WEALDEN LINE CAMPAIGN

15th September 2026

WD/2025/0922/MEA - LAND WEST OF UCKFIELD - OWLSBURY FARM, HORSTED GREEN, LITTLE HORSTED, UCKFIELD, EAST SUSSEX TN22 5TJ

This is our formal OBJECTION to the above Planning Application to construct approximately 1,700 homes on the land comprising Owlsbury Farm.

We are in full support of Network Rail's position on this application, which states: *'The development fails to sufficiently safeguard the Uckfield-Lewes railway line and is therefore in conflict with the adopted Core Strategy.'*

Following closure in 1969, strenuous efforts were made to safeguard the trackbed between Lewes (Hamsey) and Uckfield for future reinstatement. In due course, policy TAE22 was adopted, despite objections from ESCC Highways which made several attempts at undermining its effectiveness. The policy was also challenged by private developers who wanted to extend the Bellbrook Industrial Estate; this was successfully defeated in 1989.

In 1990, ESCC then weakened the policy (then known as CA/T8) in its County Structure Plan by inserting the words 'significantly' and 'possible' – thus it read: 'IT IS PROPOSED TO RESTRICT DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD SIGNIFICANTLY PREJUDICE THE POSSIBLE FUTURE REINSTATEMENT OF A RAILWAY ALONG THE ROUTE OF THE FORMER LEWES TO UCKFIELD RAILWAY, NORTH OF THE JUNCTION OF THE HAMSEY LOOP AY HAMSEY.'

Continuing efforts were then made by both WDC and ESCC to rescind the policy to allow other developments, specifically on the relinquished station site at Uckfield; e.g. a large retail supermarket in 1999 by Robin James Investments Ltd, as well as ESCC Highways 'Uckfield Gyratory Road' in 2005. Prior to this, in 2000 ESCC had, through its consultants, Mott MacDonald, succeeded in significantly undermining the Trackbed Protection Policy by changing it to 'LOW-SPEED, SINGLE-TRACK OPERATION ONLY'. Even though we strongly objected to this in writing (17th May 2000) the response from Mott MacDonald (30th May) only said: *'Your prompt response was appreciated and will allow East Sussex County Council to review your comments before the next draft of the Local Transport Plan is presented to Cabinet*'.

Not unexpectedly, ESCC ignored us, hence this is the origin of the 'Low-speed, single-track operation only' classification which is now being used to justify the creation of a so-called 'Greenway' which the developers of Owlsbury are deploying as a sop in the hope of justifying their extensive housing scheme.

This 'Greenway' is NOT a 'Transport Scheme' – and can never be described thus. It is, at the very best, a leisure/recreational route for walking, cycling, horse-riding etc. It is no more a 'Transport Scheme' than the South Downs Way, the Vanguard Way – or any other of the many footpaths and trackways across East Sussex. As with, the 'Cuckoo Trail' on the former Heathfield – Polegate railway line, there is no public transport function whatsoever, despite the fantasies of its outlandish proponents.

The Uckfield Line is an extremely important and strategic railway which must be returned to its previous main line status, double-tracked and electrified. It serves the most populous corridor second only to the Brighton Line. Its function is not confined to rail transport between Uckfield and Lewes, as some of its detractors claim, but the entire corridor from Surrey (Warlingham/Oxted) through Kent (Edenbridge) and into East Sussex (Crowborough, Buxted, Uckfield) – areas which are seeing massive housing expansion. Pertinent to this is the expansion of the Tunbridge Wells area.

The value of the Uckfield line stretches far beyond its immediate area and once reconnected it will prove invaluable to the region encompassing the aforementioned counties, as well as London. The Sussex coastal towns of Eastbourne, Seaford/ Newhaven; the City of Brighton & Hove, as well as Lewes, will benefit markedly with the introduction of fast, comprehensive train services throughout a rapidly-growing area. It is also, the *only* route capable of relieving pressure on the overloaded 'at capacity' Brighton Line – as previous rail managers, Train Operating Companies and Network Rail have declared many times.

Therefore, any encroachment directly upon the trackbed; viz, the FULL-WIDTH railway property which previously existed must not be allowed. The corridor must be properly safeguarded for reinstating the railway for which, Transport for the South East has designated for mainline operations.

Furthermore, for safety reasons, any development that is proposed too near the operational railway must be disallowed. Whilst we have no objection to a 'Greenway' between the two towns – if constructed and funded by the developer – it should be kept at a very safe distance from the railway. This is because, according to Network Rail's 2008 Engineering Study into reinstating Lewes – Uckfield, the new line would be engineered for 90mph operation.

The continuing absence of the Uckfield line performing its proper function as a major transport route, weakens the attractiveness and worth of the region. All competent construction companies recognise the tremendous value of good rail connections in providing a premium to their developments and a distinct attraction to purchasers. Equally the GDP of East Sussex, and it could be said, the wider region, is materially disadvantaged by the continuing absence of this railway.

We concur fully with Network Rail's objection: *'The application will stifle the future delivery of the Uckfield – Lewes railway link and impact on safeguarded land and conflicts with adopted policy.'* We therefore trust WDC will act in the interests of Sussex and beyond by disallowing any encroachment by this 'Greenway'.

Brian Hart
(on behalf of the committee and members of the Wealden Line Campaign)