



Lee Green Lives

Annual Report 2024–25

Fond farewell (front photo): Lewisham East MP Janet Daby – centre, standing – joins volunteers, service users and session leaders to say goodbye to their community centre of 14 years in Leegate at a party on 12 September 2024. Although leaving was underpinned by sadness, they were cheery because they knew a new era is about to begin in nearby St Peter’s Hall, where they resumed their activities weeks later. Photo: Maxwell Anderson

Welcome to our Lee Green Lives Community Report

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Chair's Report

A sad farewell and a new beginning

It has been a year of great challenges... it has also been a year of great sadness.

Lee Green Lives (LGL) went into this past year faced with the prospect of having nowhere to stay and with insufficient funds to survive. That we are still alive with a place in which to provide our activities and services and with enough money to keep us going is testament to a lot of hard work by volunteers and staff alike, the faith of those who take part in our activities and use our services, and the support of others in the community.

There has been sadness, too, as we lost our Chair, Pat Coyne, a close personal friend, and one of our trustees, Wendy Moss, both of whom passed away before their time. Their hard work helped us to maintain the platform that enabled us to overcome those other challenges.

Thanks to an extremely generous donation from a local supporter, the continued funding from Trust for London for our Support & Advocacy service and from Clarion Housing for our Warm Space project, and new resources from Awards for All for Healthy Exercises and Sewing classes, our activities and services are flourishing again. Our valued partner, Lee Fair Share time bank, has worked with us throughout, continuing to provide Coffee, Cake & Company, and other important activities. To these we have added a computer skills drop-in, assisted by Cat Bytes.

None of this might have happened once we were given notice to quit our community centre in Leegate shopping centre. That site's demolition to make way for redevelopment forced us to seek alternative premises. We have found these, thanks to the Church of Good Shepherd, who were looking for a main tenant for St Peter's Hall, their underused community hall. We moved in September 2024 and, after a few months spent bringing our numbers back up, we are now happily installed. St Peter's Hall committee have helped us enormously in settling into our new home.

All of Lee Green Lives' energies are focused on supporting socially and economically disadvantaged people, impacting on their lives by improving their skills and sense of well-being. Our activities, along with those of Lee Fair Share, help people to overcome loneliness, isolation and physical frailty or disability. These operate in synergy with our Warm Space project and Support & Advocacy, which has benefited hundreds of people with benefits, housing and other financial issues. Our work has intensified in recent years, first with Covid and then with the cost-of-living crisis, with many cases increasing in complexity.

Because we also believe that communities thrive through greater engagement, LGL brought together some 16 local groups to form Lee Green Consortium. We work together and take part in events and raising funds for the wider benefit of the local community.

We wouldn't have survived without the work of our session leaders, volunteers and trustees, but particularly of our coordinator, Shirley Kirkland, with a special mention to James Rathbone, our treasurer and Frances Migniuolo, who stepped into the breach to help. My thanks to them all for their efforts in what's been a really difficult year. Like so many in the community and voluntary sector, our existence is precarious. Our chances of survival, however, are stronger because of their efforts and the support of the community we continue to serve.

Jim Mallory, Chair (Acting)



Activities and Services

Coordinator's Report: A year of change



A new beginning: Centre coordinator Shirley Kirkland (right) joins Maureen Russell, who leads the Warm/Welcome Space and Healthy Cooking projects, in front of St Peter's Hall, Lee Green Lives' new home.

This past year has been dominated, in particular, by our move from Leegate to St Peter's Hall. The move, long expected because of the planned redevelopment of the shopping centre, caused us much heartache but also a worthwhile challenge.

The move involved extensive planning to ensure as smooth a transition as possible for all the community groups which use the centre. Initial meetings were held with the Vicar of St Peter's Church, followed by discussions with others involved in the running of their community hall. These meetings were essential to coordinate the timing and logistics of the move, including the allocation of space and budget considerations.

Although Lee Green Lives is now the hall's main tenant, there is less space and decisions had to be made regarding as to what to take and what to leave behind. This required careful assessment and negotiation, including securing cupboard space for storage and taking some of our own storage.

The actual move took place on 15 September 2024, with all necessary items and equipment successfully transported. With a lot of support and cooperation from members of St Peter's Hall management committee, the move was executed smoothly, ensuring that community activities could continue without significant disruption.

At the centre we see every day how much the cost-of-living crisis continues to impact on the people who visit, use our services or take part in our activities. Their financial worries affect their health, in particular, their mental health. That has resulted in greater numbers visiting our Support & Advocacy service.

If you add in the continuing problems for people post-COVID, you can understand why it is also reflected in the lives of the people who use and have depended increasingly on our Warm Space project, re-named during the warmer months the Welcome Space. The job also involves supporting the session leaders and teachers, whose reports follow. Meanwhile, administering the centre itself has been more time-consuming, whether it's everyday enquiries or emergencies, dealing with building and supplies, supervising volunteers and welcoming visitors.

Monitoring has been a real challenge, with funders wanting to know the demographics of the people their funding helps, while different funders want different sets of data. We have overcome some of these difficulties creating spreadsheets to help organise this information. We have also had to provide it in sensitive ways to avoid using names and other personal information. In all of this, I want to pay tribute, in particular, to volunteer Valerie Miller, without whose help I could not have managed.

Shirley Kirkland, Community Centre Coordinator

Support & Advocacy Service: One of a kind



Support & Advocacy leader Joanne Harvey displaying the sensitivity and understanding required in dealing with people's difficult issues. The service has had a brilliant success rate in their casework, appealing benefits and other decisions.

The Support & Advocacy Service is funded by Trust for London, who had enough confidence in our work to inject continuing funds last year for a further two years, and it has gone from strength to strength over the past year. Indeed, since moving to St Peter's, we have sustained the service for those in dire need in our community, despite some disruption immediately afterwards.

Not only have we seen an influx of new issues, but our regulars continue to put their trust in us, hence, returning with further problems to be dealt with. The service is one of its kind in Lewisham, in as much as we:

- Welcome referrals from similar agencies
- Accommodate walk-ins/emergencies
- Offer follow-up appointments without the need to rebook each week
- Monitor progress and outcomes once a case has closed

Last year we dealt with a large number of issues related to Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) claims being denied. Our work entailed appealing decisions, which I am happy to say were overturned 100%. We are often inundated with matters surrounding benefits and changes in entitlement to awards, and this is predominantly due to one of our target groups being adults with learning disabilities, who need a great deal of assistance in understanding changes to their income. Since the Government decided to replace the Employment and

Support Allowance (ESA) with Universal Credit, there has been a vast increase in queries and for assistance, most of which prove lengthy and detailed and, as such, we can often see the same person three weeks' running.

We support adults with a variety of severe mental health issues, including recovery from substance misuse. As a result, we have to work even longer hours on issues arising from time constraints and a lack of funding. Indeed, our target groups tend to arrive for appointments much later than expected, due to their lifestyle, being"late to bed and late to rise".

Despite the centre's move, resulting in some dislocation to the service, 70 adults came through our doors the third quarter alone with the following issues:

- Employment
- Food support
- Housing
- School disputes
- Care needs
- Taxi cards
- Disability parking blue badges/Freedom passes

The Support & Advocacy Service, whilst in need of longer hours each day, continues to play a much-needed role in our community.

Joanne Harvey, Support & Advocacy Lead Worker

Warm/Welcome Space: Sanctuary for people with various needs

A kind, warm and welcoming environment provides support in overcoming a lack of funds to pay for home heating and the loneliness many people experience. Their testament tells us they feel valued in meeting others, sharing problems and discussing ideas, often complemented by games and activities, and a healthy meal they may not manage for economic or health reasons.

Clarion Housing resumed their funding, with extra money for a "Community Fridge" project after evidence that its loss for a few months was keenly felt, many service users providing feedback written and verbally on the essential role it has provided. After a drop in attendance after the move from Leegate to St Peter's Hall (it caused some challenges), the numbers are steadily rising again from an average six to ten per session, with some new faces and a good balance of men and women.

The service operates on Thursdays as a free drop-in, therefore, I must estimate the numbers likely to attend beforehand, as I shop for fresh produce to prepare and cook and serve.



The community centre provides warmth for people having difficulty meeting their energy bills and company if they live on their own.

There is no doubt warmer weather will bring more faces, particularly as our new location and its more comfortable premises become better known.

Maureen Russell, Warm/Welcome Space Project Leader

Healthy Exercises for Seniors: A journey of community resilience



All in it together: Older people meet up between the two exercise classes that help them maintain or gain fitness while gaining new friends. It has been so popular, they have had run two separate sessions to accommodate everyone.

Lee Green Lives has been a warm and inclusive community, bringing together people from diverse cultures and backgrounds. My journey with LGL began in 2012 when I joined as a Health & Fitness Instructor for seniors, aged 60 and above. I feel fortunate and blessed to have helped so many people maintain their strength for as long as possible.

The exercise programme consists of light resistance training and dance to music. This unique combination significantly reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, lowering blood pressure and supporting healthy weight, all while adding a fun element with dance.

In autumn 2024 we made the big move to St Peter's Hall, in the process benefiting from improved facilities, particularly for older people. The hall is larger than our room in Leegate, next to a wheelchair accessible toilet (a significant change from the upstairs toilet which

made life difficult for many of our participants). Despite colder weather and slightly further travel for some, the exercise group is back to former levels of attendance and enthusiasm remains high.

Hilma, a participant in the group, recently volunteered the following comment:

“It was a bit sad to leave the Leegate Centre, but moving into St Peter's has been an absolute joy. The centre is conveniently located near the High Street, where many buses make it easy to reach, especially for those who have trouble walking any distance..

“As soon as you step into St Peter's, you feel a sense of uplift. It's clean, bright, and very well-maintained. Everything is so nicely organised. Taking Keep Fit lessons each week has become even more enjoyable.”

Our classes can now hold more people per session, and the numbers are still growing as we journey into 2025. The legacy of Lee Green Lives continues to thrive in our new location, providing a space for a community enjoying better health and fitness.

Jean Lee, Tutor, Healthy Exercises for Seniors

Sewing Class: the best thing

The Sewing Class continues to thrive, boosted by new funds from Awards for All. Participants learn new skills using the sewing machines, overlocker and techniques, meet others and build new relationships in a warm, welcoming environment. Numbers were initially down after the move, but once again are growing steadily with new people coming on a weekly basis since the move. The space at St Peter's accommodates more and, as a result, we have seen new members join recently, meaning we now have a steady number on the register of about five-to-eight people – as many as we can take, given the number of sewing machines.

The move has for some participants been a little tricky as they have to get two buses now, due to weather and health. Also, having a shared space with other Wednesday activities means there are some distractions, but not enough to deter anyone.

Running these sessions is really enjoyable as the space and materials are always readily available. I have built up a bond with most of the participants outside the group sessions by texting and calling if they are working on a project from home, so they can ask me questions, remind me to bring things in or, if they cannot attend, they contact me to let me know – as I frequently check to make sure they're alright if they haven't attended.

Below are a few testimonials from members:

"I love the help given and the company, a friendly and nice place to invite someone."

"Really enjoying the class, however, using a shared space other users can be distracting, the low tables, it would be helpful if we had one high-cutting table. I've recommended the class to a number of people as I've had a good experience."

"I can make clothes for myself."

"Joining the sewing group was the best thing I ever did. Clem makes it enjoyable and spends equal amounts of time with us all."

Clementsia Paquette, Tutor, Sewing Class

Healthy Cooking on a Budget



Healthy eating on a budget: Some of the participants in the cookery classes, where they learn to plan and prepare food which is both healthy and doesn't cost too much.

These classes only started in October 2024, intended to run in tandem with the Clarion-funded Warm/Welcome Space project, with the addition of the Community Fridge. Again, an improvement on our Leegate facilities, the new premises provide a good-sized kitchen, oven and fridge. The classes only last for a few more months, so we hope for a repeat once the classes have had time to get established.

Held for free on Wednesdays, they have proved to be increasingly popular with publicity and word-of-mouth. Again, it's a mixed group of men and women, so far of at least a half-dozen. Aims of the classes are to encourage more people – particularly those on lower incomes – to shop wise, try out new recipes, and cook healthier foods for themselves, families and friends.

As tutor, I cover the basic hygiene rules with the groups, including the washing of hands and the wearing of aprons and gloves (if people are able to wear) and tying back of hair. The group has cooked and baked a wide variety of dishes on a small budget since the start, including leek and crouton soup, mixed vegetable curry, healthy cheesecake, and apricot and orange loaf.

Maureen Russell, Tutor, Healthy Cooking on a Budget

Computer Skills: Digital Drop-In

Helping people develop their computer skills: volunteer Billy Betson watches over a pupil as she works at a laptop. The classes are enjoying a welcome return to the centre, with the support of Cat Bytes Lewisham.



Lee Green Lives' long-standing commitment to widening people's computer skills sort of dates from the many years in which Pat Coyne voluntarily ran classes in Computer Skills and Online Publication until his sad and untimely death last year.

Fortunately, thanks to Cat Bytes Lewisham, we have been able to restore that Monday tradition with Digital Drop-In which only started at the end of 2024, so it's still in the early stages, but it's slowly starting to grow. People are starting to find out about it, each week we are seeing new faces.

I have found it to be a relaxed and friendly space and I'm sure as word spreads, we will reach more people in the community who could benefit from a little extra help with technology that they have difficulty in accessing. People appreciate having a place to ask questions without feeling rushed or judged, and we enjoy seeing them gain confidence with technology. It's been great to see more and more people coming in, and the feedback has been positive. I've really enjoyed growing this drop-in alongside Shirley Kirkland and Maureen Russell.

What we really want to achieve is not just helping with digital skills but also creating a space where people can chat, connect, and support each other and build a team effort mentality between us and the learners similar to what Cat Bytes has at the other drop-ins.

Billy Betson, Computer Skills Volunteer Worker

Knitting and Crocheting

This class had temporarily to be discontinued as we lost the tutor, DeShaun Smith, at the time of the move. We have been actively looking for a replacement, so far without success. This was particularly unfortunate as we had just obtained funding to support the class from Awards for All.

Prior to that, many of those taking the class made items to a high standard – something they could do for themselves, starting like DeShaun as a beginner and moving onto a higher level. Some also came for social reasons, the classes offering them a chance to meet others and make friends.

Clearly, there continues to be a need, so we will carry on searching for a successor to DeShaun.



Happy 20th anniversary!



Oh, I do like to be beside the seaside – A regular fixture in the time bank’s calendar, Lee Fair Share members and family outside the coach that took them to Hastings, their visit in 2024.

Lee Fair Share had another busy year in 2024 as it was the time bank’s 20th anniversary. This is quite an achievement for a small charity. To celebrate 20 years, we hosted a tea party in July and in October an exhibition of photos and memorabilia in Manor House library.

Coffee, Cake and Company, our weekly Monday get-together, is always popular, but during the cold, wet winter months numbers tend to drop off. To celebrate the arrival of Spring and to encourage members to return to the sessions, we hosted hot cross buns and Easter eggs in March.

These sessions are followed by Chair Exercises, run by Patty Fullarton, our marvellous tutor, and have proved of enormous benefit for many of our members, particularly those experiencing decreased mobility as they get older.

During the year several talks were arranged. Nima Stepney of Thackery Williams Solicitors gave a talk on Power of Attorney, which was very useful as so many people have not put Power of Attorney in place. The speaker emphasised how it can give peace of mind,

knowing that someone you trust will be in charge of your affairs. This talk was especially arranged in the evening in order to encourage members who work to attend.

The annual FUSS Christmas fairs are important fundraising events in Lee Fair Share calendar, last year's strong winds making it too dangerous to put up the stall, nevertheless, Lee Fair Share made £165. Later, the Spring Fair generated £184.

Another important event is the annual seaside trip, this past year's day visit to Hastings in a hired coach being no exception.

The move to St Peter's Hall late in 2024 has been a great success. Everyone likes being there, with the Coffee, Cake and Company session gaining several new members from the local area. It was great to have the Christmas party there, it not only hosted Brenda's Bingo, but the space meant people could get up and dance.

Lorraine Spenceley, Coordinator, Lee Fair Share



Lee Fair Share 20th Anniversary celebration at Manor House Library



Working with and for the community



Lee Green Open Studios artists display their wares: one of the many stalls run by groups at the Community Corner Manor House Gardens' Festival in June 2024, the equipment was funded by Lee Green Consortium.

The Consortium, a network of community groups, was formed in 2016 to work together and make sure our voices are heard. Facilitated by Lee Green Lives, our main aims included supporting Lee Green Assembly's work, celebrating and enhancing the work of volunteers, and developing groups' resilience, particularly in securing funding for theirs and our collective activities.

Over the past 18 months, our work included overseeing the distribution of the last of the money we won in 2023 through a bid to Lee Green's Ward NCIL (Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy) Fund. Called "All in it together", it was based on the belief in the importance of ensuring that it was fairly spread among local groups. The bid was very different from those elsewhere in Lewisham because we didn't specify what it was to be

spent on, rather than it had to meet ward priorities and deliver community cohesion, particularly in the wake of Covid.

We allocated over £8,000, the last of which was £1,000 to Manor House Gardens to support the Community Corner at their annual summer festival in June 2024.

The Consortium also coordinated a successful action in objecting to a change of use at the nearby historic Lee Centre. The owners are now having to look for organisations to run it as a community enterprise and resurrect it for community use,

Finally, we supported successful efforts to get more money for traders, services and charities in Leigate - including Lee Green Lives and three other Consortium members - to help them relocate from the shopping centre when forced out in the run-up by its redevelopment.



Jim Mallory, Chair Lee Green Consortium

Hard working former councillor and tireless supporter of local community initiatives

Lee Green Consortium members

Friends of Manor House Gardens

Lee Green Lives (LGL)

Lee Manor Society

Arts Network

Friends and Users of Staplehurst Shops

(FUSS)

GRACE (Connecting Communities, Changing Lives) Charity Shop

Lee Fair Share Time Bank

Lee Forum

Lee Green Open Studios

Lee Green Women's Institute

Leegate Traders Forum

Lochaber Hall Association

Manor House Library

Manor Park Friends

Newstead Tenants and Residents Association

Soul Refresh Café, Leegate

Street Wildlife Action Group (SWAG)

Users and Friends of Manor House Library



Lee Green Lives: Governance

Lee Green Lives (LGL) was founded in 2010, becoming a charity in 2011, since when it has run a community centre from an empty unit in the run-down Leegate shopping centre. In September 2024, we moved nearby to St Peter's Hall, Weigall Road.

Our Vision

Our vision is for a safer, stronger and more cohesive community with opportunities for self-development and growth accessible to all.

Our mission

We aim to offer opportunities, advice and support for local people to work, play, think and learn together, and to address economic and social disadvantage for mutual benefit, health and wellbeing.

Our Goals

- To provide activities for the benefit of local people, especially the elderly, young people and people experiencing social or economic disadvantage with a focus on well-being, health, mental health, learning and opportunities to socialise
- To help local people to overcome difficulties with housing, health or lack of income
- To sustain a community centre in the Lee Green area with the active participation of local volunteers
- To support the work of other local groups and organisations and to work in partnership through the Lee Green Consortium
- To contribute to the cohesion of the local community
- To advocate for the needs of local people and assist them to influence decisions that affect their lives or community

Our values

Our values are at the heart of everything we do. We aim to work in ways that are:

- Welcoming: we want everyone who comes to the centre to feel welcome and valued
- Inclusive: our activities are for everyone from the local community
- User-led: we encourage our volunteers and people using our services to help us design, develop and improve what we do
- Collaborative: wherever possible we work in partnership to improve outcomes for local people

Trustees 2024–25

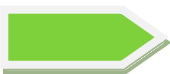
Pat Coyne (Chair)
Elaine Curley
Simon Hooks
Pat Mahony
Jim Mallory (Secretary/Vice Chair)
Caroline Mayow
Frances Migniuolo
Wendy Moss
James Rathbone (Treasurer)

A special tribute to...

Pat Coyne, Chair of Lee Green Lives from 2021, who sadly and tragically died in May 2024. He worked hard on behalf of the local community, and was a great source of wisdom and strength to Lee Green Lives. Equally tragically, Wendy Moss, another trustee, who died in November 2024, who contributed greatly to LGL and the wider community.



The full accounts are published in a separate document, available on request.



Treasurer's report: James Rathbone



LEE GREEN Lives

Creating a vibrant, well-used space for the benefit of the community



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