

Downlands Trust Newsletter

SPRING 2024



From the Chairman

Peter Wakeham

Welcome to our Spring Newsletter. As explained in the item below, 2024 began with the splendid news that, against strong competition, Fidelity International staff voted to sponsor us for a further 2 years. This will mean so much for the Trust, our partners and the conservation work that they carry out in the countryside.

It has been a busy winter for grant applications and the trustees have approved 30 since the last issue of the newsletter. The majority were requests for equipment and livestock supplies, but we were also pleased to be able to fund the excavation of a new wildlife pond at Old Lodge Farm that will become a major educational resource for visiting groups of young people.

At our AGM in October we enjoyed a presentation from Lucy Shea, Clerk to the Banstead Commons Conservators, covering the history and management of the Banstead Commons. Two of the four commons, Banstead Downs and Park Downs, are Sites of Special Scientific Interest and we are fortunate to have these rare chalk grassland habitats on our doorstep. Also in October, and jointly with the Downlands Partnership, we applied to the City of London for a grant under their Enjoying Green Spaces scheme. The request was for funding over a period of 2 years for habitat improvements on Farthing Downs and Riddlesdown to boost the populations of Skylarks and Yellowhammers. We were delighted to learn very recently that the bid had been successful.

February provided us with yet more evidence of climate change, it being the warmest on record in England and Wales and the wettest on record in the south of England. Climate change in its various manifestations is having, or will have, an impact upon our flora and fauna. Some species, such as Bee Orchids, are expanding their range northwards in England as temperatures rise. Others, such as the Surrey population of Musk Orchids, are declining, almost certainly because of hotter and drier summers. An emerging problem is that of mismatch in the cycles of interdependent species and there is already evidence that some birds are starting to miss the peak caterpillar season, leaving their young with less food and the population vulnerable to decline.

The Trustees

Fidelity Funding for the Trust

Noreen Siba



(from left to right)

Elspeth Pringle (Social Media), Pam Mascall (Grants), Peter Wakeham (Chairman), Geof Haseler (Newsletter), Sarah Milan (Membership), Roger Findlay (Treasurer), Noreen Siba (Marketing)

In December 2023, Fidelity staff voted once again for the Downlands Trust to be the lucky recipient of Fidelity International's sponsorship in the Environmental category. Based upon project proposals put forward by the Trustees, we will receive two more years of funding in 2024 and 2025 at the same level as for the last two years. This means that we are able to continue to fund countryside conservation work by the Downlands Partnership and other local conservation organisations at the same level as previously enjoyed. We are all delighted and grateful to Fidelity for their ongoing support.

Special thanks are due to the Downlands Partnership's Grazing Team and their volunteers for the event days that they provide for Fidelity staff at Old Lodge Farm. Likewise to the Task Team for the practical work days that they organise for Fidelity volunteers at a variety of sites. Fidelity staff greatly enjoy these experiences and this contributed in no small way to the renewal of our sponsorship.

Dates for your diary

- Wednesday 1 May * BCC Dawn Chorus walk on Banstead Heath 6am - 8am
- Sunday 5 May Oaks Park Dawn Chorus Walk - 6-8 am Meet by the café
- Sunday 5 May Oaks Park Guided Tree Trail - 2-3 pm Meet by the café
- Sunday 19 May Banstead Arts Festival. Flowers and Butterflies on Park Downs, a 2 hour walk led by Jill Hall and Peter Wakeham. Meet 10.30 am at the Holly Lane car park.
- Sunday 2 June Oaks Park Guided Tree Trail - 2-3 pm Meet by the café
- Thursday 6 June * BCC Flora and fauna walk on Park Downs 10am - 12pm
- Sat/Sun 8-9 June Oaks Park Fete Champetre Celebration 10 am - 4 pm
- **Sunday 9 June *** EezeSport Bug Hunt at the Teddy Bear Picnic, Nonsuch Park (in aid of NCT and Downlands Trust)**
- Saturday 15 June Environment Fair at St Lawrence's Church, Church Hill, Caterham CR3 6SA
- Friday 28 June * BCC 3 mile Flora and Fauna ramble on Banstead Heath 10am - 12.30pm
- **Saturday 6 July *** Old Coulsdon Rotary Fair**
- Sunday 7 July Oaks Park Guided Tree Trail 2-3 pm. Meet by the café
- Sunday 7 July Summer Wildflower and Orchid Walk on Farthing Downs/Happy Valley. Contact Pauline Payne on 01737 554449 or paulinepayne@btinternet.com to book a place.
- **Monday 26 August *** Carshalton EcoFair, Carshalton Park, Ruskin Road SM5 3DD**
- Sunday 1 September Oaks Park Guided Tree Trail 2-3 pm. Meet by the café
- Thursday 24 October * BCC Fungi Foray on Banstead Heath 10am - 12.30pm

AND DON'T FORGET OUR AGM:

- **Tuesday 22 October Downland Trust AGM at 7.45 pm The Banstead Centre, The Horseshoe, Banstead SM7 2BQ. Dominic North, Ranger, Happy Valley, will give a talk on the management and wildlife of this site.**

* **To reserve a place on a Banstead Commons Conservators' walk, please call 07919 251512 or email enquiries@bansteadcommons.org.uk. Walk numbers are limited and there is a suggested donation of £5.**

***** Downlands Trust will have a stall at these events. Please contact Noreen Siba on 07770 417796 if you can offer help on any of these days.**

Photocall event for Downlands Partnership Hilux

Debbie Hescott

On a sunny 28 November, notably Giving Tuesday, some of the partners that helped to fund the purchase of the new set of wheels for the Downlands Partnership conservation crew, met in Chipstead to celebrate the newly branded vehicle that is finally out on the road. Back in summer 2021, the Downlands Partnership with their charity partner Downlands Trust ran a successful online fundraising campaign, Driving Downlands Ahead, to raise all the funds to purchase a new Toyota Hilux off road vehicle for the task team.



An off-road vehicle is vital to accessing the glorious countryside sites that the team manages in partnership across NE Surrey and South London, in particular rare chalk grassland, for biodiversity, wildlife and people. The vehicle is used to transport tools and materials, including the important biscuits for volunteers, and some volunteers get a lift to site too.

The Downlands Trust kindly granted £10,000 towards the purchase and a further generous donation of £5,000 was provided by Fidelity International (Kingswood Office), a very supportive local corporate partner. Small grants were successfully awarded through Reigate & Banstead Borough Council, Caterham-on-the-Hill Parish Council and Chaldon Village Council plus a contribution was made by host authority Surrey County Council. Around £4,400 was secured through online donations, which was an amazing amount of local financial support.



Many thanks again to everyone that supported the campaign. Due to manufacturer delays it took 18 months to take delivery of the new vehicle, so it is fantastic to now have the vehicle in action.

Photo shows Downlands Partnership staff and volunteers with representatives from Downlands Trust, Fidelity International and local councillors Nadean Moses and Peter Harp from Reigate & Banstead Borough Council.

Hutchinson's Bank sits in a narrow, dry valley between New Addington and Featherbed Lane. It is a long, narrow strip, one kilometre by 250 metres in size, mainly chalk on the upper slopes and clay-with-flints along the valley bottom. Always poor farming land, over several centuries the main crop was rabbit meat and pelt. The landowner lived overlooking the Bank, the farmhouse on the site now occupied by Croydon's recycling and waste centre. Croydon Council had bought the estate in the 1930s. Most of Hutchinson's Bank was scheduled for the construction of 120 private houses and Farleigh Dean Crescent, the first eight, completed as World War 2 began.



Entrance to Hutchinson's Bank

After the war building did not resume and the valley became part of London's Green Belt. The Crescent, now a short cul de sac, is the road leading to a main access to Hutchinson's Bank.



Entrance meadow -
Farleigh Dean Crescent

The large rabbit population still grazed the open chalk downland and controlled scrub re-growth effectively. The lower clay slope, farmed as arable during the war, quickly reverted to grassland with scrub. The next change was seismic and over very few years in the 1950s myxomatosis wiped out as much as 99% of Hutchinson's Bank's rabbits. Natural succession followed and within three decades the open downland had largely disappeared under scrub, mainly Hawthorn and Dogwood. Secondary woodland followed with Whitebeam and Field Maple leading the way.

By the early 1980s only two or three pockets of remnant downland had survived. It was serendipity that brought together the London Wildlife Trust, formed in 1981, and the emergence of a group of local wildlife enthusiasts who campaigned for the Trust to urge Croydon Council to recognise the importance of Hutchinson's Bank and the surrounding area. Keith Corbett and Mick Douglas (both from the London Wildlife Trust) and Martin Wills, John Russell, Richard Goldfinch, and Mick Lock (from the local group) united to lobby the Trust and the Council. Many local people joined the campaign, building real momentum and, in 1986, achieved success. London Wildlife Trust was granted a rolling licence to manage Hutchinson's Bank plus adjacent Chapel Bank, Featherbed Lane verge and Threecorner Grove. This was a more successful outcome than any of our lobbyists had dared hope for. London Wildlife Trust paid a peppercorn rent but were financially responsible for all aspects of the management of the four sites. Removing burned out, joy-ridden vehicles and golf buggies proved to be, in the early years, a major and expensive problem. From the outset the management of the four sites was overseen by the London Wildlife Trust, advised by a succession of management plans. It was a collaborative effort with the Downlands Partnership (DCMP as it was then) and the local group chaired by Martin providing regular work parties between September and March.



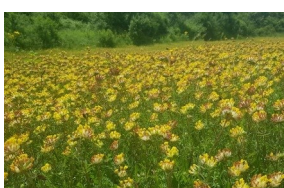
Beulah and Jacobs sheep on site

The initial aim was to expand the small, open areas and to connect them where possible. The longer term was to introduce grazing as areas became large enough and fenced. DCMP provided the first grazers from 1994: sheep - Beulahs, Jacobs and Herdwicks funded in part by the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. By the end of the 1990s five large paddocks had been created and partly cleared of scrub and woodland. However, this was well short of the 70% recovery of chalk grassland. Time and the National Lottery smiled on our hopes when the London Wildlife Trust made a successful bid for

five-year funding and secured a 25-year lease for the 4 sites in 2001. Old fencing was replaced with substantial involvement of contractors and the larger trees within the paddocks were removed. It had always been accepted that three substantial strips of mature woodland would be retained to continue to support a wider range of biodiversity. The sad death of Peter Guest, the Trust's HLF project manager, during the funding period caused a temporary loss of momentum but a second Lottery bid promoted by the Downlands team - the Old Surrey Downs Project - included our four sites. This second five-year funding effected the most significant progress to the main 10% aim of chalk grassland recovery by its conclusion in 2009 - great combined team effort by Old Surrey Downs Project, the London Wildlife Trust and the local group.



Malcolm brushcutting



Kidney Vetch on the scrape

During this period a range of animals had grazed or browsed. Sheep were the mainstays but five charismatic goats (loved by local residents) proved the most efficient grazers of woody scrub. Two Exmoor ponies have contributed but the cattle identified by earlier management plans could not progress due to the absence of piped water and self-filling troughs. Happily this has now been resolved as London Wildlife Trust got funding for mains water to all five paddocks. This step is now being planned for and, when implemented, will advance the realisation of herb rich and diverse grassland which has been very slow to date over the last decade. Herb colonisation has occurred close to the herb rich tracks, the bridleway and the nature trail but the less selective and ground poaching browsing of cattle will create more favourable conditions for herb rich restoration. These remarkable species rich sites have achieved a nationwide recognition and each year attract visitors from all parts of our country with Hutchinson's Bank and Chapel Bank attracting the greatest interest.

A fortieth anniversary is just two years away!

Hutchinson's Bank - Large Tortoiseshell

Malcolm Bridge

Within a couple of days of completing the article above, I was enjoying a warm and sunny walk on Saturday 9 March at Hutchinson's Bank. I hoped to spot one or two of our four resident butterfly species which hibernate as adults. I was not disappointed and several Brimstones, then a Small Tortoiseshell followed by a Peacock were also enjoying the pleasant day. While hoping to spot the last of the quartet, a Comma, I saw a large butterfly which set my pulse racing. Happily this new arrival was obliging and settled on the dry, sun-warmed track. I was able to approach and then photograph a Large Tortoiseshell. This splendid insect has not been resident in the UK since the late 1940s but recent years have seen small numbers of migrants reaching our shores each year. I consider this sighting, which I first saw at Hutchinson's Bank in 2020, suggests a breeding presence in the area and possibly a charismatic addition to Hutchinson's Bank's 42 breeding butterfly species.



Photo: Martin Wills

Hazel coppicing by the Woodchips in Banstead Woods

Richard Carter

Coppicing is the periodic cutting of trees to a few inches above ground level. It maintains the diversity of flora and fauna in ancient woodlands by not destroying the mycorrhiza, vast networks that interconnect the roots of trees underground, and by allowing sunlight in to the coppiced area which triggers woodland plants to flower.

Cutting is usually done on an eight year cycle so that there are a variety of habitats in the coppiced area. Coppicing can extend the life of a Hazel stand for maybe 200 years, and benefits the wood - coppiced trees can be thought of as having the root system of an old tree with the growth potential of a young tree. However, unless the tree is regularly coppiced, the stems will grow outwards and their weight will finally pull the stand apart, letting in rot and fungus which will destroy the tree.



Many stands of Hazel in Banstead Woods are now overgrown and need drastic work to ensure their longevity. The Woodchips have now been coppicing for nearly 10 years but there are still large areas of Hazel that need attention.

Because Natural England do not allow fires in the wood and to avoid unsightly piles of branches, all our coppicing involves the building of dead hedges which act as a barrier to protect the sites and as a wildlife corridor for small mammals and birds. Some of the smaller branches are used to form mini barriers around each Hazel to deter the deer from nibbling the new growth. It is most satisfying to revisit previous years' coppice sites and see how the areas have regenerated.



Pond at Old Lodge Farm

Sean Grufferty

The construction of the new Butterfly Bank at Old Lodge Farm gave an opportunity to use the soil from an area to begin a new pond. Staff from Fidelity carried out more of the work by hand – no mean feat! After seeing the progress made, the Trust gave a grant which enabled Matt Bushell to dig out the rest.



Volunteers from Fidelity at work

The next step will be to carry out a little cosmetic work by hand to smooth the profile and ensure that it is perfectly level in all directions, after which it will be lined with sand before the main liner is installed. When complete the pond will be a haven for wildlife and provide another element for groups of people who visit. The increasing number of habitats at the farm will enhance the aspects of education with younger groups and continue to provide a rich experience to take away!



The new butterfly bank



NoFence electric collars

New cattle collars purchased for the Grazing Team are being used at Nork Park and Dene Farm in Chipstead. They make the management and welfare of cattle so much safer and achieve a more favourable impact from the grazing.



The Grazing Team also requested four collars for sheep to give them more flexibility with the animals they use and also make the stock checking easier on sites such as Brockham Quarry where the sheep can be very difficult to locate. Last Autumn the Team had to use electric fencing to keep the sheep in prescribed areas but these collars will allow either for sheep to be taken on to more sites or to mob graze on a site where more appropriate.

Trail cameras

The copse at Old Lodge Farm has come a long way in the last few years, forming a wonderful new habitat. The only downside is that it is more challenging to see the barn owls that nest in the box installed over 10 years ago! Thanks to the trail cameras funded by the Downlands Trust, Downlands Partnership have been able to install them to keep an eye on how their charismatic residents are doing!

It was important to keep disturbance to a minimum so the photos and videos from the trail cameras provide an excellent way to engage the groups that visit the farm without causing disturbance to the owls.



Fencing equipment

The Trust funded the purchase of an auger, post driver and cordless stapler which will allow the Grazing Team to repair or install fencing up to four times faster. It will also place less of a strain on them compared to the manual basher and hammer! The pictures here are at Dene Farm in Chipstead Valley.

Addington Hills Notice Board

Addington Hills now has a new information board funded by the Trust. This has a map of the site showing features, Rights of Way and the differing habitats across the area. Tom and the DP volunteers constructed the frame. Two of the volunteers are seen here erecting the board on site.



Signage at the Skylark Field

The Sanderstead to Whyteleafe Countryside Area has now been grazed for many years and Sarah Clifford, the Warden, thought that it would be very beneficial for Croydon land and the two grazing paddocks to have new metal signage advising the public that sheep are grazing in the vicinity. The signage is situated in the fields and along the footpaths leading up to the Skylark Field and the grazing paddocks, and advises the public on the correct protocol that should be used by dog owners around the livestock grazing area.

Fencing on Park Downs and Banstead Downs

Banstead Commons Conservators manage four sites including Park Downs and Banstead Downs. These are both chalk downland sites which were designated SSSIs in 1955 due to their unique flora and fauna. This year, the Conservators are working in collaboration with the Downlands Partnership to extend their grazing regime to include these Downs. The Trust approved a grant for additional straining posts and galvanized stock fencing to enable the Conservators to have at least three stock enclosures erected at any one time.

A Second Hilux for the Downlands Partnership

Late last year the Trust approved a grant of £10,000 to the Downlands Partnership towards the cost of a new Hilux for the Grazing Team. Their previous Land Rover was old and costly to run as it did not meet the ULEZ requirements.

Shortly after the grant was agreed, the old Land Rover broke down and was written off, so the Grazing Team were without their own off-road vehicle for their daily, busy conservation grazing service. They had to borrow another Partnership vehicle which affected other Partnership work. Fortunately, the new Hilux arrived quickly to the relief of all.

In total, since the last newsletter, the Trust have approved 30 grant applications. Of these, seven grants were given to local organisations for tools, equipment and training as well as for site maintenance work where additional help was needed. The remaining grants, which represented almost 80% of the total amount awarded, went to the Downlands Partnership.

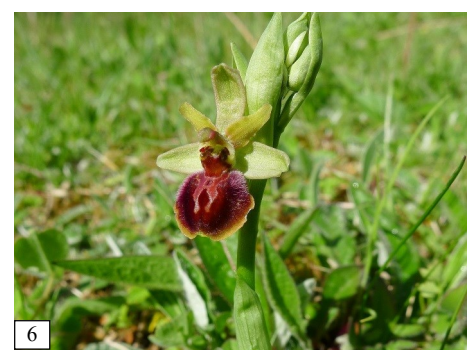
Chalk grassland is one of the most biologically rich and diverse habitats to be found in the country. Traditionally grazed by sheep and rabbits, the springy turf provides a rich habitat for chalk-loving wild flowers, notably orchids. In Surrey, we can find over a dozen orchid species on chalk grassland and some that are to be found in our local area are pictured below, accompanied by a brief description.



1. Common Spotted Orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*). This is our commonest orchid, probably because it is equally at home in damp meadows and on dry chalk grassland. The leaves have distinctive elongated purple spots aligned across them, hence its common name, but precise identification can sometimes be problematical because the *Dactylorhiza* genus readily hybridises, leading to many intermediate forms.

2. Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*). The Bee Orchid is one of our most striking orchids and is an opportunist that can be quick to colonise disturbed habitats such as disused quarries, road verges and new housing estates. The species gets its name from its main pollinator, a species of bee that its flowers mimic, although this bee is not present in the UK and the flowers here are self pollinating.

3. Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*). The name 'pyramidal' comes from the conical shape of the young inflorescence, but once the flower is fully developed it becomes more cylindrical. Like Bee Orchids, Pyramidal Orchids are early colonisers of bare and disturbed ground, often appearing in large numbers only to decline rapidly after a few years.



4. Chalk Fragrant-orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*). The Chalk Fragrant-orchid lives up to its name and in the evening it produces a sweet, orangey smell that attracts moths, its main pollinators. This orchid is most commonly found on the scarp slope of the North Downs, but can be seen locally on Chipstead Downs and at Howell Hill Nature Reserve, Ewell.

5. Man Orchid (*Orchis anthropophora*). Man Orchids are nationally rare and very local, the UK being at the northern edge of their range. In Surrey we are fortunate in having a good population of this very distinctive species which is named for the resemblance of the flowers to tiny human figures. Man orchids prefer dappled shade and are often found on the edge of chalk grassland adjacent to woodland or scrub rather than in open grassland. Whilst this species is long lived and persists at its known sites, it is slow to colonise apparently suitable new sites, perhaps because of the absence of the particular mycorrhizal fungi in the soil that it requires for successful germination.



6. Early Spider-orchid (*Ophrys sphegodes*). Nationally, this is a very rare orchid that is found in just a few locations scattered along the south coast. Some years ago a single plant appeared on a site near Epsom and numbers have slowly grown since then to form a small colony of half a dozen plants. It is protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.



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7. Greater Butterfly-orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*). A tall plant of chalk grassland with stems up to 30cm tall, it has whitish-green flowers that have spreading petals and sepals, rather like the wings of a butterfly. It not common in this area, but individuals appear from time to time in new locations.

8. Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*). Surrey has lost almost all of its Green-winged Orchids as a result of habitat degradation, but we are fortunate to have a small population on a site near Ewell. The flowers do not produce nectar, but attract pollinators with their visual appearance, a mechanism known as 'nectar deception'.

9. Autumn Lady's-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*). This is the last orchid to flower in the summer and is found in short, high quality downland turf. It derives its scientific name from the manner in which the flowers spiral around the stem. A large colony, some years numbering over 1000 individuals, is to be found on a road island near the grandstand of Epsom Downs Racecourse.

Dog walkers' Code of Conduct

Geof Haseler

Surrey County Council launched a [Code of Conduct](#) in February which they have asked dog walkers to follow. The Code contains useful advice, including:

- Keep dogs under control and within sight and always keep on a lead if not trained in basic recall.
- Keep dogs on leads and at a distance from grazing animals which are vulnerable and nervous of dogs, even more so when they have their young.
- Please keep paws on paths from 1 March to 15 September to stop the disturbance of ground nesting birds.
- Pick up dog waste. Dog waste can take a year to fully decompose and parasites such as Neospora can be transmitted to livestock, causing diseases which can result in death of sheep, and abortion in cattle.
- Check local signs - they are there to keep visitors, wildlife, livestock and your dog safe.

Back in November, the Downlands Partnership Grazing Team suffered the death of three sheep within three days. The first occurrence was at Happy Valley when one sheep was horrifically killed outright with another suffering half its jaw being ripped off with multiple other bites on its body - sadly due to its injuries it had to be euthanised. A second attack happened to another flock at Happy Valley where, sadly, the sheep had been horrifically mauled on all his legs down to the bone and had to be euthanized. The dog that inflicted these injuries was a gentle Labrador that had apparently shown no previous signs of aggression.



Safe sheep!

Even if your dog is fine, if you are walking next to a grazing area, you can still spook the sheep and you may inadvertently make other untrained owners think it is fine to have their dog off lead by the pen, increasing the risk of attack. Even small dogs that 'only' nip a sheep can kill them through secondary infection due to the bacteria in a dog's mouth.

A recent report from NFU Mutual, the insurer, has said that the cost of dog attacks on farm animals jumped by nearly 30% in 2023 with sheep and lambs found savaged to death or distressingly injured. Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, dogs being walked on publicly accessible land near livestock must be kept on a lead that is no more than 2 meters long at all times.

Dogs chasing sheep can have serious consequences. Even if a dog does not make contact with a sheep, the distress and exhaustion from being chased can cause a pregnant ewe to miscarry or die. It can also separate young lambs from their mothers, which can lead them to become orphaned.

The NFU Mutual's survey found that despite 64% of owners admitting their dogs chase animals, almost half (46%) believe their dog was not capable of injuring or killing livestock. Nearly two thirds of owners (64%) say they let their dog roam off-lead in the countryside. Almost four in ten (39%) admit their pets do not always come back when called.

Support us with membership, donation or a legacy

DOWNLANDS TRUST MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

If you are not a member or if you know anyone who would like to support our valuable work in the countryside, we would be delighted to receive the following application form and subscription. Alternatively, you can join via our website.

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP (please tick)

- Individual (**£10**)
 Senior /student /unwaged (**£5**) Please delete as applicable
 Family (**£15**)
 Group /company /school (**£15**) Please delete as applicable

Please note: Memberships are due for renewal annually on 1st January. However, any memberships taken out after 1st September in any year are covered for membership for the following calendar year.

PAYMENT OPTIONS (please tick as applicable)

- I enclose a cheque for £..... to cover the subscription. You may like to add an additional donation to aid our work.
 I have made an online payment of £..... to your bank account, Downlands Trust 40-09-04 31439820. Please use your name as the reference so that we can connect the payment to your membership.

GIFT AID Please tick the box below if you are in a position to do so.

- I agree to the Downlands Trust claiming tax under the Gift Aid Scheme on all my donations and subscriptions until I advise otherwise. I confirm that I am paying an amount of UK Income and/or Capital Gains Tax that at least equals the amount that the charity will reclaim.

YOUR DETAILS

Title:		Full name:	
Address:			
		Postcode:	
Email:			
Telephone:			
Signature:		Date:	

Please return completed membership application to:
Membership Secretary, Downlands Trust, 71 Warren Road, Banstead, SM7 1LG

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These donations help us fund projects to keep the countryside accessible to all.

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