

Rail plan could signal the end for nature trail

Conservationists to oppose redevelopment of line

Luke David

A POPULAR nature walk could be closed down to link Highgate by rail to Hackney in the East and Wimbledon in the South, the Ham&High has learned.

The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has drafted plans to use parts of the disused North London Railway, which was turned into Parkland Walk nature reserve in 1976, to realise their Cross Rail Two project.

The disused railway line between Finsbury Park and Alexandra Palace was last used for passenger trains in 1956.

The last service travelled on the line on July 3 of that year and closed because it depended entirely on visitors to Alexandra Palace and was no longer profitable.

An SRA spokeswoman told the Ham&High the proposals would use two miles of the former railway to link Hackney with Chelsea and Wimbledon.

"The proposals for Cross Rail Two are at very early stages of development.

"The Highgate to Alexandra Palace line is one of the proposals being considered. We are considering a few other options."

She added it would be a sensible option to use that stretch of the line because it was not a residential, built-up area.

But David Bevan, Parkland Walk conservation officer for Haringey Council, said he would vehemently oppose the plan.

"The land belongs to Haringey Council but I know the SRA has powers to override us," he said.

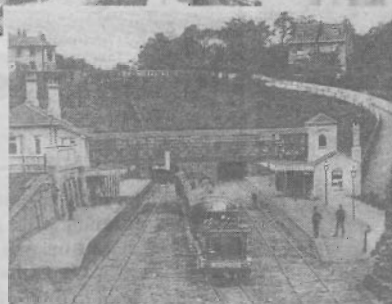
"It would be vehemently resisted because the Parkland Walk is unique; it is London's longest statutory nature reserve.

"They have no business destroying a unique feature and I will fight them to the death."

Mr Bevan added he was retiring next year and Haringey Council would not be replacing him.

But the Muswell Hill Metro Group (MHMG), which has been campaigning for a tram or light rail system on Parkland Walk between Finsbury Park and Muswell Hill, with a possible extension to Alexandra Palace since 1988, has vowed to keep up pressure to ensure it goes ahead.

Ivor Wiggett, secretary of MHMG, said: "We now have a situ-



Ivor Wiggett of the Muswell Hill Metro Group at the tunnel on Parkland Walk where Highgate Station (inset) used to be.

Main picture by Nigel Sutton

ation where the roads from Highgate and Muswell Hill into Finsbury Park have reached critical capacity – it is gridlock.

"Haringey Council is opposed to reopening the line but if the government was behind the scheme any objections by the council would be swept away for the greater public good.

"If the government say they want that line they will get it."

The news comes as conservationists prepare for the golden jubilee celebrations next Saturday, marking

50 years since the last passenger train travelled along Parkland Walk.

Hundreds of people are expected to turn out to the event, which will be held in the Highgate Bowl in Holmesdale Road from 1pm, to celebrate the closure of the three-mile service.

Each of the old stations will have different activities. A nature walk will start at 1.30pm and a dog show, maypole, and egg and spoon races will be held.

luke.david@hamhigh.co.uk