

FRIENDS OF THE SOUTH DOWNS



Friends of the
SOUTH DOWNS

Protecting the beauty of the Downs



FRIENDS OF THE SOUTH DOWNS
REPORT AND FINANCIAL
STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR
ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

Charity Registration Number 230329
Company Number 319437

Annual Report of Trustees and Directors 2022

Registered Office: 5 Swan Court, Station Road, Pulborough, West Sussex RH20 1RL

Telephone: 01798 875073 Email: enquiries@friendsofthesouthdowns.org.uk

Website: www.friendsofthesouthdowns.org.uk

President: Baroness Jones of Whitchurch

Vice-Presidents Peter Harris, Lord Lloyd of Berwick PC, Richard Reed, and Gerard Ryan QC.

Patrons Lord Sawyer of Darlington, Lord Egremont

Corporate Sponsors Albourne Estate & Nyetimber Vineyard , Landmark Systems, Langhams Brewery

Members of Council during 2022 (The Charity Trustees and Directors of the Company) *

David Sawyer	Chairman		4/4
Patrick Haworth			2/4
David Coldwell			2/4
Glynn Jones			2/2
Andrew Lovett	Treasurer		4/4
Nick Isaac			3/4
Caroline Douglas			3/4
Richard Reed			3/4
Chris Steibelt			3/4
David Green			4/4
Jon Templeton			2/2
Paul Wilkinson			4/4
Janet Goody			2/3
Martin Small			1/1

* Indicates actual and possible number of Council meetings attended.

Staff at 31st December 2022:

Office Manager

Alison Isaac

Marketing Manager

Gill Linturn

Social Media Coordinator

Laura Libricz

Bankers

CAF Bank Ltd, 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Mailing, Kent ME19 4JQ PO Box 358

Barclays Bank plc, North Street, Brighton BN1 1SF

Independent Examiner of the accounts

Cheeld Wheeler & Co, Redhill Chambers, 2d High Street, Redhill, RH1 1RJ

Investment Managers: Cazenove Capital Management, 12 Moorgate, London EC2R 6DA

Representatives on significant external bodies as at 31 December 2022

Campaign for National Parks:	Richard Reed
South Downs Network:	David Coldwell

Structure, Governance and management

The Friends of the South Downs is a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Acts (number 319437) and a registered charity (number 230329). The name of the company and charity changed from South Downs Society during 2022. The Articles of Association were revised at the Annual General Meeting 7th November 2020.

Membership of the Friends is open to all. Membership on 31/12/22 was 1,449. The Council is responsible for the management of the Friends and for setting its strategic direction. Its membership consists of the Treasurer and up to 12 ordinary members who are elected at an AGM.

The Treasurer is elected annually but may be re-elected whilst ordinary members are elected for three years after which they may be re-elected. Members are invited to become trustees, by the Chairman, in the Downsman magazine and in the monthly e-news. Applicants are interviewed by the Chairman and one other trustee. The names of members of the Council serving in 2022 are shown on page 2. New members of Council are provided with relevant Charity Commission publications and offered a one-to-one briefing.

The Friends has three committees which are appointed annually. These are the Planning and Conservation Committee which co-ordinates the work of District Officers in advising on developments in their area; the Access and Rights of Way Committee which provides guidance to the team of Area Access Officers in considering access and rights of way issues currently in the process of reinstatement; and the Membership and Marketing Committee which aims to increase the membership of the Friends and is responsible for fund raising and member events.

A large team of volunteers perform a variety of tasks including being committee members, District Officers, Area Access Officers, walks leaders and providing administrative support.

Objectives and Activities

The Friends's objective is to conserve and enhance for the public benefit the beauty and amenities of the South Downs in and within the vicinity of the South Downs National Park. We are the only membership organisation dedicated to conserving and enhancing the beauty and amenities of the SDNP. We work hard to improve access to the park and take an informed interest in planning policy and planning applications.

As well as providing a comprehensive programme of walks and strolls we take a special interest in access, rights of way and other park initiatives both in the Park and in the immediate area.

Contracts are in place with the NPA to replace stiles with gates which the Friends has part funded, 33 of which have been completed, and to provide seats along the South Downs Way.

We run projects to encourage the interest of children in the South Downs.

The trustees believe that all these activities ensure that we fulfil our duty in section 4 of the 2006 Charities Act to have due regard to the public benefit guidance published by the Charity Commission.

Achievements and Performance

Our 99th year coincided with the virtual end of Covid restrictions, and we were able to resume “normal” service. An enthusiastic and knowledgeable group of Trustees led the Friends to a successful and active year, making a real difference in and around the National Park.

During the year we:

- Continued to respond to planning, transport and access issues (see below)
- Resumed the full walks and strolls programme. This programme continues to be well supported by members, encouraging many onto and around the Downs on walks and strolls that provide a warm welcome to newcomers and regulars alike.
- Our project to replace stiles on paths within the park with kissing gates in association with the National Park Authority concluded in 2021, but we are fortunate to find another group to take over. The Monday Group are an enthusiastic group of men who have undertaken to replace stiles alongside their existing work refurbishing stiles. This project enables very many less mobile walkers to use popular paths that have been impossible for them to use because they cannot climb over stiles.
- Continued to run projects encouraging children to learn about the Downs
- Progress continues with the provision of oak seats on the South Downs Way. Three seats have been fitted: a new supplier has also been engaged whom we hope will fit seats rather faster than has hitherto been possible.

Our staff have continued to provide support to Trustees and members. All three current members of staff work part time, giving a full-time equivalent staff level of 1.3.

Our office manager Alison Jones with her team Gill Linturn and Laura Libricz managed all finances, membership records, attendance at local shows etc. In particular we have significantly increased our presence on social media thanks to the expertise of our staff.

Planning and Land Management

The Planning and Conservation committee is tasked keeping a watching brief on planning activity across the South Downs National Park; committee members are members of the Friends of the South Downs and are known as District Officers.

Presently there are 21 on the committee, spread over the 170-odd Parishes and some unparished areas in the National Park.

Each week, the SDNPA publishes a list of Planning Applications received and validated, and this list is circulated to the District Officers; additionally, there is a list of decisions made and another of appeal decisions. In the year past there were about 6300 applications circulated.

2022 was as busy as ever although with fewer applications within the Chichester and Horsham District council areas where Natural England has introduced a requirement for water neutrality meaning that any new developments will not be allowed to increase water consumption from local sources.

Access and Rights of Way

In late summer 2022, we resumed our role of assisting the SDNPA with their audit of a representative sample of PROW in the NP. Thanks to all AAOs who helped out. We are encouraged by the government's promise to come up with a new farm payments scheme in the aftermath of Brexit. The Environmental Land Management Scheme holds out the promise of payments for improved access to the countryside, underpinned by the concept of public payments for public goods. We await details of the scheme, and speedy implementation.

The Landscapes Review led by Julian Glover suggested that the government acknowledged the importance of our protected landscapes and was prepared to do something to promote the role of our national parks and AONBs. Many groups, including the rejuvenated Campaign for National Parks, have pressed the government to implement the recommendations: and action is awaited.

It is disappointing to note that car parks in the NP affording access to the top of the Downs have come under threat. WSCC withdrew its support of Kithurst Hill car park, but fortunately the facility was saved by Horsham DC agreeing to step in. The owners of the Firle Estate have decided to charge for the use of its car parks at Firle Beacon and Bopeep. Planning consent has been granted for the former. We regret both the need to pay to use these car parks, and the loss of amenity due to the presence of car park boards, machines and cameras. We will remain active in opposing these changes and other similar proposals.

Membership and Marketing

We are the only membership organisation dedicated to protecting the South Downs, and therefore demonstrating the value of being a member is important to us. Our publications The Downsman and E-news are popular and well respected, including by other National Park Societies, and we continue to build our presence on social media. With the ending of the pandemic, we have recommenced our popular programme of talks, which is now a blend of face-to-face and Zoom events, and our speakers have included James Sainsbury and Revd. Peter Jones. We also raised our profile with the wider population by arranging for Sussex Life magazine to publish one of our short walks every month during 2022, generating both significant interest and new members.

Walks and Strolls

The story of the Friends of the South Downs began during a country walk one hundred years ago. We continue to encourage people to experience at first hand the beauty of the South Downs with a very impressive programme of walks and strolls. This is only possible because of the dedication of Walks Coordinator Ian Lancaster and Strolls Coordinator Mick Heywood, assisted by many members volunteering to be leaders. We held a garden party in two locations across the Downs to show our appreciation of all their hard work.

We are pleased to report that, during 2022, the number of events returned to pre-pandemic levels, with us providing 199 walks and strolls across the whole length of the South Downs.

Education and Understanding

The trustees have agreed that one of the key ways in which can safeguard the Downs in the future is to encourage the interest of children in the hope that they will get to know the landscape and culture and look after it when they grow up.

The Friends have set up the projects described below with that objective.

South Downs Generations was a two year project largely funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. We worked with four primary schools to encourage children to learn about South Downs history and culture. We contributed £10k of a total cost of about £55k. The project finished in 2021, but a legacy is a wonderful website <https://southdownsgenerations.org.uk/>

The website is a great resource for everyone interested in the Downs, especially schools. We have sent a leaflet to all schools encouraging them to use the site.

South Downs for All is our current two year centenary project, also largely funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. We are involving eight schools and taking children on fieldtrips on the Downs. The schools have higher than average numbers of the less well off and ethnic minorities: groups seen less in the natural environment. The children's resulting work will be featured in a book and some heritage trail leaflets. We will contribute £10k of a total cost of about £55k. We have just completed the first year of the project. A website is being developed as the project progresses: <https://southdownsforall.org.uk/>

Explorers of the South Downs is a new project financed with £10k from a recent legacy. We will donate £10k to the South Downs National Park Authority who will contract with an experienced company called So Sussex to run about 30 fieldtrips for children by July 2023. Again the focus will be on schools with children less likely to know the Downs. We hope to extend the project into future years.

In addition to our work with children we organised a series of talks on issues relating to the South Downs held both on-line and in person. All proved successful, with good attendances.

Services for members

The Downsman magazine and the monthly E-News keep members informed of the Society's activities and concerns. 2022 saw us further increase our social media presence with a greater use of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Our team of staff are assisted by many volunteers who ensure the smooth running of the society.

Financial review and reserves policy

The Friends uses its financial resources to help achieve its charitable objective of conserving and enhancing for the public benefit the beauty and amenities of the South Downs in and around the South Downs National Park.

During 2022 income exceeded expenditure by £145,749 (2021: deficit £17,134). The market value of investments fell by £79,111 (2021: rise of £68,883), resulting in an overall increase in funds of £66,638 (2021: £51,749). The year was exceptional for the amount of legacies received: £150,120 (2021: £9,557) in total. At the year end total funds stood at £870,209 (2021: £803,571).

The Friends maintains its funds at a level to provide income to support activities which would not otherwise be affordable and to fund projects which are consistent with its objectives.

Conclusion

We will be celebrating our Centenary in 2023 and have produced a comprehensive program of activities to mark the year. We shall use the year to increase our exposure on print and electronic media with the aim of furthering our objectives, and to especially increase awareness of the National Park and our role in protecting it. We are the third largest National Park Society and compare well with those in other National Parks in our contribution to current policy issues and provision for its members. Our professional approach in responses to issues continues to achieve a good relationship with the National Park Authority, the Campaign for National Parks and other public bodies.

Statement of Member's Responsibilities

The members of Council are required to prepare financial statements for each financial period which give a true and fair view of the state of the Friends's affairs at the end of the financial year and of net incoming resources for the financial year. In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently; and make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent.

Trustees are responsible for:-

- a) keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time financial position of the Friends and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the relevant statute;
- b) Safeguarding the assets of the Friends and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities; and
- c) Preparing the financial statements on a going-concern basis unless it is inappropriate to assume that the Friends will continue to operate.

Approved by the Council on March 27th 2023 and signed on their behalf by

David Sawyer - Chairman