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Campaign call to put Bideford 'back on track'



Wednesday, December 22, 2021

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## Top of the class for Christmas

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Picture: NIKI TAIT

**Tom wins  
Citizen of  
the Year  
award**



**Two North Devon primary schools are celebrating a bumper Christmas present.**

Government inspectors have delivered a 'good' performance rating for Witheridge and High Bickington Academies.

The accolades are even more remarkable as they come as the schools battle their way through one of the worst pandemics in modern history.

**JIM PARKER**

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Head teachers Rob Norton, at High Bickington, and Lucy Ratcliffe, at Witheridge, praised the staff, children, parents and governors for the team effort which has led to the 'fantastic' rating.

**Full story: Page 4**

**Wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year**

**From all the team at the North Devon Gazette**



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# Campaign call to 'put Bideford back on track'

TIM HERBERT  
tim.herbert@archant.co.uk

**A campaign is underway to improve connectivity to Bideford through a more prominent place in the national rail network and support is coming in from across the community.**

'Restore Bideford to the national rail network' was the call when Bideford's mayor David Ratcliff, Cllr Peter Christie and Tim Steer, director of Bideford Railway Heritage Centre, met OkeRail's Kevin Ball and Railfuture director Roger Blake at Bideford Station.

The meeting was to discuss the next steps for a Government "Restoring Your Railway Fund" bid.

Mr Ball outlined the 14-year campaign by OkeRail which has culminated in the recent successful return of a seven-day-a-week passenger service between Okehampton and Exeter under the initiative.

Roger Blake gave excellent advice on progressing studies to bring the railway back to the area better than before.

Tim Steer ACERail lead and Bideford Railway Heritage Centre director, said: "We were able to show our VIPs presentations on how the railway might look and included a design that might build the new railway on a sea defence, like that being built at Dawlish.

"The whole Tarka Trail from Bideford to Barnstaple is in danger of being under water by 2030, so a sea defence with integrated railway and active travel on top would be an engineered solution.

"I named our railway line the Atlantic Coast Express railway or simply ACERail."

ACERail is the grouping of stakeholders set up to campaign and progress a bid to the Restoring Your Railway Fund.

Railfuture is Britain's leading independent organisation campaigning for a bigger better railway.

It is a voluntary group representing rail users, with 20,000 affiliated and individual members.

Railfuture is not affiliated to or funded by train companies, political parties or trade unions.

OkeRail is a forum made up of representatives from a variety of stakeholders, and have campaigned for the re-introduction of the passenger service between Okehampton and Exeter.

With services now introduced, OkeRail will continue to campaigning for continued improvements with the service, the construction of Okehampton Parkway Station and the reinstatement of the 'northern' route to Plymouth via Tavistock.



From left, OkeRail's Kevin Ball, BRHC director Tim Steer, Railfuture director Roger Blake, Mayor David Ratcliff and Mayoress Philippa Ratcliff, with BRHC's Steve Trowbridge, Karen Harley, Spencer Taylor, Andrew Toon with Cllr Peter Christie

Pictures: ACERAIL

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