

LEE MANOR SOCIETY



www.leemanorsociety.org email: news@leemanorsociety.org

Review of the Year

What goes around comes around and **Leegate** is never far from our thoughts. St Modwen, the site's owner, submitted additional information in April but has made no obvious changes to its plans. We remain committed to encouraging a scheme where public realm penetrates the site, away from the highways, and traffic flows are engineered to minimise pollution. We do not subscribe to the nihilistic belief that no development at all would be preferable to elements of the scheme currently on offer and we earnestly hope that the current stakeholders don't just walk away.

Lee Manor Society has always advocated an holistic approach to the developments at **Lee Green Crossroads**, starting with our Design Brief in 2007. This initiative has been expanded with the recent approval by the Boroughs of Lewisham and Greenwich of the **Lee Neighbourhood Forum**,



Parking signs and trees vie for pavement space

Lee Manor Society's 2016 Annual General Meeting

7.30pm on Wednesday, 18 May at the Manor House, Old Road.

Agenda

Chairman's report; Treasurer's report; Election of officers; General discussion. The following officers are standing for election: Ralph White, chairman; Sheila Peck, secretary; Lorraine Burton, treasurer. The post of deputy chairman is vacant. Any other nominations must be presented to the secretary seven days in advance of the meeting.

Speaker

Planning policy is in a mess with a series of misguided initiatives intended sweep away the supposed constraints on economic development imposed by the planning system. Local authorities have neither the resources nor the powers to resist the developers so as to plan liveable and attractive neighbourhoods. Our speaker, **Peter Eversden MBE, chair of the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies**, of which the Society is a member, is well placed to shed light on the challenges facing the capital.

established under the Localities Act, and with an area embracing most of Lee Green Ward but also relevant areas of Greenwich Borough on the north east and east boundaries. The designated area also covers the geography of the **Lee Manor Conservation Area** and we will seek to establish a pragmatic working relationship between the Society and the Forum.

At the other end of the scale we have the **household lumber compound** by Glastonbury House in Wantage Road – it has successfully solved the chronic fly-tipping problem and thanks are due to LeeGreen.London and Lewisham Homes for getting to grips with it.

Street trees are one of our major interests and it is an unfortunate coincidence that many of the ornamental cherries and rowans are coming to the end of their natural life at a rate greater than they can be replaced. However, your Society, individual residents and a consortium of residents in Effingham Road are making every effort with the Council and contractors to replace missing trees, including efforts to enhance the avenue to the east of Burnt Ash Road. As described elsewhere, not all plantings have been to the required standard and indeed have been damaged by

the contractors themselves – this has meant unnecessary extra work to remedy the faults.

An unfortunate consequence of the financial and staffing cutbacks at Lewisham Council is that the regular **Amenity Societies' Panel** with representatives from Conservation Areas has been suspended indefinitely. We still review applications and comment on-line but the opportunity for Societies to meet as a group, share knowledge and discuss issues with a conservation officer face-to-face has been lost. We are supporting efforts to find an alternative forum for these essential activities. The cutbacks have also hit another cherished local asset – **Manor House Library** (see below) which it is planned to be reduced in status to a Community Library. We take the view that survival of the Grade II* Manor House itself must be assured because, without it, there will be no home for the Library in whatever form it emerges.

Finally, as we go to press, installation of the **Lee Green West Controlled Parking Zone** is nearing completion. Whilst there was overall support for introduction of the scheme with a limited (10 am – 12 noon) restriction, few of us had any idea of the visual impact, especially in roads with many pavement crossovers. We urged the council to install short signs. But each parking bay has to be signed and so there are festoons of unsightly notices standing in the pathway away from wall or hedge. Cross-overs to allow front garden parking make matters worse but if the new controls reduce on-street parking by commuters there should be an overall improvement in the street scene.

The Manor House and its Library

The ancient Chinese are believed to have coined the ultimate curse 'May you live in interesting times' and so with the Manor House and its valued Library. You probably know the Manor House, one of Lewisham's Grade II* listed buildings, was built by Thomas Lucas in about 1772 – 74. It's believed he commissioned Richard Jupp as architect. Money from slavery is rumoured to have been the source of wealth which afforded the Manor House (see the excellent blog by *Running Past*) but now the situation is reversed because there is outright concern about how the Manor House and Library can be financed.

To quote Jim Mallory "If we're (Lewisham Council) forced to make the cuts under the Government's current projections, then all we will be doing is protecting the vulnerable – social care for older people and vulnerable children – and emptying the bins and sweeping our streets". It's blunt, but let's avoid politics – short of an economic miracle the situation will be faced by any government, priorities are not going to change and we have to find other ways to finance this cherished building and its library. Lee Manor Society takes the view that the prize asset – the library – with all that it holds in educational, social and intellectual capital can only survive if the Manor

Brickbat of the Year goes to Conway, Lewisham's highways contractor, for damaging a recently planted oak tree in Burnt Ash Road. The Society planted a young tree to replace a two-year old planting that had died. The new tree was supported by a post and protective circular mesh so while small was clearly visible. Barriers and signs placed next to new paving stones were placed on top of the tree which on two occasions was bent right over. There was no reason to touch the tree which was just outside the work area. It is particularly frustrating when workmen show so little respect for local community initiatives. The original tree had been paid for by a mix of Lee Green Assembly and Lee Manor Society funds. Fortunately the tree survived and we have re-set the post and protective mesh. We think respect for existing features should be one issue considered by the council when selecting contractors.



How far can you bend a tree without it snapping?

House itself commands a viable future. We should count ourselves lucky that we achieved the magnificent restoration of the building seven years ago – a scheme now unimaginable – but it gives solid basis for optimism.

What is to be done? The building is a challenge because it is what it is – a grand domestic residence from a bygone age. The layout – floors and rooms – presents all kinds of challenges to modern application. What is necessary is that we should entertain a wide range of options and not immediately dismiss any proposal out of hand. Could it be a sheltered home? Should the library move elsewhere in the building? Could it become the base for an architect's or other professional practice? Should we invest in catering facilities to support a professional functions venue?

Without some creativity that brings a revenue stream, the Library will not survive. We support (and co-chair) the Manor House Working Group and are actively seeking your proposals; we aim to positively influence the bidders (if any) that may tender for operating the building while appreciating that they must have room for manoeuvre.

Leegate – more pretty pictures but no improvement

St Modwen, owner and developer of Leegate shopping centre, has filed additional information with Lewisham's planning department in support of its application to demolish and rebuild. The company was responding to a request from councillors* for clarity on 18 outstanding issues including public space, the covered passageway and traffic issues.

We do not think this additional information in any way strengthens St Modwen's case for its current redevelopment plans. A meeting of the council's strategic planning committee in December deferred a decision on the planning application and we expect the proposals to come before a second meeting of the committee within the coming months.

St Modwen has now provided the council with illustrations of other pedestrian areas in London including Lewisham High Street and Tottenham Court Road in an attempt to show how generous its own proposed "linear square" is. The relevance of these examples is not obvious since individual contexts vary so much. Nor does it explain why we should accept a poor quality scheme when there is an opportunity to design a good one. People may well sit alongside a noisy, traffic and fume-choked road if that is all they are offered. But why should they accept such a poor quality environment in 2016 when so much more is known about the damaging effects of pollution on our health?

St Modwen also presents a four-page defence of its design of the covered pedestrian arcade though it does not propose any changes to the escalator lay-out to which the committee objected in December. The company provides a map of the Lee Green crossroads which it describes as an "area of possible highway improvements" but it makes no suggestion as to what these improvements might be. This is anyway a matter for Transport for London.

We believe that serious consideration of the public space, traffic and pollution issues would lead to the rejection of the plans in their current form. Why a profit-driven retailer such as ASDA would consider opening a superstore that did not generate large amounts of extra traffic with resulting pollution defeats us. But surveys carried out by St Modwen and endorsed by the planners show insignificant increases in traffic and pollution.

Similarly, St Modwen's survey of returns on property investments in the area - the viability assessment - shows that building 229 homes on this small site is such a minimally profitable enterprise that only 15 per cent of these homes can be considered "affordable."



A wider pavement is planned but this is still not our idea of a public square

Good quality public space, an essential element in any of the other development schemes being carried out around the country, also seems to be expendable at Leegate. You might argue that the existing square on the corner of Eltham Road and Leyland Road is not in the best position and the passenger walkway unappealing (but only because St Modwen has let the centre become so run-down). But they provide valuable refuges away from the noise and the fumes of traffic.

What St Modwen is now offering is a slightly wider pavement along busy Burnt Ash Road next to a bus stop, vehicle loading bays and the entrances to the rooftop car park and ASDA's delivery yard. ASDA may not care because it will have its own café but the smaller shops in the centre would probably welcome an attractive square with a café and outdoor seating.

The cut-throat approach by St Modwen and ASDA is perhaps to be expected. But the willingness of the planning department – whose advice will influence councillors – to go along with it is inexcusable. The council's own core planning document states unequivocally that "town centre" developments and specifically Lee Green must contain good quality public space. Why are they ignoring this commitment?

Yet the planners seem willing to twist the facts to get the current plans through. Their map of existing public space – presented to councillors in December – left out some of the square and all of the passageway, making St Modwen's plans look more generous. It is possible this was a simple error. If so, it is a serious one given that this is such a vital issue. The present plans will, according to our calculations, reduce the amount of public space to between a quarter and a third of what is currently available.

The planners stated as early as July 2014 that they were "satisfied with the amount and location of public realm being proposed" despite the meanness and poor

quality of the space on offer. But in case the local community continued to object the planners advised St Modwen to “please ensure that the public realm proposals are exhibited as [a] strong feature of the redevelopment scheme.” We do not think the role of the planning department is to act as marketing advisers to a developer.

We have been lobbying since 2007 for a decent redevelopment of Leegate but our arguments have fallen on deaf ears. It is always better to try to influence a scheme in its early stages before too much money has been spent and that is what we have tried to do. We do not expect St Modwen to show much interest in our concerns but we had hoped for better from the planners and from councillors on the planning committee. It is not too late but there is little in the current scheme that takes account of residents’ reasonable concerns.

**Planning committees draw on councillors from across the borough. Our three local ward councillors have supported our objections but cannot sit on a committee considering a scheme in their ward.*

Beneath your feet –Hither Green Ditch

All of you will be familiar with the Quaggy River, but there is a little-known tributary of it, the Hither Green Ditch, hidden underneath our feet. It arises near Reigate Road to the south of the cemetery in Verdant Lane, flows generally northwards and under the railway to Manor Lane at Kimberley Terrace and then north under the railway bridges and alongside the west side shops in Manor Lane where there is a widened pavement. Older residents have recalled there was an open ditch here in the past. It turns northwest between Longhurst Road and Manor Park along the boundary line and here picks up a tributary that runs from the vicinity of Elthruda Road and across the Triangle Nature Reserve between Hither Green Station Platforms 4 and 5. The Hither Green Ditch empties into the Quaggy within sight of the road bridge on Manor Park. Its existence would have remained little-known but for the large diesel spill in Hither Green sidings in February – some 4 tonnes in all which severely polluted the Hither Green Ditch and then the Quaggy and Ravensbourne Rivers up as far as Deptford Creek. Prompt action by Network Rail and the Environmental Agencies sought to contain the damage, and this looks to have been successful. Manor Park is returned to normal, the stream and ponds in the Nature Reserve were mercifully unaffected.

The Society

We are a voluntary group composed of local residents keen to maintain and enhance the attractive, largely Victorian character of the local area. We meet on the second Wednesday of every month at 7.30pm.

We are always looking for new members to join in the projects in which we are involved. No special knowledge of planning or architecture is required - just a concern for the well-being of the area. Everyone who lives locally is welcome to come. If you are interested in taking an active role in the work of the Society we would be pleased to talk it over with you in confidence.

We have a formal role in advising the council on planning matters and see all applications made in the conservation area. We work with other local conservation groups to achieve improvements to our immediate neighbourhood and Lewisham in general. We see our role as encouraging people to take an interest in their street beyond their front gate. Past experience shows that we can make a difference. We do not win all our battles but through concerted action we do achieve improvements and we can prevent ill-thought-out schemes by developers, the council and individuals.

Large home extensions including roof extensions may require planning permission while the demolition of buildings and changes to front garden boundaries are also controlled. Satellite dishes and replacement doors and windows in uPVC are also subject to restrictions.

Changes to frontages that can be seen from the street – or from a park or even a train – are subject to particularly tight controls. Contact us or the planning department on 0208 314 7400.

Why not contact us to receive our monthly Newsletter and other news from the Society? Just email Ralph White on news@leemanorsociety.org and we will add you to our distribution list. Alternatively, visit our website at <http://www.leemanorsociety.org>

Lee Manor Society
2016
**Annual
Plant Mart**
2-4 pm Saturday 14th May
2-6 Micheldever Road SE12 8LX
Plants!
Raffles - Tombola -
Children's Games
Bric-à-Brac - Gifts - Cakes
Jams and Preserves
Cream Teas will be
served
Donations of plants and goods
for the stalls welcome!
email news@leemanorsociety.org