

## Scrutiny Committee - Lewes to Uckfield railway line

### The future of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line

*Note: This report should be read in conjunction with the attached background briefing note*

Report by Councillor Vic Ient, dated: 12/01/17

#### **Introduction:**

Policy recommendations, for this and other public bodies, to improve the rail infrastructure, north of Lewes, - reinstating the Lewes to Uckfield railway line.

As members will know this Council passed a motion at its October 2017 meeting agreeing the Scrutiny Committee should be asked to consider what further action should be taken in relation to this matter. This report makes recommendations for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee.

#### **Background Notes – Summary (1969 – 2016):**

As you will see from the attached background report it has been a long-standing aspiration of Lewes District Council, Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council to re-instate the railway line linking Lewes and Uckfield that was closed in 1969.

#### **Background Notes – LDC/ESCC (2017):**

At the December meeting of the Lewes District Council it was agreed that:

The Cabinet Member for Planning, agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Transport seeking further clarification as to how they would envisage a project to restore the lost connection between Lewes and Uckfield be initiated including a framework for funding and details of government criteria which will allow the project to be initiated

Prior to this, in October 2017 the Lewes District Council passed a motion reconfirming its support for the reinstatement of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line. The motion said:

"Lewes District Council resolves to positively continue its long standing support for the much needed re-opening of the Uckfield to Lewes railway line.

This is something which hundreds of Lewes District residents have called for over many years, and it would be a strategic addition to the rail network for the Lewes District. This vital transport link, especially if electrified, would help Lewes District Council meet their sustainable transport aspirations. Other examples of successful projects along these lines include the Borders Railway line".

With the agreement of the Council, Councillor Barnes agreed to the amendment of his Notice of Motion to read:

".....much needed re-opening of the Uckfield to Lewes railway line and the Council asks the Scrutiny Committee to consider and propose what actions the Council and potential partner organisations might take to further this outcome.

This is something which hundreds.....".

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At their December meeting the East Sussex County Council reaffirmed their commitment to the reopening of the Lewes to Uckfield line.

### **Background Notes – UK Government (2017):**

On 29 November 2017 the Transport Secretary published a new '**Strategic Vision for Rail**' which included commitments to expand the railway network. Under section 2 entitled 'an Expanded Network in 2.10 the Secretary of State referred to restoring lost connections. It is understood that the Department for Transport (DfT) may have in mind the former Lewes to Uckfield railway line when referring to lost connections.

Prior to this, in March 2017 the Department for Transport published the **London and South Coast Rail Corridor Study**. In this report the DfT said ".....it recognised that it (the Uckfield to Lewes rail link) might be justified on the basis of economic growth. The study recommended that a new approach is required, starting with the LEP and local authorities commissioning a review of potential growth scenarios".

### **Next Steps**

Whilst the district council does not have the transport responsibility or the funding control to develop a project to rebuild the line, it does have a responsibility to pursue its long-standing policy to reinstate the line, especially in support of its residents. How can this be done? The council has the opportunity to be an influencer and a catalyst for change.

Before making detailed recommendations it is suggested that we enable members to more fully understand, (a) how the government may wish to proceed? (b) what are the existing proposals? and (c) how a project to improve the transport infrastructure in this part of East Sussex would be supported by key local & government sponsored bodies in the South East region?:

- (a) How the government may wish to proceed? (Receiving further advice from the Department of Transport).

The lead member has already sent off a request for further information.

- (b) What are the existing proposals? (understanding what proposals exist by the organisations who are promoting the reopening of the line).

As members will see from the government's Strategic Vision for Rail, the concept of reopening of lines is based upon a report produced by the Campaign for Better Transport. Their work is supported by detailed information from Railfuture who are an organisation who specifically campaign for improvements in rail infrastructure and services. Railfuture have published a report on the reopening of the Lewes to Uckfield line. Accordingly, it would seem sensible to arrange a presentation to Lewes District Council members on the details of their strategy and proposals. Of course this would be aimed at the scrutiny committee, but it could be open to all members of the council and timed to be immediately before a future meeting.

- (c) Support by key local & government sponsored bodies (for a project to improve the transport infrastructure in this part of East Sussex)

There are many organisations that would have an interest in improved rail infrastructure including:

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East Sussex County Council, Wealden District Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, Coast to Capital LEP, South-East LEP, Greater Brighton Economic Board, Department for Transport, rail operators, Network Rail and other interested parties from the financial, business and engineering community. Also the new Transport for the South East (TfSE) body would be an important party in any infrastructure plan.

The body that is key to any future plans is the local transport authority. East Sussex County Council is our local transport authority. They are the link to all the above bodies.

It would seem logical, therefore to arrange a presentation/Q&A session for Lewes District Council members from the ESCC Transport Authority on how they can assist a project for the proposed rail link to be initiated and implemented. This would not be unlike how they approach the provision of new road infrastructure in the county. Again this would be aimed at the scrutiny committee, but it could be open to all members of the council and timed to be immediately before a future meeting.

### **Recommendations:**

It is recommended that the Scrutiny committee adopt the 3 proposals as above.