

MINUTES of the MEETING of
the ENVIRONMENT AND
LEISURE OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held
on 12th November 2009

(To be read in conjunction with the Agenda for the Meeting)

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| * Cllr Diane James | * Cllr Patricia Ellis |
| Cllr Michael Goodridge | Cllr Tony Gordon-Smith |
| Cllr Mrs Jean Arrick | * Cllr Bryn Morgan |
| Cllr Len Bate | * Cllr Ken Reed |
| * Cllr Maurice Byham | Cllr Ian Sampson |
| Cllr Carole Cockburn | * Cllr Jane Thomson |
| * Cllr Stuart Connolly | * Cllr Ross Welland |
| Cllr Jim Edwards | * Cllr Andrew Wilson |
| Cllr Brian Ellis | |

Also in attendance: Councillors Richard Gates, Celia Savage and John Savage

*Present

40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brian Ellis, Michael Goodridge, Jean Arrick, Len Bate, Jim Edwards and Tony Gordon-Smith.

41. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

42. FORMAL QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda Item 3)

There were no formal questions asked by Members of the public.

43. TRANSPORT ISSUES – GUILDFORD-CRANLEIGH RAIL LINK (Agenda Item 4)

A meeting of the Committee was convened in 'Select Committee' mode to allow members to question representatives from ATOC regarding the opportunity presented to re-open the Cranleigh to Guildford rail line which was closed some time ago as part of the Beeching cuts.

The Chairman welcomed Members, representatives from a range of invited organisations (listed below) and members of the public to the meeting and outlined the background to the in-depth review, the 'Select Committee' process and procedure for the evening.

Members were advised that the meeting was an opportunity to hear directly from ATOC on the proposals for the reopening of the Guildford – Cranleigh rail link and to ask questions. Relevant third parties had been invited also for the opportunity to question and comment on these proposals and for

members to hear the wider views of those representing the community that would be affected by the proposals.

Paul Falconer, Planning Officer for Waverley Borough Council, provided Members with information about the history of the proposal and information about the planning considerations. He then introduced Ben Condry, Passenger Demand Forecasting Scheme Manager and Chris Austin, formally Head of Public of Affairs and author of the consultation report to the meeting.

ATOC representatives presented a detailed outline concerning the background to the reopening of the railway, its importance as a component to the local transport system, potential passenger demand and potential revenue, the estimated capital costs, timescale and the way forward for putting these proposals into action. The slides from this presentation are available on request.

Following the presentation, the Chairman opened the meeting to questions reminding Members and attending organisation representatives that a report to follow the meeting would be capturing this commentary.

The questions and any observations arising would then be submitted to the usual ELOS committee meeting in January 2010 for full consideration prior to any observations or resolutions being submitted to the Executive.

Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members

Member's questions identified both pros and cons regarding the reopening of the rail link. It could provide commuters with an easier access to Guildford and onto London and encourage housing and business development in those areas along the route.

Members questions highlighted the potential costs of the re-opening proposal, noting that the local authority would be expected to potentially fund associated feasibility study costs. They were advised that the overall costs would be met in a partnership arrangement with the local authority being expected to contribute to this. It was questioned who would champion the project.

Member's questions concerned retention of the existing cycle path located as part of the Downs Link and sought reassurance that both the rail line and Downs Link could run in parallel, although noting that in parts it may need to be rerouted due to the road network etc. Members were advised that due to the nature of the potential rail route reinstatement that there was sufficient scope to retain the cycle route and path alongside the rail line but that this would be investigated in more detail as part of any feasibility study.

The Committee also questioned how the proposals would affect the properties that backed onto the Downs Link, whether residents in these properties would still maintain an access route, if any land acquisition was required and the potential for planning blight. Members were advised that in other similar instances across the UK that the proposals had actually led to a planning and house value boom in the areas close to the railway and this could apply in this

instance as it would allow an easier commute into Guildford and London for users. .

The Committee questioned ATOC representatives reference increased traffic and parking provision for the two principal affected residential centres namely Bramley and Cranleigh. The response noted that the rail line could help alleviate some traffic as commuters and school children could use the train rather than the car to travel. Members questions highlighted that consideration needed to be given to car parking provision and the siting of stations given the impact that increased car usage in associated areas might have on communities. The importance of co-ordinating bus stops with railway stations and linking services was also stressed.

The Committee questioned the pricing strategy for rail line users. They were advised that the cost of a return ticket could be around £5 to Guildford and £8.50 for longer journeys. ATOC reassured members that further work regarding pricing would be undertaken. Members highlighted the need for any user pricing to be sufficiently attractive to entice existing car users onto the service and that a fast and reliable rail service would not on its own detract commuters away from using their cars, especially if they also had to pay for limited parking at stations.

The Committee questioned whether the existing Downs Link width of 12 metres was sufficient to accommodate the proposed rail link, whether this width extended for the full distance, whether or not there was a standard distance fence to fence required for an electric rail line. ATOC representatives advised affirmatives to the questions but would provide exact details post the meetings closure.

Questions were raised over the proximity of the railway for horses using the bridleway. It was also noted that the 12m width often included steep embankments which could impact on the provision of parallel rail, cycle and replacement bridleway facilities.

The impact of a potential rail link on the LDF process was raised.

Waverley Members not on Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee

It was noted that Surrey County Council were the relevant Local Authority responsible for Transportation. It was suggested that any feasibility study should include consultation of dwellings within ½ mile walk of possible station locations at Bramley and Cranleigh. The possibility of linking the Park & Ride at Arlington with the rail link was suggested.

Surrey County Council Waverley Local Committee – Jonathan Lord

Jonathan Lord suggested to the Committee that local opinion was divided in terms of support for the proposal but a main consideration was the funding which would only be possible if there were sponsors. He suggested that there should be very careful consideration given to consultation on the proposal to accommodate all opinion.

As Vice Chairman of the Local Committee he wanted to know what contact had ATOC already had with Surrey County Council (SCC) and what were they looking to SCC for, highlighting that it was unlikely that SCC would be able to help financially, but probably only in 'practical' terms. The Local Committee - Waverley had yet to meet to discuss these proposals but he would be feeding back the comments and information from the evening to a future Local Committee meeting.

Bramley Parish Council – Peter Wadham

Peter Wadham, representing Bramley Parish Council, advised the Committee that the Parish Council had yet to produce a formal view and could not do so until the details of any scheme were worked up in more detail. However at this stage the Parish Council was concerned about the potential traffic issues the proposal could bring to Bramley, specifically, more traffic through the village crossroads and the potential car parking problems that could be created. The Parish Council was also concerned about the effect these proposals would have on the residents living close to the rail line and particularly about the preservation of the Downs Link and the loss of a bridle way, both of significant value to residents both in Bramley and beyond. Bramley Parish Council also raised significant concern about the huge costs of funding such a project, the relative value of reopening the railway and the effect it would have on the local infrastructure. The potential impact of the planned 2000 houses at Broadbridge Heath in Horsham was raised as it was considered that some additional traffic would come through Bramley. It was also suggested that the impact on the Wey and Arun Canal should be taken into account.

Waverley Cycle Forum – Alec McCalden

Alec McCalden representing the Waverley Cycle Forum, advised the Committee that although the Forum were positive about alternate means of transport it was extremely concerned about the loss of a significantly valued established cycle route sited on the bridleway. The success of "Rail and Trail" in the USA was mentioned. The Forum had felt this was a tremendous opportunity for the Council, towns and villages, but the operators should ensure that they considered the needs of cyclists at stations to allow easy access onto the train and for safe and secure cycle storage at the stations and on trains themselves. It was highlighted that there are at least four building incursions into the current Downslink route.

Rudgwick Parish Council – Peter Harris

Peter Harris, representing Rudgwick Parish Council, reminded the Committee that the effect of the proposals extended further than the area covered by Waverley Borough Council. He highlighted the advantages that reopening of the rail line could deliver namely help alleviate problems within the villages because school children and commuters would come off the road and use the train as an alternative means of getting to work and schools. Acknowledging the need for adequate parking and access to stations along the route, he also suggested that it could be advantageous to consider a new station at Arlington

Park and Ride as many people use this facility and could alleviate some of the issues of parking. He also highlighted how the reinstatement of rail facilities in other parts of the UK had led to increased property values and other benefits to local communities.

Open Spaces Society – Ralph Holmes

Ralph Holmes, representing the Open Spaces Society, endorsed the comments made by others about the significant value of the Downs Link. The Society asked for assurance that the bridleway would be maintained if the proposals went ahead. Furthermore, they felt that the proposals could place more pressure for housing in Cranleigh and thought that there were cheaper alternatives that could be implemented, such as improving the bus service, before turning to reopening the rail line. Concerns were also raised about the height of fencing required to separate electrified tracks from dogs and children using the Downs Link in close proximity.

Cranleigh Chamber of Commerce – Andrew Speers

Andrew Speers, representing the Cranleigh Chamber of Commerce, raised a number of points in support of the proposals. It was felt that the reopening of the rail line could help support local small businesses and positively encourage housing development in the village. Removing cars from the road would also help reduce CO₂ emissions. There was a concern about the effect it would have on the local infrastructure, surrounding villages and it was felt that serious consideration should be given to traffic management and car parking. A further concern was the affordability and speed of the rail line and it needed to be attractive to draw commuters away from using their cars. It was highlighted that there was an opportunity for the Cranleigh Hospital proposal to take into account the possible siting of a railway station at Cranleigh with the possibility of two.

Middleton Press – Vic Mitchell

Vic Mitchell, presenting Middleton Press, advised the Committee about an alternative proposal to ATOCs for consideration. The Committee received a short presentation about a 'Light Rail' option and how this would require less space, be far cheaper and have a less environmental impact than the current heavy rail proposals. Mr Mitchell also raised with the Committee the benefits of the tram option within and linking towns.

Friends of the Earth – Chris Meeks

Chris Meeks, representing Guildford & Waverley Friends of the Earth, advised the Committee that they welcomed the proposal to reinstate a single line track and felt if it had still been in place today there would be no question of closing it. They felt that this would be of significant benefit to the community as an alternative method of transport and would encourage cars off the road. Their main concern was maintaining the Downs Link and would not want to see this lost but rerouted where necessary. In considering the proposal it is important to recognise benefits which are not financial, such as the mitigating impact on climate change.

ATOC Response

ATOC responded to the concerns raised by attending organisations, in particular the issues in relation to traffic. They felt that the proposals would help to relieve traffic on the roads and car parking could be looked at in more detail as part of the feasibility study. The report proposal had assumed using existing car parks but additional car parking would be considered within any feasibility study.

Concerns regarding the fare/pricing structure were noted and ATOC confirmed that they would be working closely with the bus service to ensure good connectivity. ATOC had also noted the concerns expressed by the Cycle Forum and would ensure that their needs would be considered as part of the ongoing discussions on the proposals. The railway could result in two way flow of movement giving better access to the countryside and direct access onto the Downs Link. It was suggested that a Community Rail Partnership could be an option. Light Rail had not been considered as part of the report but it was not currently technically possible to bring light rail onto the main railway line. It was confirmed that ATOC had recently met with officers from Surrey County Council and received copies of the previous feasibility studies from 1996/97. Finally, ATOC did not believe that the proposals would cause a planning blight in the direct and surrounding areas and confirmed that no compulsory purchase order of land would be required.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked all those contributors to the meeting specifically ATOC for their informative and valuable briefing and responses; and advised the Committee that a meeting report arising from the proceedings would be considered at the next ELOS meeting of the 12th January 2010 before a report was submitted to the Executive, potentially in February 2010.

The meeting concluded at 9pm.

Chairman