

EGRETS WAY PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT 2016-2017



Introduction

It has now been over six years since a group of local residents proposed a network of shared cycle paths connecting the towns of Lewes and Newhaven and the villages of the lower Ouse Valley. Today we have 3.6 miles of path, or roughly half, of the proposed network open and in daily use. This has been achieved in three phases of construction each determined by funding opportunities and landowner agreements coinciding.

The first phase to be constructed was the Kingston to Lewes link funded by a government DfT grant and opened in 2012 by local MP Norman Baker, then Transport Minister. The second phase followed a successful bid for a Defra/ EU rural development grant to create new bridleways and enabled us to open a section linking the Rodmell bridleway to the South Downs Way, also a bridleway, at Southease Bridge. Half of this one mile section remains unsurfaced which, for many users, limits its accessibility in winter, but enables this to form an essential section of the project. It is still our hope that we will eventually find a way of providing an all-weather surface acceptable to the landowner.

The third phase followed on as the result of the South Downs National Park Authority's (SDNPA) successful bid for a DfT grant for improving cycling in National Parks. We were optimistic that the £620k allocated to the Egrets Way (EW) would enable us complete the majority of the river route but the cost of negotiations, legal agreements and increased construction cost allowed only two miles of new path to be completed: a 0.3 mile section from Ham Lane to the river south of the A27 bridge, and a 1.5 mile section alongside the river from Southease bridge to Dean's Farm. On reflection, and given the circumstances of having to engage with over twenty different landowners, this was a satisfactory outcome and a rich learning experience.

The highlight of the current year occurred on May 14th when the section between Southease Bridge and Chapel Barn Piddinghoe was opened by Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the SDNPA. The event was well attended by children, supporters, MP Maria Caldwell and groups of cyclists who arrived at Southease Bridge via the EW path from both north and south. Celebrations continued at the nearby YHA South Downs.

Funding and new construction costs

There have been no further new sections constructed since then but much work has been done to get agreements to an advanced stage ready to take full advantage of new funding opportunities when they arise. We are exploring a number of possibilities and with construction costs now working out at £15k-£20k for 100m of path we estimate it will need £1.2 - £1.5m to complete the route. Such major funding is only likely to be achieved by working in collaboration with the SDNPA and other bodies including East Sussex County Council, Newhaven and Lewes District Councils, the Local Enterprise Partnership, and being able to demonstrate that a completed EW route offers not only a sustainable travel option between Newhaven and Lewes but will also bring economic as well as health and well-being benefits.

The SDNPA is a major partner in this project and continues to take a great interest in the project. We have benefitted from the National Park's Cycling Officer Alister Linton-Crook's significant input and close working with other SDNPA Officers. It is encouraging that the Egrets Way has been identified as a priority shared cycle route in the National Park to be achieved. The Parks Chief Executive and Director of Planning spent a day in March walking the route from Newhaven to Lewes and visiting a number of key places and people on route.

Sustrans formal engagement came to an end with the completion of Phase Three but continues to be an important partner as it has been since the beginning. Simon Pratt (Sustrans Southern Area Manager) and his staff are currently engaged in preparing plans and drawings for two further planning applications that are now required.

We have successfully raised the more modest funds needed for our day-to-day running expenses and, for example, the preparation of the planning applications already referred to. Committee Member Barbara Dart has been leading on fund-raising.

Railway Land Wildlife Trust (RLWLT)

We are working on plans to extend the EW north from where it currently emerges onto Ham Lane, across a field, where there is an existing permissive footpath, to the RLWLT land and footpath which runs to the Linklater Pavilion. We have agreement in principle from the two landowners and the support of the Trustees of the RLWLT and is one of the sections for which a new planning application is required. This would offer an attractive route to the centre of Lewes as well as linking up with the route from Kingston to where emerges at Ham Lane.

Lewes Neighbourhood Development Plan (LNDP)

Lewes Town Council is preparing a NDP which goes out to public consultation in May. Committee Member Susan Thompson who is on the NDP Steering Group has represented the interests of the EW. The plan is expected to include a reference on supporting better access for all to paths both within and from the Town of which the EW would be an important one.

Piddinghoe

We acknowledge that Piddinghoe village has no straightforward riverside route. Alternatives which take cyclists through the village are unpopular with many residents because of potential safety issues due the narrow streets and parked cars. There is also strong opposition to a route across the Hoe, their village green open space. However we have continued to explore various options and have had two constructive meetings with Piddinghoe Parish Councillors facilitated by ESCC Ward Councillor Carla Butler. From these meetings has emerged potential compromise option for the route to run from riverside Park run around riverside boundary of the sailing pond, which the Newhaven & Seaford Sailing Club (NSSC) and their Fishing Club tenants have agreed to. At the start of Parish Hoe land the path would divert onto the bank with a cyclists 'dismount section' for approximately 200m. The Environment Agency has agreed to make an exception for the EW route to run on top of the bank. We will continue to work with the Parish Council in the hope of identifying a workable solution.

Riverside Farm

North of Piddinghoe Village lies Riverside Farm where the owner has agreed that the EW may access his land from where the pavement section currently ends at Chapel Barn. This would enhance his plans to develop tourist accommodation and various visitor attractions on site. This offer, which will reduce the distance for the route to run alongside the C7 to reach Piddinghoe village, provides a partial solution to this difficult on-road section, leaving perhaps 300m where there is no alternative to a roadside pavement path. No new discussions with Highways or bordering properties have taken place, or are currently planned, but it has always been our view that a roadside cycle path would be the most likely way of achieving some significant and much needed traffic calming measures on the approach to the village from the north.

Riverside Park

The Egrets Way will start, or finish, at Riverside Park off Robinson Road, in Newhaven. There is an existing footpath which runs through the Park and continues on the former land-fill site to reach the river bank. The site has benefitted in the last year from funding from Veolia S106 money which has allowed extensive landscape improvements, path-side seats, a bird watching hide overlooking wetland, and new multiuser recreational paths. Newhaven Town Council, and the Friends of Riverside Park have agreed to the existing footpath to the river becoming the Egrets Way once the riverside path to Piddinghoe can be constructed.

A further link with the EW is being explored by committee member John Parry who is working closely with the Friends of Riverside Park, Newhaven Town Council and UTC Harbourside, on the possibility of an environmental centre building, a 'Linklater 2', being constructed in the Park to complement the successful original Linklater Pavilion in Lewes, . Though at an early stage there is a real prospect of two centres dedicated to the study of environmental change being linked by the Egrets Way.

Newhaven Town and University Technical College (UTC)

We have continued to strengthen our links with Newhaven Town as a member of our committee. Newhaven is home to UTC Harbourside, a University Technical College which offers engineering courses to students aged 14 to 18 years. It is housed in a former Port workshop, a Grade 2 heritage listed building, which has been imaginatively restored and impressively equipped. We have met the College Principal, Ms. Umunna, who recognises the value of a cycle route from the college to Lewes. She has kindly offered practical support by inviting us to hold our AGM at UTC Harbourside. She has also offered to conduct tours of the building before the meeting. The College building is of interest not only a splendid example of a successful conversion of a heritage building but also has some impressive views across the harbour to the old Town and to the Downs.

Communications

Our EW web-site is regularly up-dated by the secretary. We are currently working on an improved method of communicating with Members, supporters and other interested parties.

Our EW Leaflet has recently been updated, copies of which are being displayed at relevant local venues and will be available at the AGM.

Committee and Trustees

At the AGM last year our CIO constitution required the three longest standing Trustees to resign: they were Wendy Brewer, Neville Harrison, and Susan Thompson. All were eligible to stand again, which they did, and were re-elected. We were fortunate to recruit a new Trustee, Mick Long, who as a professional accountant offered to act as Treasurer. We currently have seven trustees and three co-opted committee members (Table 1)

The committee has met seven times in the last year at the Abergavenny Arms, Rodmell. We are grateful to the pub for providing us with a 'pro bono' meeting space.

Conclusion

This year has not seen the construction of any new sections which is disappointing and has made it more challenging to maintain the interest of the wider community in the project. Nevertheless much essential work has continued behind the scenes to get the missing sections 'shovel ready', exploring potential funding opportunities, and championing the wider benefits of a completed Egrets Way. Most importantly there is a growing number of people and families who are using the existing sections and discovering the joys of cycling on a safe traffic free path in a very special landscape setting.

We remain confident that with public pressure building and continuing support from our partner organisations a completed Egrets Way will be achieved.

Neville Harrison

Chair of the Trustees Egrets Way Project (Charity No. 1155182)

25th April 2017

TABLE 1**Trustees and Committee Members**

Wendy Brewer (Kingston Road)	Trustee	Deputy Chair
Barbara Dart (Kingston)	Trustee	
Neville Harrison (Southeast)	Trustee	Chair
Mick Long (Seaford)	Trustee	Treasurer
Zara Luxford (Rodmell)	Trustee	
Alister Linton-Crook SDNPA Cycling Officer	Committee	
John Parry (Lewes)	Trustee	
Steve St.Clair (Piddinghoe)	Committee	
Susan Thompson (Swanborough)	Trustee	Secretary
Cllr. Alex Wolfson (Newhaven Town Council) (Substitute Cllr. Julie Carr)	Committee	

TABLE 2**Press and Publicity**

Sussex Express May 20th 2016 'Delight as new section of the Egrets Way Opens'

South Downs National Park Website 'Cycling Ambition and Egrets Way Case Study'