

Is a railway really best for Bideford?

I was amazed to learn that our MP Sir Geoffrey Cox is suggesting that any share of the levelling up funding that Torridge might get would best be spent on reinstating the Bideford-Barnstaple railway.

Okay, there is quite a lot of public support for the idea, but has it really been thought through? If Bideford had the millions in public funding that such a project would entail, would reinstating the railway be the best way of spending it? What else might be done with such a sum?

Once people have got into cars or buses to get to the station, would they really get out of them, park and wait for a train to get to Barnstaple, when they could stay on the Link Road and be there in 10 minutes? And do they want to go to Barnstaple anyway?

What about improving the network of rural bus services, or establishing fast and frequent services direct to the railway network at Exeter and Tiverton?

I am aware that the Government has recently announced additional funding to help Devon attend to the appalling state of our roads, but the amounts quoted won't clear the backlog of repairs till 2034. Meanwhile, are we expected to fill in our own potholes?

I have not seen any analysis which shows that a railway connection between Barnstaple and Bideford should be top of any transport agenda.

In fact, it would be hugely disruptive in the short term for residents along the whole length of the line and everyone who enjoys using the Tarka Trail. And I am very dubious about claims that such a project would regenerate the area when there are far more effective and deserving projects which would cost much less.

I agree that rail transport may be better for the environment, but what about implementing the recommendations of the Local Cycling and Walking infrastructure plan?

Or getting on with the multi-use trail through Kenwith Valley along the track of the old railway line which has featured for years in strategy documents without any progress being made?

These would bring real benefits to our health and wellbeing as well as cutting carbon and being attractive to visitors.

After a long period of austerity and lack of investment in public services, we are not short of other projects which would safeguard our environment, benefit residents, and boost skills and opportunities in the local economy.

What about seeing to our flood defences, or updating the sewerage system? Or transforming the harbour and riverside area as a showcase for our maritime heritage, including a footbridge over the Torridge?

If reinstatement is the name of the game, what about reinstating Bideford Art School as a University of the

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Last of the autumn colours, on the Tarka Trail between Puffing Billy Torrington and Watergate. Credit: Nigel Vaux

Arts? Or regenerating brown field sites such as Torrington Creamery for public good – I have heard a Sports Centre mentioned. And as far as our heritage goes, the Town Hall and old library building are in desperate need of repair and repurposing.

I am full of admiration for what the railway heritage groups have achieved, both in Bideford and in Torrington. Long may this work continue.

But let's not claim that reinstating the railways would combat the sort

of deprivation that makes us eligible for levelling up.

Sir Geoffrey is taking us for a ride if reinstating a disused railway line at massive expense is the best he can come up with.

Teresa Tinsley
East-the-Water

White Cross plan should be refused

Full marks to Joanne Bell for her

letter (Gazette, November 15) in respect of the effects that the proposed White Cross wind power station would have onshore.

As a former long time resident, and now frequent visitor, I can appreciate the adverse impact that this would have on local people, North Devon's environment and tourism.

There are many options along the coast for landfall for cables from an offshore wind power station – and there is therefore no need to choose a point where this would cause years

of disruption and some permanent damage to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The local planning authority should, quite rightly, refuse the application for permission to put five miles of cables underground through Braunton Burrows, on the grounds that this would contravene protections afforded to one of the UK's largest and most important sand dune and salt marsh eco systems.

Peter Cresswell

My jaw dropped at the MP's speech on awards evening

On November 9 I attended the wonderful North Devon Voluntary Services awards evening.

It was a celebration of the humanity and compassion of so many in our community who do so much to help others in desperate need.

At the end of the evening, our local MP Selaime Saxby, was given the opportunity to speak and my jaw dropped to the floor when she claimed she had had a transformative experience when visiting the Dilkhusa Hotel in Ilfracombe where the refugees were being housed.

Was this the same Selaime Saxby who was pictured in the media standing in front of this hotel saying it needed to close so that Ilfracombe could get its hotel rooms back, whilst casually ignoring the boarded up hotel next door?

The breath-taking contrast of this utter hypocrisy with the honest endeavours of so many wonderful volunteers made me shudder.

She brought to mind the Groucho Marx quote "those are my principles, if you don't like them... well, I have others."

North Devon is full of wonderful people who do so many great things, role models for the best in honesty, ethics and values, perhaps we need to have an MP who is capable of representing those qualities.

Mark Johnson
Braunton

Welcome aboard Mr Fitzgerald

I was delighted to read in the Gazette that you had teamed up with David Fitzgerald after he was made redundant by the BBC.

How the BBC managers could be so stupid as to take the highly popular and talented David Fitzgerald off air is beyond me. During

My years as a county councillor I did many an interview with him which I found very enjoyable.

So congratulations to the Gazette for helping to continue to keep his wit and wisdom in the media. Gus Honeybun lives on.

Brian Greenslade
County Councillor Barnstaple
North 1985 to 2021

Workers to finish the Link Road please?

This week's issue of the NDG (Wednesday, November 22) featured an interesting update on the current over-spent and over-schedule Hinkley C project which I was more than half-way through reading when I reached the paragraph stating: "There are currently around 10,000 workers on site...double the original expectation."

Lucky Hinkley C, I thought to myself. Would that this was so for the ongoing, painfully slow work on widening the A361 between South Molton and Barnstaple. Not that even doubling the number of workers would necessarily have that much impact on this project!

I write this letter, my wife and I having moved to this area in July from Somerset following many visits house-hunting in the weeks beforehand, adding to the many previous visits to relatives prior to our decision to re-locate to North Devon.

It became a standing joke to see so few men actually engaged on this major project that we very soon doubted that it would be completed within the three year time scale. And so it has come to pass.

Perhaps Hinkley C could lend our road builders a thousand or so of their excess staff numbers? Just until the thing is finally done and dusted. Please.

Grahame Woodward
Roundswell

Pie in the sky railway idea is a nonsense

Well said Teresa Tinsley (NDG 22/11). Without going into the merits or demerits of building houses on the Bideford Station site, the idea of reinstating the railway from Barnstaple to Bideford is a nonsense.

The cost could never be justified by the small number of potential users in the 60,000 residents of the two towns. Infinitely better schemes are available that would make huge improvements to transport links over a much bigger area and, at a fraction of the cost.

In any case, what chance of it ever coming to fruition when the clear need for the very modest modifications to allow two trains an hour to run between Barnstaple and Exeter have hit the funding buffer stops for a number of years.

There has been talk of a heritage railway along the Tarka Trail but to get an idea of the difficulties involved one only has to look at the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway and the progress made in 20 years – one mile of track.

Tim Gibbs
Bideford

First frost of winter? With A Place in North Devon Facebook page



Castle Hill in Great Torrington, quite possibly the first frost of the winter. Credit: Lynette Taylor

For all our sakes. Our future depends on it

As I write, COP 28 looms, the annual climate conference between nations, this year being held in the seventh largest oil producing country in the world.

Even in Northern Devon we've had our share of flooding, extreme winds, too hot and dry summers

but nothing like the suffering in many other places globally. We have to stop it getting worse, but how will our new Secretary of State for the Environment, Steve Barclay, behave when surrounded by some of the most powerful producers of the stuff that is ruining our planet?

And we wonder why he received a donation of £3,000 just weeks before he took up this post,

from billionaire hedge fund manager Lord [Michael] Hintze. (As reported by The Guardian).

Hintze received a baronage almost exactly a year ago. In his maiden speech he said: "The world is becoming more complex and dangerous. That is exacerbated furthermore by climate change, which not only is very real but presents its own security challenges."

But he certainly doesn't dwell on that topic. In fact, Hintze was an early backer of the Global Warming Policy Foundation a leading denier of the reality of the climate crisis and a leading manipulator of public opinion around it.

A year ago he was recorded as having given £4.5m to the Conservative Party over his lifetime. We wonder, was he party to Rishi Sunak's cabinet re-shuffle plans long before they became public knowledge? Mr Barclay is further compromised by his wife's very senior position at Anglian Water – we all know what a mess the water companies are in and in his new role Mr Barclay is supposed to oversee improvements.

But there is something the people of Northern Devon can do. The Climate and Ecology Bill, initially subject to some scepticism, is gaining support among MPs.

If passed into law, the kind of (alleged) backhanders that have been floating around the politicians responsible for environmental probity will no longer be so powerful. Support the bill for positive climate and ecology action now. Find more information on <https://www.zerohour.uk>.

Rosie Haworth-Booth on behalf of
the North Devon CE Bill Support
Alliance

Palestine and Israel

With regard to the ongoing and tragic events in Israel/Palestine.

We have Hamas set on the ethnic cleansing of the Israelis, which is not going to happen given the size of the Israeli army! On the Israel side there is an extreme right-wing government that claims all the land west of the River Jordan with no provision for Palestinians to be accommodated within the Netanyahu plan!

This can all be settled by the 'Western Powers' two state plan. Israel will hold the land it already has under international law. The separate Palestinian state will occupy the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

At present Palestinians living alongside West Bank Israeli settlers are not allowed to enjoy modern amenities and must reside in conditions of imposed poverty and active persecution. The wider world needs this constant revolving crisis sorted so we can all move on to the pressing issue of global warming.

At the present time West Bank Palestinians do not have secure control of their land, property and sheep/goats pasture rights. This is not long term tenable.

AD Gill
Ashford