

LEE MANOR SOCIETY

1976



2026

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Review of 2024-2025

Approaching our Golden Anniversary, the Society continues working to maintain and enhance the character of Lee. This past year has seen a lot of time taken up scrutinising and finally objecting to the scale of the proposed redevelopment of the derelict Leegate shopping centre.

We have also devoted time to the council's Sustainable Streets programme which seeks to further reduce car use throughout the borough. Both issues have demonstrated an increasing tendency for Lewisham council to devolve authority to officers and away from the elected members, our councillors, and for those officers to refuse any meaningful contact with residents. Increasingly planning decisions are being delegated from planning committees, where objectors (and supporters) have a right to speak, to planning officers alone.

The Leegate process has taken more than a decade and has worked through three sets of developers – the latest being London Square – with no sign that the Society's and many residents' concerns over the scale of the redevelopment, the

overweening height of the residential towers and the likely impact on local services are being listened to. We are particularly concerned with proposed changes to the earlier planning approval given to Galliard Homes. Since then the proposed number of housing units has increased – to 620 – and the towers grown in height.

The Society has called from the outset for an increase in the number of homes – the 1960s centre was primarily aimed at retail with just 36 flats on the upper floors. We are fully aware of the housing shortage brought on primarily by the failings of central government policies over decades. But squeezing as many homes as possible onto a relatively small site is not the answer. The grim central Lewisham towers, shortlisted a few years ago for a 'bad design' award, have created a gloomy street-level environment with little public space. Yet Lewisham appears bent on exporting this model across the borough.

Another glaring example of the council's failure to connect with residents was the announcement of its Sustainable Streets programme, planned to reduce car use and boost cycling and walking in a large area to the east side (the Leegate side) of Burnt Ash Road and Burnt Ash Hill. More than 60 residents attended a local assembly meeting to hear an officer on the Sustainable Streets team explain the plans.

Our three councillors chairing the meeting were informed, at the last minute and for unexplained reasons, that no officer was available. It was later suggested staffing changes had led to a mix-up. Residents and councillors were furious. The Society contacted the council offering to arrange a meeting at a convenient time but we received no reply. Further pressure from us did elicit a response – no-one was available to talk to the local community.

The assembly meeting at which the Sustainable Streets issue was to have been explained was the last one. The council explained it could no longer afford the staff needed to manage the process –



Leegate continues to grow in height, dwarfing the historic crossroads, with 17 storeys proposed for the corner block

which was borough-wide – so another point of connection has been lost.

Residents have considerable local knowledge that can prevent councils taking bad decisions. At a time when council finances are under enormous pressure it would seem obvious that councils create close links with local communities for the benefit of all. This is not happening. This makes for a depressing read but positive things are happening.

We had a successful Plant Mart raising a record £2,131. This is the Society's main fund-raiser to cover our running costs and projects including tree planting. It is much more than a plant sale, with cakes, cream teas and books. We raised £2,450 in neighbourhood community infrastructure levy funds, jointly with the Friends of Manor House Gardens, to plant up the neglected big central flower bed next to the north gate of the gardens. The Society and the Friends will also contribute funds.

Plans to extend controlled parking across Lee approved

Lewisham's mayor and cabinet have approved plans to extend their Sustainable Streets initiative - involving permit-only parking, street trees and electric vehicle charging points - to streets to the east of Burnt Ash Road. Only three streets are mentioned in the plans given the green light on July 9 although the original proposal unveiled in February covered all the streets on the Dorville Road side of Burnt Ash Road.

Streets referred to in the council plans are Burnt Ash Hill, Cambridge Drive and Upwood Road with no mention of Leyland Road, Dorville Road or Carston Close. In addition, council traffic planners seem to think Burnt Ash Hill, which runs from the south circular to the Lee station bridge, continues all the way to the Lee Green crossroads.

No mention is made of the length of time for which parking restrictions would apply but the changes will be made by extending the existing Lee Green controlled parking zone, covering much of the Lee Manor conservation area, the mayor and cabinet said. Permit parking in this controlled parking zone



A programme intended to improve residents' quality of life got off to a rocky start. Photo: Lewisham council

(CPZ) runs from 10 am to 12 noon Monday to Friday suggesting these timings will apply to the east of Burnt Ash Road.

Sustainable streets aims to improve air quality and road safety, reduce noise and traffic congestion and make neighbourhoods greener and healthier by reducing car use. The council wants 80 per cent of all journeys to be by cycle, walking or public transport by 2041. Fifty-five per cent of Lewisham's streets are covered by CPZs, one of the lowest levels of any London borough.



Matching bricks and careful re-pointing restore the Church of Good Shepherd wall in Handen Road

Church wall restoration

Work has begun to restore the damaged historic brick wall surrounding the Church of the Good Shepherd. Lengthy negotiations between the church, council planners and the diocesan authorities and a challenging fund-raising campaign were needed before work could start. Old age and tree roots had combined to weaken a long section of the wall in Wantage Road and several years ago it collapsed.

Forecast at one point to cost an eye-watering £44,000 because of the need for deep foundations and bridging over tree roots, the project was a serious challenge. Although many of the original bricks were lying around there were not enough to restore the wall so new bricks matching the old were needed.

The original contractor backed out but a local builder, John Walsh, stepped in with a competitive bid and some clever cost-saving measures, says churchwarden James Murdoch. Local residents and community groups contributed while the Benefact Trust, which supports religious causes, contributed £5,500. The Society helped publicise the church's funding appeal.

The original focus was on the Wantage Road collapse with a short, badly restored section on Handen Road only on the list if funds could

stretch that far. But closer inspection of the Handen Road section revealed it also faced collapse. It was made a priority and by the end of August the unsuitable modern bricks replaced and long sections of the wall repointed and stabilised with fresh lime mortar.

The wall dates from 1881 when the original church was built though the church itself was severely damaged by bombing in World War Two and substantially rebuilt in 1957.

Leegate objection

We have lodged a comprehensive objection to London Square's proposals to amend the planning consent given to previous developer Galliard Homes for Leegate. The key points are:

The proposal for the 17-storey Leegate Tower is in breach of the tall buildings height restrictions (12 storeys) as set out in the Lewisham Local Plan – and there is no over-riding material reason why it should be approved.

The numerous changes proposed by London Square cannot be characterised as “minor material amendments” as the developer claims. Lewisham Planners should treat them as material.

London Square's proposal to increase the number of residential units on the site (an additional 59 taking the total to 620) is not a result of recent changes to fire and building regulations but a direct result of the developer simply believing that Lewisham Council will not hold it to account and will agree with anything the developer wishes to construct irrespective of whether it constitutes over-development of the Leegate site or not.

The proposed two- and three- bed flats above the fourth floor will not be suitable for families.

Some of the other proposed buildings are also in breach of the height limits in the Lewisham Local Plan and should also be rejected because of their unacceptable massing. The absence of any parking for able-bodied residents will prevent normal deliveries and maintenance of the homes on the development. It will also put significant pressure on street parking in the immediate area.

The reduction in commercial floorspace will impact employment opportunities in the area.

The current proposals were not consulted on by London Square at its exhibition earlier in the summer.

The objection concludes that Lee Manor Society along with many of the residents of Lee Green and amenity societies that represent the area, fully accept the need for redevelopment of the Leegate site. We believe that such significant works must be carried out with full sensitivity to the local environment and the needs of Lee Green, not the

needs of the developer to make a profit over and above what was reasonable.

If Lewisham Council approves the proposals it will not be helping in the council's stated aim ‘to provide a welcoming place where people will be able to live their best lives’ or ‘where generations will not only live but will thrive.’

Greening the streets

We have been working over the past year with residents in Southbrook Road to restore the much reduced tree cover in the street. The Society is jointly funding with residents the planting of 14 trees along the pavement. Planting will take place this winter of a mix of varieties including liquidambar (also known as sweet gum), Norway maple, Judas tree and Indian horse chestnut. These will provide a mix of spring flowers and autumn colour.

Avenues consisting of a single variety were once popular – limes in Micheldever Road and Handen Road - but mixing varieties means fungal infections are less likely to spread. We have collaborated on this project with Street Trees for Living, the charity that now manages Lewisham's street tree programme. In future years we hope to work with other streets.



Young trees contribute to the avenue in Burnt Ash Road, though pavement-planted specimens face a tougher struggle

History Corner: Hokum Pokum in Lee

Weardale Road is the north-west boundary of Earl Northbrook's property. At the entrance to this road, when a meadow, there was a step-style, the place was commonly called Hokum Pokum, in consequence of the frequent robberies committed in its vicinity.

As late as 1850, the thieves laid in wait for the carriage of Messrs Martin, bankers, of Lombard Street who were on the journey to their mansion at Chislehurst; they were plundered of a large leather box, which was cut from the roof of the carriage, but fortunately the policeman on duty was close at hand at the time...

In the early part of the morning, on the 20th May 1813, near this spot Mr John Hearnden, the parish clerk and constable, was nearly killed by a notorious sheep stealer, who struck him on the head with an iron instrument, and left him insensible for some considerable time. Lee, at this period, was so rural as to be unsafe after dusk...

The medical gentlemen, on their journeys from Greenwich to Lee, when attending their patients, never went without arming themselves with a brace of pistols.

From *History of Lee*. F.H. Hart, 1882

Submitted by David Plumer

The Society

We are a voluntary group of local residents keen to maintain and enhance the attractive, largely Victorian character of the local area.

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. We are particularly looking for more volunteers to manage our Sunday ice house openings. If you are interested in taking an active role in the work of the Society come to one of our meetings. We have a formal role in advising the council on planning matters and see all applications made in the conservation area..

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.

Why not contact us to receive our regular newsletter and other news from the Society Alternatively, go to our website at www.leemanorsociety.org and add your email address in the box.

The Society's 2024-2025 Annual General Meeting

The Lee Manor Society's AGM will be held at 7.30pm on Wednesday, October 1 in the Baring Room of Manor House, Old Road, SE13 5SY

Agenda

Chairman's report. Treasurer's report. Election of management committee. The following are standing for election: Simon Bucks, Michael Haste, Frances Migniuolo, Karen Pratt and Charles Batchelor.

Light refreshments will be served.

Speaker

Paul Wright, local resident and history enthusiast, will give an illustrated talk, using many previously unseen photographs, on the changes through time of the community known as Lee New Town.



World War Two bombs took their toll on Lee but post-war slum clearance wrought even greater change. Redevelopment north of Lee High Road came first (pictured) but in the 1970s large swathes of Victorian houses south of the main road made way for modern developments.

The area of Lee currently bounded by Boone, Lee Church and Fludyer Streets was developed in the 1820s on land sold by the Lee Place estate. It was known as Lee New Town and consisted mostly of densely packed working class housing.

The area had a colourful history for over 100 years and in the 1950s underwent extensive redevelopment as part of Lewisham's first post-war slum clearance project.

In a richly illustrated talk, local resident Paul Wright will tell the story of this area drawing on contemporary records and many previously unseen photographs taken by the Rector of St Margaret's at the time - a keen photographer and chronicler of the profound changes to this part of the borough.