

## OUSE VALLEY CYCLE NETWORK (OVCN) PROJECT ANNUAL REPORT 2011-12



This is our first annual report since the OVCN became a constituted organisation in August 2011. We have had a busy and productive year and made significant strides in turning our vision into reality.

I would first like to put on record events leading to the formation of the OVCN project and express our gratitude for the help we have received from the South Downs National Park (SDNP), in particular from Chris Patterson, Community Engagement Lead and Jeremy Burgess, Eastern Area Countryside Manager, in facilitating several of our early meetings with our local communities.

OVCN was formed because people living in the Lower Ouse Valley continued to yearn for safe cycling routes linking their homes, schools, colleges, shops and workplaces as well as for recreation. We have been able to build on the experiences of an earlier attempt between the years 2001-4 to create a 'Greenway' alongside the C7 road between Lewes and Newhaven. Unfortunately this foundered when a feasibility study concluded it was unlikely to be achievable.

A number of events served as catalysts to setting up this new project: the decision of the Environment Agency (EA) to maintain the flood defences along the river for the next hundred years; the creation of the South Downs National Park, and the Government's announcement of substantial funding for local sustainable transport projects. Meetings, advertised as open to all, were arranged for local people to explore the option of a shared-use route alongside the river between Lewes and Newhaven with links to the seven villages as well as connecting to intersecting cycle networks such as the South Downs Way and the Avenue Verte (Paris to London).

Between March and July 2011 four open meetings were held in Kingston and Lewes culminating in the meeting at the Linklater Pavilion in Lewes on 25<sup>th</sup> August when a constitution was unanimously adopted and a Steering Committee and Officers elected.

### **Steering Committee**

Members: Neville Harrison (Chairman); Andy Lock (Vice Chairman); Susan Thompson (Secretary); Jan Marshall (Treasurer); Gid Cox; Sam Barlow; Dinah Morgan; Tom Lockyer; John Parry; Helen Price. During the year Gid Cox and more recently Tom Lockyer resigned; Wendy Brewer (Chair of the Kingston & Cranedown Residents Association) and Jenny Leon (Newhaven Community Development Association) were co-opted.

The Steering committee has met thirteen times and we have held two further public meetings and a number of engagement events (See Appendix).

A basic structure for running the project was quickly established with the creation of a bank account, web domain, a web-site ([www.ovcn.org.uk](http://www.ovcn.org.uk)) and e-mail address [info@ovcn.org.uk](mailto:info@ovcn.org.uk).

We have built up a significant list of supporters and currently have around 350 names on our mailing list.

An early undertaking was to walk the proposed route and record details of path surfaces, signage, gates, obstructions and opportunities.

A more complex task has been establishing land-ownership which we are doing through Land Registry records, as well as local knowledge and personal contacts and is on-going. Seven landowners in the northern half of the network have been identified and approached; all have agreed in principle to a cycle path on their land.

Steering Group members, collectively or individually, have had a number of constructive meetings with people and partners whose support is vital to the success of the project, including:

Lewes MP and Minister for Transport, Norman Baker; The Environment Agency; East Sussex County Council Highways; Sustrans; the South Downs National Park, the South Downs Local Access Forum, the South Downs Society, the British Horse Society, The Mid-Sussex Bridleways Group and the Disabled Ramblers Association.

We have engaged with our local communities through Parish Councils and Parish Meetings (each of the rural Parishes is represented on the Steering committee) and by two further open public meetings.

We have also engaged with other cycling groups through Cycle East Sussex and by participating in a recently formed ESCC Cycle Partnership.

During the summer we have had a promotional stand at a number of local events (see Appendix)

## **Achievements**

There has been substantial progress during the year including:

- Securing a start-up grant from the SDNP's Local Sustainable Communities Fund
- Producing promotional and information leaflets outlining OVCN's Vision, Aims and Actions
- Developing a project brief for a feasibility study of the river route and network and engaging Sustrans to carry it out. The report, completed in December, concluded not only that the OVCN project was achievable but that it would bring many more benefits and therefore had Sustrans support.
- Submitting a proposal, within a tight deadline, for the OVCN project to be included in the joint ESCC and SDNP bid to the Local Sustainable Transport Fund.
- Making a film to promote the project and to demonstrate its broad base of support. This was successfully achieved thanks to a generous offer from a retired BBC documentary maker, Roger Ordish. It involved considerable planning, organisation and commitment over many weeks while interviews, filming on location and editing was carried out. A first cut was shown at the open meeting in May and a final version will be shown at the AGM.
- Designing and commissioning two banners for use at promotional events.
- Organising a public competition to suggest a name for the Network
- Being selected by Waitrose as a community project to be promoted by the 'green token' scheme in their Lewes store during the month of August.

## **Kingston to Lewes Link**

In October and November we had a number of meetings with the Kingston and Cranedown Residents Association (KRACRA) which, together with representatives of Kingston Parish Action Plan, had been working for six years on a proposal for a cycle route from Kingston to Lewes. A community engagement exercise had shown strong support for the project and a section of the route over farmland had the agreement of the landowners Tom Carr and Will Greenwood, but progress was slow. Because this section would form a key part of the network it was mutually

agreed to join forces and include the Kingston to Lewes route in our feasibility study; a move which brought an early and unexpected outcome.

In March 2012 Norman Baker announced that his department was funding twelve schemes to help connect communities by sustainable transport and one of those selected for £150k of funding was the Kingston to Lewes route. The announcement came as a surprise for us as well as for ESCC who had not budgeted for the £100k of match funding they were expected to supply. To date ESCC have been unable to offer us the required match funding. However we are fortunate that Sustrans has agreed to manage the project and have been making progress, working with ESCC Highways, on the required development work: safety audit, design and access statement, ecological appraisal, public consultation and planning permission.

Meanwhile, OVCN and KRACRA have sought match funding and have raised over £11,000 with a generous grant offer from the Chalk Cliff Trust, and contributions from Lewes Town Council and Kingston Parish Council, together with sales of donated items. We remain optimistic that this important section of the OVCN project will go ahead and be completed, as required, by the end of the financial year in March 2013.

### **Paths for Communities (P4C) Fund**

In May this year the Government announced another funding initiative to enhance public rights of ways in rural areas. Managed by Natural England the fund aims to increase and encourage the use of local facilities by a wider range of residents and visitors by creating new means of shared-use access, especially by bridleways. We are proposing making a section of new bridleway along the river between Rodmell and Southease as this meets the criteria particularly well. The proposal has been approved for a full application is at an advanced stage of preparation. If successful we will need to identify sources of match funding but having to bear in mind that organisations which receive government funds, such as the SDNP or local councils, will be not be eligible sources.

### **Conclusion**

Our first year has shown the benefits and potential strength of a community led project and has endorsed our vision of a project which can be realised in phases over time as opportunities and funding become available. A valuable lesson has been learned that such opportunities may arise at short notice and have tight completion schedules. To be successful a project needs to be at an advanced state of readiness. The challenge for the coming year is to have more sections worked up to that level.

The P4C scheme seeks to enable a wide range of people with differing needs and abilities (e.g. pushchairs, wheelchairs and mobility scooters) to enjoy pathway access to the countryside and with the inspirational London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics fresh in our memories achieving this goal for the whole network would be a really worthwhile legacy.

We have written or expressed support for the project from many key partners such as the SDNP, Sustrans, the Environment Agency, County, District and Town and Parish Councillors, and with their support I believe we can look forward to further achievements during the next year.

Finally, I would like to thank members of the Steering Group, and other volunteers, for their support in various and different ways and to especially to those who have been able and willing to give an exceptional amount of time, talent and hard work to this immensely worthwhile project.

Neville Harrison

Chairman

August 2012

## Appendix

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

<b>2011</b>		
March 13	Kingston Community Pavilion	General views expressed
April 12	Lewes Linklater Pavilion	Facilitated engagement by SDNP with feedback and summarised outcomes
July 7	Lewes Linklater Pavilion	Breakout session facilitated by SDNP; agreed to form a steering group and members invited to join
July 25	Kingston Community Pavilion	Chaired by SDNP; vision statement agreed and four working groups formed (Consultation; Routes; Funding; Communication)
August 25	Lewes Linklater Pavilion	Chaired by SDNP; Constitution agreed, Steering Group and Officers elected
November 29	Newhaven Hillcrest Centre	Review of progress Facilitated group work and feed back
<b>2012</b>		
April 25	Lewes Linklater Pavilion	Presentation on the Shipwrights Way First cut of promotional film shown
June 3	Lewes Railway Land Festival	OVCN Display stand and information. Naming the network
June 10	Seaford Family Fun Day	OVCN Display stand and information
June 23	Newhaven Fish Festival	OVCN Display stand and information
July 14	Lewes Cliffe precinct	OVCN Display stand and information
July 21	Basic Bikery, Harvey's Depot	OVCN Display stand and information
August (month)	Lewes Waitrose	One of three Green Token Community projects
August 18	Rodmell summer Show	OVCN Display stand and information
August 27 28 29	Swanborough Artwave	OVCN Display stand and information