

Bideford Town Council

meeting of the Full Council on Thursday 26th October 2023

Briefing by the Tarka Rail Association's Vice-Chair and ACE Rail campaign lead, Tim Steer

Mr Mayor, Councillors, ladies and gentlemen. I most recently had the pleasure of addressing you on the subject of restoring rail connectivity for Bideford and Torrridge on Thursday 3rd August, in the presence of Sir Geoffrey Cox KC MP, following my original presentation to you on Thursday 20th January last year.

I stand before you this evening with one straightforward request, in support of our shared endeavour to see mainline passenger train services in Bideford once again.

As I'm sure many here are aware, Torrridge District Council has a current public consultation on its draft Strategic Plan for 2023-28. As the local authority's corporate plan, its work programme for the coming few years, it is structured under four Themes – Local Economy; Communities, Health and Housing; Our Environment Our Future; and Our Council. Each Strategic Theme has a number of Priorities, and 'Actions by us and in partnership.'

The Tarka Rail Association views this consultation as a golden opportunity for the Town Council, as well as other organisations and individuals, to impress upon the District Council the necessity of incorporating a commitment to support the development of the strategic, economic and environmental case for Bideford to be reconnected by rail to Barnstaple and beyond in its work over the next few years.

There will be some here this evening who will recall the Motion agreed by the Full District Council at its meeting on 13th June 2022 [see Minute 12 (a):] *"That Torrridge District Council, following on from the presentation made at the last Full council meeting, do support the extension of the railway line from Barnstaple to Bideford and that this aspiration is embedded in the new Joint Local Plan."* It was seconded with a suggested amendment that the extension of the railway line from Barnstaple to Bideford also be embedded in the Economic Development Business Plan, which was agreed by the proposer and the amended Motion was then carried by an overwhelming majority.

In order now to reflect that commitment in the District Council's new Strategic Plan for 2023-28, recognising the socio-economic benefits that rail already brings to the wider area, and that those benefits could be further embedded by restoring a direct link to Bideford, the Tarka Rail Association is advocating inclusion of the following additional Priority and Actions within the 'Local Economy' theme of the final Strategic Plan:

Priority - Develop opportunities to enhance community prosperity through improved public transport connectivity.

Actions by us and in partnership - Support further work on developing the business case for restoring a Bideford-Barnstaple rail link, to allow the strategic, economic and environmental case and the implications of reopening to be more fully evaluated.

It will be seen that this also supports the Priority *"Develop Torrridge to be a great place to work and build a career"* within the 'Our Council' theme.

The Tarka Rail Association believes that these amendments will strengthen the District Council's new Strategic Plan and demonstrate the local authority's appetite to play an active role over the coming years in a wider partnership exploring and evaluating the case for a restored rail link.

The Tarka Rail Association will therefore be grateful if Bideford Town Council would consider making a submission to the District Council's consultation in light of the Association's proposition as I have set out above.