

LEE MANOR SOCIETY



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Annual Review 2019-2020

Like other Amenity and Conservation Groups our programme for 2020 was almost completely stalled. We have not been able to hold our ever-popular Annual Plant Mart – by far the most important source of funding for our activities – and, because of the cramped environment we have not been able to open the Ice House. We did, however, take part in a joint Quiz Night with Lee Fair Share just before the end of last year – a very enjoyable evening – and this raised very welcome funds. Activities on our Community Garden have also been severely curtailed and at the time of writing there is no sign of a return to normality – but the opportunity has been taken to undertake some major repairs (see below). We have tentatively restarted our regular meetings through the agency of videoconferencing and our Annual General Meeting was held through this medium.

Planning

However, not everything has ceased, and we continue to monitor and, if necessary, comment on the steady stream of planning applications within the Conservation Area. We enjoy a generally good working relationship with the Planning Officers and have seen several examples where our observations have resulted in satisfactory outcomes to all parties.

Planning enforcement, a vital element in the planning process, is a different matter. Never good at communicating with the outside world, they have outdone themselves in recent weeks. Initially ignoring our request for action at one property, where the owner was flagrantly ignoring a council planning directive, enforcement suggested that since they had already taken up the issue – though there was no evidence they had – there was no need to inform us of their actions. This smacks of a remoteness from the concerns of residents. Unlike

private businesses that have lost revenues and been forced to close during the coronavirus epidemic, Lewisham Council (like all others) continues to receive our council tax payments. They should continue to provide the service for which we are all paying.

Two matters which are still to be resolved are the shed which has been erected in the front garden of Pentland House in Old Road, and the high fence and advertisement obscuring St Winifred's chapel in Manor Lane.

Low Traffic Neighbourhood

Lee Manor Society circulated concerns about the introduction of the scheme, but we acknowledge that some parts of Lee Green Ward have benefitted from the pilot scheme. Informal conversations with residents consistently reveal a desire not to return to the previous cross-town traffic. However, there is no doubt that the changes have increased traffic on bordering roads and at junctions and added to pollution on these routes as well as delays for emergency services and public transport. As we go to press, the temporary scheme has been reviewed with input from TfL and some of the measures are being taken out. Whether the results are satisfactory to the majority of residents has yet to be seen. The irony of the whole episode is that once cross-town traffic is reduced, the draconian – and profitable – enforcement system only has one population to watch: the local residents.

Celebrating Diversity

We have opened a discussion on finding ways for Lee Manor Society to include more diversity in the way local history is represented in the Conservation Area, for example more on the lives of women and ethnic minorities and their contributions. We have agreed to identify and highlight examples that have contributed to the

social fabric of Lee Manor and we will welcome your histories.

The Manor House

The Manor House is a Grade 2* listed building - the star being added because of the people associated with it, among them Sir Francis Baring. We noted that the plaque about Sir Francis Baring on the front of the building now languishes behind wooden shuttering. This cannot continue indefinitely, and we look forward to the Mayor's proposals to review local landmarks and plaques. We discussed how to accommodate our sometimes-unpleasant histories with the reality that they do not go away by hiding or destroying them and considered the need for educational panels where links between this building and its owners and the wealth gained partly from the slave trade could be explained and set in context.

Lee Manor Community Garden

As referenced in the introduction, activities on the garden, which is sponsored by The Society have been reduced but that has not meant a complete halt. The originally-installed planters are coming to the end of their useful life and we have rebuilt four of them from new scaffold boards, and we have experimented with the installation of a 2.5 x 1.5 m planter fashioned from recycled plastic. Some limited autumn planting is about to resume.

Fly tipping

A chronic issue in the Conservation area with hotspots, amongst others in Burnt Ash Road and Wantage Road. The FixMyStreet app. (highly recommended) is effective and we acknowledge the Labour of Sisyphus faced by the Council clearance teams but the irony is that the fly tippers are effectively relying on well-intentioned citizens for proxy waste clearance.

Trees

Society members continue to monitor local street trees and push for new plantings and replacements. David and Charles recently planted two trees - a liquid amber and red oak in Southbrook Road and Burnt Ash Road, respectively.

We recorded the loss of two mature street trees in Handen Road and these now appear to have been associated with Bracket Fungus – the fungus does not attack living wood but it does proliferate in dead heartwood and its presence, usually near the ground, indicates a likely weakening of the tree.

Some of the fallen trees in Manor House Gardens seem to have suffered from the same fate and, once you get to observe it, you will notice a seriously large number of trees are affected. As we go to press, a notable casualty has been the magnificent beech tree in the grounds of the Church of the Good Shepherd – a substantial loss.



It has been suggested we align our tree-planting initiatives with organisations like Street Trees for Living (Lewisham Borough) and Trees for Livable Cities (an international organisation): this would give us leverage in fund-raising and support. At the same time we will not lose sight of Lee Manor Conservation Area and its immediate surroundings as our prime focus.

On a brighter note, we are exploring ways to restart the popular tree walks in the area and especially in Manor House Gardens, but we are conscious of the need to manage group size and observe social distancing.

Officers

At the Annual General Meeting held by teleconference on Tuesday 22 September, the Annual Accounts were accepted, and the Chairman (Dr Ralph White), Secretary (Ms Sheila Peck) and Treasurer (Ms Lorraine Burton) were re-elected *nem. con.*