

EGRETS WAY PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT 2017-2018



Introduction

The Egrets Way is the name given to a planned network of safe, largely off-road and traffic-free multi-user paths connecting Lewes, Newhaven and villages in the Lower Ouse Valley. The project was initiated by local people in 2011 and was then called the Ouse Valley Cycle Network. It remains very much a community project but has secured essential support from partner organisations including local Parish, Town, District and County Councils, Sustrans, the Environment Agency (EA), and most importantly the South Downs National Park Authority. And critically we have secured the support of many local landowners who have been willing to grant us access to their land without which we could not have constructed approximately three and half miles of path to date.

Planning application for route extension and variation

Last October we submitted a planning application for an extension of the path at Ham Lane, Lewes and a variation of the route at Piddinghoe and confirmation of approval is expected imminently. We are grateful to over seventy members of the public who submitted statements in support and provided evidence that the available sections are well used, but pleading for the missing sections to be joined up. Views also were expressed that a completed route will bring benefits to local businesses.

HAM LANE. Our plans to extend the path from Ham Lane to the Linklater Pavilion via the Railway Land Local Nature Reserve have made progress with landowner agreement in principle and planning approval expected. This new way of getting into the centre of Lewes will be especially attractive for tourist and other visitors to the town.

NEWHAVEN TO PIDDINGHOE. At Newhaven the Egrets Way starts at Riverside Park and runs on the existing path through the greatly enhanced wildlife area to the river. It continues below the riverbank to the Newhaven and Seaford Sailing Club Pond where, in a variation from the original plan agreed with NSSC, it will circuit the sailing pond below the river bank to Piddinghoe.

In last year's report I referred to the encouraging discussions we were having with Piddinghoe Parish Council to find a way of taking the route through Piddinghoe which would be acceptable to most residents. I am pleased to report that we have reached an agreement with the Piddinghoe PC for the route to continue to follow the riverside until it meets the Street at the north end of Piddinghoe village. This can be achieved by the Egrets Way using a short section of the footpath on top of the river bank for 200m before continuing on the riverside path. As with all compromises not everyone will have achieved their preferences and the path on top of the bank will remain a footpath and therefore cyclists will be required to dismount and push their bikes. Unfortunately mobility vehicle users will not be able to access this section because of the boat house pinch-point.

Funding

We have successfully raised the more than £8000 needed to pay for the planning application as well as the more modest funds required for the day-to day running of the project.

Our big challenge now is to find the much more substantial funds, £1.5 -£2M required to construct the remaining sections of the path. We have begun the process of applying to a number of potential funding sources to complete the path. Having planning approval in place for all sections is an essential part of that process. Construction of the earlier sections was funded through successful bids to various UK Government/ EU bodies but until recently there has been little further on offer. We acknowledge the help and advice we are getting from the SDNPA and the SDNP Trust.

We know that most government funding bodies are looking for social, economic and environmental gains which we believe the Egrets Way can deliver and have always been recognised in our project aims.

The economic re-generation of Newhaven is a national and local government priority and we believe that a completed Egrets Way can contribute to this by encouraging tourists to visit the villages and other attractions of the Ouse Valley and to stay overnight locally. In addition, the Egrets Way will encourage everyday walking and cycling and deliver the well-recognised and wide-ranging health benefits that regular exercise brings.

CPRE Countryside Award

In October The Egrets Way Project received a Rural Enterprise Countryside Award from CPRE Sussex. At a ceremony at Petworth House we were presented with a Certificate and a Plaque; the plaque can be seen displayed on an access gate at Southease Bridge. This award was a great boost to the project and, being in the Rural Enterprise category, confirms that the additional benefits the Egrets Way can bring to local businesses and tourism is recognised. Most importantly, it endorses our belief that the Egrets Way can help Newhaven to establish itself as a gateway from Europe to the South Downs National Park.

Swanborough Holiday Lodges

An unexpected addition to the EW has come from a successful planning approval to construct a number of holiday lodges at Swanborough lakes. In order to provide better accessibility to the countryside and to Lewes, the planning agreement includes constructing a new shared off-road cycle path which will extend the Egrets Way from the current path on the Spring Barn Farm corner to the Holiday Lodges, and then on to Swanborough giving bridleway access to the South Downs Way.

Sheep, Cyclists and Dogs

Sheep are regularly grazed on a substantial length of the section of the EW between Dean's Farm, Piddinghoe and Southease where they often graze on or near the path. Having sheep grazing close to the path has the benefit of helping to control excessive vegetation but unfortunately there have been a few incidents involving cyclists and dogs which have resulted in injury to lambs and sheep. We urge cyclists and dog owners to understand that they are in a working landscape and to act responsibly. With lambing completed, ewes and their lambs are now out in abundance and we have again posted notices reminding cyclists to ride with care. Also we beg dog owners to keep their dogs under control and on leads near sheep, and for everyone to keep the paths free of litter.

Committee and Trustees

Our constitution as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) require two longest serving trustees to step down each year. Last year it fell to John Parry and Zara Luxford to resign, but fortunately both were eligible and prepared to stand again, and were duly elected.

Conclusion

We remain determined to complete the network so that local people and visitors can make full use of a safe, and essentially, traffic free link between Newhaven and Lewes. Our key challenge for the coming year is to obtain the substantial funds needed to construct the missing sections of the path, for until this is done the benefits delivered are quite meagre. We don't know when this will be achieved but, as always, we are very conscious that we would never have come this far without the support of our partner organisations and most importantly the landowners who have been willing to allow the path on their land.

Many of our supporters want us to move faster to complete the project and we want to reassure them that it will be done as quickly as access to the land and funding for construction will allow.

APPENDIX

COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The committee has met eight times since the last AGM. Meetings are held at the Abergavenny Arms and we are grateful to the pub proprietors, John and Lucie, for offering us accommodation.

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	
John Parry (Lewes)	Trustee	
Susan Thompson (Swanborough)	Trustee	Secretary
Alister Linton-Crook (SDNPA Cycling Officer)	Committee	
Steve St.Clair (Lewes)	Committee	
Cllr. Alex Woolfson (Newhaven Town Council) (Substitute Cllr. Julie Carr)	Committee	

TABLE 2

Press and Publicity

Sussex Express 11th August 2017 'Cycle Project'. A response to a letter about dangers of cycling on the C7 and the limited options on the Egrets Way.

Sussex Express 27th October 2017 Report of CPRE Award Ceremony at Petworth House where the Egrets Way received a full award in the Rural Enterprise Category

Sussex Express 10th November 2017 News Article 'Joining up the gaps as cycle 'jigsaw' talks shape'

Sussex Express 26th January 2017 'We Plan to complete the work'. A response to a letter expressing disappointment at the paucity of infrastructure for cycling including the Egrets Way.

Sussex Review CPRE Magazine, spring edition 2018: report of the 'Countryside Awards' event at Petworth House.