

UNADOPTED

POLEGATE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on Monday 17th August 2009 in the Council Chambers, Council Office, 49 High Street Polegate at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Cllr Mrs M Piper (Chair), Cllr T Voyce, J Rogers, M Cunningham, R Martin A Watkins, G Carter, S Shing, Mrs D Joy, Mrs J Bigsby and Mrs J Voyce.

1 member of the public and 3 members of the Uckfield Line Rail Extensions Group (ULREG)

8748 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllrs J Harmer, S Barber, T Wright And Mrs C Berry

8749 Declarations of interest

Cllr A Watkins – represents other Local Parishes – personal and non-prejudicial
Cllr M Cunningham – employee of Southern Rail.

8750 Emergency Item – High Street Public Toilets

Cllr G Carter brought to everyone's attention a letter that had been published in the Sussex Express recently regarding the Public Toilets in the High Street. The letter had complained regarding the overall state of these conveniences and it was felt that a strong letter should be sent to Wealden District Council asking what they intend to do about the cleanliness of the toilets. The Town Clerk stated that she had sent a report via the Wealden District Website but as yet had no response. Cllr S Shing stated that he had a copy of the schedule of cleaning for the toilets and he would let the Town Clerk have a copy.

It was resolved that the Town Clerk would write a letter of complaint to Wealden District Council asking them how they intended to rectify this position.

8751 Local Development Framework – Polegate Town Councils Response.

The Council had a presentation given to them by representatives of the Uckfield Line Rail Extensions Group. Cllrs Ian Smith (Uckfield), Duncan Bennett (Firle) and Eddie Collicott (Seaford) explained to the Council that they are a Campaigning arm of the long-established Uckfield Line Rail Parishes Committee. Their purpose is to monitor the current service and consult with the Train Operating Company on issues involving operations of the line.

ULREG was formed recently to pursue the arguments in favour of re-opening for Public use both the Uckfield to Lewes link and the Eridge to Tunbridge Wells Central Link.

ULREG believes that the political climate at the moment provides extra impetus to The aims of ULREG. In the past few months:

- Both the Sussex and the Kent Route Utilisation Studies have highlighted the pressure on the current lines to deal, for example, with the capacity problems facing the Brighton Main Line and the need for rail customers to gain better access from Mid and North Kent to East and West Sussex and vice versa
- The Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) has published a Report entitled "Connecting Communities" that inter alia, refers to the Uckfield to Lewes Link
- The Central Rail Corridor Boards Uckfield to Lewes Railway Line Reinstatement Study Report , commissioned from Network Rail, has been published and confirms the technical feasibility of re-opening whilst the Business Case has not been proven (the Business Case outcome is being challenged by Rail Line Parishes Committee)

Cllr S Shing left the meeting

Cllr Mrs Piper thanked the representatives from ULREG for their very informative presentation.

The draft response had been circulated beforehand for consideration. The Councils Response to the Local Development Framework was discussed and necessary amendments were made.

The following is the responses that Polegate Town Council made to the Local Development Framework:

Please tell us which of the housing options is the most appropriate for Wealden
Option 6

Please give reasons for your choice.

Option 6 would provide the opportunity for regeneration in Uckfield and Crowborough by creating sustainable new homes and sound local employment opportunities.

Reliant on the re-opening of the Lewes – Uckfield railway, development focused in the north west of the District would deliver: a) a much needed new rail link in the north west, b) a reduction in the need to travel by car in the north, c) avoidance of more pressure on road networks in the south, d) a high proportion of affordable housing where it is needed, e) easy access to and from London and Brighton for employment, education, health, tourism.

One of its secondary advantages is "that the significantly lower levels of housing in Hailsham/Hellingly and Polegate/Willingdon may be more consistent with Hellingly and Willingdon and Jevington Parish Councils' opposition to further large scale growth". Polegate Town Council is equally opposed to large scale development, as stated in its Town Masterplan.

Option Six is supported by many Town and Parish Councils in the locality. Polegate Town Council adds its support to this Option.

If you do not agree with any of the suggested housing options, please tell us how you would like to see housing growth distributed.

Polegate Town Council is of the opinion that there is little choice for Polegate within the housing Options given. With the exception of Option Six which Council supports and Option One, which it would support should the railway line on which

Option Six is dependant be undeliverable, Options Two - Five predetermine that Polegate will receive major housing development of unsustainable proportions. Council feels strongly that this would be contrary to the Polegate Town Masterplan.

Development where it has been requested (Option Six) or in a proportionate spread across the existing settlement hierarchy (Option One) would give managed expansion to accommodate families/businesses wishing to remain in their environs.

However, a well positioned NEW settlement could also enable Towns and Parishes to maintain their identity whilst creating the opportunity to build an innovative, forward thinking, 21st century village within historic Wealden.

Polegate residents and Town Council are vehemently opposed to major development in Polegate and consider a new settlement Option should still be considered.

To invert this question, the reasons why WDC proposed distribution to Polegate should not be delivered are:

1. Polegate is primarily a small residential settlement with adequate facilities to support the day to day needs of its community. The town centre is constrained by a lack of space to accommodate further significant development. It would therefore seem logical to prioritize the enhancement of its neighbouring larger towns of Eastbourne and Hailsham, which already have a sound basis for developing economic regeneration.
2. Every effort should be made to maintain the rural character of the area, particularly the spaces between Polegate and Hailsham to the North, Polegate and Berwick to the West, and Polegate and Eastbourne to the East. Infilling these spaces would spoil the natural boundary lines, reduce open spaces and destroy the character of each town or village, in direct opposition to PolicyBE3 - 'Open space should be undeveloped gaps within settlements'.
3. Polegate residents enjoy the 'village community spirit' which still exists in the town. The percentage growth proposed in Options Two, Three, Four and Five would destroy that. Indeed, should Willingdon not receive any major development, the proposed percentage change in dwellings 2006-2026 for Polegate would be as high as 50%. This is unthinkable and should that development take place on sites 16a, 16b or 16c, a disembodied, unsustainable satellite to the town would result, contrary to the social objective of promoting social inclusion and wellbeing.
4. The Polegate Town Masterplan emphasizes that any housing allocation should be within land south of the Polegate by-pass in order that it will integrate with the existing settlement of Polegate, in accordance with 6.4 – Integrated Housing Development in the GVA Grimley report. Additionally, any planning gain achieved should be spent on directly benefiting both new and existing residents/facilities. The development should be of a sympathetic scale and design and include sufficient 4 bed units to enable growing families to stay within the Polegate community as well as starter homes.
5. Polegate Town Council wishes to challenge the disparity of the housing allocation between north and south Wealden. It is highly appropriate that a great deal of emphasis is given to preserving the integrity of the Ashdown Forest and

its environs. Why, then, is there no reference to the importance of the newly granted National Park status of the South Downs and the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty with which Polegate and Willingdon share boundaries? It seems absurd that 7000 out of a proposed 11000 dwellings should be built in south Wealden, which is geographically smaller than north Wealden and which borders Eastbourne, a town which has more than met its targets for delivery of new homes set under the South East Plan.

6. The current options for growth in Polegate depend on a reliable infrastructure being in place before houses are built. However, this has proven to be difficult if not impossible to expect. It is not a reason to delay planning permission and road works in particular are not expected to take place in advance of any housing being built, or indeed at least until 2015. The implications for existing residents should be of importance when discussing the options given in the LDF as any strain on existing roads would be detrimental. Results of ESCC 12 hour traffic counts support the fact that traffic flow through the High Street, which reduced immediately after the opening of the bypass in 2002, has returned to and has exceeded its former level (5543 movements in June 1999, 4670 in May 2003 and 5806 in June 2007). Together with high volumes of traffic returning to the A2270 and B2247, improvements should be made to managing through traffic to take advantage of the bypass completion before any sites are developed in or around Polegate.

7. Whilst excellent links exist on the railway and buses, the A27 trunk road requires further improvement prior to taking any increased volume of traffic. The bridge at Beddingham has benefited traffic flow but there are still bottlenecks at certain points of the A27 which remain unaddressed and the stretch between Polegate and Lewes continues to be particularly dangerous and inadequate. Likewise, the Cophall roundabout in its current form, ie without grade separation, is a deterrent to many road users from using the Polegate by-pass, resulting in traffic reverting to its previous routes via the High Street.

8. Existing educational facilities and medical centres in the area would need adequate financial support from relevant agencies to accommodate additional residents. With reference to already overcrowded cemeteries and burial grounds, it seems unlikely Polegate could sustain such a provision due to high levels of the water tables in the area.

9. Although there is currently a waiting list for social housing from people in Polegate, residents are concerned that if the social housing stock is increased significantly, tenancies will be given to people from outside of the area. In the absence of set criteria which would ensure that people with proven Polegate associations should be given priority, it could result in families with high levels of social/medical need moving into the town.

10. Polegate cannot sell the housing stock it currently has and it is a huge leap to justify the necessity to build more. One assumes that this is target hitting, not addressing the needs of the people of Polegate.

Please tell us which of the employment options is the most appropriate for Wealden.

Option 7

Please give reasons for your choice.

Contrary to the Eastbourne Hailsham Triangle report, the Town Council does not consider Polegate to be suitable for focused development. Demographically the population of Polegate contains 37% of people over 65, so therefore the work available may be covered by workers from outside the town and not be beneficial to the people living here.

Polegate is located on a mainline railway servicing Brighton and all stations west, London Victoria and Folkestone to the east. This attracts commuters into the town for whom there is inadequate parking provision, causing great inconvenience to residents in surrounding streets, who rely on on-street parking in the absence of driveways and garages. The suggestion of a Parkway Station has been ruled out and the rail networks show no indication they would be prepared to make a financial commitment to provide additional car parking for commuters, resulting in these vehicles taking spaces from potential retail customers as well as local inhabitants.

Polegate is supported by a High Street which comprises small retail units together with one larger convenience store. The majority of the small shops are privately owned and staffed by the owners, together with the help of family and friends. The building of more houses and business parks may therefore not necessarily provide more retail employment opportunities for the people of Polegate. The transformation of Polegate proposed in the favoured GVA Grimley Report Spatial Scenario 1 would require enormous support and commitment from private investors in order to achieve a service capacity beneath which Hailsham has already attained. However, if Spatial Scenario 3 was to be favoured and Eastbourne and Hailsham supported in their regeneration proposals, Polegate residents could benefit from improved employment, tourism, leisure facilities and high quality public services within easy reach, without the need to duplicate them by encroaching into Greenfield sites surrounding the town.

The A22 both north and south of Polegate and the A2270 between Polegate and Eastbourne currently lacks capacity particularly at peak times and are inadequate to support the growth envisaged in any of the options. The Cophall roundabout and A27 trunk road west are inadequate for additional commercial vehicle use and it is known that the funding for the necessary road improvements will not be made available until the middle/end of the plan, if at all. Polegate Town Council supports growth in Eastbourne and Hailsham, being already well established centres of employment to which Polegate residents have easy access by road and public transport.

Is there anything else you wish to tell us about our vision and strategic aims or the suggested options?

There is an over-riding impression that the South East Plan is dominating the LDF process and that central government will succeed in imposing vast quantities of new housing on Wealden. It is imperative that the District Council robustly supports local Councils in their bid to protect their attractive, rural identities and does not destroy them with unwieldy development that cannot be integrated into existing settlements.

The LDF process has given much emphasis to reports commissioned from professional agencies from outside the area. It is hoped that this final consultation will enable residents and local Councils the opportunity to

communicate our views to the District Council decision makers on equal terms with the professional town planners and consultants.

It was resolved by 9 votes for and 1 abstention (Cllr A Watkins) that this would be the response made by Polegate Town Council

Downland Protection Petition

It was resolved that Cllr John Rogers would represent Polegate Town Council in signing a petition to protect the South Downs Foothills, including the Cuckmere Valley from the development of housing.