**Friends of the South Downs**

At the January meeting we were treated to a presentation about the Friends of the South Downs by David Sawyer.

The Society of Sussex Downsmen was founded in 1923 to promote and protect the South Downs in Sussex. This partly sprang from the ‘Right to Roam’ movement, and also from concerns about preserving the countryside, for example, restricting further expansion following the development of Peacehaven in the coastal landscape after the First World War.

In 1947, twelve areas including the South Downs were recommended to become National Parks, but unlike other areas, the South Downs was not designated until 2010, after a long campaign. The South Downs cover areas of chalk downs, river valleys, and heathland, stretching into Hampshire as well as Sussex, and include varied wildlife, flora, and cultural heritage.

The Sussex Downsmen became the South Downs Society, and then the Friends of the South Downs. Today the organisation provides feedback to the National Park on subjects such as planning applications, and have recently been involved in the discussions about the A27 improvements planned near Arundel, and the power lines from offshore wind farms. Other activities include organised walks, including walks with an archaeological guide, and tree-planting. Recent projects are positioning QR codes to provide information to walkers, and replacing stiles with kissing-gates, to make walking routes more accessible. There are also talks, and a singing society, reviving old songs from the South Downs.

The evening concluded with light refreshments and a raffle.

Jo Myland