

THE EGRETS WAY

Safe shared village connections from county town to channel port



EGRETS WAY PROJECT Registered Charity No.1155182

TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus pandemic, which continues to impact on the lives of millions of people worldwide, has inevitably affected the progress of the Egrets Way Project (EWP) over the last year. However, as this report will show we have worked hard to maintain a degree of momentum and to keep the public informed.

Until last year our AGMs have been held earlier in the year, in May or June, but since then we have moved the dates closer to the time limit the Charity Commission allows. This report covers the period from June 2020 to October 2021. Although there has been some welcome relaxation in Covid-19 restrictions, we have decided to exercise the option of holding the AGM online.

THE EGRETS WAY NETWORK PROGRESS REPORT

Ham Lane to Rodmell - Phase 6

The majority of this two-mile section on the Egrets Way (EW) running alongside the river is on land owned by the Iford Estate. A decision by the SDNPA Planning Committee in April 2021 to approve a Farm Consolidation application (SDNP/20/05439) was linked to three legal agreements, one, (a S.106) that will allow the Egrets Way path to be constructed on Estate land, another for a 25-year license to operate and manage the path, and one more to secure the path in perpetuity. We understand that the three legal processes are very close to completion which, when signed, will mark a key moment in the Egrets Way journey as it will clear the way for construction of this final section of the Egrets Way riverside route. With substantial funding already in place we expect Phase 6 to proceed to construction in 2022.

Newhaven to Piddinghoe - Phase 5

At the end of 2019 we reported that we had secured funding for the riverside section between Riverside Park in Newhaven and Piddinghoe village. With planning approval and landowner agreements in place we had anticipated that construction would have started early in the new year and been completed by now. Unfortunately, a number of factors including finalising detailed legal agreements with five different landowners, concerns over the ownership of Piddinghoe Common land, Covid-19, and most recently fuel shortages, have slowed progress so that the contractors only started work on site in the third week of October. Reaching this stage has involved much detailed work and consultation with Piddinghoe Parish Council, landowners, the village community, and individual residents, which has been patiently and

courteously led by Alister Linton-Crook, SDNPA Cycling and Access Officer. We look forward to seeing this phase completed and in use by spring of 2022.

Iford to Rise Farm Bridleway

At the end of year, we reported on the possibility of an unexpected addition to the EW network of paths. This opportunity arose from an application submitted by Chris Smith on behalf of the Ramblers Association for a 'lost' byway from Iford Church to Rise Farm to be added to East Sussex Highways Definitive Rights of Way map. Much of the old route followed an existing permissive path and discussions with the applicant and the Iford Estate resulted in an agreement for the route to be designated as a public bridleway. One outcome of this agreement was a requirement for a number of new gates and fencing to be installed on the path in order to prevent livestock from straying and to keep users safe. Raising funds to meet these costs has been coordinated by the Egrets Way and the required amount secured from five local organisations: the British Horse Society, the Mid Sussex Area Bridleways Group, the SDNPA Eastern Area Ranger, Iford Parish Meeting, and the Egrets Way. In July this year the legal dedication of the path as a bridleway was announced publicly, however due to Covid-19 related delays the gates and fencing have only recently been installed. Still to come is appropriate signage which will be funded and installed by the SDNPA, in agreement with ESCC Rights of Way Team. Thanks to the initiative of the Ramblers and to the Iford Estate's cooperation and agreement we now have 2.4 km more of public bridleway linking to the Egrets Way. The path is a shared one available to walkers, cyclists, and horse riders to enjoy and experience the beauty of the lower Ouse Valley with its wonderful 360-degree views to Lewes Castle and to the Iford, Caburn and Kingston downs. What a great example this is of the benefits which a landowner can bring both to local people and visitors to the South Downs National Park and for which we express our gratitude. In return we ask users to treat all other users with courtesy and consideration and to respect the Countryside Code

FUND RAISING REPORT

With the funding secured for the delayed Newhaven to Piddinghoe route (Phase 5) by the end of 2019, work began on raising the £930k required for the riverside Rodmell to Lewes section (Phase 6).

Working closely with our SDNP partners, Emma Allen and James Winkworth, significant contributions were secured from Lewes District Council CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funds and a private donor. However, it was the July, 2020 public announcement by Highways England of a very substantial grant for this route which pushed us much closer to our goal.

With £820k of funding assured, two sequential, but unsuccessful, applications were made to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund for the remaining amount. However, with a recent successful application for funding from the SDNPA CIL programme and discussions soon to take place with a National Lottery Heritage Grants programme representative, we are reasonably confident that the required funding will be available when this next phase of the Egrets Way Network is taken forward in 2022.

Another funding challenge arose from the creation in July 2021 of the new bridleway which runs from Iford village to Rise Farm in Lewes, referred to earlier. The Egrets Way Project co-ordinated raising the necessary funds from other interested groups and the total costs of fencing and approved BHS standard gates will be met as follows:

BRITISH HORSE SOCIETY	£2600
MID SUSSEX AREA BRIDLEWAYS GROUP	£ 600
IFORD PARISH MEETING	£ 350
SDNPA AREA	£1000
EGRETS WAY PROJECT	£2689.35
TOTAL	£7239.35

The Egrets Way contribution will be met from operating funds donated by the NINO and Lewes Funds which are both administered by the Sussex Community Foundation.

COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

Despite the disappointment of the unavoidable cancellation of the scheduled opening celebration of the Linklater to Ham Lane route in March, 2020, there have since been opportunities to remind Egrets Way Project supporters that progress, though slowed by Covid-19 restrictions, was still being made. Updates were posted on the Egrets Way website to ensure that supporters were kept aware of developments and included the announcement by Highways England of their substantial grant for the Egrets Way Project; progress made since 2011 in the “Brief History of the Egrets Way Project, the creation of the Iford to Rise Farm bridleway and the approval of the Iford Estate planning application in April, 2021.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Inevitably, due to Covid-19 restrictions, there have been no opportunities to organise community events until very recently. Because of the cancellation of the celebration in March 2020 we were especially pleased to have an Egrets Way stand at the Planet Party held on the Railway Land in Lewes on 19th September 2021, We were glad to welcome supporters into our lovely underused new gazebo with an exhibition of photographs of the Egrets Way. This event was a great chance to catch up with EW supporters, to let them know about the latest progress on construction and funding, and to introduce others to the project. We also had an updated map of the Egrets Way routes and links to distribute and 46 new names were added to our supporters mailing list.

We were also pleased to have shared the Egrets Way stand with Cycle Lewes and Dr Bike. The event was very well attended and having a stand with other related organisations proved to be an effective and friendly way of working together and sharing the tasks.

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 Footpaths team, whereas non-statutory sections are largely the responsibility of the SDNPA and the Egrets Way. Following last year’s AGM we recruited a group of volunteers whose work is coordinated by one of our Committee members to help with maintenance. SDNPA Area Ranger, Jan Knowlson, has kindly provided practical advice, tools, and materials.

We have had a relatively quiet year with little maintenance required for the completed sections of the Egrets Way but, once again, a very willing team of volunteers turned out to cut back vegetation, erect some signs, and to help clear a fallen tree on a section of the path under our responsibility (professional tree surgeons were engaged to clear the bulk of the tree).

We have benefited from the cooperation of the ESCC Rights of Way team who have done work along certain sections of the path. The Environment Agency (EA) has also helped by agreeing to mow a strip of vegetation along the riverside sections as they require access to the EW to mow the grass on the flood defence river banks for which they are responsible. This year, unfortunately, in one area a five-metre strip of vegetation was inadvertently cut, rather than the agreed one metre, which prompted some sharp criticism of the EA on social media for causing unnecessary harm to wildlife. Once notified the EA promptly gave correct information to their machine operators that we required only a narrow strip to be cut, sufficient just to stop progressive encroachment onto the path surface.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Two years ago, we decided to make use of social media and co-opted a youthful member onto the committee for his expertise. The Egrets Way can be found both on Facebook and Instagram. We also use WhatsApp for internal communication. This rather tentative start has meant that social media has not been a major part of our communication strategy but latest statistics show it is working.

For the Way Artwave Trail event in 2019 we started an EW Instagram account www.instagram.com/egretswayart, which now has over 350 members, and proved to be a reliable means of circulating information during the 2020/21 lockdown encouraging people to make good use of the shared of the EW and other paths in the Ouse Valley.

The Egrets Way Facebook page is currently followed by 387 people in the local area, including community group pages such as Cycle Lewes. Each post is reaching on average 1000 unique accounts with the latest post reaching 3,821 accounts.

WEBSITE

Our website www.egretsway.org.uk which was redesigned in 2018 using Squarespace is our main communication method.

Since the AGM last year, the website has recorded over 5500 visits, 4500 of which are from users who have not accessed the site before. Of the 10000 page views, just over half focus on THE ROUTE and then a further third focus on NEWS AND EVENTS. The balance is taken up equally over the other pages.

Emails we have received using the 'Contact Us' form generates a small but steady number of questions and criticisms, some more helpful than others, but these are always noted and responded to. Our mailings list of supporters receive direct mailings of updates and other information being posted on the website. There are currently 377 subscribers listed as supporters of the EW.

CONCLUSIONS

This year the Egrets Way Project celebrated its tenth anniversary having been underway since August 2011 when it was started by a group of local residents seeking an alternative to cycling between Lewes and Newhaven on the busy C7 road. Apart from embracing a more inclusive user group our vision has not changed and remains to create a network of safe, shared paths for walkers, cyclists and wherever possible horse riders and disability vehicle users. The Project also aims to connect Newhaven and Lewes by a route running largely alongside the river, and to link to villages, amenities, and to other routes in the lower Ouse Valley. The automatic counters installed on two sections of the EW record the steadily increasing path usage which has accelerated since the Covid-19 (See Appendix) as more people discovered the benefits of walking and cycling in the countryside.

Throughout the intervening years there have been many challenges, 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. Some of the setbacks have been balanced by unexpected additions to the network such as the path from Swanborough to Lewes which links to the first section of the EW to be constructed between Kingston and Lewes, or the recently opened Iford to Rise Farm bridleway. To date we have managed to meet the majority of those challenges, and with the prospect of the two remaining riverside sections being constructed in the coming year maybe we can with some confidence claim that vision will ultimately be realised.

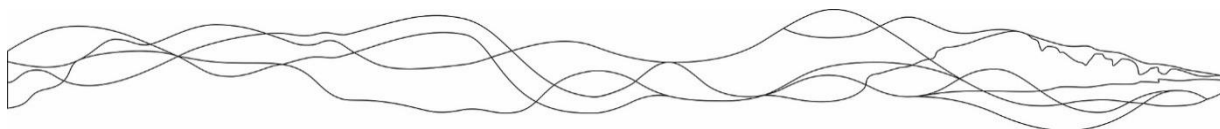
Of course, even then there will still be the C7 road section between Riverside Farm and Piddinghoe village to be made safe to use and to achieve this we will need the support and cooperation of both ESCC Highways and Highways England. However, we believe that this will be forthcoming as both of these organisations are committed to providing access to sustainable transportation.

So, we end on a note of optimism but reflect on the paradox that at a time when the benefits of outdoor exercise to personal health, and the project's contribution to climate mitigation and improved air quality, are so widely recognised, that despite the consistent support which the Egrets Way Project has received from local communities, Councillors, Sustrans, and our key partner, the South Down National Park it should take more than a decade to achieve something so clearly beneficial .

Over these years there have been many people who have contributed to the project in various ways, especially as trustees or committee members, to whom we are grateful, however, our final thanks go as always, go to the generous landowners who have agreed to the paths running on their land, as without their permission the Egrets Way would have remained just a community dream.

Neville Harrison
Chair of Trustees Egrets Way Project

October 2021





Committee Meetings

Since the AGM in September, 2020 the Committee met 7 times [October 26th; December 14th; February 22nd; April 19th; June 28th; September 13th; October 18th]. All the meetings have been online via Zoom

EW Project Steering Group

This was established in 2019 to provide a more formal liaison between the EW and the SDNPA. We have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in place to support delivery of the remaining capital works required to deliver The Egrets Way and to ensure a clear understanding of the roles of the two parties relating to securing funding, project delivery and maintenance of the constructed route network.

The SG met on 16th February 2021 via Zoom and is due to meet again soon.

Presentations, Press and Publicity

Due to the covid restrictions we have not made any public presentations but the following articles have been published:

- Sussex Express: April 30th, 2021, Feature: 'The lovely thing about this route is...'
- Transportation Professional Magazine, April 2021: 'Shared Path draws people to the river'

The following items have been published on our website:

- September 2020 The Egrets Way AGM
- October 2020 'Good news from Highways England'
- January 2021 'A Brief History of the Egrets Way Project' also published on the Greenhavens Network website
- April 2021 'Good News for the Egrets Way Project'
- July 2021 'The egrets Way Celebrates a New Addition'
- September 2021 'The Egrets Way Project arrives in Newhaven -at last!'
- October 2021 'Update on Construction of the Egrets Way -Newhaven to Piddinghoe'

EW Path Usage Data 2017-2020

YEAR	KINGSTON TO LEWES (Cyclists only)	SOUTHEASE TO DEAN'S FARM (cyclists & pedestrians)	TOTAL MEASURED USAGE
2017	23,757	12,968	36,725
2018	24,512	13,750	38,262
2019	23,328	17,635	40,963
2020	30,448	28,810	59,258

Trustees and Committee Members

<p>TRUSTEES</p> <p>Joe Attwood Wendy Brewer Barbara Dart Neville Harrison Mick Long Susan Thompson Rick Ross</p> <p>COOPTED COMMITTEE MEMBERS</p> <p>Cllr. Lesley Boniface Tiger Cox Alister Linton Crook Sue Wylde</p>	<p>Deputy Chair</p> <p>Chair Treasurer Secretary until April 2020</p> <p>NTC & Riverside Park Mgt. Cmte.</p> <p>SDNPA Cycling Officer Secretary</p>	<p>Resigned 2021 (moved away)</p>
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