

CENTURION WAY THREATENED BY DEVELOPERS

John Grimshaw revisits after 22 years and is dismayed but also hopeful

It was a bright sunny day when we all cycled up to West Dean. I was so pleased to see how well the path was looking 22 years after its construction, so pleased that it was well used and well cared for, and so grateful for the invitation to come back to visit it again and to help put forward positive proposals which would cement the Centurion Way’s place at the heart of this expanding city, central to its transport plans.

The threat

The Centurion Greenway from West Dean is under threat at its most sensitive point - the connection to Westgate at the entrance to Chichester. Developers of Whitehouse Farm have planned their new road to provide a direct route for motorists towards the City Centre. But this will simultaneously degrade the one high-quality cycling route in the area through diversions onto roadside pavements and light controlled crossings. The outcome will be more cars and vehicular traffic and fewer pedestrians and cyclists. This is the very opposite of what the community would prefer to see.

When the Friends of Centurion Way asked me to meet up with them on the route I accepted with alacrity. I have designed and built dozens and dozens of cycling routes over the years and there is not one where I don’t hope to see extensions, enhancements, links and connections, all with the aim of further popularising everyday cycling and walking.

Care and attention

So much effort went into designing and creating this route. Every detail was the subject of debate

and decision, of planning applications and contractor’s notes. In this case we had the positive support of Jeff Lander from the County Council, and local civil engineer Brian Griggs, to oversee the works. Some readers will remember the branch line to the sand and gravel pits at Hunters Race that stayed in service to 1991, long after the rest of the branch through to Midhurst was shut following the collapse of a bridge near Cocking in 1951.

A great deal of care went into its construction in 1995 which involved a lot of heavy equipment (see photo). We negotiated with Tarmac, owners of the gravel pits, to pay for restoration that included Roman/Celtic landscaping, clearly visible on Google Earth. We also persuaded David Kemp, a sculptor from Cornwall, to make the survey chain gang from recycled scrap; his artwork marks out the site of old wagon loading bays and is a crossing point for the Roman road out of Chichester. The same care can be seen with the welcome extension from Mid Lavant to West Dean, which now provides a more complete route for local people to reach into the South Downs National Park.



Staff and volunteers from Sustrans in 2001 are, from left, Brian Griggs, Mark Strong and Liz Beth. Artworks are frequently commissioned by Sustrans when designing its pathways. This arch, next to Bishop Luffa School, was designed and made by Richard Farrington. But it collapsed a few months ago and is now stored at the County Council’s Drayton depot awaiting repair.

Photo: John Grimshaw

Only connect!

Strangely I don’t really mind if the Centurion Way is changed and rebuilt – provided that it is for the better, extends towards the City Centre as a traffic free greenway that is landscaped and planted. Most crucially, Centurion Way must be connected to provide such a direct and attractive route that new residents will see cycling to school, to the Station and the City Centre as the most natural and easy way to travel in Chichester.

Challenging the developers

I applaud the Friends of Centurion Way for challenging the Whitehouse Farm developers. What do they know about the area and the history of Centurion Way? Why could they not be grateful that their planned housing had such a useful resource as its boundary? Why could they not strive to take every advantage of it? But no, they plan to drive their new road right through it; and to trade off a section of Centurion Way to gain access to land owned by Bishop Luffa School for yet more housing. Can you be surprised at the community’s upset? Let’s hope the authorities and developers make the most of what we have built.

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John Grimshaw set up cycling charity Sustrans and the National Cycle Routes scheme in 1977. He stepped down after 30 years in 2008 and today is Honorary Engineer and Trustee of Greenways and Cyclerroutes Limited, which is involved with walking and cycling issues.

WILL YOU JOIN THE FRIENDS OF CENTURION WAY?

Asks Chichester resident, Hannah Moxom

We want to preserve the path for future generations of residents and visitors to travel sustainably and safely, honouring the original design by John Grimshaw and making the most of this very important part of Chichester.

If you use Centurion Way for walking, cycling, running, dog-walking or commuting you should join the Friends!

To find out more or to make a donation

- visit the Friends website www.centurionway.org.uk
- email sarah.ccc13@gmail.com
- contact pledgefunds@centurionway.org.uk



Centurion Way’s southern section was built 1995-6. Houses facing onto Newlands Lane can be seen in the distance Photo: John Grimshaw