

Heated debate over reopening historic railway line between Cranleigh and Guildford

More than 2,000 people have backed a petition to reopen the railway line between Guildford and Cranleigh



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Former railway station in Bramley on the closed Guildford to Cranleigh line

Calls to reopen a historic railway lane between **Cranleigh** and **Guildford** - shut nearly 50 years ago - have been backed by thousands but sparked fears about more development.

An unnamed firm has now undertaken a study to see if the Downs Link project would be viable after being contacted by Guildford's Liberal Democrat candidate Kelly-Marie Blundell.

The private company has reportedly expressed an interest to invest in reopening the line which closed in 1966 - 100 years after it opened.

Ms Blundell told *Get Surrey*: "We have more than 2,000 signatures for the Cranleigh to Guildford line campaign and this must not be kicked into the long grass by **Waverley Borough Council** or **Surrey County Council**.

"This would help tackle continued infrastructure problems between the two. With recent proposals in development, infrastructure is vital.

"However, Guildford's **MP Anne Milton** has written to residents in Cranleigh to say such a railway line proposal is unfeasible.

"This is not the case, as demonstrated in Tavistock and Cambridge, where a community infrastructure levy was used."

A community infrastructure levy is a contribution fee paid by developers who receive planning approval for schemes, which could be used for transport, parks or schools, for example.

Although the county council has said it would not fund the re-opening of the route, Ms Blundell claims it would be open to a private firm or investor to do so.

Yet there are concerns that with improved infrastructure comes more developers.

Mrs Milton said: "There is considerable discussion about whether the Downs Link should be used as a rail link, a bus corridor or not at all. "Following the two meetings I held in Cranleigh, it is clear that one of the main concerns people have about any new development is our over-stretched infrastructure.

"A number of developers at the meeting in January suggested the construction of a guided busway between Cranleigh and Guildford along the Downs Link, as a possible way of mitigating extra traffic.

"However, I believe we should be mindful that greatly increasing infrastructure capacity can be a green light to considerably increased development.

"I was pleased to hear that Surrey County Council see, not least, the importance of retaining the Downs Link for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

"So I have a number of concerns about new uses for the Downs Link and no one has yet considered what happens at Guildford."

In a letter to Mrs Milton, Paul Millin, group manager of travel and transport at the county council, said that even with the upper range of new potential housing within the area, it is not clear that any potential increase in demand would be sufficient to make re-opening the link for rail, or as a bus guideway, economically justifiable.

Mr Millin also suggested that the cost would be tens of millions of pounds, adding: "With no obvious promoter, spending taxpayers' money on revisiting earlier work seems of little value."

Cranleigh Civic Society welcomed any initiative that might relieve the traffic chaos that it says blights Surrey.

But a spokesman added: "We appreciate that any new transport links must provide value for money for taxpayers and be part of a county-wide infrastructure

development programme.

“We believe traffic issues here in Cranleigh cannot be dealt with in isolation from other village communities nearby, and from Guildford.”

Susan Parker, leader of the Guildford Greenbelt Group, does not support the re-opening of the Downs Link.

She said: “I’m not in favour for the reason that with improved infrastructure in that area will come more housing development. ”Furthermore, the Cranleigh Downs Link will only partly use the old track, which is now a much-loved cycle and footpath.

“The proposal, as I understand it, is to re-route the final part of the track on to the A281 near **Shalford** and then to run along the road as a tramway for the final section, into the congested centre of Guildford.

“This road, which is already gridlocked most mornings, cannot cope with red lights in order to give trams free access to the route on an uninterrupted basis, and this would ensure near permanent gridlock.”

Ms Blundell plans to share the results of the feasibility study when they are ready later in the year.

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