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Dear Mr Bell,

North Devon UNESCO Biosphere 10-year Strategy 2025 to 2035

I am responding highly selectively to just those parts of the consultation on which, with my organisation's very specific interest, we feel that we can most usefully contribute.

1. What is your connection to the North Devon Biosphere?

Barnstaple-born and bred, I live and work in the Biosphere area.

I represent an organisation or business – Railfuture Ltd (Devon & Cornwall regional branch, of which I am Chair). I am also Chair of the Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station, which is a station adoption group recognised by the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership and an accredited member of the national Community Rail Network. In both capacities I am those two organisations' representative in the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance.

Railfuture is Britain's leading and longest-established, independent national voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users, to support sustainable economic growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities. We seek to influence decision makers at local, regional and national levels to implement pro-rail policies in development and transport planning.

The NDRDA was initiated by Railfuture in late-2023 and now has within it two dozen partner and stakeholder organisations. Its mission, as presented to delegates participating in the Alliance's second annual Convention in Barnstaple in March 2025, is *"To achieve delivery of a modernisation programme for North Devon (Tarka) Line passenger rail services between Barnstaple and Exeter, and their extension to Bideford, championing their transformational benefits for communities and businesses and advocating to decision-makers the economic, social and environmental case for developing and investing in the project programme."*

Further details of the work which gives expression to that mission can be found in Railfuture's website here [Railfuture | Bideford and Barnstaple to Exeter](#) and at the foot of that page is a link to the diary which records the origins of the current work in March 2021 and activity since.

From the NDRDA's mission flows interface with the North Devon Biosphere as the 19th-century rail alignment – still in use as a freight railway at the time of the original designation as a biosphere reserve in 1976 – which was converted in the 1980s to a 20th-century active travel route, is now the subject of assessment for restoration in the 21st-century to serve its original purpose as a mainline railway while, most importantly, maintaining a continuous active travel route. We note that while the former rail alignment itself is within the Biosphere's Transition Zone, it directly abuts the Buffer Zone which includes the bridge at Fremington Pill.

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk

We particularly note this very last part of the register in the Risk Management section:

- ~ **Description of risk:** Biosphere Reserve is undermined by other authorities making inappropriate development decisions. Eg National Infrastructure
- ~ **Impact:** M
- ~ **Likelihood:** M
- ~ **Counter measures:** Strong promotion of the benefits of the Biosphere. Close working with the authorities. Be strategic and outwardly communicate only the growth that is appropriate to the area.
- ~ **Contingency:** Major departures can be modified and improved. The ethos can be “not what is done, but how it is done”

It goes without saying that we have no wish to be party to the Biosphere Reserve being “undermined by other authorities making inappropriate development decisions.” We do wish to engage with the Biosphere Partnership, noting that its members include charities and voluntary sector organisations. We would hope to develop a conversation and collaboration to seek best alignment between our objectives - noting that “Sustainable economic development and green business growth” is part of the Biosphere Partnership’s “What We Do” - maturing a shared vision for our shared part of northern Devon while respecting and committing to resolve difference.

Overall reflections on the draft 10-year Strategy:

61. Overall, how supportive are you of the strategy's vision and direction?
Very.

62. What do you think are the biggest opportunities in this strategy?
As expressed in Targets 8, 14 and 19.

63. What do you think are the biggest risks or challenges?
Funding sufficient to maintain and develop activities eg recent challenges with the Biosphere Business Partner Network.

64. Is there anything missing from the strategy that you would like to see included?
~ Page 8 ‘The Place’ / ‘What makes it special?’ makes no mention of the Transition Zone.
~ Pages 21-25 ‘Living in balance with our nature’ may be the most appropriate section within which, in the spirit of the Preamble’s “consultation draft ... is deliberately aspirational to set the high ambitions of the Partnership reflecting the sustainable development needs in the area.” to reflect an ambition for an increase in the mode share of visitors to the Biosphere by sustainable transport (active travel and public transport). In that context we note the reference to ‘Green and sustainable tourism’ on page 28 and Target 12 on page 29.

65. Would you like to be involved in future Biosphere activities or consultations?
Yes.

Yours faithfully,

Tim Steer
Chair, Railfuture Devon & Cornwall regional branch
Roger Blake
Acting Convener, Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance
Infrastructure & Networks Director, Railfuture national Board

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