

Friends of Lewes



Annual Report 2009

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

E-mail address: - enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

Personnel at 31st December 2009

President	Phyllida Stewart-Roberts CVO, OBE	
Vice-Presidents	Norman Baker MP	James Franks
	Peter Mettyear	

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Officers	Chairman	Robert Cheesman	(11/12)
	Vice-Chairman	David Hutchinson	(11/12)
	Secretary	Vacant	
	Treasurer	David Tufnell	(12/12)

Elected members	At 2008 AGM	At 2009 AGM	
	Katharine Clark (10/12)	Roger Beasley	(11/12)
	Edward Gibbs (10/12)	Anthony Dicks	(9/12)
	Ruth O'Keeffe (9/12)	Jonathan Gunson	(8/12)
	Frances Tufnell (12/12)	Paul Millmore	(8/12)
		Patricia Sexton	(10/12)

Co-opted Members Tom Crossett (10/12), James Daly (3/12)
 & Nicholas Robinson (9/12)

Minutes Secretaries Judith Davies & Angela Blyth

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

PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE

SOCIETY EVENTS SUB-COMMITTEE

* indicates member of Executive Committee

Frances Tufnell (Chairman) *
 Carolyn Beckingham
 Raymond Brownell
 Katharine Clark *
 Averil Garritt
 John Kennett
 Betty Lewis
 Joy Preston
 Nicholas Robinson *

Patricia Sexton (Chairman) *
 Edward Gibbs *
 Peter Hammond
 Marietta van Dyck

Membership Secretary
Distribution Organiser

Marietta van Dyck
 Michael Cotgrove

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Friends of Lewes - the Lewes Civic Society is an unincorporated association whose constitution was last amended in March 1997. It is a registered charity (No 258756) usually known as the Friends of Lewes but referred to in this report as the Society. Communications to it should be addressed to Lewes Town Council Offices, High Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2QS. Membership is open to all on payment of the relevant subscription.

Members of the Society's Executive Committee, who are elected at an Annual General Meeting, are the charity trustees. Officers are elected for one year whilst half of the other elected members retire each year but are eligible for re-election. The trustees in office on 31st December 2009, all of whom are members of the Society, are listed opposite; in addition Betty Lewis served until 26 March. The Executive Committee, which meets monthly, manage the Society's affairs but annually appoint a Sub-Committee to examine all planning applications affecting Lewes and the surrounding area and another to provide services and events for members.

The Society had a membership of 534 at 31st December 2009 (541 - 2008). The Charities Aid Foundation holds the Society's liquid assets. Its accounts are examined by Clifton Page Wood, Chartered Accountants of 11a Gildredge Road, Eastbourne BN21 4RB. The Society employs no staff and has not incurred fees from professional advisers during the year.

On 31st December 2009 the Society's representatives on the following external bodies were: -

Federation of Sussex Amenity Societies	Ruth O'Keeffe
Lewes Conservation Area Advisory Group	Katharine Clark
Lewes District Council's Planning Service Users Group	Robert Cheesman
Lewes Town Partnership	Robert Cheesman
South Downs Campaign	Robert Cheesman

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The Society's objectives are to stimulate public interest in the beauty, history and character of the town of Lewes and its surrounding area; to organise concerted action for protecting and enhancing the townscape of Lewes and the architectural, visual and historic interest of Lewes and the surrounding area; for preserving free access to the latter; and to co-operate with kindred societies. It does so by arranging meetings for members on conservation issues; lobbying relevant bodies to protect the historic environment of Lewes whilst recognising that the town needs to remain an economically vibrant place, and by supporting projects that fall within its objectives. The principal risks facing the Society are an inability to find sufficient volunteers to undertake these activities (something the Society intends to address in the coming year) and a possible decline in income through lower membership, lack of legacies and interest rates. This would limit the projects the Society is able to fund.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

INTRODUCTION

The most significant decision to affect Lewes in 2009 was the confirmation of the South Downs National Park designation with the inclusion of the town within it. Subsequently the Government announced the creation of a National Park Authority which will be established in shadow form on 1st April 2010 and take up its powers on 1st April 2011. The Authority will have 27 members, 14 of which will come from principal local authorities, including one from Lewes District Council; 6 from Parish Councils and 7 people on the recommendation of Natural England because of the particular skills or experience they will bring to it. The Society has already told the Interim Chief Executive of the National Park Authority that conservation and enhancement of the built environment must be given equal priority to conservation and enhancement of the rural environment in view of the Government decision to include a number of settlements, such as Lewes, within the National Park boundaries.

The successful creation of the National Park must be due, in part, to the persistent determination of the South Downs Campaign over a period of almost 20 years, whilst the inclusion of Lewes within it is partly due to the support that the Society received, as part of the Campaign, from both the District and Town Councils as well as townsfolk generally. It is now important to ensure that campaigning issues such as the delegation of most development control decisions in Lewes to the District Council takes place, albeit within the policies set by the National Park Authority with whom the statutory planning powers will rest.

More generally the Society has continued its work in considering and commenting as necessary on all planning applications in Lewes and the immediate surrounding area as well as planning policy documents affecting the town. It has also had meetings with the local Councils as well as with Norman Baker MP on relevant issues.

The Society remains constrained in what it can do by the number of members willing to undertake the work necessary to ensure that it maintains the reputation it has built up over the years with public bodies by acting in a professional way. In order to try and increase recruitment to the Society and endeavour to make it more representative of the town's population a meeting was held in November with a number of informed non-members out of which recommendations were made. These have still to be considered by the Executive Committee but it is hoped that one side effect will be to increase publicity about the Society's activities so that misconceptions are avoided in the future.

At the Annual General Meeting in April Mrs Phyllida Stewart-Roberts, a former Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex, was appointed President, whilst later in the year the retiring President, Peter Mettyear, was appointed a Vice-President.

The Executive Committee considers that during the year the Society's activities, projects and services to members, details of which follow, fulfil the Society's objectives and that as they are beneficial to the town and its inhabitants the Society has also complied with the public benefit test that applies to all charities.

PLANNING POLICY ISSUES

The South East *Regional Plan* or Regional Spatial Strategy, was finally approved by Government during the year. There was no change in the number of new houses (220 per year) which the District Council is expected to provide in the period up to 2026.

There were no formal consultations during the year on aspects of the District Council's draft *Local Development Framework* which has to be prepared in accordance with the South East Plan and other Government guidance. The District Council have said that they are working on the evidence base needed to determine the vision, and the options for addressing it, to put forward as part of the Core Strategy consultation in 2010.

The County Council consulted on their *Waste and Minerals Preferred Strategy*. This is a planning document that sets out selection criteria for sites, none in the immediate vicinity of Lewes, that could be used for land filling or land raising. The Society expressed concern about the basic information provided about waste volumes, how the various streams of it are currently managed and how it is proposed to manage them in the future taking account of future trends in such issues as recycling.

The Government issued a number of documents concerned with the development control process. The Society commented on the draft *Planning Policy Statement on the Historic Environment* where, despite being unimpressed by the draft's vagueness, it welcomed the principle of regarding the historic environment as an asset.

In the summer English Heritage mounted a campaign to encourage local bodies to identify *Buildings at Risk*. After having the District Council's Design and Conservation Officer to an Executive Committee meeting the Society submitted a list to him of buildings in Lewes that it considers fall into this category. As the District Council have not allocated any funds in their budget for grant aiding enhancements or repairs to such buildings it is unlikely that action will be taken on the list in the immediate future. This lack of finance to encourage conservation is one issue which the Society takes up with the District Council when commenting each year on their draft *Planning Service Plan*. The Society also remains concerned that they have not yet started drafting a Conservation Area Management Plan for Lewes.

One positive change to report was that after some years of lobbying, a *Conservation Area Advisory Group* was set up for Lewes. The Society is represented on this independent Group and other representatives come from professional bodies and organisations concerned with the Lewes and Malling Deanery conservation areas. The Group's role is to comment on planning applications in these areas and consider other aspects affecting the public realm. Although there were some concerns that this Group would remove the need for the Society's Planning Committee, it will in practice strengthen the comments made on inappropriate or badly designed development.

During the year the District Council initiated a scrutiny review of *S.106 agreements* which are sometimes made when developers receive planning permission and they provide finance for infrastructure or environmental improvements. The Society commented that there needed to be more openness over these agreements so that suggestions could be made as to how such finance should be spent prior to an agreement being finalised. There was also concern about the amount of finance that

had already been pledged by developers but not yet spent. The Society also commented on a draft *Windows guidance note* that the District Council are planning to publish. It was suggested that this needed to be more positive as to what changes are permitted rather than emphasise what is not allowed.

The Environment Agency consulted on its *River Basin Management Plan* for the South East and the Society commented on this so far as it affects Lewes. Concern was expressed that the reaches of the River Ouse had only been assessed to a limited extent and that flow in the river above Lewes needed to be taken fully into account. In addition it was suggested that the recommendations in the Catchment Flood Management Plan should be reflected more clearly in the River Basin Plan's objectives whilst support was given to improving the ecological potential in both the tidal Ouse and the Winterbourne stream. During the year the Society was pleased that work was started by the Environment Agency on improving the flood defences on the east side of the river southwards from Phoenix Causeway.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Planning Committee has continued to meet on the first Thursday of every month. In the last year 277 applications were considered including 2 from the County Council, a slight decrease from the previous year. Comments are made for various reasons, not always to object. Of the 44 applications on which comments were submitted four were commendations. 84 applications for tree work were also noted .

Objections were made when proposed materials seemed inappropriate for a Conservation Area or out of keeping with the surroundings. Objections have also been made when drawings are inadequate or unclear. Concerns were expressed about the conversion of gardens to hard standing, often when garages are converted to habitable rooms, and permeable surfacing is put forward for consideration.

The Committee objected strongly to the demolition of the Canon O'Donnell Hall preferring repair and refurbishment. Objections were also made to the proposed replacement building particularly on the grounds of scale and materials, and that the proposed east elevation did not provide an adequate focus when approaching it from the town centre. The nearby Meridian Public House was also the subject of an application for demolition and rebuilding. The Committee objected to any demolition until a suitable replacement has been approved and strongly objected to the proposed replacement. None of these applications had been determined by the end of the year.

Helen Grogan has retired from the Committee and was thanked for her many years of service. Her experienced contributions are missed. Averil Garritt and Nick Robinson were welcomed to the Committee during the year. Further new members, especially those with planning or other professional experience, would also be welcome.

The Committee is aware that some of its decisions are criticised but they are taken after open discussion and in consideration of any representations made to them. Every member is expected to examine the plans and consider them in the light of existing planning policy. Objections cannot be made just because we do not like an application; reasons for objection must be stated in planning terms.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Due to the economic recession 2009 was a year when no new proposals for major developments were made and the possibility of such development taking place on the *Phoenix site* receded when the previous promoter went into administration. But this was not before planning permission had been given for industrial buildings to be erected on land zoned for such development in the *Malling Brooks*. This would have enabled businesses located at Phoenix to be decanted there. However no work has started on this site. Long term appropriate development of the run down Phoenix site together with a flood wall on the west side of the river north of Phoenix Causeway would be welcome and a Community Land Trust has been set up in the town with a view to progressing this idea.

Construction of the new *Police Station in North Street* started in the autumn after the existing car park there had been unnecessarily completely closed for some 6 months. But as construction of the new *Aldi* store beside the Tesco roundabout is being delayed the District Council have opened a temporary car park there. The planning application for an extension to the *Tesco* store, to which the Society objected, had not been determined at the year end.

On the *Lewes House site* little progress has been made with the approved proposals for a mixture of affordable and private housing.

TRANSPORT ISSUES

The Society has suggested to the County Council that in preparing its draft *Local Transport Plan 3* account needs to be taken of the need to provide enhanced provision in conservation areas as well as the National Park. It also suggested that emphasis needed to be given to the possible effects of climate change whilst more local aspirations would be the reopening of the Lewes – Uckfield railway line, changing the priority at the Fisher Street/West street junction, establishing a roundabout at the exit from Waitrose and providing adequate pavements in Station Street.

Other issues on which the Society has lobbied the County Council include the need to properly maintain the iconic streets of Castlegate and Keere Street with the correct material. In addition the need for the street drains to be kept clear of debris so that puddles do not form after heavy rain has been an issue which has been pursued although the division of responsibility between the County Council, who are concerned with the drain itself, and the District Council who are responsible for the gutters and drain cover top, does not help.

SOCIETY PROJECTS

Books

The revision of the Street Names book is at an advanced stage and should be published in 2010. This will be followed by a revision of the Twittens book.

The "magic circle" above Castle Ditch Lane

An application for a grant towards this project was submitted towards the year end.

Elisabeth Howard memorial and Southover Grange

The Society will be providing a bicycle rack in memory of Elisabeth close to the garden entrance nearest to Keere Street when the District Council undertake work in that area in 2010. Separately the Society has been concerned about the slow progress being made on renovations to the house and the mosaic in the knot garden. It also objected to the proposals to completely fence in the Winterbourne stream as it considered that safety there could be achieved in more environmentally friendly ways.

White Lion sign

The Town Council have agreed to partially fund the restoration of this sign.

Commercial Square and Paddock Lane flint walls

Slow progress is being made on the proposals to remove the render on the Commercial Square wall and renovate the Paddock Lane wall although the Town Council are sympathetic to making a contribution to these works.

SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

Three lectures took place in 2009; in January Lesley Fielding spoke on the "Baxters in Lewes"; in April Virginia Nicholson spoke on the Bloomsbury Group; whilst in November Christine Hall spoke about the oral history project undertaken on the Lewes Phoenix Iron Works. Three newsletters were again provided for members to keep them abreast of Society business, and an increasing number are now receiving them by e-mail.

Two general meetings were held in the year; at the AGM in March Paul Roberts from English Heritage spoke about their current approach to cultural heritage whilst in October Richard Shaw, the Interim Chief Executive of the National Park Authority updated members on the progress being made towards it taking up its full powers and responsibilities.

Marietta van Dyck remains the Membership Secretary as well as continuing to raise funds through the sale of cards which are always available on our sales tables at meetings and events or by telephone from Marietta (474521) who will deliver them within the town.

The Society again participated in the town's annual Societies Fair where it was able to attract some new members apart from explaining what it does. Thanks are due to all those who give their time organising events such as this, services for members or other work for the Society but offers of help to ensure that all our activities and work continues would be much appreciated.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The Society's unrestricted income last year amounted to £6,759 and total expenditure to £4,382, including expenses paid to trustees of £14.40, which resulted in a surplus for the year of £2,377 compared with a surplus last year of £3,004. Interest decreased to £ 141 but unrestricted donations increased by £284, plus an additional £310 for the proposed bicycle rack in the Grange Gardens in memory of Elisabeth Howard. The Society's plans for project expenditure this year have been frustrated because of the need for cooperation with other bodies. However, the Society and the Town Council have recently applied for a grant from Biffaward to part fund the renovation of the "Magic Circle". The Society has allocated £2,000 towards this project and £2,600 to the Howard memorial referred to above.

At the end of the year the total financial assets amounted to £25,906. A balance of about £2,000 is needed to manage the day to day expenditure, leaving year-end reserves of nearly £24,000. The Society holds reserves in order that it can provide firm funding for projects which meet the Society's overall objectives, without having to make an appeal first.

The subscriptions received this year, which decreased by £ 336, just covered the core costs of operating the Society leaving nothing for additional project expenditure. However printing and postage costs continue to increase and for this reason we are hoping that as many members as possible sign up to receive newsletters etc. by e-mail. Nevertheless the Society is reviewing subscription levels partly because it wishes to support the newly formed national Civic Society Initiative (which has replaced the Civic Trust) and partly to provide additional funds for project expenditure.

The Society continues to manage a 'restricted fund' for the Lewes Library Friends, which is held in a separate deposit account. The value of the fund rose during the year from ££8,638 to £8,692 by the interest paid on the account. There was no expenditure on library projects, which the Society generally support on the recommendation of the Library Friends committee.

PLANS FOR FUTURE PERIODS

Whilst the Society aspires to be more pro-active in pursuing its objectives in the future the extent to which it can do so will continue to be determined by both the human and financial resources available to it. Within these constraints it will continue to take a professional and independent approach to the issues facing the town whilst endeavouring to explain through better publicity what it does to townsfolk as a whole. Promoting or financially assisting more projects which enhance the townscape of Lewes is something the Society would like to do if it had more funds. Raising the membership subscription will bring in some additional income for this but further legacies would also be welcome. Members are therefore encouraged to leave the Society a legacy which, bearing in mind the Society's charitable status, would reduce their inheritance tax liability.

Approved by the Executive Committee on 27th January 2010 and signed on their behalf by
Robert Cheesman Chairman