

Barnstaple to Bideford train line re-instated - pipedream or reality?

Energy prices are going up so fast, we wonder where it will end. Petrol and diesel prices are at a record high and this was all beginning before the effect of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

These rocketing prices in the cost of transport will push up inflation and make everything more expensive to buy.

As someone put on Facebook, last year we weren't allowed to travel more than five miles, this year many will not be able to afford to drive more than five miles.

This doesn't make life easy in a rural area like North Devon.

Cycling, walking and public transport are going to become more and more popular.

Unfortunately, the public transport in much of our area is very limited.

Some of our villages get very few buses and only part of North Devon is served by the Barnstaple to Exeter railway.

At the last full North Devon Council meeting, Councillor Graham Lofthouse, lead member for climate change, moved a motion to support the

North Devon
Council leader
David Worden



re-instatement of the Bideford to Barnstaple train line for passengers and other services.

This will now be debated by a future strategy and resources committee.

In drawing up the motion, Councillor Lofthouse had worked with Fremington parish councillor Tim Steer, who is the director of Bideford Railway Heritage Centre and ACE Rail lead.

The motion gave six reasons why a link between Bideford and Barnstaple would be of benefit to Northern Devon:

- to provide an alternative method of transport between the two major towns of North Devon and, in particular, to help reduce vehicle commuter traffic
- to help alleviate some of the

current traffic congestion that occurs, particularly at rush hour at the Cedar's roundabout and the Sticklepath Hill area of Barnstaple

- to help reduce the greenhouse gases (GHG) traffic emissions by using electric trains in an effort to meet the Devon Carbon Net Zero target

- to link Torridge and the coastal strip, including Bickington, Fremington, Yelland and Instow with the wider country via the Exeter Tarka line connection

- to bring more prosperity to residents who will be connected with the line and to the wider area
- to open up easier access for tourists to visit the area.

The motion also requested NDC to include the aim of providing a rail link between Barnstaple and Bideford in the joint North Devon/Torridge local plan, which is currently being revised.

A scheme like this does cost a lot of money and NDC is not responsible for public transport, so Councillor Lofthouse requested working with partners and organisations to lobby those who may help to make this happen, including Great British Rail,



Barnstaple railway station

Picture: SUBMITTED

Devon County Council and the Government.

There are a number of organisations already looking to support the re-instatement of the Bideford to Barnstaple train line but clearly a feasibility study would need to take place.

For example, is there room to have a line adjacent to the Tarka trail or would that not be possible because the trail is used by walkers and cyclists?

Many hoops will need to be overcome to make this happen.

Some might argue that perhaps it would be more realistic to improve the Barnstaple to Exeter line and speed up the service. It is already used by many people and has become even more popular in

recent years. Perhaps improving the bus services should be a priority.

So, is this a pipe dream or could it become a reality?

Certainly, it will take some effort and lobbying to get the finance to do something like this but it could be the first step to further expansion of the rail network in our area.

After a gap of nearly 50 years, daily passenger rail services have returned to Okehampton.

The Dartmoor Line opened on November 20, 2021, and is the first line to be reinstated under the Department for Transport's 'Restoring your Railway' initiative. Is it desirable that a similar thing should happen here?

No robots can ever replace Devon's sheepdogs

What a pleasure to listen to David Kennard, famed for his starring role in Channel 5's children's show, Mist: Sheepdog Tales.

At a luncheon at Ilfracombe's Carlton Hotel, he entertained a more mature audience with tales of faithful sheepdogs, past and present, all with unique personalities, and still essential to sheep farming.

A livestock farmer at Morteheo's Borough Farm, David's cattle are currently clearing bracken that degrades soil quality and pastureland.

His GPS-guided Belted Galloways are the best method of doing so, and David has enthusiastically embraced technology while retaining traditional methods of land stewardship.

The cows' electronic necklaces guide them away from the precipice above the sea, from which he has previously lost herd members.

British farmers are among the world's most efficient, and their predecessors' legacy is that beautifully managed patchwork of fields we see from

The Gazette's
man in
Ilfracombe,
Dave Griffin



the aircraft window exemplifying generations of wise custodianship.

It's the very essence of Devon.

Farmers are tired of armchair environmentalists preaching to our food producers.

Meanwhile, beloved of the dewy-eyed romantics at Hampstead dinner parties, is the concept of rewilding, which by definition is wholly unmanaged land turning to scrub and wilderness.

Such an indulgence is unaffordable in a country our size.

In the light of recent events, I asked David if Britain should strive for self-sufficiency in crops and livestock and he agreed that we should. He told

his audience about Welsh sheep farmers being offered millions by investors to plant trees on grazing land.

He condemned the practice of mulesing, a painful and odious, but legal procedure inflicted upon Australian sheep; it's a hideously cruel and widely banned form of flystrike prevention. No Australian lamb for me, ever.

EVERYTHING HURTS AFTER TURNING 70!

I was recently described as the Gazette's resident dinosaur, and that's not far off the mark.

I certainly felt as old as an ageing stegosaurus when getting out of bed this morning.

My legs were as stiff as broom handles, and my back and shoulders felt as though I'd done ten rounds with Tyson Fury.

As if! Moreover, I was stone deaf, the obvious consequence of the drops I had filled my ears with moments before drifting off.

My feet felt all squelchy thanks to the heel balm I had applied to them before getting into bed, the nightly anointing being an attempt to soften the

hardened callouses which emerge with age.

This 'topical emulsion' is slippery, so my bleary-eyed trip to the bathroom was energised by a spontaneous Torville and Dean performance across the floor.

I almost tore the shower screen from its hinges as I grabbed it to steady myself.

You've never heard of Torville and Dean? Then my point is made.

Getting older is the long journey into antiquity and there is no return ticket.

Everything aches, everything hurts, and some things are thicker than they were twenty years ago, mainly skin, cataracts, and one's oesophagus.

Certainly not hair, which gets thinner and greyer before disappearing altogether.

And yes, I know what baldness is associated with, but I'm still determined to fritter my grandchildren's inheritance away to retain what hair remains.

In the 1960s, my locks rested upon my shoulders, but now it gets industrial daily doses of

Alpecin and Folligain to help supercharge the precious follicles still reluctantly producing the odd wispy.

Increasing with maturity is the number of tablets consumed in the daily pill-popping regime.

Down the hatch each morning goes Atorvastatin and Candesartan to lower cholesterol and reduce blood pressure alongside the government issue Vitamin D sent to me during the pandemic. Thanks, Boris.

They're added to the rainbow of medication accompanying my porridge. Blue ones, orange ones, white ones. I've forgotten what they're for. Then it's inhalers, drops and creams to prolong and preserve us.

There are, however, advantages to advancing years.

They include the gift of friends at my Ilfracombe Probus, U3A and Friendship clubs, and extended family, even if just to share our aches and pains with. And more time of course. Next year, it's back to India, Australia, and Burger Joint breakfasts in New York with my daughter.