
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.
7. To learn, and to seek support for our local efforts, by engaging more broadly with other civic societies and Civic Voice.
8. To increase our engagement with the local community, by engaging with residents' associations, schools and others.

PERFORMANCE AGAINST OUR GOALS

Planning

An important part of Friends of Lewes' regular work involves the consideration of planning proposals in the town by the Planning Committee. This work has continued throughout the lockdowns with the members of the committee meeting each month online to examining planning applications, listed building consent applications and advertisement consents submitted to the Local Planning Authority for determination. Some 220 applications were examined during the year and representations made on 75. The Trees Committee provide an important input into all those applications involving trees and vegetation, also achieving valuable wildlife gains. The Planning Committee looks at all applications within the Lewes town boundary and those in the surrounding area which may have an impact on the town. Responsibility for determining planning applications falls to the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), but most applications are determined by Lewes District Council planners under an agency arrangement with the SDNPA. Those applications that may have a significant impact on the landscape of the town and the wider National Park are called in by the SDNPA and determined by their Planning Committee. FoL Planning Committee comments are submitted via the online planning portal, which records the representations made to each application and notifies the planning officer considering the application. The comments, which are in the public domain, are taken into account when the application is determined by officers, having regard to national, SDNPA and local Neighbourhood Plan policies.

Significant applications considered by the committee have included the redevelopment of the former Gorrings' auction house site in Garden Street, which highlighted the importance of the Friends of Lewes' views. The SDNPA Planning Committee overturned officer recommendation for approval and agreed with FoL that the impact on the conservation area had not been given sufficient weight and the design of the development did not preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area as required by legislation and planning policy. The application was refused, and the developer has since lodged an appeal, which will be determined by the Planning Inspectorate under the written representations' procedure.

Other important applications the Society has made representations on include the major development planned at Old Mall Farm, redevelopment of Astley House in Spital Road, housing development at Anne of Cleves House, new studios in Pipe Passage and the impact of increased traffic on the conservation area that could result from redevelopment of Iford Farm.

Over the years many shop premises in the upper High Street have become vacant and an increasing number of planning applications are being submitted to change the use of shops to residential use. It is important that the town centre maintains its vitality and should do so against a clear policy framework that allows any justifiable change to take place. It is recognised that throughout the history of the town there have been periods of change and that many properties have undergone changes in use and appearance. However, this needs to be carefully managed to maintain the character of the conservation area. This year the Planning Committee has added to the two existing guidance notes on Dormer Windows and Garden Rooms and developed a planning guidance note on 'Retail to Residential' which is aimed at local planning authorities, property owners, developers and architects.

The Society has devoted considerable time and work over the years liaising with the developers of the North Street Quarter redevelopment, including chairing the Sounding Board considering design matters. During 2020, North Street Quarter Ltd marketed the site with the benefit of the current Planning Permission and in December it confirmed that it intended to sell its land to a third-party developer, Human Nature. This was a change to the previous proposal to appoint a developer to deliver the scheme. The chair of the North Street Quarter Sounding Board, Robert Cheesman, subsequently met Jonathan Smales and Chelsea Renton of Human Nature, who confirmed that it was their intention to submit a different scheme for planning permission and therefore it was likely to be 2 years before anything happens on site.

In collaboration with Lewes Conservation Area Action Group (LCAAG) the Society has worked to address breaches of planning control and other concerns which need to be brought to the attention of the Local Planning Authority. This has included building and alterations which have been carried out without the necessary planning permission, advertisements or new signs, without the necessary prior approval, as well as properties in the conservation area which are falling into disrepair. Meetings are currently held virtually with Lewes District Council planning, conservation and enforcement officers to discuss a list of cases. This gives an opportunity to prioritise cases and understand if, how or when enforcement action is to be pursued.

There have been changes in personnel within the District Council's Planning department which together with the Covid pandemic have prevented regular meetings. However, it is understood that a new enforcement officer is in post and that an additional experienced planning officer, appointed by the SDNPA is working alongside LDC officers. These arrangements, together with the active involvement of the new SDNPA link officer should improve the quality of decision making and the effectiveness of the enforcement service.

The SDNPA are looking to create a 'Local Heritage List' which will enable non-designated heritage assets in the town to be identified and taken into account in any planning decisions. We are waiting for the SDNPA to set out the criteria and will then form a small group within the town to examine the list of listed buildings and make suggestions for buildings which should form part of the local list.

The Draft Lewes Conservation Area Management Plan, which has been adopted by the SDNPA, includes a number of action points that have yet to be undertaken. The SDNPA have been reminded of these, including the need for a photographic survey of building frontages, historic paving and street furniture. They are to undertake an awareness campaign on the importance of regular building maintenance although there is no time scale for this to be undertaken.

During the year there has been particular focus on the condition of flint walls. This was highlighted by the sudden collapse of a large section of the Inner Castle Wall adjacent to Castle Ditch Lane. Whilst Heritage England have still to decide if and how this is to be restored it has drawn attention to the need to have a watching brief on the many flint walls within the town. The ownership of some flint walls is not always clear. Persistent investigation confirmed that the County Council, as Highway Authority were responsible for the wall in Mount Pleasant, which has now been repaired, with the loose rendering removed revealing the original flint finish. Repairs to walling in Paddock Road and Rotten Row are also being pursued. Members are requested to contact the society if they are aware of other flint walls in need of maintenance and repair. In conjunction with a local flint wall expert, we are looking to provide advice and guidance on the repair of flint walls. It is hoped to provide guidance on the repair and building of flint walls in conjunction with local craftsmen to ensure that the appropriate techniques and materials are used. This will appear on our website.

The County Council as Highway Authority has proposed that all future repairs to the footpaths throughout Lewes town's conservation areas will be undertaken with a single use bituminous macadam, with the exception of the High Street, from Cliffe Bridge to Irelands Lane, where the present paving slabs and brick paviers would be reinstated. The result of this proposal will mean pavements outside of this designated area could permanently look like the area outside the Law Courts where there is a random checker board of bituminous macadam and paving slabs. The Executive Committee objects to the proposals as it would be detrimental to the character of the historic core of the town of Lewes. It plans to set up a small working group, drawing on the different expertise that exists, to clarify the County Council proposals and understand more fully the degree of harm that could arise, particularly on streets where enhancement works have been undertaken.

If there are any members willing to assist with this work or wish to identify streets and twittens that should be subject to special protection, they are encouraged to get in touch through the Secretary at enquires@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

Chris Kneale & Peter Earl

North Street Quarter

During 2020 very little happened on the North Street Quarter site as the North Street Quarter Ltd were marketing the site with the benefit of the current Planning Permission and it is understood that a number of parties expressed an interest.

However, during December 2020 some 'significant' items of interest were confirmed. On Friday 4th December 2020 the Sussex Express published both a front cover and supporting article announcing that the "Eco-developer Human Nature" was in the process of buying the site. A report prepared for Lewes District Council's Cabinet meeting on the 10th December 2020 confirmed the following:

- (a) That the majority landowner of the North Street Quarter site in Lewes, (MAS REI / NSQL), had confirmed that it intended to sell its land to a third-party developer, Human Nature.
- (b) This was a change to the previous proposal for MAS REI to appoint a developer to deliver the scheme that currently has planning permission.
- (c) As a consequence, at the Cabinet Meeting on the 10th December, councillors' would consider a proposal for the Council to sell its land on the North Street Quarter site to Human Nature.

At the meeting on Thursday 10th December 2020, it is understood that the Lewes District Council's Cabinet agreed to sell its land to Human Nature.

On the 18th January 2021, Human Nature issued a 'Phoenix Project Update', stating that they were "currently completing due diligence on the land titles and expect to take ownership of the sites in North Street in February". The same document also stated that they "intend to move forward rapidly, re-design the scheme and to submit a new planning application in early 2022".

Human Nature intend to consult widely on their proposals in order to enable various interest groups within the town to make a contribution and to meet and work alongside the specialist team of consultants that have been invited to join this project.

It is understood that the specialist team of consultants may be made public in February 2021.

Roger Maskew

Increase the tree canopy

We got off to a very good start in 2020 with planting a mixed native hedge of 400 Hawthorns and Hornbeams at the edge of Bell Lane Recreation Ground at the beginning of January. This was organised in collaboration with LDC and we were very pleased to welcome members of 6th Lewes Beavers to the planting team. In February we planted an Oak tree on the Railway Land with the support of the Meadow Minders but from March onwards our planting projects had to be postponed because of the first lockdown. Lewes Urban Arboretum gave a presentation at the Trees Summit, organised by the Railway Land Wildlife Trust at the beginning of March and are following up on the ideas and initiatives that were shared by the contributing groups. We are also taking part in the LDC Climate Action Forum.

As the lockdown restrictions eased over the late Spring and Summer, we were able to complete all our maintenance work: weeding, mulching and pruning the 56 street trees that we have already planted at various sites across Lewes. It became clear that we had to re-prioritise our tree-planting projects and with the helpful collaboration of Lewes District Council Specialist Adviser, Chris Bibb, we drew up plans to plant 27 trees at Lewes Cemetery in a joint LDC/FoL project. We were thrilled and relieved to complete the plantings at the beginning of November before the second lockdown started. In such difficult times it is especially rewarding to be able to “do something positive” to benefit our environment.

At long last, in November we were also able to plant the two trees, which had been delivered for planting in March, on the green at Mount Harry Road. We are very grateful to the resident, Mike Robson, who took such good care of these trees until we were able to plant them!

Over the Summer and Winter, we have been able to make site visits in small groups to plan for future tree-planting projects. If you have any ideas for further tree planting in public places, please let us know! We are always happy to give advice on tree-planting in your own garden and you may contact us by e-mail: arboretum@friends-of-lewes.org.uk



Audrey Jarvis planting a Grey Alder on Mount Harry Green

Audrey Jarvis

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

Friends of Lewes have supported **Lewes Swifts Supporters** by part-funding their project to buy and install an additional 15 Swift nest boxes and callers in Swift “hot-spots” identified through their monitoring. Some of these Swift nest boxes are due to be installed in De Montfort Road before the Swifts return in late April/early May.

We have a FoL representative who regularly attends meetings of **Lewes Climate Hub**: a network of Lewes-based groups that share our aims of working together to mitigate the results of climate change. More details of the hub are given below in this newsletter.

In August the Trees Committee worked with **Wildflower Lewes** to produce the leaflet: “Lewes Heritage – A Town Nature Walk” which highlights significant trees and wildflower sites you may visit on a walk around the town in different seasons. In celebration of publication of the leaflet, we contacted schools to involve them in a “Design your own Nature Trail” competition, with three winners receiving a prize of a £15 book token. The leaflet and details of the prize winners are available on our website. In October and November, members of the Trees Committee helped Wildflower Lewes to plant wildflower plugs and sow Yellow Rattle seeds at nine new sites across Lewes as part of their “Green Stepping Stones” project, which has been part-funded by Friends of Lewes.

Audrey Jarvis

Increase engagement with the local community

In the January talk Chris Rowland of OVESCO and Nick Rouse outlined the issues surrounding installing solar energy in a town with many old and Listed Buildings. In February Carmen Slijpen and Natascha Padbury of Depot Cinema explained its commitment to sustainability in all its forms and how their success was being monitored.

At that point, no-one could have foreseen that the rest of the year's programme was going to be abandoned or go "virtual". By the summer Jane Slater had contacted almost all members by telephone; By the Autumn we had begun regular online Coffee Mornings and we could see our way to resuming talks in the New Year. A year ago, Zoom was a word only found in children's comics, so there was much to learn! 2021 will see talks in less predictable dates, but we hope that being able to access these from home will increase participation.

The Societies' Fair and planned promotional events got swept away, but a possible side benefit of Lockdowns was increased take-up of FoL's online content. with almost 18,000 views of the website over the year. The most popular pages were on heritage, followed by environment and planning. There are now 100 News item subscribers (2019: 88), +14% and on Facebook 533 are following FriendsOfLewes (2019: 412), +29% up and 412 are following LewesUrbanArboretum (2019: 352), +17%. Particular thanks are due to Barbara Merchant for managing this aspect so smoothly.

Marcus Taylor

Heritage Open Days

Last year, with all the disruption surrounding the pandemic, members of the Friends of Lewes may remember that a few of us got together to design some self-guided walks leaflets for the town, in place of organising the usual open buildings weekend, traditionally held on the second weekend in September. These free walks leaflets - on the High Street, local architects and nature - are stocked in the tourist office and the Town Hall and have proved popular with visitors as well as residents.



The national organisers have already announced the 2021 Heritage Open Days dates being the 10th to 19th September. Realistically, I don't think that an open buildings programme will happen in Lewes. Too many of the public service buildings that have traditionally opened such as the Prison, Police HQ, the Law Courts, the Registry Office (Southover Grange) - are still struggling to cope with the extra resources needed to maintain services. Also, asking private homes/buildings to open up similarly seems unrealistic.

It may be possible to create some more walks leaflets, and nearer September, if the situation allows, running an actual programme of guided, distanced, walks. Some sponsorship money remains in the Society's funds, and more could be raised.

Judith Davies

Judith has ably led the Heritage Open Days for over ten years and had already decided that, 2020 would be her last in helping to organise the HOD event. Our sincere thanks go to Judith and her team for all their hard work and dedication in organising these events over the years. We are planning to continue her good work and keep the Heritage Open Days going in the years ahead. If there are any of you that would like to get involved, or if you know of anyone who is not a member of the Friends but might be interested, please contact the Secretary at enquires@friends-of-lewes.org.uk In particular, we will need someone to take over the task of leaflet design.

Keeping you in the 'Loop'

One of Friends of Lewes Civic Society Goals is to increase our engagement with the local community. In the year ending 31st December 2020 - the year of COVID-19 - the majority of our Members, during the first lockdown in March 2020, have been contacted by phone to see if we could help them in anyway. Most were managing well and only a few needed practical help. However, many were lonely and missed meeting others. In order to keep us all 'in the Loop' we decided to organise a series of Coffee Time Talks to keep our Members informed and up to date.

These Coffee time Talks are freely available to the Members of the Friends of Lewes. If you would like to join in and attend our talks you can find details on our Membership page on the website, and we will send you a Zoom link a few days before each talk. More information is available from the membership secretary, Paul Mockford, via email – membership@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

Look out for some informative Coffee Time Talks from February onwards such as a COVID update - a talk on local Birds by Vivien Yule, a cooking demonstration.

Jane Slater

Financial Review 2020

Receipts and Payments

General Fund

There was an overall surplus in 2020 of £3.3k whereas there was a deficit of £2.6k in 2019; a net change of £5.9k. Net receipts remained stable at £6.6k (£6.9k in 2019). However, within this, two legacies offset the £800 spent on the purchase of new tea towels.

At £3.3k, expenditure was £6.2k below that for 2019 (£9.5k). The main reasons for the reduction is that the spend on Projects, Grants & Donations, and Heritage Open days was some £5.8k less than in 2019 (and £5.4k less than budgeted for 2020). The factors contributing to this are that only one application was received (and paid) for grant support and the £2.5k supplementary funding support for tree planting was not required because much of the planting had to be deferred to 2020. (See "Restricted Trees Fund" below.)

As one would expect, Covid-19 inevitably had an impact on the Society's 2020 expenditure plans. However, as regards the General Fund, other than there not being a need to use the £2.5k earmarked for tree planting support, there was only a marginal impact; the main effect being on the Restricted Trees Fund account (see below).

With no remuneration being paid to, nor any benefit obtained from a related entity by any trustee, and with only minimal expenses in the course of the Society's business being reimbursed, the cost of running FoL in remained stable at £1.9k.

Restricted Trees Fund

Total receipts paid into the Trees Fund (which is restricted to expenditure on tree planting) was £5.9k (£0.9k in 2019). This £5k increase primarily arises from a successful bid of £4.5k to the Sussex Community Foundation for 2021 tree planting schemes. The balance £0.6k mainly comes from the participation in the Lewes District Lottery that was launched in December 2019.

On expenditure, it was anticipated that there would be an £8k tree planting programme in 2019. This was to be financed by £5.5k from the Trees Fund (the totality of the fund's anticipated resources) with a further £2.5k being met from the General Fund.

Although the impact of Covid-19 meant that the priority of tree planting sites was changed to allow Covid-safe working parties, the Trees Committee planted more trees than were planned for in 2020. However, the anticipated expenditure on tree planting was much reduced owing to matched funding from LDC on our joint projects and funding from SDNP Trust 'Beelines' grants which paid for other projects in full. This meant that the Trees Fund was able to finance all the 2020 trees expenditure. Consequently, the £2.5k support that was anticipated would be needed from the General Fund was not drawn upon. However, this transfer will now be actioned in 2021 to support spending on future projects.

Balance Sheet

At the end of the 2020 financial year, the Society's total monetary assets on the unrestricted funds account amounted to £54k and £10k on the restricted (trees) fund, all of which is held in Charities Aid Foundation bank accounts. Stocks of books and tea towels valued at £3k were also held.

2021 Reserves Policy

The Executive Committee considers that with the current uncertainty surrounding Covid-19, a 2021 year-end General Fund cash reserve of around £47k (as incorporated in the 2021 budget) is appropriate. This comprises continuation of at £10k operating reserve, and £37k for new projects and unplanned newexpenditure which are likely to include:

- the potential financial impact of future trees expenditure predominantly having to be met from the unrestricted general fund.
- the possibility that new costs may arise from the Society' goals and priorities; and,
- the unknown longer-term impact and consequences of Covid-19.

Mike Stepney – Hon Treasurer

Jim Franks 1927 to 2020

Long term members of the Friends of Lewes, Jim and Maureen Franks sadly died, within a few days of each other on December 20th and 2nd January. They were two people who made a considerable contribution to the civic life and heritage of Lewes over several decades and particularly the Friends of Lewes.

Jim was born in 1927 and was brought up in Brighton. He completed military service with the Royal Engineers in the Middle East and Kenya. Returning to Brighton after the war he was preparing to qualify as a Chartered Quantity Surveyor when he met Maureen. After marrying they found a plot of land for sale on Cuilfail where, with the help of some friends, they built a bungalow and subsequently raised two children.

Jim became a Principal Lecturer in 'Building Trades Management' with what was then the 'Brixton School of Building', which became part of 'London South Bank University'. He wrote regular articles for trade journals, many of which became books, alongside some of his other published writing. One of Jim's passions was the conversion and restoration of old buildings, including Nan Kemp's Corner on Kingston Ridge, the Alms-houses in Keere Street and most significantly the Fitzroy Memorial Library, at the foot of School Hill. The former grade II listed library, designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott, was abandoned by the County Council following the partial removal of its roof. It was Jim and Maureen who took on the challenge of restoring the derelict structure, subsequently living there for over 40 years before moving to Greyfriars. In 2012 wrote a book about the task 'Building and Saving Fitzroy Library, Lewes: A Victorian Love Story with a 20th Century Ending'. He also wrote a book about the creation of a large model of the town. Jim, along with John Houghton, was a prime mover in the construction of the model of Lewes, which is now on display in the Barbican House Museum. Jim drew the workforce and contributors from all ages and sections of society in the town, including the prison, with the Arts Minister of the time, Richard Luce, opening the model in 1986. Jim was also instrumental in organising the restoration of the former well in Friars Walk, just below the eastern corner of what is now All Saints Community Art Centre. Whilst the water supply was not reconnected Jim did suggest that it would only be viable to update it to dispense Coca Cola or similar beverages.

Jim served as a Lewes Town Councillor, as Deputy Mayor, President of the Institute of Quantity Surveyors and President of the Lewes branch of the British Legion. He was Vice President of the Friends of Lewes, where he was an active committee member for over 30 years and amongst those instrumental in seeing off the destructive Inner Relief Road plan in the 1970s in favour of a by-pass. He was also a qualified mediator, being entitled to follow his name with five different sets of letters, indicating professional or academic achievement. Remarkably, being a man of prodigious energy, he did many of these things at the same time!

An incorrigible archivist, Jim kept journals since the late 1950s and made many records, written and photographic, of things that have interested him. In 2017 Marcus Taylor gave a talk based on a large collection of Jim's colour photographic slides of the town covering the years 1969-99. The collection of slides is now in safe keeping in the Keep at Falmer so hopefully it may be possible to show them again in memory of Jim and Maureen, once normal times resume.

It was great sadness that the Covid lockdown restrictions didn't allow their lives to be fully celebrated as many would have wished. It was fitting that the funeral cortege passed both Fitzroy House and the Town Hall where the town's flag flew at half-mast.

They will both be sorely missed.

Peter Earl

OUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Climate Hub

Friends of Lewes is one of many Lewes-based environmental and community groups affiliated with Lewes Climate Hub. It is setting up a physical base, at 2 Fisher Street, which will invite and support everyone to get involved in tackling the climate emergency. Providing an information and networking point on all climate and environment-related projects, events and activities happening in and around Lewes, it will also give practical advice on activities from home retrofitting to improve energy efficiency to tree-growing.

To find out more visit <http://lewesclimatehub.org/> or contact them via info@lewesclimatehub.org

Trees

The Trees Committee of Friends of Lewes, (Lewes Urban Arboretum), have several plans for 2021, subject to Covid-safe guidance, including:

- To plant more mature street trees in the Wallands area to recreate the avenues of trees that have been much reduced as trees have been lost over the decades and not replaced.
- To further increase biodiversity at Lewes Cemetery by planting hedgerows of mixed native trees to extend the flowering season for the benefit of pollinators
- To plant a hedgerow along the fence line at Jubilee Gardens
- To plant a new Elm at Lewes Cemetery, awarded by the Trees Council to celebrate 30 years of their Tree Wardens Scheme

Surface Water Flooding

Friends of Lewes is currently assessing the progress that has been made in protecting Lewes from surface water flooding and supports all measures necessary to reduce surface water runoff e.g. minimising impermeable areas in new developments.

The recently published Environment Agency's National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England (2020) addresses the unavoidable impact of climate change and encourages building in resilience by a variety of means. For example – by retaining the permeability of floodplains and by dealing with surface water locally e.g. by tree planting. The Friends of Lewes welcomes this approach and will be working with partner organisations in support of implementation of recommended measures.