

# THE EGRETS WAY

Safe shared village connections from county town to channel port



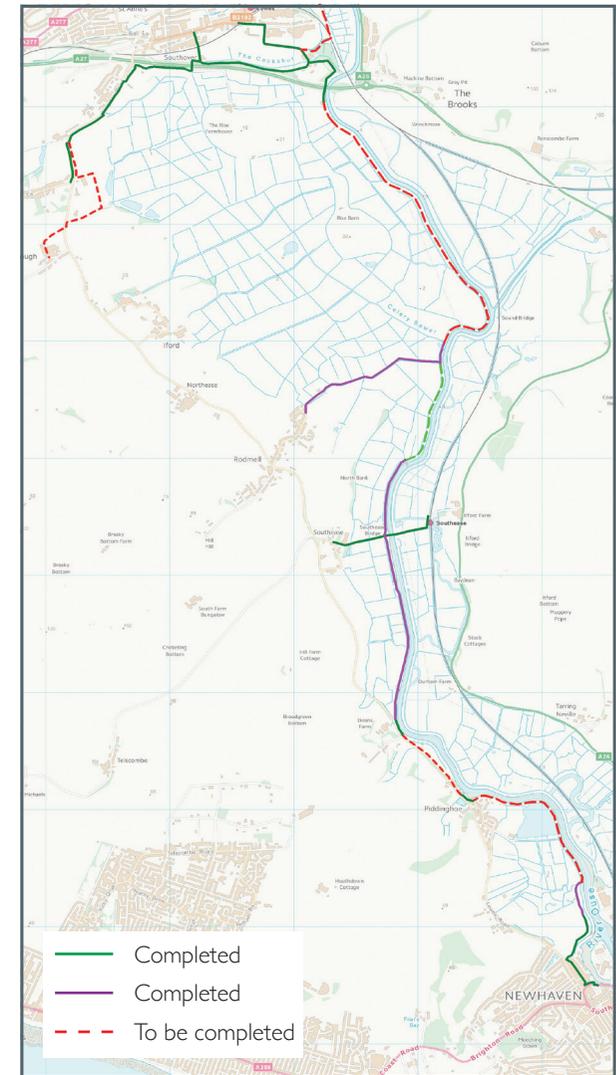
**When completed, the Egrets Way will comprise a safe, largely off-road network of walking and cycling paths linking the towns of Lewes and Newhaven with the villages in between.**

For some it will offer a route to work or school, for some an opportunity to link to other recreational routes and enjoy a healthy lifestyle but to all it will provide an opportunity to access and enjoy the attractions of the beautiful Lower Ouse Valley in the South Downs National Park without being deterred by the fast-moving traffic on the rural but exceptionally busy C7 road.

## Sustainability at its heart

The Egrets Way will link villages to towns, schools and businesses, local routes to national routes and, via the Newhaven to Dieppe ferry, international routes. With its completion it will play an important part in delivering a sustainable future for those who use it whilst supporting the aspirations of the South Downs National Park. One half of the network has been built and opened but now new funding is required to take it to completion.

This document sets out the sustainability attributes that the Egrets Way can ultimately deliver.



## Social Impacts – Bringing health and well being

The population of Newhaven includes a high density of people between the ages of 20 and 64 with 23% of adults expressing some form of income deprivation and roughly 1 in 3 children receiving additional financial support for schooling. Newhaven also records some of the highest values in the district for smoking, resulting in a significantly higher than average rate of mortality from cancer. Mental health issues and deprivation go hand in hand and Newhaven reports significantly higher than district average rates of depression. Across Lewes District, 25% of adults are reported as being obese.

The linkages which the Egrets Way provides will facilitate the use of sustainable transport with its positive effect on the health and well-being of the individuals living in the communities it connects and correspondingly a beneficial impact on the costs of providing medical care and support.

***“We know from our 16 years of activity that getting access to the countryside can be a dramatic, life changing experience for disabled people who have felt condemned to a life of sitting at home in a wheelchair.....and Disabled Ramblers declare support for the Egrets Way”***

*Tony Dickens, Former Chairman, Disabled Ramblers*

Every £1 spent on a new walking scheme saves £7 to the NHS (Local Government Information Unit, ‘Walk this Way’)

Living near newly developed cycling and walking infrastructure increases activity levels by an average 15 mins per week. (American Journal of Public Health, ‘New Walking and Cycling Routes’)



## Economic Impacts – Helping to strengthen local economies

The South Downs National Park reports that tourism is growing. However, over three quarters of the reported 46 million visits in 2012/2013 to the National Park were day visits, which reflects a shortage of overnight accommodation. The Ouse Valley hosts one of the five Youth Hostels in the Park, enhancing its tourist appeal. A dozen holiday lodges are currently being developed in the village of Swanborough and there is informal accommodation in the form of Air BnB and there is bed and breakfast accommodation available along the valley.

The economic return on investment for improvements to walking and cycling routes are 20 to 1 as compared to 3 to 1 for road and rail (Sustrans, economic appraisal of walking routes). Projects aimed at increasing walking have been shown to lead to a 300% increase in visitor numbers (University of California – as referenced by Sustrans)

Tourism can strengthen existing businesses as well as creating new ventures. Already local businesses have seen an increase in their trade as a consequence of people using the completed sections of path.

For Lewes and Newhaven, the increased numbers of tourists will present a welcome opportunity to invest in supporting services such as food, recreation and accommodation. For Newhaven in particular, the Egrets Way provides a chance to attract new and sustained sources of investment, creating opportunities that can be linked to the ‘Gateway’ to the National Park which Newhaven offers as a channel port.

***“We have seen a steady rise in the number of people cycling to us.....”***

*Louise Possegger, Partner, Spring Barn Farm, Lewes*

## Environmental Impacts - Exploring the countryside

The Egrets Way takes it all in; from downland to river valley and marsh to chalk scarp. Two sites of special scientific interest lie along its route: one rich in downland flora and fauna, the other a wetland environment, rich in birdlife and invertebrates. The latter, called The Brooks, is located on the flood plain of the river, between Lewes and the village of Southease. It supports a wide diversity of invertebrates as well as several rare snails, flies and moths. Kingston Escarpment comprises two separate areas of chalk downland on the steep scarp slopes. This site is important for its chalk grassland, a habitat type

which is rapidly becoming rarer owing to widespread agricultural improvement, and for the rich invertebrate fauna the grassland supports including a rare grasshopper and an uncommon chalk downland butterfly. In addition orchids are prevalent.

The Little Egrets, after which the routeway is named, with their attractive and distinctive white plume can be seen along the course of the Ouse.

Completion of the Egrets Way will help to preserve these landscapes, educating users on the complexity of the ecosystems and advocating for enhanced protection.

## Links to the South Downs National Park

‘.....opportunities will exist for everyone to discover, enjoy, understand and value the national park. Its special qualities will underpin the economic and social well being of the communities in and around it, which will be more self sustaining and empowered to shape their own future. Its villages and market towns will be thriving centres for residents, visitors and businesses and supporting the rural community....’

*2015 vision statement for the South Downs National Park*

The national park has two statutory purposes;

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the national park by the public

It also has a duty - ***‘To seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park’***

The Egrets Way supports the SDNP’s sustainable tourism objectives:

- To improve visitor experience
- To diversify tourism
- To share the social and economic benefits
- To encourage and support sustainability best practice
- To encourage change in travel behaviour
- To encourage a greater sense of custodianship (and improve the experience of tourism for residents)
- To raise visitor spend levels that contributes more widely to the economy of the national park



## Getting on with it

Sustainability is central to the creation of the Egrets Way. Social, environmental and economic aspects of the project are distinctive, carrying with them their own set of issues and yet they are inter-related. One aspect can't exist fully without the other ultimately ensuring that sustainability is real and relevant. With its focus on connection, on access and on lifestyle the Egrets Way can help to bring lasting change, not only to Newhaven but also to the villages it links up with and to Lewes.

We now have planning approval in place for the whole riverside route and our next steps are to secure final landowner agreements and to get the funding to complete construction. And then of course after that, and arguably the most challenging as well as the most fulfilling step, is to promote the Egrets Way; to get people onto it, to enjoy it and to bring the benefits to all that it was originally intended to deliver.

***“I was struck by the untapped economic and tourist potential of such a beautiful and easy to walk route.....This would create an important link in our long term plans for a strategic off road cycling and walking network”***

*Trevor Beattie, CEO, South Downs National Park Authority, March 2017*



**Newhaven**  
Town Council

