

# LEE MANOR SOCIETY



[www.leemanorsociety.org](http://www.leemanorsociety.org)  
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## Review of the Year

High-profile projects such as the rebuilding of Northbrook School spur controversy and frequently provoke strong opposition from the local residents most affected. But throughout the year the society gets to see hundreds of **planning applications** in our own conservation area and others throughout the borough. We give our views on these through the Amenity Societies Panel which meets fortnightly. These applications usually attract little attention but the decisions taken by the planners have a big cumulative impact on the character of the neighbourhood.

Lewisham's core strategy document creates a **development framework** for the borough over the next 15 years. We attended



**Street trees provide a shady canopy**

public hearings before an inspector in February to comment on the plans. We argued on behalf of conservation groups across the borough for greater weight to be given to the conservation of Lewisham's heritage. We managed to persuade the council to beef up the wording of its documents. We also succeeded in getting street trees written into the council's environmental policies. Opening up loft spaces, building back extensions and remodelling front gardens are among the most common projects. Our aim and that of the planners is to prevent change damaging the character of the house and the conservation area generally. Common problems are oversized dormer windows, chunky extensions that eat up too much of the garden and inappropriate front garden walls.

Plans for the redevelopment of **Leegate**, the ugly 1960s shopping centre at the Lee Green crossroads, are moving forward slowly. St Modwen, the site owner, is looking at proposals for a large supermarket to take space. We are concerned that these plans could

### **The Society's 2011 Annual Meeting**

The Lee Manor Society's AGM will be held at 7.30pm on Wednesday, May 18 in the Baring Room of the Manor House, Old Road.

#### **Agenda**

Chairman's report, treasurer's report. Election of officers. The following officers are standing for re-election: Charles Batchelor, chairman; Ralph White, deputy chairman; Sheila Peck, secretary. Any other nominations must be received in advance of the meeting. Any other business.

#### **Speaker**

Chris McGaw, Lewisham's Rivers and People Officer, will give an illustrated talk on **The Wildlife of Lewisham's Rivers and Manor House Gardens**. Light refreshments will be served after the meeting.

lead to the loss of valuable public space – the square and the foot passage.

After months of discussion about the terms of its lease, the **Lee Manor Community Garden**, opened for business in March with teams of volunteers creating raised vegetable beds. The garden is at the back of 94 Burnt Ash Road but access is from Micheldever Road. Work days take place at weekends. For details of times contact Ralph White at [news@leemanorsociety.org](mailto:news@leemanorsociety.org). The society is backing the garden with funds to meet public liability insurance costs.

We will be holding our annual **Plant Mart** on Saturday May 14 between 2pm and 4pm at 2-6 Micheldever Road. Full details are in the panel on the back page of this newsletter. This event involves a lot of hard work by many people - growing and potting up the plants for sale, staffing stalls and providing teas. Our sincere thanks are due to them.

## Trees

Trees make an important contribution to any neighbourhood and they play an important role in making Lee the attractive place that it is. Many houses in the conservation area have long back gardens which provide room for large specimens while Manor House Gardens is home to a wide variety of trees.

But a vital and often overlooked role is played by the trees that line local streets. Southbrook Road and Effingham Road have their cherries, Micheldever its limes and Handen its horse chestnuts. We persuaded the council to take more account of these vital trees in its core strategy document but funds to implement this policy are lacking. We have in the past paid for the planting of trees in Manor House Gardens and on the green spaces on Burnt Ash Road.

For many years the society managed to persuade the council to maintain an active street tree planting programme in the conservation area but this appears to have come to an end. Trees lost to old age, disease and the stresses of urban living are no longer being replaced. We are particularly concerned

about the impressive avenues of trees that run along Burnt Ash Road and Eltham Road. We have asked Affinity Sutton, which has taken over management of the Leybridge Court estate, to include the Eltham Road avenue in its landscaping plan. We have also sought locality fund money for the Burnt Ash trees, so far without success.

Apart from their visual appeal, trees help cool city streets in hot summers and reduce water run-off, by retaining moisture in their leaves and absorbing water through their roots, so they contribute to mitigating climate change. New York City has an ambitious plan to plant (and look after) 1m trees on its streets while the Mayor of London has a programme to plant 10,000 trees by March 2012 including about 250 in New Cross, Deptford and Brockley.

But there are still many streets in Lee and elsewhere throughout the borough that would be enlivened by the planting of more trees. Council budgets are under pressure but we believe Lewisham should give a higher priority to maintaining and extending its avenues of street trees.

## Street clutter

Trees may battle to find a place on our streets but traffic signs and telecommunications cabinets seem to have no difficulty. Lewisham and other London boroughs are currently facing a rash of applications for new cabinets to take the wiring needed for broadband and other telecoms applications.



**Large telecoms boxes add to street clutter**

The cabinets are getting bigger and more prominent while old ones rarely get removed. It is curious, at a time when electronic equipment gets ever smaller, that these cabinets are getting larger.

The London Forum, which represents conservation groups including us, and individual conservation societies in Streatham and Kensington have taken up this issue. Utility companies including the telecoms groups have a great deal of freedom in what they can do but councils need to use what powers they have to the full.

Lewisham needs to draw up a borough-wide policy – rather than dealing piecemeal with individual applications – to reduce their impact. They should be installed underground if this is possible and in unobtrusive locations. They most certainly should not be sprinkled alongside the limited areas of street planting that we have.

Traffic signs represent another unwelcome intrusion in our streetscape. Motorway-scale signs are installed in quiet back streets with no thought for their visual impact. Drivers who need such large signs to tell them where to go should not be allowed behind the wheel. Traffic planners need to think beyond the narrow bounds of their own specialism.

## Leegate

Plans for the long-awaited redevelopment of the Leegate shopping centre are making slow progress but the society is concerned that they appear to involve reducing the amount of public space available. The latest proposal we have seen would involve loss of the pedestrian passageway and a reduction in the size of the square. This would allow the site to accommodate a large supermarket with rooftop parking.

If the passageway is lost this would cut the square off from the Burnt Ash Road side of the site although it could be reached by walking along Eltham Road. This might increase the number of people walking past the shops on the Eltham Road frontage and increase the business they do.



## High quality public spaces are vital to the Leegate redevelopment

Loss of the passageway would also make it harder for people on the Leybridge Court estate to reach the shops on Burnt Ash Road, including a planned parade of new shops at the petrol station end of the site. The society believes that high quality public spaces are important in maintaining the liveliness of the neighbourhood. Sacrificing them to accommodate a large supermarket at Leegate might suit the supermarket owner but it would result in the loss of a public amenity and might not even benefit other smaller shops.

We do not want to see Leegate and the Lee Green crossroads turned into a magnet for largely car-driving customers of two large supermarkets – Sainsbury's and the newcomer. Traffic, often clogged at the Burnt Ash Road/Taunton Road corner, would become even heavier. The society would like to hear your views.

## Trinity School

Trinity, formerly Northbrook School, has reopened on its original site. Until the very limited landscaping has matured it will stand a rather stark building on the corner of Taunton Road and Wantage Road. Even then it will remain a dominating presence in an area of modest houses.

We rescued two historic plaques from the 1960s building and reached agreement with the school for these to be fixed on one of the walls of the new building. They have, in fact,

been “planted” in one of the small areas of garden around the school where, we fear, they will suffer rain and frost damage. The school has said they will be moved but we have yet to hear whether that has happened.

### Gas pipes

We have also been waiting, since last September for action on disguising the ugly gas pipes that have been fitted to the outside of several houses in Burnt Ash Road. We had a meeting with representatives of Southern Gas Networks about the pipework on the Micheldever Road side of the 96 Burnt Ash Road and they promised to look for a solution. Eight months later we are still waiting.

We are also waiting for the council’s enforcement department to take action over an ugly developer’s advertising hoarding at Glenmere Row near Lee station and to persuade residents in several streets to re-site intrusive satellite dishes and antennae.

### The Society

We are a voluntary group composed of local residents keen to maintain and enhance the character of the local area. We meet on the second Wednesday of every month at 7.30pm at a member’s house.

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.

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](mailto:news@leemanorsociety.org) and we will add you to our distribution list. Alternatively, visit our website at <http://www.leemanorsociety.org> or call Charles Batchelor on 020 8852 1644.

**Lee Manor Society**  
**2011**  
**Annual Plant Mart**

*2-4 pm Saturday 14th May*  
*2-6 Micheldever Road SE12*

Raffles - Tombola -  
Children's Games  
Bric-à-Brac - Books  
Cakes, Jams and Preserves

Cream Teas will be served

*Donations of plants and goods for  
the stalls welcome!*

visit [www.leemanorsociety.org](http://www.leemanorsociety.org) or  
email [PlantMart@leemanorsociety.org](mailto:PlantMart@leemanorsociety.org)