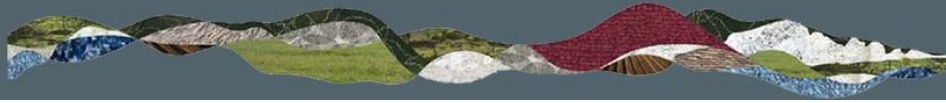


# THE EGRETS WAY

Safe shared village connections from county town to channel port



**EGRETS WAY PROJECT** Registered Charity No.1155182

TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT 2023- 2024

## INTRODUCTION

The report covers the period from January 2023 through to March 2024.

This year we are pleased to be holding the AGM in a village hall with a guest speaker for the first time since 2020 . Disappointingly the project has moved forward hesitatingly as we have experienced some significant weather-related setbacks during this period.

However, there have been some positive developments particularly with regard to improving access for users of Disability Scooters. The SDNP has recently introduced Mobility Scooter hire at five locations within the National Park and is exploring the prospect on including the Egrets Way network of paths in the lower Ouse Valley as an additional site. Coincidentally, the Disabled Ramblers Association has recently approached us when looking for a new area to include in their programme of rambles in 2025. We are currently exploring and mapping potential routes with both organisations. So we remain positive about the eventual completion of the Egrets Way Project and the significant benefits which it will continue to provide to local residents and visitors to the SDNP. As always , we will endeavour to keep supporters well-informed through mailings and updates published on the website.

## THE EGRETS WAY NETWORK PROGRESS REPORTS

### Newhaven to Piddinghoe - Phase 5

The final elements of the construction works in Piddinghoe were completed in March 2023 connecting with the southern section through Riverside Park, Newhaven which was completed in 2023. The new path extends for over 1.5km and provides a safe, year-round, surfaced route for pedestrians, the less abled (such as mobility scooters users), families with pushchairs, and cyclists avoiding the busy C7 road. Minor surface improvements only were undertaken to the final 100m in Piddinghoe between The Street and Newhaven and Seaford

Sailing Club, which remains a rustic gravel track at the request of stakeholders to reduce users, vehicle speeds and the risk of conflict with the adjacent stables. Egrets Way Phase 5 was delivered with funding from Lewes District Council CIL, SDNPA CIL and SDNPA Strategic Fund.

### Ham Lane to Rodmell - Phase 6

In October 2022, following unforeseen ground failure on the narrowest section of the route, through which all construction vehicles and materials have to pass during construction the contractor JT Mackley Ltd (JTM) had to withdraw from site. New engineering designs requiring 10m depth sheet piling, were developed by Sustrans to stabilise the ground and raise the path height above the high-water table. Once the works specifications were authorised by Natural England and the Environment Agency, JTM returned to site in May 2023 once the ground had sufficiently dried, to undertake the ground stabilisation works and recommence the path construction.

A new 3km section of Egrets Way opened in October 2023 providing a new path between Lewes and Rodmell, within Lewes Brooks SSSI, following the River Ouse. JTM completed almost half of the new path surfacing, however due to excessively wet ground conditions making construction works impossible activities were suspended once again. It is intended that JTM will return to the site in late spring this year to complete path construction and apply the top surface dressing of limestone dust. Prior to completing the path, JTM will be undertaking planned Environment Agency works at the Rodmell Pumping Station, and we look forward to seeing this phase completed in 2024.

Funding for Phase 6 construction was secured from a range of sources including National Highways, Lewes District Council CIL, the South Downs National Park Trust, SDNPA CIL and The Worshipful Company of Grocers.

### FUND RAISING REPORT

With the funding for Phase 6 (Rodmell to Lewes) already in place and construction underway, weather permitting, securing the additional funding required for essential improvements to the surface of Bridleway 13 (Iford to Lewes) became our immediate goal.

The South Downs National Park Authority had made available £15k from their Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds for this project in 2022 so securing the remaining £16.5k was our major focus. When the next Lewes District Council CIL bidding round was announced in autumn, 2023, an Expression of

Interest was submitted and approved with the result that our application is now pending with a decision anticipated in late spring/early summer this year.

In early 2023, an application which had been made to the Chalk Cliff Trust for funds to cover essential operating costs such as path maintenance, insurance, printing and signage, was successful when they awarded us a grant of £3,000.

A later application to the Lewes Town Council Community Grants programme for capital funds of £1800 to purchase much needed equipment for our path maintenance volunteers was also successful and enabled us to purchase both an electric chainsaw and strimmer for their use.

And, most recently, the £167 received since January 2023 from the Lewes District Local Lottery was augmented by a £125 grant from the Lewes Town Council Community Grants programme.

As always, we are grateful to the many local organisations which continue to support the Egrets Way project by providing the funding needed to complete and maintain this network of multi-user paths in the Lower Ouse Valley.

Looking ahead, the next capital funding challenge is likely to be provided by the engineering work which will be required to gain approval and support for Phase 7 of the Egrets Way network of paths, running from the northern entrance to Piddinghoe to Dean's

## COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

- Sussex Express article May 17<sup>th</sup> 2023 'Work begins on next Phase of Path'
- Sussex Express article May 26<sup>th</sup> 2023 'Progress update on the Egrets Way Path -further construction scheduled'
- Sussex Express article September 15<sup>th</sup> 2023 'Safety Concerns Close Path'
- Sussex Express Rodmell Parish Pump September 8<sup>th</sup> 2023 'Egrets Way Update'

## COMMUNITY EVENT REPORT

The Egrets Way committee members were very pleased to welcome Green United cyclists to Iford village again in July 2023, offering refreshments at the halfway point of their circular off road Joint Schools Sponsored Bike Ride. This well supported cycle ride and brainstorming event was organised by pupils from Lewes schools. The group gathered in the paddock next to Iford village hall where participants exchanged sustainability ideas for their respective

schools. The return trip to Lewes was more direct this year thanks to the newly constructed Iford to Swanborough bridleway link.

Bike ride participants raised for funds Dr Bike, an organisation promoting increased bike usage in Lewes by offering assistance with bike repairs. Details for the event can be found:

<https://greenunited.org.uk/completed-project/joint-schools-sponsored-bike-ride/>

## MAINTENANCE AND VOLUNTEERS

Since the last report the maintenance co-ordinator has only had to organise two outings of volunteer groups to clear ingress of foliage onto the cycleway. Once again, the volunteers have been extremely willing and helpful, and the work done was enjoyed by all.

Certain sections have had very heavy ingress of established shrubs, and this is required coordination with South Downs National Park Rangers who have willingly stepped in when this was required.

Liaison with the Rangers is now well established and we anticipate working closely together in the future.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

The Egrets Way Facebook page is currently followed by 898 (778) people in the local area, including community group pages. 836 (702) 'Likes' have been recorded. An increase from last year's figures shown in brackets.

## WEBSITE

Our website [www.egretsway.org.uk](http://www.egretsway.org.uk) remains our main communication method. Since the AGM last year, the website has recorded over 5700 visits (up a very significant 23% from last year) the majority of which 4600, as with last year are from users who have not accessed the site before. The vast majority of these are direct searches (i.e. people typing in Egrets Way into their browser) however 5% are referrals from social media such as Facebook.

The page THE ROUTE remains the most popular page, not unexpectedly. This page takes roughly half of the total number of page views (some 10900 total views) with NEWS AND EVENTS taking second place. Average time spent on viewing across all the page is 1.5 minutes. Emails we have received using the

'CONTACT US' form generates a small but steady number of questions and criticisms, some more helpful than others, but these are always noted and responded to. Our mailings list of supporters receives direct mailings of updates and other information being posted on the website. There are currently 362 subscribers listed as supporters of the EW up 27 from 2023.

## CHAIR'S COMMENTS

It is now nearly thirteen years since the communities located along the Lewes to Newhaven Road, better known to locals as the busy and dangerous C7, agreed they must find a safe, off-road alternative for cyclists and the Ouse Valley Cycle Network (OVCN) Project, came into being with the objective of creating a safe and attractive route away from the C7 linking Lewes, Newhaven and the villages in between. More about how the project progressed, through building sections of the Egrets Way while supporting the development of new permissive paths and public rights of way, whilst can be found in 'A Brief history of the Egrets Way Project' available on our website

<https://www.egretsway.org.uk/our-story>.

Phase 6 There were high hopes that the continuous Egrets Way route from Lewes (Ham Lane) to Rodmell would have been completed last year (2023) but once again these were dashed by adverse weather resulting in Mackley Construction, having to abandon the target and withdraw from the site. They will be returning to complete the surfacing in later this year when surface conditions have improved. The contractors will also be carrying out essential engineering work for the Environment Agency (EA) at the Rodmell Pumping station through which the path runs. When this work is undertaken, the Egrets Way path will have to be closed until completed. Notice of this temporary closure will be provided.

Phase 7 The C7 on road section of the Egrets Way (Phase7) between Dean Farm and the northern entrance to the village has always been expected to be challenging, in particular because a section close to the northern entrance to Piddinghoe will need to be constructed alongside the road and this will require realignment of the highway. However, positive discussions between Piddinghoe Parish Council, the SDNPA, Sustrans and ESCC Highways are ongoing with a firm commitment from the National Park to get this done.

Bridleway 13. This bridleway, which runs across the Ouse Valley between Iford and Rise Farm, Lewes needs to undergo surface upgrading to make usable all the year round. It has been agreed with the landowner, Iford Estate, that the best way to do this is to concrete surface at the cattle coral and carry out

surface repairs to potholed sections. Good progress is being made in raising funds for this.

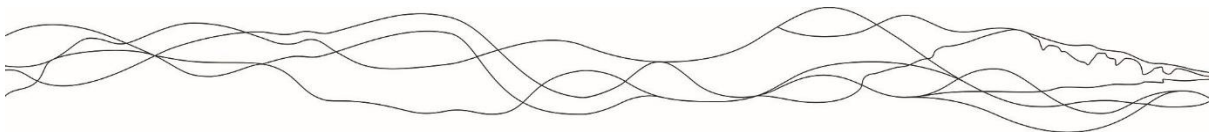
There are currently over 10 miles (16km) of the EW network of off-road paths, available for cyclists, walkers and mobility scooters to use. This focus on 'Access for All' with the inclusion of mobility scooters and the involvement of the Disability Ramblers Association is a very positive development on which to end this report.

Once again, the Trustees wish to express our sincere thanks to the landowners who have allowed the Egrets Way to run over their land as, without their cooperation, we would never have been able to make progress with the project.

Neville Harrison

Chair of Trustees Egrets Way Project

March 2024



## APPENDIX TO THE EGRETS WAY 2022-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

### Committee Meetings

Since the last AGM in February 2022 the Committee has met 6 times [ April 4<sup>th</sup>; June 13<sup>th</sup>; August 30<sup>th</sup>; November 7<sup>th</sup>, January 10<sup>th</sup> & March 18<sup>th</sup>]. All the meetings since July 2020 had been held online via Zoom but in August last year, we resumed face to face meetings returning to the Abergavenny Arms where we are always made very welcome by the landlord Chris Bently and his staff.

### Trustees and Committee Members

TRUSTEES	POSITION	OTHER ROLES
Joe Attwood		Website & Mailings
Wendy Brewer	Deputy Chair	Communications & Fund Raising
Neville Harrison	Chair	
Mick Long	Treasurer	Events, photography & art
Susan Thompson		Volunteers & Maintenance
Rick Ross		
Sue Wylde	Secretary	
<b>COOPTED COMMITTEE MEMBERS</b>		
Cllr. Lesley Boniface		Riverside Park Committee & Social media
Alister Linton Crook		SDNPA Cycling Officer

