

Rail link will ruin Tarka Trail

I SAW the front page story of the *North Devon Gazette* today regarding the Bideford train line.

There has been a lot of coverage of this scheme which clearly glosses over the negatives of this scheme.

Most people do not seem to support the train line, it is just being pushed by a very vocal minority.

1 - Commercial model

No one can provide a business case for this scheme. I work for a small fintech.

Anything we do requires a full business case that outlines the plan, the costs and the commercial return.

That level of planning doesn't exist for the proposed train line but money is being spent on it already.

2 - Better use of train lines

We have good bus links between Bideford and Barnstaple.

Neither town is has large scale employers. Commuters need to get out of the region to find meaningful work. It would be better to link Barnstaple to Tiverton by fast train to enable commuters to get to the rest of the country.

The Devon locals need to accept that the work isn't here and in order to access meaningful jobs we need to travel.

3 - Tarka Trail

The proposed railway can only follow the Tarka Trail route. There isn't a viable alternative. The railway would destroy the Tarka Trail.

The Tarka Trail is of more value than a rail link. It draws tourists into the region. It fills up the pubs, cafes and leisure venues. It promotes healthy living and exercise. It allows cyclists to travel between Barnstaple and Bideford without going on the road. To remove the Tarka Trail is a backwards step.

I am not alone in holding these opinions, there is a ground swell of support on social media every time I try to raise these points.

However, comments seem to be erased quite quickly when non support for the railway is expressed.

All of the reporting I have seen so far has ignored the above. Please can you introduce some balance to your reporting and maybe talk to more than just Tim and his very vocal small band of railway enthusiasts.
Oliver Harding-Fleet

Brownfield sites for over a million homes

CPRE - the countryside charity - has long campaigned for a brownfield-first approach, more genuinely affordable housing and an end to speculative development.

We welcome Labour's support for these policies. There are enough 'shovel-ready' brownfield sites in the UK for 1.2 million new homes - this is where we should start.

We are concerned about the

Poignant reminder of a great fundraiser



An aerial shot of Minis assembled at Hartland Quay shows the scope of the famous annual fundraising convoys organised by Terry Baker, who has died at the age of 71. Terry leaves an incredible legacy after bringing the Legendary Grand Tour to North Devon every August bank holiday weekend for 25 years and raising hundreds of thousands of pounds for Children's Hospice South West. **Full report, pages 1 & 2** Picture: AW Photographic

rhetoric. The Green Belt is crucial to solving the climate, nature and food crises and it is protected by law for a reason. This new approach must be considered against this reality.

We must also abandon the existing piecemeal approach and look at the Green Belt as a whole. If done badly Labour's policy could permit landowners to run-down land for speculative development.

Instead, the Green Belt needs to deliver affordable homes on brownfield sites, while today's scrubland can become the woodlands and wetlands of tomorrow.

Roger Mortlock
CPRE chief executive

Full recognition at last for family pets

THE UK's biggest cat charity Cats Protection welcomes the Pet Abduction Bill, which has cleared another hurdle through Parliament.

The Bill - proposed by Anna Firth MP - will give cats and their owners greater protection in law and help prevent pet theft.

Pets share our lives, and any pet owner will confirm that they are much more than just mere property, they're part of the family. It is impossible to compare the companionship, fun and comfort that pets bring

to our lives to something like a bike or a mobile phone.

Pets are sentient beings, capable of feeling pain, fear and stress, which is what makes pet abduction a particularly nasty crime. Stolen animals are at high risk of mistreatment, and owners may live in permanent limbo, never knowing what has happened to them or if they'll ever come home.

This new law would finally give pets the full recognition they deserve and help stamp out the criminal activities that prey on much-loved pet cats by onward selling or from breeding kittens to sell. With an ever-growing demand for purebred and pedigree cats in particular, we need to act quickly to stamp out backstreet breeding.

A new and specific offence will also enable police to finally build an accurate picture of pet theft across England and Northern Ireland by requiring a specific log, as opposed to the current situation where pet theft is recorded as property theft. Currently, it's a catch-22 situation - we know pet theft is going on, but because it's not being individually recorded we can't get a grip on the scale of it.

We're hugely encouraged to see the Pet Abduction Bill making such swift progress through Parliament

and will be working tirelessly with other animal charities and politicians to push it forwards. We cannot let this important opportunity to protect pets and owners slip through our hands.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading cat welfare charity and has helped an average of 157,000 cats and kittens a year over the last five years through its national network which includes around 200 volunteer-run branches and 32 centres.

Annabel Berdy
Senior advocacy and government relations officer, Cats Protection

Going to great lengths to help our butterflies

LETTING parts of your garden grow wild with long grass can increase butterfly numbers by up to 93 per cent and attract a wider range of species, according to new research from leading wildlife charity Butterfly Conservation.

The study, published in the journal *Science of the Total Environment*, provides the first scientific evidence that having long grass in your garden increases butterfly abundance and diversity. Creating such wild spaces may help to reverse the decline of these beautiful insects.

Undertaken by Butterfly Conservation scientists Dr Lisbeth Hordley and Dr Richard Fox, the research analysed butterfly sightings from more than 600 gardens across the UK, collected by members of the public over six years through the charity's Garden Butterfly Survey.

The results show that gardens with long grass had a significantly higher number of butterflies recorded, with a greater variety of species, than those without.

Importantly, the biggest benefits of these wild spaces were found in urban areas and intensively farmed landscapes.

In highly arable areas, gardens with long grass saw up to 93 per cent more butterflies, and those in urban areas showed an increase of 18 per cent.

The potential to provide wild spaces for butterflies and moths to thrive is huge. Gardens make up more than 728,000 hectares in Great Britain - the equivalent of over a million football pitches. If each of these gardens had a space that was allowed to go a little wild, with grass growing long, it would make a huge difference for butterflies and moths, providing spaces for them to feed, breed and shelter.

Wild spaces can be created by anyone, anywhere.

Butterfly Conservation