



# NEWSLETTER

Winter 2023



Lewes Christmas Shops - by Nick Robinson

*I heard a bird sing  
In the dark of December  
A magical thing  
And sweet to remember,  
'We are nearer to spring  
Than we were in September.'  
I heard a bird sing  
In the dark of December*

*Oliver Herford (1860-1935)*

## Ruth O'Keeffe - Chair of Friends of Lewes

Welcome to the Friends of Lewes Winter Newsletter 2023

As I sit down to write this piece in my attic, I can hear birds singing despite the gloomy dark of the winter afternoon and I was reminded of Herford's short poem. He was better known for witty aphorisms and a famously skewed sense of humour (look him up if you have not met with Herford's one liners) but my favourite piece of his is this poem with its common sense but happy reminder about the timing of Spring.

The newsletter starts with news from Roger Maskew and the planning committee who have had a busy time over the last few weeks. In addition to perhaps more traditional planning matters Roger's report includes news of an initiative planned for the Nevill area to reduce rainwater runoff. (See page 3). Following on from this Roger has news about the North Street Quarter application and Friends of Lewes' planning committee's response to this, which has elicited both praise and censure from members; see pages 3-5.

Next, there are updates both on the Lewes Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan (pages 5-6), and on the Lewes Bus Station from Peter Earl (pages 6-7) plus some very positive news from Peter about Heritage Open Days 2023, looking forward to the next celebration of local heritage in 2024 (pages 7-8).

Audrey Jarvis is the next contributor on pages 8-10 with news of the Trees Committee's work since the last newsletter; tree maintenance, interesting talks and exhibitions and a lot of planting planned for the next few weeks. On Pages 10-12 Di Wilkins, Barbara Merchant, Jane Slater and Bronagh Liddicoat let everyone know about the work of the Membership Services Committee, including some future dates for events, and news about the continuing additions of heritage plaques around Lewes.

Finally, on page 12, the work of two very important people in the history of Friends of Lewes was marked at the Heritage Open Day launch by the Society's President, John Davey. Robert Cheesman and Marcus Taylor received certificates to warm applause for their many years of service to the civic society. Readers may know that Robert Cheesman was also awarded a British Empire Medal or BEM for his services to the community in East Sussex in the Queen's Birthday Honours list in 2020.

My thanks as always to all members of the Executive Committee and the various individual committees of Friends of Lewes and to our much-appreciated secretary Diana Freestone.

With all good wishes for a Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year

*Ruth*



**Christmas Gift ideas from the Friends of Lewes** Our popular books, cards, prints and tea towels are for sale via our website, with a discount for FoL members, plus postage and packing charges waived during December. All the details are at <https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk/resources/>

## **THE PLANNING COMMITTEE** *from Roger Maskew*

Since the last Newsletter in June 2023, there have been a further five meetings of the Planning Committee at the beginning of each month from June to November, when a total of 74 planning applications were considered and responses submitted to the relevant planning authority on 35 submissions.

As a result of these responses, the views of the Society continue to be well received by the South Downs National Park Authority in the determination of a number of planning applications that the Committee considered and comments submitted.

During this period there has been one major project of continuing concern to the Planning Committee, namely whether the planning application by Human Nature on the North Street Quarter site, now referred to as the Phoenix Project, would be determined. Indeed, there has been close scrutiny by the Committee of Human Nature's proposed flood defences for the Phoenix Project on the North Street Quarter site.

Please refer to the following item for an update on the North Street Quarter proposals. Regrettably, there has been no further progress on the future use of the Lewes Bus Station. Please refer to the separate update by Peter Earl.

In addition, there has been a consultation from the SDNPA on the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for Lewes. (Referred to as CAAMP). Peter Earl to update separately. Since the last Newsletter there has been no further news regarding the proposals to build 226 houses on the Old Malling Farm Site on the outskirts of Lewes.

During this period the Planning Committee has continued its work promoting the control of rainwater run-off, which needs to be reduced. The Friends of Lewes attended the Nevill 2030 event on sustainable front gardens at St Mary's Hall on the Nevill estate on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October. Support materials to demonstrate the benefits of 'slowing down the flow' by allowing rainwater to drain away close to where it fell, were used from partner organisations The Aquifer Partnership, Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust and Southern Water. Attendance was good and attendees sought advice on particular issues relating to their gardens. A 'pilot scheme' to promote the installation of measures to intercept rainwater run-off by the use of rain gardens will be promoted in the near future.

In terms of personnel on the Planning Committee, since the June Newsletter, John Gower has now joined the Committee. His experience in flooding and climate change from his time working for the Environment Agency will make a valuable addition to the range of skills of the Committee. We also hope to arrange a couple of flood related membership talks on measures to reduce surface water flooding and wider climate change matters in the near future.

## **The North Street Quarter** *from Roger Maskew*

As mentioned in the previous Newsletter, a planning application for the Phoenix Project was submitted by Human Nature to the South Downs National Park Authority, as the planning authority, on Tuesday 07<sup>th</sup> February 2023.

Initially responses were invited by Friday 21<sup>st</sup> April, but this deadline was subsequently extended to Friday 26<sup>th</sup> May. The Society submitted its response on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May, the content of which was included in the Spring / Summer Newsletter.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> June 2023, the South Downs National Park Authority made public its initial officer response to Human Nature on the Phoenix Planning Application, indicating a number of ‘key’ areas which required further consultation, including detailed discussions with Human Nature on a wide number of topics.

Following extensive discussions between the National Park officers and Human Nature, proposed amendments to the Phoenix Planning Application were detailed in a letter from Human Nature’s Planning Consultants, dated the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023.

Interested parties, including the Friends of Lewes, were then given a month to assess the amendments and to submit any further comments by the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023. The Society’s previous submission, dated the 17<sup>th</sup> May 2023, had highlighted a number of concerns that it considered essential to be assessed in further detail.

Having studied the amendments to the original planning proposals, the Friends of Lewes continue to have strong objections to many aspects of the planning application and was disappointed that a number of our concerns had not been adequately addressed.

As a consequence, the Friends of Lewes objected to the specific amendments to the Phoenix Application on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and the full details of this objection were circulated to members for information.

The National Park subsequently arranged for a meeting of its Planning Committee to be held at County Hall in Lewes on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023, with the consideration of SDNP/23/00526/OUT, North Street, Lewes, as item 6 on the agenda. Two members of the Executive Committee attended the meeting and Peter Earl made the following statement on behalf of the Society.

1. “The Friends of Lewes shares much of the officers’ assessment, and agrees that successful integration of the development into the town is vital to address the wider townscape and landscape concerns, to protect the conservation area and serve wider community interests. It is crucial that the traffic flow and transport modal shift aspects are clarified and realistic needs met.”
2. “The Santon consent provided vehicular access outside the Conservation Area and replacement public car parking to avoid vehicles circulating the town in search of a space. Clarity is required on the main pedestrian and cycle access linking the site to the town, within the constraints of the one-way Eastgate Street, and the absence of the riverside cycle and walkway beneath Phoenix Causeway. The proposed ‘Thomas Paine Bridge’ link to Malling must be provided at an early stage.”
3. “Phoenix Causeway is characterised by significant tree cover with all 67 trees on both sides covered by TPOs. The previous report omitted to consider the specific impact on the TPO trees. The current proposal will remove more trees, which again is not assessed, nor compared with the previously proposed treed boulevard to Phoenix Causeway, and off-site traffic management, which justified tree removal. New buildings off Phoenix Place now prevent the extant consent’s implementation requiring a fresh review of the TPO trees under the Pilkington case law principles, and the town’s international recognition as an ‘Arboretum Town’.”
4. “The large Mobility Hub with its Phoenix Causeway frontage cleared of trees prevents a ‘high quality’ public realm within the current Green Gateway to Lewes. This is a significant part of the development that should be fully detailed with a ‘landscape led’ design, including buildings with more active frontages.”

5. “In effect, the report seeks to provide a replacement bus interchange for the town. This is premature given that no consent exists for the removal of the current off-street bus station. The Local Plan Policy requires developers to justify an operationally satisfactory and accessible alternative with a comparative assessment, not limited to public land.”
6. “There has been no public consultation on an alternative bus interchange, and no information in this application which underpins the site selection or clarifies how 10 town centre bus stops will provide a useable interchange. The new bus stops are isolated, inadequate, and unsafe, with nothing to encourage modal shift.”
7. “The principal gateway to the town, and its busiest street must not be dominated by tarmac, devoid of vegetation, at the expense of necessary cycleways and footways.”
8. “So, members are asked to give considerable weight to these matters at this stage and seek significant amendment, regarding the heights and densities of the development, so that it can become acceptable.”
9. “Remembering that any permission runs with the land not the developer.”

Following a comprehensive discussion on the proposals, it became apparent that there were a number of concerns that needed to be addressed further. In addition, a number of the ‘Statutory Consultees’ had requested specific information from Human Nature, which they considered essential to be able to properly evaluate the Planning Application, in order to make a recommendation.

As a consequence, the SDNPA Planning Committee resolved: -

“That a decision on this application be deferred to seek to resolve the following issues with the application reported back to Planning Committee within 4 months for a further or final decision.” Namely (a) Transport: (b) Design: (c) Flood Risk: (d) Air Quality: (e) Section 106 Agreement: plus, further consideration of the proposed “Stopping Up” of the existing adopted highways.

**Members, please note that the “4-month period” finishes on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024.**

## **Lewes Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP)** *from Peter Earl*

Lewes Conservation Area was designated in 1970 recognising its great antiquity, with development from the Anglo-Saxon period onwards, and both the town’s attractive appearance and historic national significance. It has an Appraisal and Management Plan dating from 2007 and 2013 respectively, both of which were out-of-date and in need of revision.

It is considered by the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) that all Conservation Areas should have a written appraisal which is an objective analysis of the elements, which together define the area’s special architectural or historic interest and therefore give the designated area its special character. This in turn should assist agents, architects, developers, and householders to make well-informed decisions on planning applications and planners to make knowledgeably planning decisions within the town. It also seeks to allow a better understanding and appreciation amongst the wider population of the quality and significance of Lewes as a historic town. In addition, it is helpful in setting out proposals and aspirations for improvements to the Conservation Area. Collectively, the National Park Authority refers to these as ‘CAAMPs’.

The new Lewes CAAMP was prepared for the National Park Authority by a well-respected heritage consultancy. An initial draft was the subject of an extensive consultation process, which resulted in quite major revision and improvements. The new Lewes CAAMP was approved by the SDNPA Planning Committee at their meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> October and is now available on their website:- [https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/FINAL-CTEE-Lewes-CAAMP\\_28September2023-compressed.pdf](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/FINAL-CTEE-Lewes-CAAMP_28September2023-compressed.pdf)

The CAAMP also considered those elements of the town which are currently considered detrimental to its special character of the conservation area. In general, these so called ‘areas for enhancement’ consisted of most of the car parks within the town, but also some buildings which were deemed to be out of keeping.

The Friends of Lewes, in a 21-page submission, supported the review of the CAAMP, but made a number of comments and requested it be amended to respond to the climate emergency by setting out how the energy efficiency of buildings can be improved to reduce carbon emissions and how measures seeking to reduce surface water run off can be incorporated. The Friends of Lewes did not support the reduction to the boundaries of the conservation area, which appear inconsistent with the previous enlargements and requested more assessment work to clarify the appropriateness and scope of changes to the Article 4 Direction which would change the permitted rights within the conservation area. The scope of the Article 4 Direction is now to be considered in the near future in a separate consultation.

Many of our recommendations were accepted, although the SDNPA did not agree that St Thomas’ Court development to the north of the church, be omitted from an improvement area, or that the larger and more incongruous County Hall in St Anne’s Crecent be included within improvement areas.

### Lewes bus station update from Peter Earl

The 2<sup>nd</sup> planning application for the demolition of the bus station and its replacement with 32 flats and 3 houses is still undetermined (ref SDNP/23/02973/FUL). There is no clear timescale for when the application will go before the National Parks Planning Committee, or whether the meeting will be in Lewes rather than Midhurst. Recently a pneumatic concrete breaker has been in operation at the site - to apparently allow archaeological investigations to be undertaken (see picture below).



As matters stand, Lewes District Council are recommending refusal on air quality grounds. East Sussex County Council have raised objections as Lead Local Flood Authority and as the Highway and Public Transport Authority, as it has not been demonstrated that suitable and deliverable alternative bus stop facilities can be provided as part of the development and therefore the application does not comply with SDNP Local Plan Policy SD57 (which requires attractive, operationally satisfactory interchange facilities for passengers on a site elsewhere of equal convenience in this sector of the town). Southern Water have concerns about the risks to the Chalk groundwater aquifer.

It would appear that the County Council's preferred on-street replacement bus interchange facility for the town would involve 4 bus stops on the north side of Phoenix Causeway (A2029), 2 stops on the south side of Phoenix Causeway and an extension of the Waitrose bus stop to two spaces (reducing the width of Eastgate). There is uncertainty about whether the three existing Phoenix Causeway bus stops and the Friars Walk bus stop will be retained.

The Friends of Lewes raised strong objection to the application on multiple grounds which can be seen on our website.

### Heritage Open Days - Save the date 2024 *from Peter Earl*

We have had an enormous amount of positive feedback from so many people about all elements of the 2023 festival in the town, with the total number of visits to venues and participants on tours and walks totalling several thousand. We have had nothing but praise about the exhibitions and individual tours, including some particularly kind comments from the High Sheriff, Richard Bickersteth.

It was really pleasing to be able to provide access to new venues and include others that had not been included through the pandemic. In this respect it was wonderful that Sussex Past were able to open the doors of three historic Lewes landmarks, The Castle, Anne of Cleves House and Bull House, and offer a warm welcome to individuals and families seeking a glimpse into Sussex's rich past, making our region's cultural treasures accessible to over 3000 visitors over the Lewes festival.

Lewes Crown Court was also open again with over 1160 visitors on the single day of opening. The feedback again was overwhelmingly positive, with the majority of individuals stating that it had also given them a better understanding of the justice system!



The Lewes organising committee would like to express their huge thanks to all those that supported the event, whether as property owners, tour and walk guides or as stewards, without whose help the event could not take place. We are also extremely grateful for our sponsors, Lewes History Group, Lewes Therapeutic Gardening Group and the House of Friendship.

The 2024 national HOD event is to take place between 6-15 September with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary theme being the exploration of the history of **routes, networks and connections**.

The Lewes festival will be between **Friday 13<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September** with the launch being on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> September.

**Save the dates in your diary.**

### **Trees Committee Update** from Audrey Jarvis

Since the last newsletter, we have been busy visiting all 171 of the trees and hedgerows we have planted between 2014 to 2022 to weed, mulch, and prune them so that they might thrive. We are very grateful to those residents who have watered the trees regularly during the dry Spring and Summer. We had such a long time without any rain that we made sure that all the trees planted in 2021 and 2022 had long drinks from a bowser to keep them going.



*Gundreda Road*



*Jubilee Gardens*

After consultations with residents and landowners and several site visits we were able to decide on the planting goals and priorities for the 2023/2024 season. We are going to plant “Gateway trees” at three of the entrances to Lewes: Offham Road, Prince Charles Road and Brighton Road. Most of these trees will be disease-resistant Elms, *Ulmus Lutece*, to help to make up for all the Elms lost to Dutch Elm Disease over the past decades. They will also provide habitat for the rare White Letter Hairstreak Butterfly and reduce traffic noise and pollution along these busy roads.



We are continuing our planting plan around the perimeter of Nevill Green Recreation Ground with more Elms, (*Ulmus lutece*), and Cockspurthorn, (*Crataegus persimilis Prunifolia*). We hope that this will provide much-needed shade and shelter for families using the green and play park in future years.

In 2018, at the request of residents, we planted twelve trees in Houndean Rise which are all doing well. Since then, some new spaces have become free where older trees have been felled, so we are going to plant seven more trees there and in Southdown Avenue.

In Ham Lane, between the Scout Hut and the Cockshut, we plan to plant five Alders, (*Alnus glutinosa*), and five Black Poplars, (*Populus nigra*), which should grow well in this waterside setting.

Thank you to the officers of East Sussex County Council and Lewes District Council for giving us the necessary planting permissions and providing maps of the underground services. We look forward to showing you photographs of the new trees in the next newsletter!

We have been fortunate in being offered several opportunities to share news of our activities with the community. In May, through our partnership with Lewes Climate Hub, we were able to take over the Hub premises at Lewes House to display an exhibition to explain how our trees enrich our environment and wellbeing. Trees Committee member Peter Thurman gave an excellent talk on “Trees and Climate Change” on the first day of the exhibition.



Peter Thurman's talk at Lewes Climate Hub

Visitors to our stalls at the Societies Fair and Heritage Open Days in September shared their ideas for place where we might plant trees next year. At the Nevill 2030 “Sustainable Front Gardens” event, we shared suggestions of trees which could be planted in their gardens. Do get in touch if you would like a copy of the list.

One of the most enjoyable days this year was the “Tree Walk and Talk” around Malling Deanery Arboretum during Heritage Open Days. This was led by Keith Sacre, another Trees Committee member, who shared some fascinating facts about the wide variety of trees to be found there. Thank you very much to the owners for giving us permission to explore this wonderful space.



*Malling Deanery Arboretum*

**Membership Services Committee update** from Committee Members: *Di Wilkins, Barbara Merchant, Jane Slater and Bronagh Liddicoat*

**Join the Membership Services Committee**

Do you have a passion for local topics? Do you like meeting people and sharing ideas? Then why not join us on the Membership Services Committee? We are a small, friendly team who meet once every three months to create a programme of talks and events to inform and support the Friends of Lewes’ mission to ‘Keep Lewes Special’. If you would like to find out more, please contact Di Wilkins at [membership@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:membership@friends-of-lewes.org.uk).

**Past Events**

Over the summer, we ran a lively series of in-person events including a coffee-time talk with farmer and conservationist, Michael Richards, in July. In August, Marcus Taylor gave us a preview of the Heritage Open Day, while in September Tom Reeves and Brigitte Lardinois provided a fascinating insight into their exhibition of vintage photography. Tony Freeman kindly updated us on the latest plans for the Lewes Priory Trust in October. Then in November, with the onset of winter, we returned to Zoom events, with Marcus Taylor and Peter Earl giving us the benefit of their years of experience with a ‘Rough Guide to Planning in Lewes’.

This will be followed by a seasonal offering on 5 December when our President, John Davey, will be talking about ‘[The Old Inns of Lewes.](#)’

**Media coverage**

The number of views of our website so far this year has already exceeded previous annual records, due to the public interest in the prominent planning applications such as the Phoenix development, and to the ever-popular Heritage Open Days events. We post News items on our website, and you can receive these via email (see ‘Get News via email’ on [friends-of-lewes.org.uk](http://friends-of-lewes.org.uk)) or [facebook.com/FriendsofLewes](https://facebook.com/FriendsofLewes) or [twitter.com/lewesfriends](https://twitter.com/lewesfriends).



*Barbara Merchant, Audrey and Nick Jarvis at the Societies Fair*

We have also represented FoL at a wide range of public events including the Lewes Societies Fair (see photo above), Heritage Open Day, the Nevill Sustainable Gardens Day and the Sussex School of Archaeology & History Symposium.

If you have any feedback or suggestions for future events, these would be very much appreciated and should be sent to [membership@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:membership@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)

### **Future talks**



Storms and flooding have affected many people in the UK this autumn and will continue to increase due to climate change. Future talks will feature experts who will cover what we can do to reduce the likelihood of damage to our homes and towns, such as reporting blocked gullies or installing rain gardens (see photo left), plus considering what needs to be done at a larger scale in towns and in the countryside.

All our events are listed on the [Diary](#) page of our website and members will be notified by email. Our events are also open to non-members if they book via Ticketsource and pay a small charge of £4, so please do encourage friends and family to take part.

You may also be interested in the following [Lewes History Group](#) events:

- Monday 11 December 2023, 7:30pm Sue Berry on the development of Lewes c1840-1914.
- Monday 8 January 2024, 7:30pm Archaeologist Arthur Redmonds on the impact of castles on their surrounding communities (Includes Lewes Castle).
- Monday 12 February 2024, 7:30pm Geoff Mead on Daniel Defoe's 1724 tour through South-East England (Includes his visit to Lewes).
- Monday 11 March 2024, 7:30pm John Kay on the life and times of John Whitfield, Cliffe merchant.
- Monday 8 April 2024, 7:30pm Heather Downie on the South Street Story.

## Heritage plaques

The cost of having metal plaques cast has risen steeply over the past few years and the Town Ranger, Brian Courage, has checked with the few companies who can offer this bespoke service. At the request of the licensee of the Snowdrop on South Street, a plaque has been agreed, with contributions from him, Lewes Town Council's rolling fund for this purpose and Friends of Lewes. It should be installed in the next few weeks. This will reinforce the memorial in South Malling church marking this nineteenth century tragedy in the right location and stimulate interest in this event.

It is hoped that another similar arrangement, with a financial contribution from the house owner, can be reached in the present financial year to put a plaque in St Annes Crescent, which was the home for almost 50 years of Lewis Bilbie Rees, who rode *Music Hall*, the Lewes-trained winner of the Grand National in 1922. Remarkably, his brother Fred Rees had won the Grand National in the previous year on *Shaun Spadah*. This should help provide greater recognition of Lewes's rich history as a horse training and racing venue.

☆☆☆☆

At the Heritage open day launch the Society's President, John Davey, paid tribute to the huge contribution of two of the society's past officers. Robert Cheesman was Chair for 25 years and Marcus Taylor served as Secretary for the best part of ten years. They were presented with certificates and small gifts.



Robert Cheesman & Ruth O'Keeffe



Marcus Taylor and Ruth O'Keeffe

☆☆☆☆

## VOLUNTARY DONATION

We depend largely on our members' subscriptions to carry out our work, and welcome additional help from donations and legacies of any amount, however small.

You can also support Friends of Lewes by participating in the Lewes District Council Local Lottery at: <https://www.leweslocalottery.co.uk/support/friends-of-lewes>