

The Planning Inspectorate
Room 3J Kite Wing
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol
BS1 6PN

please reply to:

70 Dynevor Road
Stoke Newington
London
N16 0DX

For the attention of Tim Salter:
tim.salter@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk

Your ref: APP/P1425/23/3314192

22-03-2023

Dear Mr. Salter,

**Town & Country Planning Act 1990, appeal under S.78
Appeal by Gleeson Land, land east of Harrisons Lane, Ringmer, East Sussex**

Railfuture is Britain's leading, longest-established, national independent voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users, to support economic (housing and productivity) growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities. We seek to influence decision makers at local, regional and national levels to implement pro-rail policies in development and transport planning.

Railfuture's objection dated 07-02-2022 submitted to Lewes District Council for planning application LW/21/0986, now APPEAL/23/0004, had to confine itself to planning policies established at the time. Railfuture's long-term strategic interest in Ringmer in general and in this planning application and appeal in particular is not however covered by any current planning policy adopted thus far by Lewes District Council. To that extent therefore what is offered below can only be by way of a background briefing so that the Inspectorate is aware of the wider context of our original objection and our continuing interest.

Since the closure of the Lewes - Uckfield rail link in 1969 there has been, in common with so many other parts of the country which lost their passenger railway services, continued interest in a revival of such a link. That interest was heightened by the closure of the link between Eridge and Tunbridge Wells in 1985, which cemented Uckfield's position at the end of a long branch line and sealed the loss of all rail access south to Lewes and Brighton.

Railfuture's specific interest came to a head a decade ago when the County Council was considering options for road schemes within Uckfield, one of which would have severed the former rail alignment. Our engagement in those consultations then led to an independent specialist adviser being commissioned to produce what became "*Access and Connections: East Sussex - opportunities to align railway investment to the economic growth requirements of East Sussex*" published in July 2013. The Wealden Line Corridor is examined on pages 57-70, four options for potential routes of a revived Lewes-Uckfield rail link are illustrated on pages 62-63, and a route via Ringmer is identified as one such option on page 63.

From Network Rail's "Lewes-Uckfield Railway Line Reinstatement Study" report published in 2008 and since, studies have found a revived link technically feasible but lacking a business case. Then in March 2017 the Department for Transport published its April 2016 "London and South Coast Rail Corridor Study" report which identified a new economic growth-based approach, rather than the more limited transport-based approach of previous studies.

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk

Railfuture has for the past six years recognised, embraced, and advocated the merits of such a growth-based approach in holding better prospects of a viable business case being developed for a new rail link. We presented our approach to Lewes District Council's Scrutiny Committee, at their request, in April 2018. We launched our new campaign leaflet "LUcky garden village" at an annual public event in Uckfield in July 2019, and then at a public event in Lewes in September 2019. Our most recent formal presentation was, at their request, to Lewes Town Council's Planning Committee in August 2022.

In recognition of the issue identified earlier, namely that a new Lewes-Uckfield rail link lacks any adopted local planning policy basis, Railfuture has engaged with the work of both Lewes and Wealden District Councils as they prepare their new Local Plans, including responses to their formal consultations in 2021. The author represents Railfuture in the Transport Forum of the shadow sub-national transport body Transport for the South East, formed in 2017. TfSE has since conducted a number of consultations and workstreams such as Area Studies which have afforded opportunity for a new Lewes-Uckfield rail link to be set in an appropriate sub-regional as well as local context.

TfSE's work has in March 2023 culminated in the final adoption by its Partnership Board of their Strategic Investment Plan to 2050, which gratifyingly from Railfuture's perspective identifies a 'radial resilience corridor' between Brighton and Tunbridge Wells. It specifically references an 'Uckfield – Lewes Wealden Line Re-opening' and also what is described as a 'Spa Valley Line Modern Operations Re-opening' between Eridge and Tunbridge Wells. The two are identified as interventions with a medium-term implementation timeframe (which is stated as the 2030s), at pre-Strategic Outline Business Case project stage (ie yet to develop a business case), and with next steps being (another) 'feasibility study.' Six delivery partners are identified as the Department for Transport, Network Rail, TfSE, local authorities, transport operators, and other private sector organisations. TfSE's role is identified as four-fold: Pre-feasibility work and Funding, Business Case and Scheme Development and Funding, Use of Analytical Framework, and Advocacy and Securing Funding. Taken together, that should probably be taken by the local planning authorities as a strong indicator of the strategic policy direction of the sub-national transport body on the specific matter of a Lewes-Uckfield rail link.

It nevertheless remains unclear for the purposes of this appeal whether the site in question will in any way be affected by such a link. It probably remains the case however that the growth-based approach of the 2016 report published in 2017 is the most likely to support a viable business case for the link, and that a route via Ringmer will be a strong candidate for consideration within that approach. In that eventuality, the Ringmer - Broyle Side gap offers a potentially attractive rail alignment and station location, implying that at least some of the appeal site, even if developed, may very well come under detailed scrutiny for rail purposes.

Further details of Railfuture's approach to the question of a new Lewes-Uckfield rail link can be found here: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Uckfield-Lewes> and regular quarterly updates are published in the centre-pages of the London & South East regional branch newsletter, here: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/branches/index.php?dashboard=London+and+South+East&group=MAG>

Yours sincerely

Roger Blake BA, MRTPI (Rtd), MTPS
Railfuture
Vice-Chair, London & South East regional branch
Director for Infrastructure & Networks, national Board