

LEE MANOR SOCIETY



www.leemanorsociety.org leemanorsociety@gmail.com

Review of 2023-24

We have spent the past year strengthening the Society's governance and reviewing our priorities and the way we work. We have put in place a management committee which has shared responsibility for our day-to-day activities and reviewed our longer term strategies. Members of our management committee have taken turns to chair our monthly meetings. Our committee is focused on our long-term core concerns: preserving the historic character of Lee while accepting the need for positive change; enhancing the green spaces and street trees that make up the natural environment; and engaging residents in support of both these objectives.

The Society dates back to February 1975 when a public meeting was held to consider the creation of a conservation area and a steering committee of local residents was set up. Lengthy discussion of the extent of the conservation area ensued and it was not until the following year that the conservation area itself was approved by the council. We will be celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2025.



Society members have worked to improve the drive of the 250-year-old Manor House

Planning matters have, as usual, taken up a lot of our energies with a constant stream of applications for ground floor rear extensions, rooftop dormers, window replacements and tree felling and pruning. The oversized redevelopment of the Leegate shopping centre was approved last year by the council and we now await the start of work on demolition and construction. Large projects of this sort require detailed planning of how building products will be delivered and waste removed. Any plan needs to take account of the wishes of residents for minimum disruption while avoiding the disruption of the busy traffic at the Lee Green crossroads. The past ten years have seen plans for Leegate drawn up, revised, cancelled and then revived. The building of the shopping centre in the late 1960s was no less fraught as evidenced in our brief history below.

The council's interaction with the Society leaves much to be desired. We responded to a request to register more formally with the council and provided all our details but have received no acknowledgement of our filing. We also received no notice of the notionally public examination before an inspector of the council's Local Plan in June so were unable to attend. It would appear most other Lewisham conservation societies were also left in the dark. This plan, on which we had commented in writing previously, will set the direction of Lewisham's planning policies for the next 20 years.

The Society's 2023-2024 Annual General Meeting

The Lee Manor Society's AGM will be held at 7.30pm on **Wednesday, October 16**, in the Baring Room of the 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. General discussion.

Speaker

Paul Wood, author of *London Street Trees: A Field Guide to the Urban Forest* will give an illustrated talk on the topic.

Light refreshments will be served.

Trees

We have launched a programme of working more closely with residents over the funding and planting of trees in local streets. We are acting alongside Street Trees for Living, the charity that manages Lewisham's street tree planting programme. We have £2,400 to put towards street trees with individual trees costing £450 to buy and plant and are hoping to match that with funds raised from the residents in Southbrook Road which has suffered from a particularly serious loss of trees in recent years. We think that focusing on a particular street will allow us to make a visible difference and we plan to engage with other streets in future years. The process of surveying the street for suitable sites that avoid sewers and electric cables is a long one so the trees would not be planted before the winter of 2025 but we need to start the process now. Last year, using council funding, we planted five trees along Burnt Ash Road – an Italian alder, small leaved lime, field maple and two honey locusts. As they mature they will fill out the existing avenue of mature trees on the road. Trees convert carbon dioxide into oxygen, absorb pollutants, reduce water run-off and deaden traffic noise as well as gladdening the eye.

Plant Mart

This is our main fund raising event of the year and also an opportunity for an enjoyable social gathering with local residents. We raised nearly £1,500 this year, a record amount that will be put to our tree planting programme, ice house maintenance and general admin costs. The event is now much more than an opportunity to buy plants with cake sales and bric-a-brac and book stalls. Its success owed much to Karen's management skills while we also increased our advanced publicity through Facebook, notice boards at Lee and Hither Green stations and the leafletting of train commuters. We also enjoyed the support of the garden owners and other volunteers.



Plant mart: a perennial favourite...



In need of repair: a survivor of the Blitz, but time has taken its toll

Church of the Good Shepherd wall

Plans are afoot to restore a section of the church's surrounding wall on Wantage Road that collapsed two years ago. After lengthy discussions the parish council has reached agreement with the diocese of Southwark to reinstate the section of the wall that has lain in ruins ever since. 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.

The present church is locally listed and is described in Lewisham's conservation area appraisal as making 'an important contribution to its character by providing an important community building.' The wall has suffered from the root growth of several large trees. Joining a new section of wall to the remaining leaning section would have been difficult so the parish has opted to restore the entire length from the Wantage entrance gate to the corner, bridging the roots of the nearby trees. The parish has applied for planning permission though it still has to raise funds for the work. The Society has supported the parish in its planning application.



...the tea and cakes were also popular



Leigate in its Victorian prime. Swept away in the 1960s redevelopment

Leigate – a history

In Victorian times the present Leigate had shopping parades on its Eltham Road and Burnt Ash Road frontages with the corner occupied by a branch of Barclays Bank. This was all swept away during the 1960s and early 1970s by a development whose style reflected its time. In July 1957 Clark Barker & Partners, architects, submitted an application on behalf of Rushey Development Company to develop what is known as the 'island site' bordered by Eltham Road, Burnt Ash Road, Dorville Road and Leyland Road.

The plan comprised mainly housing but with commerce and shops on the Leigate corner. In September 1961 London County Council (LCC) discussed widening Eltham Road to 100ft to give eight lanes of traffic with a flyover taking the road over the Lee Green crossroads. The flyover plan made the Eltham Road side of the site unattractive for shopping so this is concentrated along Burnt Ash Road but with a department store on the corner of Leyland Road.

A few months later Lewisham's planners approved a plan for 48 shops with flats above, an eight-storey department store, a multi-storey office block and a three-storey car park. Lewisham later changed its mind about the need for such a large department store while the LCC doubted the need for such an ambitious scheme so close to Lewisham town centre and Eltham High Street.

Clark Barker came back with a more modest plan but including a 10,000sq ft supermarket, a 'club' cinema for 500 people and a swimming pool convertible for dancing, skating and tennis. In July 1962 the plans changed again and included a 30-room hotel and a bowling alley over a car park.

Residents objected that these ideas would attract undesirable characters to the area. Lewisham approved a development involving a four-storey hotel and two-tier parking garage in September 1964 and building work began. But the plans continued to change and the development comprising shops, an office block and 30-plus flats that has stood for the past half-century is built.

Lee Manor Community Garden

Would you like to grow your own vegetables but you don't have an allotment? Spend time gardening with local people and share the produce? Teach your children how to grow veg and support local wildlife? Our community garden was set up in 2010 at the Burnt Ash Road end of Micheldever Road.

It is run by volunteers and contains several raised beds, which have produced, among other things kidney beans, onions, garlic, potatoes, courgettes, blackberries and black tomatoes. We also have some flowers and bushes to encourage wildlife. We get together once or twice a month in the growing season, although you can have access to the



Grow your own vegetables in the community garden

garden anytime if you want to do some sowing, watering or harvesting. Gardening sessions are posted on the blackboard on the gate in Micheldever Road. No gardening experience necessary. For further details, please contact Dan Griffin at leemanorsociety@gmail.com

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 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 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 work with other local conservation groups to achieve improvements in Lee and Lewisham.

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 monthly Newsletter and other news from the Society? Just email us on leemanorsociety@gmail.com and we will add you to our distribution list. Alternatively, visit our website at <http://www.leemanorsociety.org>

The Lee Centre

Plans to turn the Lee Centre in Aislibie Road into a children's nursery have been turned down by planning inspectors as leading to an unacceptable loss of a community space. The centre has been put to community uses for many decades though in recent years it has been closed. The Society and other local groups argued against the change of use and it was turned down by Lewisham's planners. This led the developer, Oakhurst Guardian, to appeal but the inspector backed the council.

Other local community spaces are fully booked while the redevelopment of Leegate will lead to the loss of the Lee Green Lives' community centre. There is unmet demand for nursery spaces locally – and nationally – but the inspector thought it would be easier to find a suitable building for nursery use than for community purposes.

The Lee poet

Oh, Lee! Oh. Lee! What are thou doing?

Josiah Thomas, a shoemaker, was born in Peckham in 1805 and came to Lee, Kent in 1830. Josiah spent nearly 50 years in Lee and was known as the Lee Poet. After nearly 30 years in Lee he wrote the following poem.

Thoughts by Josiah Thomas, March 1859

**Oh. Lee! Oh. Lee! What art thou doing?
 Dame Nature says you've worked her ruin
 Where once was lovely meadows green
 Now brick on bricks in piles are seen
 The blackberries on brambles wild
 No more shall tempt the peasant child
 The primrose decks thy banks no more
 And the sweet violet's reign is o'er
 And even I am grieved to see
 The loss of each familiar tree.**

From The Story of Lee by
 R.R.C Gregory
 & F.W.Nunn 1923
 Submitted by
 David Plumer

