

Minutes of a meeting of the **ENVIRONMENT** Committee held at the Town Hall,
The Broadway, Crowborough on Tuesday 25th November 2014 at 7.30 pm

Present	Councillors	Quentin Burch	
		Michael Cooke	
		Elizabeth Fermor	Vice Chairman
		Philip Fermor	
		Beverley Johnstone *	
		Kay Moss	
		Ronald Reed	
		Wendy Scrace	
		Andrew Steen	
		Sandra Timms	Chairman
Also present		John Coleman	Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Comm.
		Clr Richard Stogdon	East Sussex County Council
		Philippa Hewes	Town Clerk
		David Foot	Operations Manager
		Susan Barnard	Operations Administrator
		1 member of the public	

* *Denotes non attendance*

APOLOGIES

None

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

MINUTES

Minutes – 30th September 2014

7331 **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 30th September 2014 as confirmed be signed by the Chairman.

Matters Outstanding (including reports on updates)

Lighting improvements at Jarvis Brook pedestrian crossing (7073)

The application for match funding was approved by the Lead Member on 10th November. NOTED

Trees at Clokes Corner (7235, 7236)

Replacement trees will be planted in the spring. Future Christmas lighting and the possibility of a Christmas tree at this site will be considered at the next meeting.

Additional planting of shrubs at Clokes Corner (7281)

The shrubs have been planted, in addition to winter pansies and hanging baskets.

Widening of footpath by new pedestrian crossing at Beacon Academy

The equipment cabinet has been removed and East Sussex County Council has been requested to adjust the width of the footpath.

Crowborough Cross Traffic Signals Improvement Scheme

The timing of the signals was altered to allow time for traffic turning right to clear. Initial monitoring indicated an improvement to clearance at the junction but concerns were raised at a recent Neighbourhood Police Panel Meeting that the situation has worsened now that drivers have acclimatised to the changes. The issues will be reported to East Sussex County Council.

RAILWAY REPORT

Further to his written report, John Coleman highlighted the news that Southern will acquire an extra 12 carriages for the Uckfield line next spring, which will enable main peak hour trains to be lengthened to 8 carriages. The recent Network Rail Sussex Route Study has rejected the reinstatement of the Uckfield to Lewes line before 2043. There are likely to be significant objections to the findings of the local Route Study and the Parishes Committee will contribute to this. John Coleman was thanked for his report.

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT

Request for a reduction in the speed limit on Beacon Road

The cost of the scheme has risen to £14,000, for which the Town Council is being asked to submit a bid for match funding of 50%. The police have raised objections to the proposal and are not willing to undertake enforcement. The proposal will be discussed further at a meeting on 28th November, which Cllr Richard Stogdon will attend.

It was **AGREED** to await feedback from the meeting. It was requested that a Sussex Police representative attends an Environment Committee meeting to discuss the enforcement of speed limits and other traffic issues in Crowborough.

Cleaning of road signs

East Sussex County Council has advised that members of the public must not undertake cleaning of road signs. Anyone working on the highway needs to have appropriate training and insurance. Some cleaning of signs will be undertaken by the groundstaff. Any damaged signs will be reported to the County Council.

Wealdlink Report August – October 2014

Cllr Sandra Timms reported on a Wealdlink meeting held 12th November and expanded on a written report covering the activities for August to October. Wealdlink has submitted a tender for the 226 route and other supported services which have been combined into one contract.

Disabled parking bays – Croft Road

Further to the possible change of parking restrictions in laybys in Croft Road to disabled use only, a formal application needs to be made by the police for a Traffic Regulation Order. This would be followed by a consultation process.

LIGHTING

To consider request for street lighting at new housing development – School Lane

It was **AGREED** not to install and maintain Town Council street lighting at this development. East Sussex County Council has advised that it will adopt and maintain lighting installed to comply with current standards.

CROWBOROUGH'S NATURAL HABITATS

To review report of tasks completed against Management Plans and other work

A list of tasks completed in October and November 2014, as part of the Management Plans for the Country Park and the Ghyll, was reviewed and noted.

Five Year Management Plan for Crowborough Ghyll

The existing Management Plan expires at the end of this year and a further five year plan is being prepared. NOTED

8.30pm – John Coleman left the meeting.

FINANCE

Management Account Reports to 30th September and 31st October 2014

- 7332** **RESOLVED** to adopt the Management Account Reports for the two periods ending 30th September and 31st October 2014.

Draft committee budget 2015/16

The draft budget was reviewed and some minor changes were noted.

RANGER

To consider the role of the Ranger

- 7333** **RESOLVED** to accept the revised job description for a ranger to work 16 hours a week.

URGENT MATTERS AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN FOR NOTING AND/OR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA

A bench at the junction of Ghyll Road and London Road has been destroyed in a traffic accident. Enquiries are being made as to whether this was a memorial bench.

A number of emails are being circulated regarding Gatwick issues. The Planning and Development Committee will consider any formal consultation.

The meeting closed at 8.51pm.

**RAIL REPORT for the ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING 25th NOVEMBER 2014
MEETINGS ATTENDED**

Uckfield Railway Line Parishes Committee 12th November 2014

Southern did not attend.

It was reported by members that recently the services had become worse in regard to time-keeping, reliability and the provision of useful information when delays occurred.

The problems and inconvenience for passengers, caused by the termination of late running trains at Crowborough was again discussed. For other Southern passengers this method of recovering the timetabled schedule may be acceptable. Unfortunately, for many of our line's passengers it is extremely unsatisfactory: those at Crowborough, Buxted and Uckfield may, unexpectedly, have to wait for up to an hour for the next train.

The "signalling failure" causes of delay seem to indicate either a serious lack of weather resistance by Network Rail's equipment on the line, or that it is no longer fit for purpose and needs replacement.

It is understood that Southern have recently been trying to recruit or replace staff, presumably to prepare for the merger into GTR. It is to be hoped that difficulties with this will be overcome in double quick time so that all trains can run as timetabled.

Representatives of the Committee will be making these points to Southern at the next Stakeholders' Meeting.

However, the Committee was very pleased with the recent announcement that Southern will be getting an extra 12 carriages for the Uckfield line next spring. After overhaul, these will enable the main peak hour trains to be lengthened to 8 carriages. This is ahead of what is required by the DfT franchise awarded to GTR.

The peak trains will be lengthened to 10 carriages when the line's station platforms have all been lengthened. Network Rail is bringing its programme forward and a completion date will be requested.

There will be major engineering works at London Bridge over the Christmas to New Year period and all users should check before travelling.

It was noted that the most recent draft timetable fails to provide an earlier Sunday train to London than the present 10.43 from Crowborough. This understood to be due to Network Rail's maintenance regime only having access to the line from the North.

The Committee then went on to discuss the recently published Network Rail Sussex Route Study. This has been put forward for public consultation and comments are required by 13th January 2015.

NETWORK RAIL SUSSEX ROUTE STUDY

Despite the amount of effort obviously put into its production, this Study was considered to be a most disappointing 205 page document, even though the earlier indicative report should have perhaps prepared everybody for its likely content.

The Study, which replaces the earlier Rail Utilisation Study (RUS) looks ahead as far as 2043, and in more detail at Control Period 6 (2019-24). To estimate the future traffic over these periods it utilises figures from the earlier Network Rail Market Study.

The new Route Study quite rightly sets out to look at the future of the Brighton Main Line as the principal part of the work, unfortunately the other parts of the extensive network are treated as considerably less important and problematic in assisting the assumed main task of getting people from the South into London (via Gatwick Airport). The logic being that, accomplishing this in the morning peak, all else will be well.

The result of the Study is that it recommends that up to £2bn be spent in CP6, or shortly afterwards, on removing the many, presently flat, junctions and replacing them with new flyover junctions and in addition increasing platform availability at some key stations along the Brighton Main Line itself. Various combinations of interventions (enhancements) and implementation dates, for overcoming these problems are provided, together with the respective funding requirements and benefits (additional trains) for each combination. Although no additional trains from Brighton itself are to be provided. The engineering works required for the interventions are very considerable and can hardly be undertaken without causing disruption to the train service over a period of several further years.

There would, however, be no additional running lines and so the tracks will remain similar to those put down in 1901. Increasing the tracks was delayed by the Great War and has not been initiated since.

[Of the existing problems, those that are north of the junction with the Oxted Lines at South Croydon are the stated reason for the opposition by the DfT (as advised by Network Rail's interim report) to discount the BML2 project].

Of course, since WW2, the Brighton Main Line has had to provide for the requirements of Gatwick Airport (including Gatwick Express trains), the Canary Wharf Development, served by new Overground metro trains, a huge rise in London (and Southbound) traffic and the Thameslink project (now revised as a metro scheme to take the pressure off the Underground). None of these have resulted in extra running lines being provided on the Main Line itself. Soon there is to be a new vast retail development adjacent to the west side of East Croydon station. Gradually the once efficient and comfortable main line is being effectively down-graded to become the main constituent of a Greater London metro system on which are to run the new DfT specified standee friendly trains.

So far as the Committee's main interest is concerned, the Study is disappointing in the extreme. Apart from the continuation of the protection of the track-bed, there is no suggestion of any further enhancements or extensions of the Uckfield line before 2043.

The possible use of the re-instated Lewes - Uckfield link is not seen as being capable of providing a worthwhile Diversionary Route for the Brighton Main Line. Because the 2 train paths per hour currently provided by the existing Hurst Green to Uckfield section of line are insufficient, and the trains would be too slow. To overcome this, the Study points out that the existing line would require to be re-doubled, where single line, and re-signalled and electrified. Another perceived problem is that for trains to run between Uckfield and Brighton itself they would have to reverse at or near Lewes (although the Sussex Stage of BML2 would of course enable direct running). For similar reasons, the Study concludes that the re-instatement is not capable of providing worthwhile additional Capacity for Brighton Main Line passengers.

The new Study reminds us that the re-instatement does not have a strong enough Business Case (as concluded by the Network Rail Report of 2008 which considered a minimal specification project, had questionable criteria, and is now quite out-dated in terms of local developments, traffic growth and Government stated policy.)

However, it is noticeable that none of the interventions proposed by the Study appear to have strong business cases, but that Network Rail will continue to work developing these.

The new Study, surprisingly perhaps, has not even suggested the significant annual cost savings that should be made possible and the operational and maintenance advantages that would also accrue to Network Rail and the Train Operator by being able to start and finish a major proportion of the daily Uckfield line workings at the South Coast, as required by the main traffic direction, rather than at the London end of the line.

In addition to this, it is clear to most that the timetable that is to be worked from 2018 is, to say the least, extremely challenging and that almost any delay anywhere will have the potential to cause widespread disruption. This challenge will hardly reduce whilst the interventions of CP6 mentioned above are implemented. On the other hand, it seems that no consideration has been given to the improvement in performance and reliability that electrification, double tracking and re-signalling of the Uckfield line would provide that might prove to be quite desirable when the Thameslink project is completed, from the points of view of overall timetable resilience and possible enhancement.

[It is noted that the Study does mention that a new Electrification RUS will be published next year and may deal with possible in-fill electrification schemes in the South East. However, it appears that Reigate - Reading is considered a higher priority than Hurst Green - Uckfield.]

The Study does not appear to take account of the untapped southbound traffic being available in the area between the Brighton Main Line and the London - Tunbridge Wells - Hastings Line, or of the economic growth that is being sought and anticipated in the area, and is supposedly being encouraged by the Government: this encouragement is supposed to include improving rail transport links.

It certainly appears that no proper aggregation of all the advantages of enhancements and extensions to the Uckfield line has taken place in preparing this Study for consultation and the Committee has agreed to put together a response to include the points made here.

J N Coleman 17th November 2014