



EGRETS WAY PROJECT Registered Charity N0 1155182

Alternative Name OUSE VALLEY CYCLE NETWORK (OVCN)

CHAIR OF TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025

INTRODUCTION

I would like to start this year's Annual Report by looking at the map of the Egrets Way published at the end last year <https://www.egretsway.org.uk/route>

because it shows how much of the Egrets Way has been completed and is in use: from Rodmell to Lewes (Phase 6), we know it is used for recreation, but also commuting and shopping; and from Southease to Chapel Barn, and from Piddinghoe to Newhaven. The remaining, and final section (Phase 7) between Chapel Barn and the entrance to Piddinghoe village presents its own particular challenges [more details in the reports that follow].

EGRETS WAY NETWORK PROGRESS REPORTS

Ham Lane to Rodmell - Phase 6

Contractor JT Mackley Ltd (JTM) returned to site during 2024 to complete path construction and to lay the final top surface dressing of limestone dust to the 3.1km section of Egrets Way path. Improvements have also been made to the bridleway farm track which connects Rodmell to the Egrets Way Phase 6. Including track drainage and surface repairs to pot-holed sections and the install of new user-friendly gates.

The completed path and bridleway improvements have been very well received by the community and enable year-round journeys between Lewes and Rodmell following the River Ouse, passing through Lewes Brooks SSSI and a welcome alternative to the busy C7 highway.

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

Piddinghoe – Phase 7

Sustrans were appointed in the latter part of 2024, to undertake stage one feasibility work and stakeholder engagement for the final section which has its particular challenges. The project necessitates extending the current route south from Deans Farm onto the C7 road to the Piddinghoe village entrance and involves engagement with residential property owners and stakeholders,

including East Sussex Highways, Piddinghoe Parish Council, Active Travel England, and the South Downs National Park.

Due to physical constraints, proposed options will require the path to run adjacent to the C7 highway, interacting with residential accessways, and resolving the 'pinch point' at the junction with Harping Hill. It is anticipated that the construction of a safe path will lead to a reduction of highway speeds, improved pedestrian connections to bus stops and improved safety for all users crossing and joining the C7 from both The Street and Harping Hill .

The project team are also liaising closely with the Safer C7 Project to ensure designs are consistent with recommendations for the whole C7. Once the preferred path alignment has been identified and negotiations with landowners concluded over the next year or so , the next stage will be to finalise designs and develop a planning application for approval for construction. This will require significant capital funding and is still some time away.

Stage one funding has been secured from Active Travel England Capability Fund and SDNPA.

Maintenance - Newhaven to Piddinghoe section

Surface repairs funded by SDNPA Access budget were undertaken to repair approximately 100m that was damaged following the River Ouse over-topping the Environment Agency maintained flood defenses during the spring tides. Minor surface improvements only were undertaken to the final 50m of track between The Street in Piddinghoe and Newhaven and Seaford Sailing Club, which remains a rustic gravel track at the request of stakeholders to reduce vehicle speeds and the risk of any conflict with the adjacent stables.

The extreme weather event also damaged approximately 100m of path surface south of Southease which is scheduled for repair this summer. We are also exploring funding opportunities and resources with the South Downs National Park to resurface the Southease to Piddinghoe section which was constructed 10 years ago.

COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

"A Brief History of the Egrets Way Project" was updated to mark the completion of Phase 6 of the Egrets Way network in November 2024. This was circulated to registered supporters and posted on the website:

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COMMUNITY EVENTS REPORT

'Egrets Way Update'. Presentation by Chair to Rodmell Parish Assembly March 2024

MAINTENANCE AND VOLUNTEERS REPORT

The maintenance volunteer group has gone out three times in the last year. This has mainly been brush clearance to retain the width of the route.

Work has also been done by South Downs National Park when heavier tools were required.

In the forthcoming year we will be exploring liaison with other groups of volunteers along the Ouse valley and exploring new ways of working with the South Downs National Park.

WEBSITE REPORT

After our mailing list of supporters, our website www.egretsway.org.uk remains our main communication method. Since the AGM last year, the website has recorded over 5300 visits (down slightly from the year before by 3% but still a very impressive figure). Of these visits, again the majority 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). As always the page THE ROUTE remains the most popular page taking roughly half of the total number of page views (9900 total views) with NEWS AND EVENTS taking second place again.

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CHAIRS COMMENTS

We are now into the fifteenth year since the Ouse Valley Cycle Network (OVCN) was formally adopted as a community organisation August 2011 with the help of the, then newly established, South Downs National Park (SDNP). Our ambition was, and remains, to create a safe shared path between Lewes and Newhaven, largely following the River Ouse. We have worked in close partnership with the SDNP from the beginning and more recently also with Sustrans.

In January 2014 we became a registered Charity which helped us to raise funds for the construction of the 9km of surfaced path in use today. Although the OVCN is a network of paths linking villages in the Ouse Valley we decided we needed a more engaging name and, following a public competition, chose 'The Egrets Way', reflecting the Little Egret's arrival in the Ouse Valley as a summer visitor some thirty years ago, and now a resident.

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

Preparatory work on the final section (Phase 7), which includes 800m of path alongside the C7 road connecting the Egrets way at Chapel Barn to the entrance to Piddinghoe village, is well underway, working closely with the Safer C7 Project where we have shared objectives. There are still some challenges to be resolved but I think we can feel confident that completion of the Egrets Way project, is in sight.

The Egrets Way runs on land owned by over twenty individuals or organisations and without the generous consent of every one of them the path could not have been constructed. We are extremely grateful to them.

Coming up for discussion are some important decisions to be taken about the ongoing roles for the EW Project, the OVCN Charity, the SDNPA and Sustrans following completion of the path. As I am stepping down as Chair these will be for others but I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank the contribution made by the Trustees and members of the working Committee.

Two people require special mention:

- Alister Lynton-Crook, the SDNP's Cycling Officer, has played a pivotal role in our journey; liaising with contractors and landowners and dealing with day to day detailed matters of path construction, always with care, courtesy and clarity.
- Wendy Brewer, Deputy Chair. Wendy has particular drafting and negotiating skills and has been unstinting in giving her time to discuss issues, almost on a daily basis, and providing support to me in so many ways.

If approved at the AGM Wendy will take over as Chair at a key time when decisions have to be made about the future role for the Project and the Charity.

Neville Harrison
Chair of Trustees, Egrets Way Project
July 2025

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Committee Meetings

Since January 2024 the Committee has met 6 times [January 23, 18th March, 1st July, 2nd September, 4th November, January 27th 2025]

All the meetings have been held in the Abergavenny Arms, Rodmell where we are always made very welcome. Our thanks to Chris and Daisy Bently (landlords) and their lovely staff.

Trustees and Committee Members

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