

# LEE MANOR SOCIETY



web site: <http://www.leemanorsociety.org>

## Annual Review – October 2021

COVID has wreaked havoc with our usual pattern of monthly meetings and we have had to resort to *ad hoc* telephone and video contact. One area where we have managed to keep a grip is in the review of **planning applications** and we thank Charles Batchelor for casting his experienced eye over the many applications within the Conservation Area. The majority are not of concern, but we do take the opportunity to comment when an application is just not in keeping with the requirements of the Council's own guidelines. Currently many applications are for rooftop or dormer extensions. The planning department's **Alterations and Extensions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)** of 2017 gives some clarity here. This advises that, in conservation areas, rear roof extensions should be 'set in significantly from the eaves, ridge and sides' of the roof and be 'no wider than two thirds of the original roof.' Anything larger, in our view (as well as the council's), creates a boxy effect and unbalances the original building.

Lewisham's planners have been busy over the last 18 months putting out important draft documents for consultation. The **Local Plan** attempts to set out a strategy for the planning policy in the borough over the next 20 years. This plan, running to 872 pages in draft form, covers twice the time period of other recent strategic plans and is unlikely to survive changing circumstances. It contains many fine sentiments with which we cannot disagree but financial constraints on the council and the frequent willingness of planners to ignore their own rules prompts a degree of scepticism. Much planning over the next two decades will be driven by the

need to make up for years of central government neglect and provide additional housing.

As part of the council's plan to increase the number of homes, it has drafted a **Small Sites SPD**. This is meant to encourage smaller house-builders to develop neglected corner sites including derelict garages and factories and unattractive areas of waste land for housing. But it also contains a proposal for 'vertical intensification' which would allow extra storeys to be added to homes with traditional pitched roofs where there is a mix of roof heights in a street. And a developer's idea of waste land could be another person's green oasis. Covid has emphasised the importance of green space for personal well-being. We have responded with our comments to the council on both these documents.

The overriding planning issue in Lee is the **redevelopment of the Leegate shopping centre**. The site has been acquired by Galliard Homes from Saint Modwen. Galliard have taken over some elements of the revised St Modwen scheme including the central square and the pedestrian walkways between Eltham Road and Carston Close. We welcome this. But Galliard want to increase the height of the crossroads corner block to 15 storeys and one of the other blocks to 13 storeys. We think this is excessive. It will overshadow the crossroads and change the character of Lee. The council's planners, desperate to squeeze in as many homes as possible, are backing these plans though formal approval is some months off. The Society has called from the outset – over a decade ago – for more houses on the site but we think this is excessive. Galliard is soon to consult publicly on their plans. There will be an

exhibition in an empty shop at Leegate and we will publicise the event in due course.

Once the lockdown started to ease and meetings in the open air became feasible, we were able to host two **tree walks**, led by Charles, and David Ford. Both walks featured the surprisingly wide range of mature trees to be found in Manor House Gardens but also took in street trees. and we expect to extend these occasional walks to other parts of Lee. There is a slow but alarming progression of fatal fungus in the area, with growth extending out around the foot of a tree: infected trees are liable to collapse catastrophically and tree-felling or at least heavy lopping is required. However, our active support of street tree planting will help alleviate the impact.

We have been approached over the years by many local residents willing to pay for, or contribute to, the planting of a tree in their street, in front of or near their house. We welcome these offers but previously have not had a means of making use of their generosity. We have now decided to establish a **Street Tree Fund** – a separate item in our annual accounts – to collect any funds donated for spending in the next winter planting season. Donors will be kept informed of our planting plans

With the slow retreat from full lockdown, we were able to open up the **Ice House** once again for the last few dates in the season, including **Open House London**. We advised face masks and one-bubble-at-a-time but, even so, we welcomed a continuous stream of visitors. We have traditionally set up chairs and a table for the supervising volunteers just by the Ice House entrance, but the ground is uneven and can be very muddy: thanks to the generosity of one of our long-time supporters, Sylvia Ling, we have been able, through the good endeavours of Glendale, to install some paving slabs and these have made all the difference. Despite our summer openings over 20 years, there is still a constant stream of local residents visiting for the first time.

We decided to run the **Plant Mart** again after the disruption last year. It was later in the year than we would have liked and well past the traditional May date – but it turned into a great success with an array of seasonal plants being sold alongside many stalls for cakes, refreshments, bric-à-brac and

books. Many people told us how much they



enjoyed the event, and this made it all the more worthwhile.

The **Lee Manor Community Garden** at the east end of Micheldever Road continues to flourish with the help of a small band of hard-working volunteers. A variety of crops have been successfully grown but there are continuing problems with some of the wooden planters: wood and water do not co-exist harmoniously and there is some rot which is being repaired.

**Manor House Library** is also reinvigorated after lock-down and as Simon Higgs, manager of the library, reports: ‘Manor House is almost back to pre-covid levels of activity, thanks in large part to the support of our fantastic community. Manor House Daycare, which supported pre-school children of keyworkers throughout the pandemic, has now brought back its popular wrap-around service for primary school children. The NHS Community Midwife teams that commandeered the community rooms during the pandemic have gradually returned to healthcare centres and medical practices where possible but are still delivering vital face to face support throughout the week. The Library at Manor House has now returned to full hours and all pre-pandemic services are once more available, the team of volunteers that help keep the library going were quick to step-up and Manor House Library was the first in the borough to return to full hours. Reading Groups and Rhyme time sessions have also now returned, as well as a host of groups and activities in the community rooms from Sing & Sign classes for pre-schoolers to Yoga and Pilates classes for adults, glad to be putting the ‘classes by zoom’ period behind them’.