

Agenda Item No: 6

Report Title: Lewes to Uckfield railway line

Report To: Scrutiny Committee **Date:** 19 April 2018

Ward(s) Affected: All wards

Report By: Scrutiny Officer, Democratic Services

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Purpose of Report:

1. For the Scrutiny Committee to receive a presentation concerning the reinstatement of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line, pursuant to the Scrutiny Committee resolution on 18 January 2018 that East Sussex County Council and Railfuture be invited to give a presentation to this meeting.

Officers Recommendations:

2. To note the presentation of Railfuture and participate in an open Q&A session to inform the continuing debate in relation to the reinstatement of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line, and invite discussion regarding their existing strategy and proposal.

Reasons for Recommendation:

3. To comply with the Scrutiny Committee's right to invite people outside of the Council to address it, discuss issues of local concern and/or answer questions as stated in the Council's Constitution with regard to the Attendance by Others (Part 4, rule 15).

Information

4. At its meeting on 17 October 2017, full Council had a debate in relation to the reinstatement of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line. The Council agreed the following motion as its recommendation:

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

5. Following the recommendation above, the following three points were considered by the Scrutiny Committee on 18 January 2017 as areas which the Committee would benefit from receiving further information:
 - a) How the government may wish to proceed;
 - b) What the existing proposals were; 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.

It was resolved by the Scrutiny Committee that, before any scrutiny review was deemed necessary, representatives of East Sussex County Council and Railfuture would be invited to give a presentation covering this information and participate in a Q&A session open to all members of the Council at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 April 2018.

6. East Sussex County Council had rejected an invitation to the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 April 2018 with the following response:

“...Thank you for your email and sorry for the delay in responding.

Further to the request from Lewes District Council’s Scrutiny Committee to attend their meeting on 19 April to discuss the Lewes – Uckfield railway line, unfortunately no-one is available to attend the meeting.

I would suggest it might be more appropriate to invite Network Rail, who are responsible for rail infrastructure, to be invited to the meeting to give their perspective...”

Members to note that, as there was a delay in East Sussex County Council responding to their invitation; it was deemed too short notice to invite Network Rail to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 19 April 2018.

7. On 29 November 2017 the Department for Transport published *Connecting People: a strategic vision for rail* (see background papers). The following extract is from section 2 ‘An Expanded Network’:

“2.10 The rail projects underway and in development will restore lost connections and make new ones. The best projects will reflect the way our towns, cities and lives have changed in the last half century, and will recognise that new capacity will be needed in new places... “

Following this, the Cabinet Member for Planning wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for Transport seeking further clarification regarding whether this strategy

anticipated a project to restore the lost connection between Lewes and Uckfield. This letter was sent on 22 February 2018 and can be seen at Appendix A. No response has yet been received.

8. Mr Roger Blake, *National Board Vice-Chair, London & South East regional branch* and Mr Chris Page *National Board Chair*, will present considerations to the Panel on behalf of Railfuture, and participate in an open Q&A session to inform the continuing debate in relation to the reinstatement of the Lewes to Uckfield railway line.

Financial Appraisal

9. An annual budget of £1,000 is available to support the work of the Scrutiny Committee and its Scrutiny Panels. Any costs associated with the review proposed are expected to be minor, given that the research work can be carried out by Council staff.

Legal Implications

10. In considering the recommendations of this report, the Committee should adhere to the Scrutiny Procedure Rules set out in part 4 of the Council's Constitution.

Risk Management Implications

11. There is no requirement for an analysis of risk.

Equality Screening

12. An equalities analysis exercise is not considered necessary at this stage. If the Committee decides to proceed with the review, an equality analysis would be undertaken as part of the review and would be reported along with the review findings.

Background Papers

[East Sussex County Council's Full Council agenda and minutes.](#)

[Department for Transport – Connecting People: A strategic vision for rail](#)

Appendices

Appendix A – Letter to Chris Grayling MP, *Secretary of State for Transport*

Appendix B – Presentation by Roger Blake, *National Board Vice-Chair, London & South East regional branch*