

West Sussex Local Access Forum



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Sent by email to: planninginfo@midsussex.gov.uk

13.1.23

Dear Sirs

Re: DM/22/3806|Reinstatement and re-opening of the former Horsted Keynes to Haywards Heath branch line, connecting to the existing freight line at Ardingly – Bluebell Railway

I am responding to the above consultations on behalf of West Sussex Local Access Forum (WSLAF).

West Sussex Local Access Forum (WSLAF) is an independent advisory body, established under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to give access advice to local authorities, statutory organisations and non-government organisations. In giving that advice, the Forum's main objective is to ensure the existing network of public rights of way (PRoWs), as well as the wider access network, is protected and where possible enhanced. The Forum has a balanced membership of knowledgeable and experienced users (walkers, cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers), landowners and other interests (including conservation, disabled access, landscape). For further information about the Forum please visit www.wslaf.org.

The Forum understands the significance of the Bluebell Railway as a popular tourist attraction in the district. Large numbers of visitors from all over the country are drawn to the area and, in addition to appreciating a fine example of a preserved steam railway, it is the stunning countryside setting in the High Weald AONB which makes the experience so special.

Members are very keen to ensure that these proposals maintain and, wherever possible, improve the existing access to this countryside via the PRoW network. In addition to protecting access to the countryside, it is also important to maintain the amenity value of existing routes and to ensure that where any alternative routes are proposed, their amenity is of equal or enhanced value.

We note that the supporting documentation submitted does not currently contain sufficient information to assess, at the required level of detail, the impact of this application on Active Travel and the PRoW network. We therefore urge the Council to request clearer, more detailed information from the applicant so that the application can be properly considered.

In particular we would like to see more information regarding the proposed diversion of the existing permissive paths P1 and P2, near Avins Farm (as shown on the attached WSCC IMap extract). These paths currently form an important link between Footpaths 11 Ar and 25Ar and run partly along the bed of the original line. Although the Planning Design and Access Statement states, and the drawings show, that this existing path will

be replaced by a farm vehicular access along a similar line as the current link, there is no indication that permissive access rights will be maintained. Removal of this link will produce a dead end on Fp11Ar and will remove a north-south link in the access network. The only other such links locally are along local roads to the east and west. These are becoming more heavily trafficked and are a less safe option for users. It is essential therefore that this link is maintained and that a safe crossing of the proposed railway line is provided. We would like to see this replacement route dedicated a public right of way to provide permanent access.

We note that some concern has been expressed by a local farmer regarding the suitability of the proposed alternative route suggesting that the land is clay and wet with a number of streams crossing the route. We therefore suggest that some ground investigation works may be necessary in order to confirm that the proposed route is practical and that maintenance of the surface is not going to become an ongoing problem. Details of the proposed specification for the track and who will be responsible for future maintenance are also requested.

We are also aware that a DMMO application concerning a path in the area has been made to WSCC, details of which are enclosed with this submission. We request that this is taken into consideration and provision is made within the proposals for a suitable safe crossing point to the railway north of Bursteye Farm to link this route with Fp11Ar.

Connectivity of the PRow network between fp11HK and fp34WH relies on the use of a section of the Highway along Station Approach in Horsted Keynes where a new bridge is proposed. It would appear from the drawings that provision has been made for pedestrians passing under this bridge and we would seek confirmation that this is will be suitable for all non-motorised users (NMU's).

At the western end, College Road acts as a north-south link between PRow, for example Bw 24Ar and Fp 25Ar. We note that the application includes the construction of a new box tunnel in this location, under the road. It is not clear if the proposed work will affect this road or if it will remain in use and unaffected throughout and after completion. We therefore seek clarification and confirmation that safe and permanent access will be maintained.

Also, where Fp 15Ar crosses over the existing tunnel at Lywood Common, it would appear that this path will be unaffected by the proposed works and we seek confirmation that this is the case.

We are concerned that any development of the railway will lead to the loss of a very significant number of trees and a reduction of the existing green corridor which, in turn, is likely to have a negative impact on the environment and could potentially deter PRow users from accessing the countryside. We therefore urge the Council to ensure that the extent of tree removal works is kept to an absolute minimum, that appropriate protection measures are put in place to preserve the retained trees (both during the construction works and beyond) and that suitable mitigation measures are taken to minimise the negative impacts of the works by extensive replanting (recognising that the ratio of new trees planted to replace the established mature trees removed will need to be significantly greater than one to one).

Whilst we note that the principle of these proposals may generally be supported by DP19, the Sustainable Tourism policy in the District Plan, we note they are not necessarily conducive with the Council's ambition to promote "Active Travel". If this development is approved, a potential opportunity to provide a more sustainable project by opening the disused line as a shared use path for all NMUs would be lost. This alternative use for the line could provide a very significant enhancement to the existing

PRoW network by improving connectivity between paths to the north and south and providing much enhanced access in the district for all active travellers to improve their health and well-being.

We note that West Sussex Transport Plan 2022-2036 identifies a key issue in any proposed transport development as 'public health and well-being', which improved access will provide.

This letter constitutes formal advice from the West Sussex Local Access Forum. Mid Sussex District Council is required, in accordance with section 94(5) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to have regard to relevant advice from this Local Access Forum in carrying out its functions.

We should be grateful if you would update us with any future amendments to the scheme and provide us with an opportunity to comment further should any additional relevant information be provided by the applicant.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane Noble', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jane Noble, Forum Officer
West Sussex Local Access Forum

Copy for information to: All WSLAF members