

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 2023

Charity Registration Number 230329  
Company Number 319437

## Annual Report of Trustees and Directors 2023

**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 and The Pulborough Exchange

### Members of Council during 2023 (The Charity Trustees and Directors of the Company) \*

David Sawyer	Chairman		4/4
Patrick Haworth			4/4
David Coldwell		Resigned May 23	1/1
Glynn Jones		Resigned May 23	0/1
Andrew Lovett	Treasurer		4/4
Nick Isaac			3/4
Caroline Douglas			3/4
Richard Reed		Resigned May 23	1/1
Chris Steibelt		Resigned May 23	1/1
David Green			4/4
Paul Wilkinson			4/4
Janet Goody		Elected May 22	3/4
Martin Small		Elected May 23	4/4

\* Indicates actual and possible number of Council meetings attended.

### Staff at 31st December 2023:

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

David Wheeler, 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 2023

Campaign for National Parks:  
South Downs Network:

David Green  
Martin Small

The trustees, who are also directors of the charitable company for the purposes of the Companies Act 2006, present their annual report. The financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31st December 2023 are available on the Companies House website at. The trustees have adopted the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) ‘Accounting and reporting by Charities’ issued in 2019.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

### **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 7<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

Membership of the Friends is open to all. Membership on 31/12/23 was 1,425. 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 2023 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 have 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 South Downs National Park. 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.

The Monday Group, based in Ditchling, are replacing stiles with gates which the Friends are funding, 58 of which have been completed. A project to provide seats made of oak and with various designs at regular intervals along the South Downs Way has achieved seven seats to date.

We also run projects to encourage the interest of children in the South Downs. For the first time this year we have worked closely with Brighton University, providing encouragement for environmental students with prizes and an M.Sc project.

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**

2023 was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of our organisation. An enthusiastic and knowledgeable group of Trustees led the Friends to a successful and active centenary year, with many special projects arranged to recognise the achievement.

During the year we:

- Continued to respond to planning, transport and access issues (see below)
- 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 fund stiles on paths within and around the park with kissing gates has continued. We were fortunate to find the Monday Group who are an enthusiastic group of men who have undertaken to provide gates 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. Seven seats have been fitted: a new supplier has also been engaged who is fitting 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 Conservation**

The Planning and Conservation Committee is tasked with monitoring all planning activity across the National Park (NP). This is done through a network of District Officers (DOs), all

members of the Friends and volunteers and each covering a group of about 6/7 parishes across the 170 odd parishes in the NP.

Each week the NP Authority (NPA) issues separate lists of new applications received and validated, decisions made and appeals determined. This year there has been no noticeable slowdown in the number of applications coming in.

We would only reckon to comment on a very small proportion of these, those identified by DOs as of significance to the NP, or to local communities within it. That is where the local knowledge of DOs is so vital.

Probably the single most important application for the NP in the last few years has been that for the Phoenix Causeway, North Street development in Lewes. It is a bold, exciting, even visionary mixed-use scheme. It would provide 685 new homes, but much more. It had our support and has now been passed.

The other major application of late has been the Towner Gallery led scheme for the change of use of the Black Robin Farm complex off Beachy Head Road just outside Eastbourne into a cultural and education centre. Our view was that the scheme involved a conflict between the two primary purposes of the NP, conservation and access for the public. In those circumstances, it is clearly established that the NPA has to attach greater weight to the conservation purpose. We did speak against the Officer's recommendation to grant permission, but it was passed by a margin of 5 to 4.

### **Access and Rights of Way**

The SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY have said that they will no longer be conducting audits of a representative sample of PROWs in the Park just the SDW. It is also looking at streamlining the process for monitoring the maintenance of the SDW.

Car parking at Whiteways is now free again, but currently closes at 4pm..We will continue to monitor the introduction of car parking charges but to be realistic the objective must be to keep charges at an acceptable level rather than to oppose all together.

The Environmental Land Management Scheme continues to be rolled out.

The Labour Party has withdrawn the Right to Roam as a Manifesto Pledge but will continue to pursue the extension of CROW. An open letter drafted by CNP and signed on behalf of nine Friends organisations including ourselves has been sent to the leader of political parties with an MP in England as to policies CNP would like to see adopted in manifesto pledges and plans. There is a campaign to resolve the issue of Access Land created without access. The Darwall case relating to the right to wild camp on Dartmoor is to go to the Supreme Court.

### **Membership and Marketing**

The purpose of the M&M Committee is to increase our membership, to organise member events, and to raise funds - so that we can continue to achieve our charitable objectives. Our membership did grow during 2023, at a time when other National Park Societies have struggled to maintain their membership numbers. On events, our focus this year has been on celebrating our Centenary. This included publishing Richard Reed's excellent history of the FSD, talks by high-profile speakers, and a reception in the House of Lords generously hosted by our President, Baroness Jones. Plus, we established a relationship with the University of Brighton, adding another link with young people to the work with schools

mentioned elsewhere in this Report. This resulted in the award to top University students of prizes in honour of our founder Robert Thurston-Hopkins and of our thrice Chairman, Richard Reed.

## **Walks and Strolls**

We are pleased to report that, during 2023, we provided our members with 172 walks and strolls across the whole length of the South Downs, ranging from 3 to 27 miles in length. Obviously, this included a number of Centenary-themed events. For example, at the more challenging end we retraced the route described by Hilaire Belloc in his novel 'The Four Men', covering 96 miles over 6 days. We also organized a well-attended stroll which included lunch and 100<sup>th</sup> birthday cake at our Pulborough office. Such a successful programme was only possible because of the dedication of Walks Coordinator Ian Lancaster and Strolls Coordinator Mick Heywood, assisted by many gallant members volunteering to be leaders.

## **Education and Understanding**

The trustees have agreed that one of the key ways in which the Friends 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. The project finished in 2021, but we have continued to maintain 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 completed the greater part of this project. A website carries the content of the project: <https://southdownsforall.org.uk/>

**Explorers of the South Downs** is a project financed from a recent legacy. We have donated £10k to the South Downs National Park Authority who arranged an experienced company called So Sussex to run about 30 fieldtrips for children during the summer term of 2023. Again the focus was on schools with children less likely to know the Downs. We plan to extend the project into future years, including both Hampshire and Sussex schools.

**No child left behind** is a Youth Hostels Association scheme to enable children who don't normally visit to the countryside to stay overnight in a youth hostel. We donated £5k to enable a school to enjoy this experience on the South Downs.

### **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 2023 expenditure exceeded income by £28,058 (2022: surplus £145,749). The market value of investments rose by £17,761 (2022: fall of £79,111), resulting in an overall reduction in funds of £10,297 (2022: increase of £66,638). During the year legacies received amounted to £47,205 (2022: £150,120). At the year-end total funds stood at £859,912 (2022: £870,209).

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 celebrated our Centenary in 2023 and produced a comprehensive program of activities to mark the year. We used 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 April 8<sup>th</sup> 2024 and signed on their behalf by**

**David Sawyer - Chairman**