



## Bluebell Railway Welcomes Council Funding Over East Grinstead Housing Access

3rd October 2022

The Bluebell Railway has welcomed a council payment for allowing access to the new housing development at East Grinstead.

Mid Sussex District Council has agreed a one-off payment of £692,500 to the Railway that will enable the creation of a new Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) at Hill Place Farm in East Grinstead.

Councillor Robert Salisbury, MSDC Cabinet Member for Planning, said: “Natural England has advised the council that one of the best ways to protect Ashdown Forest from increasing visitor numbers is to provide alternative areas for people to visit. That’s why, whenever developers want to build new homes within 7km of Ashdown Forest, they are required to provide Suitable Alternative Natural Green space or funding towards the improvement of an existing one. “The new SANG at Hill Place Farm is a wonderful place for local people to relax, exercise and enjoy the natural surroundings. It’s fantastic for people to have such beautiful green spaces right on our doorstep, and it will only get better over the years as more improvements are made. “We’re grateful to the Bluebell Railway for supporting public access throughout the SANG site and I hope this funding helps the railway in its efforts to switch to more sustainable energy sources. The Bluebell Railway is one of the foremost tourist attractions in our District and plays a vital role in preserving our heritage. “The council has provided funding to the Bluebell Railway in advance, so they aren’t required to wait for developer funding to come through and are able to progress immediately with their plans to improve the railway. The council will then retain the financial contributions made by developers until the advance has been repaid.” Geoff Mee, chairman of Bluebell Railway plc, said: “We have always prided ourselves on looking after the environment along the line in this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We will use this money to improve our environmental credentials by placing solar panels on top of some of our buildings in order to reduce our rapidly increasing business energy costs.”

In Mid Sussex, developers seeking to build new homes within 7km of Ashdown Forest must pay towards the creation and maintenance of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces. Those developer payments will then gradually repay the council’s investment in the Hill Place Farm SANG. The policy, which is supported by Natural England, helps residents to access green spaces that are close to their homes and protects Ashdown Forest from excessive visitor numbers, which could affect the protected bird species that nest in the forest. The new SANG, which is just off Turners Hill Road in East Grinstead, has been provided by Developers Taylor Wimpey and Vistry as part of plans for 200 new homes at Hill Place Farm. The SANG is divided into two parts, with the Bluebell Railway line running through the middle of the site. Mid Sussex District Council is providing the Bluebell Railway with a funding advance of £692,500 to provide safe access to the SANG and to support the development of the line. Visitors will be able to access all areas of the SANG by using a tunnel underneath the Bluebell Railway to cross the line. The Hill Place Farm SANG features grassland habitats, natural woodlands, and benefits from stunning views of the historic Imberhorne Lane viaduct. The SANG has been enhanced by a programme of planting that, will complement the existing natural environment as it matures and a new walking route around the edge of the site makes it easier for people of all abilities to enjoy the space.