



THE CENTURION WAY

PROJECT UPDATE FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Contact Access@southdowns.gov.uk

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This update is provided by the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) Centurion Way Project Team for distribution to the local community, landowners, user groups, and interested parties who may wish to be informed of the progress of the Centurion Way extension from West Dean to Cocking.

Introduction

The Centurion Way is a 5.5 mile (9km) path that runs between Chichester, Lavant, and West Dean following the old dismantled Chichester to Midhurst railway line, which closed to all rail traffic in 1991. The first section of the path was established in the mid-90s and extended in 2015, taking it as far as the West Dean Tunnel.

A further 5km extension is now under construction, which will take the route to Cocking Hill and link to the South Downs Way.

The current construction of this extension is challenging and requires careful ecological planning and coordination with several landowners and other stakeholders and will take several years to achieve.

Planning approval was granted in 2018, and once initial funding was in place, construction of the first section started in 2022. The current forecast, which depends on funding and progress, is to complete the extension by 2026 or sooner if circumstances allow. We intend to open completed sections of the route as soon as they are safe and practical.

Progress Overview

The first section of the new extension is now complete and is being prepared to be opened in spring 2024. Our initial hope was to have this first section opened in 2023; this has now been delayed to 2024, pending improvements to the link between the old and new sections of the route. These include a new access ramp to West Dean and improvements to the footpath link on the A286 through the Village. Both these schemes are scheduled to be completed in early 2024.

Singleton Station to Cucumber Farm Bridge (2023/24)

The sections of the path from Singleton Station northward to Cucumber Farm Bridge have now been completed. We had to overcome many challenges in this section, including a considerable amount of clearance linked to the site's previous use. The construction of the ramp access at Hat Hill Bridge also presented a significant challenge, resulting in additional ground surveys and a structural redesign. Another unexpected element was the need to complete safety repairs to the old bridge at Hat Hill,

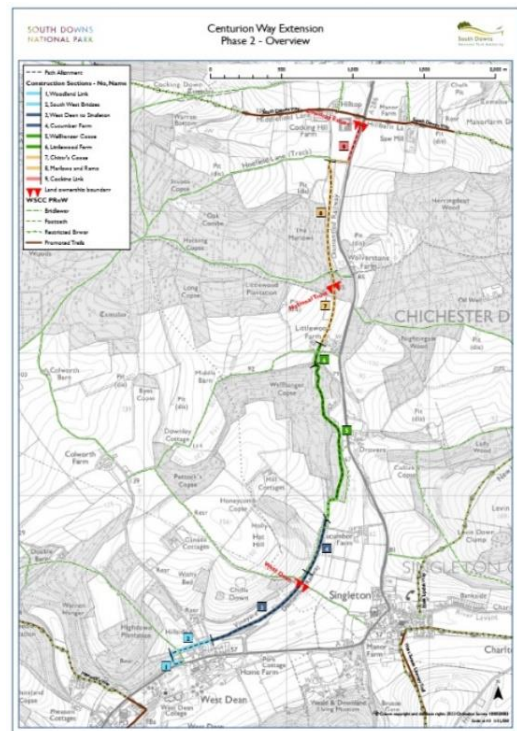


Figure 1. Route Map



which, after 130 years, was showing its age. These are behind us now, and over the coming months, we will be installing signage and completing the fencing. During the winter season we will be restocking this section; we have already sown wildflowers along the route boundary and will be planting hedging and hundreds of native trees before December. These will replace the diseased and dangerous trees that were removed due to the prevalence of ash dieback. This extensive replanting will increase the habitat's resilience and biodiversity along the route. As an added enhancement, we have found space for a small heritage orchard to offer a free snack to a lucky few. We plan to open this first short section in the Spring of 2024.



Figure 2. Before & After Photos

Wellhanger Copse to Littlewood Farm Section (2024)

Preparation and design work for the next section north through Wellhanger Copse to Littlewood Farm is ongoing. This includes the designs to replace a missing bridge demolished in the 1950s. This section is a particularly ecologically sensitive section of the route that transits ancient woods and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). We have delayed further work here pending further consultation on the ecological mitigation relating to concerns raised by Sussex Bat Group.

We are also considering a slight change to the alignment through the wood, which may offer better access, less habitat impact, and take the route away from the road and residents. If pursued, the proposed change will require adjusting the planning approval and a new application and involve a short delay in construction into 2024.

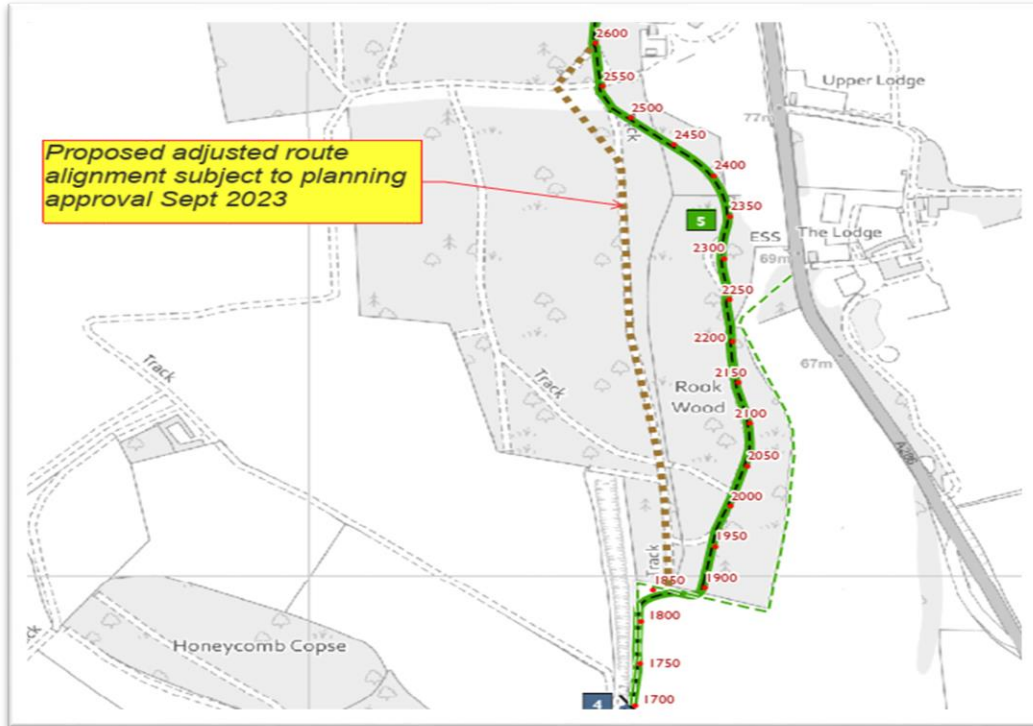


Figure 3. Route Alignment - Wellhanger Copse

Singleton Station South (2024/25)

The route south from the completed section goes through the derelict Singleton Station. The new route will pass by the water tower, old platforms, and goods shed. Some platform repairs will be required as part of the path construction. This will require listed building consent and a possible planning application. There are also three more bridges in this section, all of which will require some safety work and consent from Heritage Railways Estate. Completing this section will link to the southern part of Centurion Way via the A286. This work is scheduled for 2024/25.

Tunnels

There is no consent to take the route through either West Dean Tunnel or Cocking Tunnel and no plans to go through Singleton Tunnel. The options of tunnel transits through West Dean and Cocking Tunnel are subject to ongoing considerations and discussions. This includes the completion of Tunnel Habitat Surveys, which have been ongoing for several years and will be completed this year. These surveys and other evidence will be used to assess if taking the route through any tunnel is justified and viable. Approval will require consultation locally and the consent of external agencies and will be subject to planning approval.

Look Forward

We are excited to start a new construction phase in the coming months and open a section of the route in early 2024. We are also looking at improvements to the A286 Footpath linking to the new ramp at West Dean. A priority for the coming season is to look again at the route through Wellhanger Copse to improve the alignment.



Acknowledgments

Much has been achieved in the last year, none of which would have been possible without the active support and willingness of the West Dean Estate (Edward James Foundation) and the National Trust. We would also like to acknowledge the cooperation and patience of local residents and tenants impacted directly by the construction activities.

Finally, we would also like to thank the local community and other stakeholders for their ongoing support.

Please visit our Centurion Way Website for more updates and FAQ's

www.southdowns.gov.uk/centurion-way/

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The future route remains closed to the public. In the interest of public safety, the South Downs National Park Authority, Edward James Foundation, and National Trust urge the public to not trespass onto private land and not place themselves at unnecessary risk during the construction works.

Thank you for your cooperation.

