

EGRETS WAY PROJECT

Registered Charity

TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT

2019-2020



INTRODUCTION

All of us have been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic, which has had a devastating impact on the lives of millions of people, and which will continue to influence our behaviour and thinking for many months. However during lockdown the option to take daily exercise encouraged many people to get out into the beautiful countryside which many of us are fortunate to live in, or close to, and this has resulted in more people using and discovering the Egrets Way . This, and the media interest in the health benefits of outdoor exercise as well as new government funding for more and safer cycling opportunities, must be one of the few positive outcomes of this devastating experience.

Although our AGM is usually held in May or June, we have postponed this year's meeting until September, the furthest time allowed by the Charity Commission, in the hope that the situation might have improved by then. However, for consistency, this report covers the twelve months up to the end of June 2020

THE EGRETS WAY NETWORK PROGRESS

Ham Lane to Linklater Pavilion

Following a number of unexpected delays to its construction we were able to announce in February that this important new section of the pathway had been completed. Unfortunately, because of 'lockdown' we had to cancel an opening event, planned in conjunction with the Railway Land Trust's celebration 'Welcoming Spring', for the 22nd March. However, the good news is that the path is open for use by walkers, cyclists and mobility vehicles users, and feedback has, generally, been very positive, although there have been some concerns expressed by pedestrians about cyclists joining them in the Railway Land. From Ham Lane, where the Egrets Way from Kingston originally terminated, there is now an attractive one kilometer all weather path, passing under the railway line into the Railway land and taking users to the Linklater Pavilion and close to the centre of Lewes. Last year's report referred to the complex and detailed agreements that had to be completed before the contractors could begin construction and we would like to again acknowledge the critical part which the SDNPA Cycling Officer has played in delivering this result.

Swanborough Lodges Path.

This 1.2 km addition to the EW network provided by the Iford Estate has now been completed and is available for use, although some problems with the surface have still to be fully resolved. This section, which extends from Spring Barn Farm to Swanborough village, taken together with the Railway Land route opens up some wonderful opportunities for cyclists and walkers to access the downs and the South Downs Way from Lewes town, by a combination of a car free path and quiet lanes.

Iford to Rise Farm Bridleway

Another unexpected addition to the EW network of paths has come about as a result of the discovery of a 'lost byway' which runs through the Iford Estate. In late 2018 an application was submitted to East Sussex Highways by Chris Smith on behalf of the Ramblers Association for an ancient route from Iford Church to Rise Farm to be re-instated, by adding the route to the definitive Rights of Ways map. This route follows the historic byway much of which is on the existing permissive path which the Iford Estate agreed to a few years ago. Originally the byway would have been a 'Byway Open to All Traffic' but an agreement was reached by the applicant, the Iford Estate, and East Sussex Highways for the path to be designated a bridleway. This means that access will be restricted to walkers, cyclists, horse riders and disability vehicle users. There will be no motorised vehicles, other than farm traffic.

The route is a typical farm track with some sections having a concrete base. No path construction is planned, but in order to prevent cattle from straying and to keep users safe some new fencing and a number of new gates will be needed. Three local organisations have offered to provide funding towards this cost, and so with additional funds raised by the Egrets Way and from the Sussex Community Foundation, the new gates and fencing will be installed at no cost to the Estate. The path dedication legal procedure is under way and once completed it will add another 2.4 km of public pathway crossing the Ouse valley and linked to the Egrets Way, with wonderful views in all directions. This is an excellent example of a landowner generously agreeing to provide access to the countryside and bringing benefits for local people and for visitors to the South Downs National Park.

Newhaven to Piddinghoe

The Egrets Way riverside route originates in Newhaven at Riverside Park where the former landfill site beyond the recreational ground has been transformed by East Sussex County Council, working in consultation with Lewes District Council, Newhaven Town Council and the all-important community group, the Friends of Riverside Park, into an attractive wildlife area with seating, artwork, a bird hide and a network of interlinking paths. The Egrets Way will use the existing all-weather path through the Park to access the riverbank where the construction of the path to Piddinghoe will begin.

Last October we were able to announce that the Egrets Way Project had been awarded £250k from the Lewes District council's Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds and, a few weeks later, we had confirmation that a further £113k from the SDNPA's CIL funds had been approved. Together, these funding allocations have enabled us to start work on this next phase of development for which we already had

landowner consents and planning approval. Early in the new year the work began on developing the detailed construction specification and securing individual legal agreements from all four owners of the land on which the path will be constructed. As has been our practice the legal work is being carried out by the national cycling charity, Sustrans and the construction specification and contract management by the SDNPA Cycling Officer. We had anticipated construction work would start in the autumn, but the processes have been delayed by the pandemic and early 2021 is now the target for construction to start.

LEWES TO RODMELL

With work on the Newhaven to Piddinghoe section finally underway, we have been working hard to identify possible funding for the longest section of the network still to be completed, Lewes to Rodmell, and one which will bring us very close to our goal of having a continuous path running from Newhaven to Lewes. We have been in contact with several funding bodies who have expressed interest in the development of cycleways and are hopeful that we will know before the end of 2020 whether we will be able to start work on this essential section of the Egrets Way next year.

ART WAVE 2019

As part of the Lewes Art Wave festival that takes place each year in August and to celebrate its 26th year we organised a highly successful Egrets Way Art Trail that could be explored during the festival. This included exhibiting artwork inspired by the Egrets Way and the Ouse Valley at Artwave venues near the Egrets Way route, an Instagram collection of Egrets Way inspired pictures, and a number of events including an Art Trail walk. This required much planning and liaising with venues and artists and I would like to record our thanks to our committee member who led on this as well as to the artists who contributed their artwork and opened their houses and studios. The event was an opportunity to promote local artists and to celebrate the Ouse Valley landscape and wildlife while informing people about the Egrets Way.

CHARITY FUNDING

The Egrets Way is registered with the Charity Commission (Charity number 1155182) and inevitably we have operating costs that need to be met. Two members of the committee focus on this and have successfully raised nearly £5000 which is an excellent achievement and requires being constantly on the lookout for opportunities such as the Lewes District Local Lottery which selected the Egrets Way as one of the Good Causes to benefit from the fund.

MAINTENANCE AND VOLUNTEERS

Responsibility for maintaining the network of path varies from section to section: statutory (Right of Way) sections are the responsibility of East Sussex Highways, whereas non-statutory sections are largely the responsibility of the SDNPA and the Egrets Way. At last year's AGM we asked for your views on volunteering to help with maintenance of the route and we are grateful to those who responded and helped us to develop a management plan for maintaining non-statutory sections where there will be increasing opportunities to enlist the help of volunteers. One of our members has taken on responsibility for this and the SDNPA Area Ranger, Jan Knowlson, will help with practical advice, training, and tools.

We want local people, especially those who use the Egrets Way, to join working parties and to create a sense of ownership, perhaps by taking responsibility for a particular section. The opportunities for volunteers are somewhat limited at present but will increase as more sections are opened. We recognise that some maintenance tasks, such as surface repairs will require employing specialist contractors and will require greater ongoing funding. The Environment Agency are responsible for maintaining the riverbanks and as much of the Egrets Way runs alongside base of the bank the Agency needs vehicle access, including heavy tracked ones, to the Egrets Way. Fortunately, the path construction has allowed for this. The Environment Agency cuts the vegetation to the riverbanks once or twice a year and have kindly offered to include a strip alongside the path when grass cutting for which we would like to express our thanks for this helpful collaboration.

SOCIAL MEDIA

At last year's Annual Meeting one of the attendees, noting the age demographic in the hall, suggested that few people under the age of thirty were likely to know about the Egrets Way unless we embraced social media. We responded to the criticism by co-opting the respondent to the committee, who together with a trustee produced a paper for the committee to discuss. The conclusion reached was to embrace social media in a modest way with Instagram and Facebook and continue with the website and emails as our principal way of keeping in contact with our supporters and to review our experience after a period of use.

CONCLUSIONS

The community-led Egrets Way Project, which has now been underway since August 2011 was started by a group of local residents seeking an alternative to cycling between Lewes and Newhaven on the busy C7 road. Our vision was and remains a network of safe, shared paths for cyclists and walkers running largely alongside the river and linking to villages, amenities, and other paths in the lower Ouse Valley.

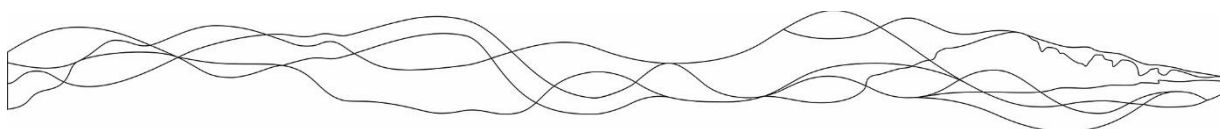
Throughout the intervening years there have been many challenges to be met, including identifying suitable and acceptable routes, securing planning permissions, obtaining the consent of dozens of landowners for access to their land and, of course, acquiring the necessary funding to pay for the construction of the network.

To date we have managed to meet many of those challenges, but it has also been a challenge to maintain the public's interest when progress has been slow and piecemeal, although we have always made this situation clear. We have taken care that whenever a new section is constructed it has a meaningful destination or links to other cycle paths or bridleways where cycling is permitted and have tried to avoid leaving cyclists with nowhere to go other than using a footpath. Although there are now many available sections of the path in use, until the main riverside path is completed there will inevitably be some confusion about which parts can be used by cyclists. We endeavour to update the website when new sections are added.

Just over two kilometres of new path were added in 2019 and we can expect the next phase from Newhaven to Piddinghoe to be constructed early next year leaving us to secure funds for the one major gap in the riverside route between Ham Lane and Rodmell. Perhaps at next year's AGM we will be able to report that a completed Egrets Way really is in sight – we remain optimistic. Never has a project, providing shared access to the countryside, communities and facilities, been more relevant and needed.

Finally, we want to emphasise once again that none of this could have been achieved without the consistent support which the Egrets Way Project has received from local communities, councillors, Sustrans, and our key partner, the South Down National Park, as well as a great deal of unseen work carried out by trustees and committee members. However, the final thanks must, as always, go to the landowners who have agreed to the path running on their land as without their permission the Egrets Way would remain just a community dream.

Neville Harrison
Chair of the Trustees, Egrets Way Project
July 2020





Committee Meetings

During the year, the Committee met 5 times [July 16th; September 17th; November 12th; January 28th; March 3rd] at the Abergavenny Arms, Rodmell. We are grateful to Jon and Lucie, managers of the pub for giving us a meeting space.

EW Project Steering Group

This was established during last year to provide a more formal liaison between the EW and the SDNPA. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was agreed by both organisations in July last year. The purpose of the MOU is to support delivery of the remaining capital works required to establish The Egrets Way and to provide a clear understanding of the roles of the two parties relating to securing funding, project delivery and future maintenance of the constructed route network.

The SG has met twice: On October 29th and January 28th at the SDNPA Eastern Area Offices, Stanmer Park.

Presentations, press and publicity

- Talk to Greenhavens Network 'The Egrets Way Journey', 4th September 2019 at the Baptist Church, Seaford
- Talk on 'The Egrets Way' to Lewes and Havens Community Network 'Green & Open Spaces and Health & Well-Being' meeting on 19th March at Southdowns YHA.
- Sussex Express: January 10th, 2020 'National Park cash boost helps Ouse Valley and Lewes projects
 - November 1st, 2019 '£1.2 million for Lewes District
 - November 1st, 2019 'Cycle route's good progress'
 - August 16th, 2019 'Artwave work inspired by the beautiful Egrets Way

Trustees and Committee Members

<p>TRUSTEES</p> <p>Joe Attwood Wendy Brewer Barbara Dart Neville Harrison Mick Long Zara Luxford Susie Mullins Susan Thompson</p>	<p>Deputy Chair</p> <p>Chair</p> <p>Treasurer</p> <p>Secretary until April 2020</p>	<p>Resigned May 2019 Resigning at AGM</p>
<p>COOPTED COMMITTEE MEMBERS</p> <p>Cllr. Lesley Boniface Tiger Cox Alister Linton Crook Rick Ross Cllr. Angela Simmonds</p>	<p>LDC & Riverside Park Management Committee</p> <p>SDNPA Cycling Officer</p> <p>Newhaven Town Council</p>	