

# OUSE VALLEY CYCLE NETWORK (OVCN) PROJECT



## ANNUAL REPORT 2013-15



At our last AGM in September 2013 the meeting agreed to adopt a new constitution, that of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and to apply for Charitable status. I am pleased to report we became a registered charity (Number 1155182) in January 2014. Under the new CIO constitution we are required to hold the first AGM within eighteen months which has allowed us to schedule this meeting at a more suitable time. Also under the constitution only Members of the Charity can vote at meetings which is why the secretary has in recent months contacted everyone on our mailing list inviting them to become Members. The result is that we currently have 118 members.

### **The Trustees**

Members elected to the Steering committee at last year's AGM subsequently became the Trustees of the organisation and signed up to the responsibilities that are required of trustees. Under the CIO constitution all trustees have to resign after the first year but are eligible for re-election. In subsequent years one third of the trustees must resign but can be re-appointed up to a maximum term of eight years.

During the year there have been a number of committee and trustee changes: Jenny Leon from the Newhaven Community Development association moved away from the area in December 2013; Barry Lambert, David Wilkinson and Andy Lock resigned during the year. Wendy Brewer was proposed and agreed to be deputy Chair following Andy's departure. We have co-opted two new committee members (not trustees as un-elected): Barbara Dart (Kingston) and Noel West (Piddinghoe).

Katherine Mondon indicated last autumn she wished to resign from the committee due to work pressures and we are particularly grateful to her for agreeing to continue as treasurer up to the AGM.

Lis Mayer attended committee meeting as the SDNPA Cycling Project Officer but unexpectedly moved away from the area in January 2014. She was replaced by Alister Linton-Crook. His post is funded from the South Downs National Park's Local Sustainable Transport Fund and, in addition to the Egrets Way, Alister has 13 other cycle projects to manage. The contribution of both these National Park officers to the project has been invaluable.

### **Southeast Rodmell Egrets Way (Phase 2)**

Construction of this bridleway section, funded by a grant from 'Paths for Communities' (P4C) fund was delayed due to a number of unexpected difficulties, but finally started at the end of January with a non-negotiable completion date of 28<sup>th</sup> February. Despite atrocious weather conditions the contractors (Landbuild) completed the work on time. Another challenge was to provide Natural England with receipted accounts for the work before they could release the grant money and would have been difficult without the assistance of the SDNPA. A further complication arose when one of the two landowners would only agree to the bridleway going ahead if the section on his land was left unsurfaced. The project went ahead but for the time being, at least, this part of the section will remain unsurfaced. The link between Southeast and Rodmell has been enjoyed and appreciated by many people, including families and horse riders, but finding the unsurfaced section unusable during the winter months has caused considerable disappointment.

### **Bridleway Opening event.**

A celebration to mark the opening was held on June 2<sup>nd</sup> and attended by Gus Christie of Glyndebourne who is one of the landowners involved. After a rather wet start a large group of walkers, cyclists, mobility scooter users and horse riders made their way along the new riverside bridleway, then continuing on the existing bridleway to Rodmell to gather in the lovely gardens of Monks House by kind invitation of the National Trust. Fortunately the weather improved and we were able to enjoy refreshments kindly provided by the Abergavenny Arms in bright sunshine. There were a number of stalls and displays including 'Dr Bike', run by Cycle Seahaven volunteers, where a constant queue reflected an endless demand for cycle help and advice.

### **Egrets Way Phase 3.**

With Phase 1 the Kingston to Lewes route now in regular use, and Phase 2 completed we have been concentrating on delivering Phase 3 which comprises the remainder of the Lewes to Newhaven riverside route. This has been made possible because, with our commission Sustrans study indicating the route was deliverable, the SDNPA selected the Egrets Way for funding from the government grant they had won to improve cycling in National Parks. The £620k allocated to the Egrets Way is sufficient to construct most, if not all of the riverside path. The section running parallel to the C7 north of Piddinghoe will require additional funding but detailed discussions with ESCC Highways and landowners are on-going so that when funding becomes available we can move quickly. It is our particular aim that re-engineering the road section will bring additional benefits to the residents of Piddinghoe of reduced traffic noise and speed.

A project partnership between the National Park, Sustrans and OVCN was agreed and a planning application for the whole route submitted. The application which attracted over 120 submissions of support, and only three against, was unanimously approved by the SDNPA Planning committee in July 2014. Details of the application can be accessed on the SDNPA web-site [www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning) by inserting the application number SDNP/14/01443/FUL

### **Establishing land ownership and landowner agreements.**

This has been a challenging and lengthy exercise largely undertaken by Sustrans. The first task was to identify land ownership from the Land Registry records and well over twenty parcels of land on the route came to light. No ownership could be discovered for two sections, one substantial, and notices of our intention to construct the path were posted at both locations for 28 days inviting anyone with an interest in the land to contact us. No one did so in the required period of displaying the notices.

Bridleway designation is our preferred way of ensuring that a path can be accessed by a wide range of users but disappointingly we have been unable to secure landowner bridleway agreements on any more of the riverside route. The path will be a subject to a fifteen year lease and licensed for use by walkers, cyclists and mobility scooter users. Sustrans will hold the leases and funding for maintenance will be secured by an agreement with the SDNPA.

Although agreements in principle had been secured from the majority of landowners before the planning application was submitted securing detailed legal agreements with each individual landowner has taken much longer than anticipated. A contractor was appointed by a competitive tendering process last September with a view to starting construction in October but no work has to date begun. We hope to be able to announce a definite start date at or before the AGM.

### **Piddinghoe**

Piddinghoe village has two features that make finding a suitable route especially challenging: the C7 road section and the need for cyclists to use the narrow winding road through the village to regain access to the river. The route that has planning permission crosses the Newhaven and Seaford Sailing Club car park. However, on grounds of safety, the Club has not given their consent to this route, which has been a great disappointment. They have, however, offered us an alternative route around the river-side side area of the pond.

We have been working with the Parish Council and local landowners to identify a number of potential alternative routes but each one has met opposition or practical difficulties and to date no solution has been found. It has recently become clear that there is a small group of residents who would prefer Piddinghoe not to be part of the Egrets Way. Since linking the village

communities between Lewes and Newhaven by a safe shared route is a fundamental aim of the Egrets Way project we will continue to seek a way of achieving this aim so long as a majority of residents support it. Following a recent well attended dropin consultation event in the village hall, the Parish Council is currently conducting a survey of the village which we hope will give us a clear answer.

## **Events**

We have organised only one public event this year, which was the very successful event to mark the opening of the Rodmell to Southease bridleway but we have participated and supported a number of other events and organisations listed in table 2.

## **Publicity**

We have achieved good local newspaper coverage, liaising with the National Park's communications team, and have responded to requests for written material or speakers on the Egrets Way (see table 3). Viva Lewes published an article about the project with the imaginative sub-title 'Moi, je n'egret rien'.

The Egrets Way leaflet first produced in 2013 has been both useful and popular. It was revised and updated in June last year and again in February this year reflecting both demand and project progress. In the latest version we have been able to include the National Park's new 'Shared Identity' design.

We made a strategic decision to refer to the project as the Egrets Way, rather than OVCN, in order to emphasise the projects aim to create a safe path, not just for cyclists, but to be shared with walkers, horse riders (where designated), and other users of all ages and abilities, including push chairs and mobility scooters. The organisation's registered name remains the Ouse Valley Cycle Network.

## **Conclusion**

This year may appear publicly to have been a quiet one, but behind the scenes it has been a very active one particularly for Simon Pratt and David Young of Sustrans who are managing the project and negotiating agreements respectively. Alister LintonCrook, the SDNPA Cycling Officer has kept the project on track but still faces some difficult deadline challenges. We are grateful to them for their essential professional input. We are very fortunate to have the National Park as a partner in the project providing expert advice and practical help in many areas as well as being the major funding source.

There have been fewer opportunities for committee members be involved with local communities this year but we have maintained links with organisations with related aims e.g. Cycle Seahaven, Cycle Lewes, and Cycle East Sussex. The committee has met on eleven occasions since the last AGM and are grateful to the Abergavenny Arms in Rodmell for giving us a meeting space. Each co-opted member and trustee has brought their own background, experience and individual contribution to the project as well as being a source of good advice and support for the chairman.

We have come a long way in a relatively short time and remain optimistic that by the summer there will be substantially more of the Egrets Way available for local people and visitors to enjoy.

Neville Harrison  
Chairman of Trustees Ouse Valley Cycle Network (Egrets Way) Project

March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2015

## TABLES

**Table 1 Current Steering Committee Members**

Wendy Brewer	Trustee	Deputy chair
Barbara Dart	Co-opted	
Neville Harrison	Trustee	Chair
Alister Linton –Crook	Co-opted	SDNPA Cycling Officer
Zara Luxford	Trustee	
Katherine Mondon	Trustee	Treasurer
John Parry	Trustee	
Susan Thompson	Trustee	Secretary
Noel West	Co-opted	

**Table 2 Events Attended**

Lewes Hike and Bike Festival, the Cliffe, Lewes	31 <sup>st</sup> May 2014
Big Parks Event, Peacehaven	19 <sup>th</sup> July 2014
Tour of Britain Event, Newhaven	13 <sup>th</sup> September 2014
Piddinghoe Parish Council Meeting	11 <sup>th</sup> November 2014
Cycle Seahaven AGM, Newhaven Egrets Way update talk	11 <sup>th</sup> February 2015
Piddinghoe Information Day, Village Hall	28 <sup>th</sup> February 2015
Piddinghoe Parish Council Meeting	10 <sup>th</sup> March 2015

**Table 3 Press and Publicity**

The Argos May 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 'New Cycle route connecting two towns nears closer

The Downsman (South Downs Society) Spring 2014 'The Egrets Way – Southease to Rodmell bridleway coming soon'

Sussex Express May 30<sup>th</sup> 2014 'Next stage of Egrets Way to be opened' –Glyndebourne owner Gus Christie will officially open the next section of the cycle path which will eventually connect Newhaven and Lewes

Sussex Express June 13<sup>th</sup> 2014 'Next step or Egrets Way' – Walkers, cyclists and horse riders descended on the official opening of the next section of the Egrets Way despite wet weather.

Sussex Express July 14<sup>th</sup> 2014 'Go ahead for riverside path' – the latest section of a shared path for walkers and cyclists connecting Lewes and Newhaven was given the go ahead by the South Downs National Park Authority

Viva Lewes 2014 'Egrets Way'

The Argos 2014 'Race against time for 9km cycle route'