





THE CENTURION WAY

PROJECT UPDATE FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Contact Centurion.Way@southdowns.gov.uk

Sept 2024

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 wish to be informed of the planned Centurion Way extension from West Dean to Cocking.

Background

The Centurion Way is a 5.5-mile (9km) path that runs between Chichester, Lavant, and West Dean following the former Chichester to Midhurst railway line, which closed to all rail traffic in 1991. The first section of the shared use path was established in the mid-90s and the SDNPA opened a further 1.5-mile (2.5km) extension in 2015, taking it as far as the West Dean village.

Following stakeholder consultation and public planning application, approval was granted in 2019 for a further 3-mile (5km) extension which will take the route to Cocking Hill and link to the South Downs Way. Construction of the extension is challenging and requires careful ecological planning, considerable resources, funding and coordination with several landowners and other stakeholders and will take several years to achieve.

Construction of the first section started in 2022 and depending on funding and progress, the whole extension is currently forecasted to complete by 2026/27. The route is being completed in sections and shall be opened in stages, when they are safe and practical to do so.

Progress Overview

The plan to open the first section of the Centurion Way extension is still on schedule for Spring 2025. Construction plans are in place to complete the southern Southwest Bridges section and Singleton Station platform stabilisation works, to connect with the completed Singleton Station to Cucumber Farm Bridge section. The A286 Footway reinstatement works will also be completed to link to the existing Centurion Way. Once all these elements are completed, we should be able to open the constructed section from West Dean to Cucumber Farm Bridge in late Spring 2025 and be advancing construction of the northern sections soon after.

Singleton Station to Cucumber Farm Bridge

The sections of the path from Singleton Station northwards to Cucumber Farm Bridge have been completed including the fencing, landscaping and extensive planting of wildflowers, hedging and native trees, including the replacement of diseased and dangerous trees that were removed due to the prevalence of ash dieback. The planting will increase the habitat's resilience and biodiversity along the route. We have also planted a small heritage orchard to offer a free snack to a lucky few in the future that includes a heritage oak as a centrepiece, donated by the West Dean Estate. This section remains closed to the public, who are urged not to trespass onto the private land which places them at risk and may also jeopardise relationships with the landowners, adjacent residential and farming properties.

Southwest Bridges

Construction of approximately 1km of path southwards along the former track bed is due to commence this month through the derelict Singleton Station and Southwest Bridges section. It will



include a new ramp link to the scout hut road and A286 footway, opposite the entrance to West Dean College. Works will also include safety works to three bridge structures, by consent from Heritage Railway Estate and the West Dean Estate and are scheduled to be completed in a few months.

Singleton Station

Significant works are required to the station site which require listed building and planning consent which is expected in the coming weeks. Works are expected to commence in the new year and will include considerable platform stabilisation and safety works and repairs to the embankment wall of the station sub-structure, which will provide another access route from the A286 opposite the entrance to West Dean Gardens. Key elements of the works must be completed for safety reasons to enable the opening of the route. The grade-listed goods shed will also be fenced off to enable the Centurion Way path to pass nearby. The aspiration exists to repair the goods shed owned by the Edward James Foundation in the future, which will require significant additional funding.

A286 Footway, West Dean

The footway reinstatement works have been tendered and are scheduled to commence in late October and be completed in 2024. In accordance with a planning condition, works specifications have been approved to reinstate the footway link to 1.5m width alongside the west side of the A286 between the existing Centurion Way adjacent to the school, through the village to the new extension, opposite the entrance to West Dean College. The project team have elected to extend the footway improvements with project funding, through the village to link with the entrance to the former Singleton Station site, opposite the entrance to West Dean Gardens.

West Dean Access Ramp

The new ramp next to the school is proving popular with path users, providing ‘at grade’ access for walkers, people with pushchairs, the less abled (including wheelchair and mobility scooter users) and cyclists. Following feedback, we will be installing additional boulders to the lower section of the ramp to strengthen the ‘chicane’ feature to encourage users to further reduce their speed before rejoining the highway.





Wellhanger Copse to Littlewood Farm Section

Preparations for the section northwards through Wellhanger Copse to Littlewood Farm is ongoing prior to construction works, including ecological and tree assessments and design work to replace a missing bridge demolished in the 1950s. This section is particularly sensitive as the route transits close to Singleton Tunnel, a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Ecological consultants Temple Group have been appointed to develop the landscape scale approach, refresh ecological assessments (where necessary) and develop the Landscape Ecological Management Plan for the whole extension which includes mitigations for the route, guidance during construction works and future management of the landscape for ten years.

Ecological surveys and assessment have been ongoing during the summer with most scheduled to be completed by October. The information gained will be used to inform our approach to construction and landscape mitigations in the sensitive areas of the route. Consultation on the ecological assessments, impacts and mitigations is ongoing with stakeholders including the Sussex Bat Group and we hope to be able to provide an update in the new year and aim to be constructing in 2025.

Tunnels Assessment

There is no consent or current plan to take the Centurion Way extension through any of the three tunnels and we remain committed to exploring all options to improve the link through West Dean.

The project team met recently with the SDNPA Senior Management Team to review the findings of the surveys and reports to date and assess route potential. The initial surveys for the tunnels are now complete and we have some favourable indication for the potential to open the West Dean Tunnel for public use. However, any potential use of the tunnel should it be pursued and consented, would be seasonal, which coupled with other constraints puts into question the viability. The SDNPA need to be able to reconcile the need to protect the valued bat habitat while recognising any public imperative that may justify any potential impact. The next step in assessing any future improvement to the link avoiding the A286 is for the project team to assess the viability of any alternative options with landowners and stakeholders.

Acknowledgments

Much has been achieved in the last three years, none of which would have been possible without the active support and willingness of the landowners West Dean Estate (Edward James Foundation) and the National Trust. We would also like to acknowledge the cooperation and patience of residents and tenants impacted directly by the construction activities and finally, we would also like to thank the local community and other stakeholders for their ongoing support.

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.

Please visit our Centurion Way Website for more updates and FAQ's
www.southdowns.gov.uk/centurion-way/

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Circulation

- Landowners: Edward James Foundation (West Dean Estate), National Trust (Drovers Estate), Cowdray
- NT Tenants: Drovers Estate (inc Cucumber Farm, Levin View)
- Organisations and Groups: Friends of CW, CW User Group, Sustrans, Chichester District Cycle Forum, Chichester Society, West Sussex Cycle Forum, SW Sussex Ramblers Association, Disabled Ramblers Association, South Downs Local Access Forum, Midhurst Area Cycling, Sussex Bat Group, Summersdale Residents Association
- Businesses: West Dean School, West Dean Pre-school, Lavant School, West Dean Stores, Selsey Arms, Weald and Downland Museum,
- Local Authorities: SDNPA, WSCC and CDC Officers and Councillors, Chichester City Council, Lavant, West Dean, Singleton and Cocking Parish Councils and Midhurst Town Council

