

LEE MANOR SOCIETY



www.leemanorsociety.org

email: news@leemanorsociety.org

Review of the Year

Our attention for much of the past year has been focused on the construction of the new **Northbrook School**. This has been an unhappy project from the outset, marked by inadequate consultation and the choice of a design that is overbearing and inappropriate on a very constricted site. Completion is planned for later this year. We will have to see whether the finished building works any better once it has bedded in.

The proposed redevelopment of the ugly 1960s shopping centre at **Leegate** has also taken up a lot of our time. St Modwen, the site



Installing the heritage panel

The Society's 2010 Annual Meeting

The Lee Manor Society's AGM will be held at 7.30pm on Wednesday, May 12, 2010 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; Steve Griffiths, treasurer; Sheila Peck, secretary. Any other nominations must be received in advance of the meeting. Any other business.

Speaker

Madeleine Adams, of Research Design Architects, tenants of the refurbished Boone's Chapel in Lee High Road, will give an illustrated talk on **The History and the Future of Almshouses in Britain and on the Continent**.

Light refreshments will be served after the meeting.

owner, has received approaches from a number of large supermarket groups keen to put a store on the site but we have yet to see any detailed plans. We believe it is important not to overdevelop the site but to retain the existing public spaces – the square and the passageway through from Burnt Ash Road.

Parking remains a controversial topic and the council has begun consulting on extending existing controlled parking zones to cover the conservation area. We believe that parking pressure has become unbearable and controls are needed. But we object to the rigid and expensive (for residents) schemes in place. We want a more flexible approach to be applied, possibly involving midday controls on parking.

We installed and unveiled our **Heritage Panel** at the Lee Green crossroads in September. The purpose of the panel is to remind residents and visitors of the rich history

of the original village and its role in the development of what is now a London suburb. Coming nearly ten years after we opened the Manor House Gardens ice house to public access, the panel reflects the Society's commitment to preserving and promoting the history of Lee.

As part of our programme to revitalise the Lee Green crossroads, we are seeking to list the two historic pubs, the **Old Tiger's Head** and the **New Tiger's Head**. Architecturally speaking they are two very different buildings but both are attractive and they reflect the history of the crossroads as a staging post on the road between London and the Kent ports.

Leegate

The run-down 1960s shopping centre that is Leegate has been an eyesore for many years. St Modwen, the owner, has been talking for almost as long about redevelopment though as yet nothing has happened. However, at the Society's recent meeting with the company and the council, executives reported they had received strong expressions of interest from a number of supermarket groups to put a store on the site.

This is good news at last but any redevelopment needs to be carefully thought through if the revamped centre is to work commercially and, more importantly for us, make a positive contribution to the character of the neighbourhood.

We fully support the actions of the recently established Lee Green Lives group to bring activity back to Leegate but we believe it is important to make an early statement of our thoughts for redeveloping the site.

We believe that the public spaces – the passageway and the square – should be maintained and, if possible, enhanced. One suggested development would remove the passage and reduce the size of the square. It is vital to retain the free movement of pedestrians between Burnt Ash Road and Leyland Road.

The scale and mass of any development should be appropriate. The existing buildings rise to a maximum of eight storeys but only

over part of the site. We would not want any replacement to be so large as to totally dominate the surrounding area.

We would like any redevelopment to retain space for independent shops, cafes and restaurants alongside the big name High Street retailers. This might require the landlord to offer some premises at lower than market rents.

We want to see a lively ground floor street frontage by moving office and secondary uses to higher storeys. The main corner on the crossroads, currently offices, should be retail.

Northbrook School

Construction work on the school is making rapid progress and the pupils should soon be returning after a gap of nearly two years.

We succeeded in making some small but still valuable improvements to the original design – setting the school back from the pavement and reducing its height slightly. We also forced the council to carry out a proper consultation on the proposed glass entrance and the school softened its original, very intrusive design.

We were also successful in persuading the council to modify its procedures so that the Amenity Societies Panel, on which we and other conservation groups are represented, and not just the Design Panel of professional architects, sees early plans of major projects.



Northbrook School under construction

But we are still stuck with a monster of a building on a very restricted site between modest two-storey Victorian terraces. A record of the original consultation recently made available to us by the project team showed that none of the comments by the Society or by residents made at the start of the consultation had been noted or taken into consideration.

By the time we were asked for our views the plans were well advanced and opportunities for change were very limited. Once the school is finished it may sit more comfortably on the site but the landscaping, which will soften its impact, will be minimal and will take time to mature.

Where is Lee?

When King Henry VIII passed through Lee on the way from his palace at Eltham to his palace at Greenwich, did he know where he was? He was, after all, Lord of the Manor of Lee.

Like most lords of the manor of Lee he was not resident here. The first known resident Lord of the Manor of Lee was Sir Francis Baring in 1798. Why Lee? Why a manor?

The Anglo-Saxon settlers divided our country, in descending order of importance, into kingdoms, counties, lathes, hundreds and manors. We were in the Kingdom of Kent (later a county), the half-lathe of Sutton, the Hundred of Greenwich (later renamed the Hundred of Blackheath) and the Manor of Lee.

The Anglo-Saxon word *leah* meant a clearing in a wood and that is the name they gave to this place.

For a long time English spellings were not standardised, so we find several variants in old documents, including Lee, Leigh, Lygh, Legh', Lege, Leah, Leahei, Leih', Lea and La.

The Manor of Lee extended, in modern-day terms, from the Quaggy near Lewisham Clock Tower to Blackheath Station and southwards to Grove Park.

Following the Christianisation of the Kingdom of Kent, a parish was formed here, based on, but not quite identical to, the boundaries of the Manor.

The pagan Ancient Britons and Anglo-Saxons had worshipped their gods at the highest point in this area, so that is where the early Christians established their church of St Margaret, Lee.

David Plumer

The Regeneration of Lewisham

The Society was recently consulted on the council's plans for the regeneration of Lewisham over the 15 years to 2025. The plans involve large-scale house-building in the north of the borough and set many worthy objectives in areas such as sustainability, job-promotion and protecting the borough's heritage.

Our experience of these long-term strategy documents is that for all their high-sounding aspirations, outcomes are often disappointing. Reality requires compromises and too often the long-term gets lost in a search for short-term, low-cost solutions. At a time of severe pressure on local government finances, this will more than ever be the case. As Northbrook School showed, conservation played a very poor second to educational and religious priorities. Planners even dismissed our concerns as "subjective."

Yet creating and maintaining liveable neighbourhoods should be one of the most important objectives of any planner.

The Lee Manor Conservation Area covers an area that was built as a planned community, with schools, shops and churches among the houses. This mix of activities makes for lively streets and a vibrant neighbourhood



New Tiger's Head

where people want to live.

Modern-day town planners seem to have lost that knack of creating liveable communities. The Kidbrooke estate (in Greenwich) is being pulled down only a few decades after it was built and Lewisham is to demolish a total of 1,534 homes as part of its regeneration plan.

Recent redevelopment schemes in Lewisham do not reassure us that these mistakes are not being repeated. Much recent house and flat-building in central Lewisham has involved boxy apartment blocks built on self-contained estates that do not link into the wider community.

The town-centre redevelopment, stalled by the economic downturn, involves high-rise developments that look out of place in a generally low-rise borough and that may not work at street level. We still see solid Victorian houses (outside conservation areas), that give the borough much of its distinctive character, being demolished for modern developments.

Given the scale of redevelopment involved, we are concerned at the implications of the council's 2025 strategy. Perhaps, in planning the future, we should look more closely at what has worked in the past.

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. 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> or call Charles Batchelor on 020 8852 1644.

Lee Manor Society
2010
**Annual
Plant Mart**

2-4 pm Saturday 29th May
2-6 Micheldever Road SE12

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

Cream Teas will be
served

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

visit www.leemanorsociety.org or
email PlantMart@leemanorsociety.org