

Minutes of a meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT** Committee held in the Town Hall, The Broadway, Crowborough on Tuesday 23rd March 2010 at 7.30 pm

Present	Councillors	Paul Adams Leigh Colbran * Phillip Fermor Damian McAlonan * George Moss Kay Moss Colin Stocks Sandra Timms Clive Wilson	Chairman
Also present	Cllr	Richard Stogdon Sgt. Steve Etherington Linda Butcher John Coleman 3 members of the public 1 member of the press	Town Clerk

* *Denotes non attendance*

APOLOGIES

Cllr Leigh Colbran – work commitment
Cllr Damian McAlonan – work commitment

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – None

MINUTES

Minutes – 26th January 2010

5728 RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2010 as confirmed be signed by the Chairman

Matters Outstanding

Country Park Entrance Area and Report from Sqn Ldr Whibley

Members had previously received a copy of the report handed in by Sqn.Ldr.Whibley.

Sqn.Ldr.Whibley was invited to address the meeting with any additional comments and the Chairman then addressed each item as detailed in the report having consulted with fellow committee members.

Privacy: It was felt the Council has made reasonable efforts to ensure a level of privacy that is consistent with the proximity of the house to the Country Park area, which was designated as such prior to development.

Where possible, the Ranger is encouraging groups to meet in other areas of the Country Park, but it is to be expected that visitors to the park will initially congregate in or near the car park.

Of the trees planted at the rear of the property for privacy purposes, only one has died. Replacing it may compromise the roots of neighbouring saplings, and therefore the most judicious course of action is to continue tending the remaining plants to ensure they provide the expected level of screening over the course of the next two to three years.

Beyond the boundary of 24 Osborne Road, maintenance of the woodland will require the felling of trees from time to time to maintain important habitats and to ensure public safety in the area. The effect of felling these trees has a negligible impact on the privacy of 24 Osborne Road.

The addition of trellis to the fence would not enhance the natural appearance of the Country Park area. Furthermore, the Council has spent considerable sums in an attempt to ensure the maximum amount of privacy is afforded to 24 Osborne Road, and it is questionable whether expenditure of more Council funds could be justified in this context, particularly since the tree planting is expected to provide a better level of screening in the near future.

Signage, in particular with regard to cycling: The original bye-laws that were proposed would have been problematic to implement, so a new set are being drafted, and are scheduled to be ready for display during Summer 2010. However, the presence of cyclists presents only safety issues, not privacy concerns.

Noise: There is no physical connection between the structure that supports the gate and the structure of 24 Osborne Road, minimising the acoustic coupling between the two. The gate and the process of regularly locking it outside normal hours of use will enhance the privacy and security of the properties in the vicinity of the Osborne Road entrance, and also helps to prevent fly tipping and theft.

Sqn.Ldr. Whibley explained that the opening of the gate often wakes him on a Sunday morning and said the gate was opened at 7.20am on the Sunday before last. The Town Clerk will check who was on week-end duty and try to arrange for later opening on Sunday mornings although the ground staff do have other duties to perform.

Safety: The use of sloping areas as toboggan runs is common during the infrequent snowy weather we experience in the UK, and during the recent snowfalls, despite many children enjoying the opportunity to sledge in the park, no injuries were reported.

Sqn.Ldr. Whibley produced photographs of young people on 'wheeled' skateboards and it was confirmed that the Byelaws will cover all wheeled vehicles and it is impossible to police the park 24 hours.

Parking: The presence of cars parking in front of the gate compromises privacy no more than pedestrian visitors walking to the entrance.

Mud on the car park: The Country Park is a natural area that is still under development. The council's priority has been to conserve the Country Park's wildlife and amenity value. If resources permit in the future, improving drainage in the car park might be an option to increase its usefulness during the wetter months of the year. However, the car park is near the lowest point in the park, which is a naturally damp habitat, so there is limited scope to mitigate this problem.

Relocating the car park to the other end of the Country Park is impractical for several reasons, including: Tollwood Road is a minor, single track route; the Tourist sign would need to be moved; significant cost would be incurred improving fencing; there would be an increased risk of unauthorised vehicles gaining access to the tracks in the Country Park; there is insufficient hardstanding in the vicinity of the Tollwood Road entrance.

Another councillor reported that they had enquired of another resident in Osborne Road who had responded that this was not an issue.

Traffic on Osborne Road: Visibility in the area around the Osborne Road entrance is excellent, and responsible road users will have no difficulty gaining safe access to the car park or passing the entrance on the highway. Since Osborne Road is a cul-de-sac, any speeding motorists are likely to be residents. If they are observed driving recklessly by their neighbours, they can be reported to Sussex Police's Operation Crackdown at <http://www.operationcrackdown.org/> or by phoning 01243 642222.

General: Recent management of the Country Park has significantly improved the security and appearance of the site.

The Chairman summed up by claiming that he was sure when the trees grow Sqn.Ldr. Whibley will benefit too.

Sqn.Ldr. Whibley responded that he thought the Council had done a wonderful job although too many trees had been taken down. He said most people use the park to walk their dogs and that there was a lot of dog mess and he hoped action would be taken to improve this situation. The Chairman responded that the Council would encourage them to be responsible dog owners and he was pleased school children enjoyed the park too.

In summary the Chairman reported that no further improvements would be made around the boundary of 24 Osborne Road although the car park may be further addressed. We have already expended considerable money. He then thanked Sqn.Ldr. for his report and coming to the meeting.

Tree planting to remember victims of domestic violence

Sgt. Steve Etherington was invited to speak and he advised that there were 863 incidents of domestic violence reported in Wealden during the year and two people could come and speak if requested to do so, Graham Lindfield from the police and Sandy Dennis from the County Council.

The committee considered an appropriate location and whether to plant a new tree or dedicate an existing tree and Canada Green or the Bluebell Wood were suggested. On balance it was felt an existing tree would be best and it was AGREED the Operations Manager and Park Ranger will locate a suitable tree and report to the next meeting.

It was reported that the footpath behind Beacon School has been greatly improved but there is a metal gate laying on the grass which needs to be removed and the Operations Manager would be asked to deal with this matter.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Uckfield-Lewes Railway

John Coleman's written report is attached to these minutes.

It was suggested that Sam Bryant should be invited to speak to the Council and the Partnership and it was AGREED the Chairman will get in touch with Sam and report back to the next meeting.

There were queries about who is responsible for Eridge Station as there is concern about certain parts.

There will be an article in the next Newsletter about the bus services.

The chairman thanked John for attending all these meetings on behalf of the Council and for attending this Environment meeting.

Parking

Michael Brooker was invited to speak about the parking in London Road outside his business.

He explained that people had parked diagonally for over forty years but recently the PCSO's had been issuing £35 tickets as they were enforcing the horizontal parking.

He advised that traffic is now moving much faster, which in itself is more dangerous, there are six empty premises but the new parking restrictions were causing great concern for the nine businesses still trading. He said that in all his time there, parking restrictions had never been enforced and if they were to be, then bays should be marked and signs installed.

Sgt. Steve Etherington advised that in October complaints had been received about parking in that layby and police had been asked to positively police it. However, if it was felt that that was not having the required effect then they could put the ticket books away for a period in order to assess the situation. He also confirmed that nowhere else in Crowborough has echelon style parking although it does work on the B2100 in Forest Row.

There was a suggestion that perhaps a compromise of 2/3 echelon and 1/3 horizontal might be better but larger vehicles which are longer would still cause a problem. Sgt. Etherington offered to allow echelon style parking in the layby for normal size vehicles but to police the waiting period, but to fine large vehicles and to expand the PCSO's discretion on this matter.

It was acknowledged that any permanent change would need to be discussed with all agencies including East Sussex County Council. The first step would be to put this on the agenda of the S.L.R. meeting on 8th April and Cllr Richard Stogdon offered to ensure Highway Officers were briefed on the matter.

5729 RESOLVED to ask the police to allow PCSO's discretion to enforce the waiting time in the layby, go easier on cars parked echelon style but to ticket/stop large vehicles that are causing an obstruction.

Sgt. Steve Etherington – CCTV

An e-mail from Sussex Police giving details of incidents involving the Crowborough CCTV cameras had been circulated to all councillors prior to the meeting but Sgt. Etherington was invited to talk through this for the sake of members of the public present.

Statistics – June 2009 to 2010

Total incidents in Crowborough monitored = 90

Total arrests generated through CCTV use = 7

Other initiated incidents through CCTV = 1

However, Sgt. Etherington then went on to explain about use of the CCTV in cases where public order is in question and police on the beat can be assisted by information being given to them via ear-pieces when CCTV operators are witnessing incidents. In answer to a question about the headcams, he explained that these are used in domestic violence cases when live evidence is recorded and this takes away pressure of prosecution from the victim because the police can then proceed. They also record language used.

Sgt. Etherington was thanked for attending the meeting.

TRANSPORT and HIGHWAYS

Street Lighting

Chairman's Report: A survey has been distributed in Jarvis Brook around the Forest Rise/Forest Dene/Heather Walk area. Responses received so far indicate that many residents have concerns about switching lights off during some of the hours of darkness (2am to 5am was suggested in the questionnaire). NOTED

Wealden District Council Road Safety Review

Chairman's Report: A copy of the report was only that day been e-mailed to members of the environment committee but some were unable to access via the link.

It was AGREED the Chairman will e-mail a pdf to other committee members and defer the item to the next meeting.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Carbon Neutral – update from Cllr George Moss

Cllr George Moss explained that the group had now reduced to three people although Catherine Cornes had expressed a wish to see the promotion of the meters and was happy to try and generate assistance. The committee is more than happy to welcome her input.

Emergency Planning

Chairman's Report: A date to have an initial meeting still needs to be set. Of the councillors that expressed an interest in this, Sandra, George, Kay and Clive are members of the environment committee. Could they come armed with some dates that they can make, and could we have the Town Hall diary available so that we can choose a date on the evening? Could I provisionally suggest April 12th, 14th, 15th, and 16th as dates to select from?

The Town Clerk advised that the new Emergency Planning Officer is Jim Foster but he is shared between Wealden District Council and East Sussex County Council.

It was AGREED to hold a meeting on Monday 12th April 2010 at 7.30 pm in the Town Hall and to ensure Cllr Tatjana Keenan is also advised as she offered to be on the Emergency Planning Working Party.

CROWBOROUGH'S NATURAL HABITATS

Country Park, The Ghyll and Bluebell Wood – The Ranger, Emma will attend and speak about her written report, a copy of which is attached to these minutes

In the absence of the Ranger it was AGREED to defer the recommendations to the next meeting, however, it was felt the balance of funds could be used for another Princes Trust group. It was further suggested that an A frame board could be placed in the Country Park to explain why trees are being felled. In the meantime, the report was NOTED.

FINANCE

Management Accounts to 31st January 2010

5730 RESOLVED to adopt the Management Reports as presented.

Management Accounts to 28th February 2010

5731 RESOLVED to adopt the Management Reports as presented.

Crowborough Country Park

5732 RESOLVED to receive the report from Sqn.Ldr. Whibley which the committee considered but decided to take no further action at this time.

The meeting closed at 9.40 pm

MEETINGS ATTENDED

Community Rail Partnership Uckfield Line Steering Group Meeting 27th January 2010

The Group recorded its thanks to Crowborough, Uckfield, and East Grinstead Town Councils, Buxted Parish Council, and Wealden and Tandridge District Councils for their contributions to the Community Rail Partnership which had been sought in part to pay for a new edition of the Lineguide.

East Sussex County Council was requested to provide an update on the station car parking discussions as soon as possible.

The Network Rail Kent Rail Utilisation Strategy (RUS) was just published and the Sussex RUS would follow very shortly. ESCC confirmed that they had sent a letter confirming their 6 rail priorities for the county. The Lewes-Uckfield re-instatement was included at number four.

The 2010 CRP Action Plan is now available for review by Partners to identify priorities. Actions specific to Crowborough include: -

To enable the provision of new station seats.

To enable additional cycle rack facilities.

To introduce the Station Partnership scheme (which will be launched in April).

Establish a team to produce station Travel Plans.

To help to obtain better connecting travel services to the station.

To assist in returning the station building to use.

It would be a great help if the Town Council, the Crowborough Partnership and other interested groups or individuals would offer help with the latter items. Please contact Sam Bryant the CRP Line Development Officer for more information.

Uckfield Line Railway Extension Group (ULREG) Presentation to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council 1st March 2010

The presentation drew the attention of the members and officers of the Council, and also some representatives from other Kent local authorities who were also present, to the advantages of the future re-openings of the Lewes – Uckfield and particularly the Tunbridge Wells lines. The meeting appeared pleased with what was put forward and asked interested, and in the main positive, questions which were well answered. During subsequent discussion several members and officers spoke positively about the benefits that would arise from the successful completion of the projects.

ULREG Meeting 10th March 2010

The meeting discussed the effectiveness of the most recent presentations, other matters and future actions.

It was agreed that the Tunbridge Wells presentation went quite well, as stated above. However, it was noted that three days later another Committee of the Council were likely to propose a new Transport Strategy that would remove the present safeguards protecting the disused track-beds in the Council's area. This proposal now seems to have been put on hold for the time being, but some action should be taken to make sure the views of neighbouring authorities are made known in Kent.

ULREG has not yet been able to visit Eastbourne and Newhaven and these will be contacted again to see if more support can be gained there.

Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee Meeting 10th March 2010

This meeting considered and approved the notes of the preceding ULREG meeting, and agreed to write to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council advising of the strong feelings in Sussex in favour of safeguarding railway track-beds of former lines to Tunbridge Wells.

Southern were not able to confirm the changes to Uckfield Line services reportedly coming in on 23rd May 2010. (Subsequently, it has been established that due to the extension of the East London Line trains to Crystal Palace and West Croydon it has been necessary to change the times of the weekday morning peak services on the Uckfield Line trains. The changes vary from one or two minutes to over ten, and so many people will be affected to a greater or lesser extent; no doubt some for the better and some for the worse.)

Southern claimed that currently the service was being maintained pretty well, and even the recent bad weather had not caused as much difficulty as might have been expected. However, there had been incidents that had not been handled as well as they should; in particular the one that involved a fatality in Edenbridge Tunnel that had caused very long delays to some passengers. Southern were studying the problems posed by these incidents with a view to amending procedures to minimise the effects on passengers.

The growing popularity of the trains is resulting in overcrowding on some of the peak hour services. This problem is not helped by the short platforms at many of the stations south of Hurst Green, the lack of gangways between the units (when these are run in multiple) and the lack of sufficient rolling stock. The Sussex RUS does at least propose that additional carriages will be needed, but suggests "by 2014" and "by 2019" as the time-scale. The separate Electrification RUS proposes that the Uckfield Line is electrified but at only priority three out of six. (This almost certainly means that additional diesel trains are needed in the short term and Southern and the DfT should be made aware of this problem and asked to resolve it as expeditiously as possible to avoid the severe overcrowding that will otherwise prevail).

Southern advised that Laura, who normally looks after passengers at Crowborough, has had her secondment elsewhere lengthened and, regrettably, it is not possible to recruit a permanent replacement until her future position is clarified.

OTHER MATTERS (Not covered above)

Crowborough Local Bus Service 228/229

Arriva (and Countryliner) are now running additional services around the town in the early mornings and evenings which do provide some quite reasonable connections with the train services at Crowborough station. These are run on behalf of ESCC and are funded by Section 106 monies arising from the past supermarket development agreements. This support will last for 3 years and therefore in order to secure a long term service on this scale passenger support is essential and adjustments to encourage this may be required. It is suggested that the Council may wish to seek the co-operation of Partners to encourage surveying/monitoring of the services. It is also suggested that the services could be mentioned in "Crowborough News".

RANGER'S REPORT- 23.03.10

Country Park

- We have received numerous positive remarks from members of the public regarding the development of the park. We will move on from the development phase through to an ongoing management phase in April

- The yearly activities in the rolling 5 year plan can be taken to be the same as the plan for 2012, unless there are extraordinary developments or new external advice.

RECOMMEND - The next professional management plan should be commissioned spring 2013 for implementation from Jan 2014.

- Practical tasks from the site management plan are on target including:
 - A dormouse survey is being commissioned
 - Tree works complete
 - 3 new picnic benches installed
 - Interpretation panels will be installed in April
 - Grant of £3,644 now received and a further £11,917 claimed from Forestry Commission EWGS – the activities we needed to do to earn this grant are complete.
 - Grant of £10,000 now received from SITA for Operation Kermit, via the Friends – This project is now fully reconciled.
- RECOMMEND – decision made on what to do with money remaining in Operation Kermit credit account for this project. (£8,597.41)
- Firewood – Further incidences of wood theft have occurred, including theft of logs in a stag beetle habitat construction.
 - Wealden's Healthy Walks Campaign – The site will host the first of these walks across Wealden in the spring, in conjunction with Active Play on April 15th.
 - Friends of Crowborough Country Park LNR
 - The AGM was rescheduled to 11th March. There is a proposal to develop the group to "Crowborough Conservation" to support other sites in the vicinity of Crowborough including the Ghyll & Bluebell Wood.
 - A grant of ~ £250 was received from Waitrose
 - Crowborough Art festival will use the site on 19th September to host an eco-land art day. A tester session will be held on June 25th.
 - Byelaws – These were presented to the Full Council meeting in March.
 - The car park is often flooded and action needs to be taken to address this. This is on hold until other discussions about the car park are addressed.
 - I am liaising with the Sussex Wildlife Trust about support for educational visits as we do not have the in-house resource to support as many school/ youth visits as would be desirable.
 - The Trefoil Guild donated a bird box as an expression of their continued support, following their guided tour last year. Our grateful thanks are expressed.

Bluebell Wood

- Practical tasks from the site management plan are on target: The bluebells appear to be thriving in areas where bramble has been cleared.
- The tree safety survey uncovered some problems that require surgery and the cost of this work is in the order of £1000. There is much honey fungus present

- in trees on the site and we should therefore budget for potential tree works in the future.
- The Scouts are making bird boxes for the wood.
- A local chainsaw sculptor will carve a crow from a felled sycamore for exhibition in the Crowborough Art Festival.

The Ghyll Park

- A free historical survey was made for us by the High Weald unit uncovering the site of the old reservoir and a site where there was evidence of iron works.
- Tree safety survey uncovered some problems that require surgery.
- The Ecologist will make her first site visit on March 18th.

Green Infrastructure

A meeting is being arranged for Q2/2010.

Finance

- FY09 Accounts

SUMMARY OF RANGER'S PROJECTS

Project	Budget	Expend.	Income	Notes
C.P. general	30,000	8,163.54	0	Non-grant related spending
SITA Operation Kermit (C.P. Grant)	n/a	4,313.27	8,597.41	Minute 5889 resolved that the committee cover the costs for Operation Kermit, up to a value of £11,000. The Friends of the Country Park will reimburse the committee when they have received the funding from SITA Trust, Greenprints flagship.
Forestry Commission EWGS (Country Park Grant)	n/a	7,409.00	15,561.10	Income includes £3,644.10 credited and £11,917 claimed awaiting payment
Country Park Total	30,000	19,885.81	24,158.51	These are the total figures including grant related projects
The Ghyll	35,000	1,312.67	0	
Bluebell Woods	1000	939.50	0	

The expenditure detail is included within the Management Reports that are circulated to all Councillors each month.