



by LEWIS CLARKE
lewis.clarke@reachplc.com
@DevonLiveNews

New alliance is formed to fight for rail upgrade

A NEW dawn is breaking for the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance as organisations have united on a bid to reopen the rail line.

The alliance has launched its bid to secure a new rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple as well as the upgrade of the North Devon (Tarka) Line between Exeter and Barnstaple.

The reopening of the line has already attracted support from locals and now 30 representatives from 13 stakeholder organisations have come together to commit to develop a compelling case to be put to Government to support the reconnection of the Torridge community, of more than 40,000 people, with the rail network.

The inaugural gathering of the new Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance was held at an event organised by Railfuture in Bideford's historic Royal Hotel with the aim of reversing Beeching's Bideford closure in 1965.

Torridge & West Devon MP Sir Geoffrey Cox said in a statement: "There is substantial support in Torridge for exploring the viability and economic case for this important railway connection to Barnstaple.

"Housing and population growth are likely to require improved communication links in the future. Such a link would no doubt require the upgrading of the line between Barnstaple and Exeter, and that too would have incalculable benefits for Torridge."

North Devon MP Selaine Saxby also issued a statement, saying: "I wholeheartedly support the Northern Devon Railway Devel-

opment Alliance's ambition to restore the rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple, and to upgrade the existing Tarka Line between Barnstaple and Exeter. The proposal to re-establish the old railway line between Barnstaple and Bideford, although not necessarily a replica of the former route, would be a huge advantage for locals and tourists alike."

Devon County Council's Andrea Davis, cabinet member for climate change, environment and transport, added: "Devon

“Improving connectivity is key to our future wellbeing and prosperity”

County Council and Peninsula Transport are committed to decarbonising the transport system, improving connectivity and giving genuine transport choice for our residents, visitors and businesses.

"In Devon we have a track record for re-opening rail links, opening stations and integrating transport modes.

"Improving connectivity for residents in Northern Devon, supporting new development with transport infrastructure and creating healthy, connected com-

munities for the future is key to our future wellbeing and prosperity."

The new Alliance's statement of purpose is: "To secure a new rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple and upgrade of the North Devon (Tarka) Line between Exeter and Barnstaple, 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."

Sixty years ago, these communities lost their rail lifeline. Charles Kingsley wrote Westward Ho! there, Rudyard Kipling was schooled there, Winston Churchill and Dwight D Eisenhower met there, it's home to the annual Appledore Book Festival, and 170 years since its foundation Appledore shipyard now witnesses Harland & Wolff continuing ship building there.

Three years ago, the town welcomed the return of the original name and number plates from steam locomotive 'Bideford' with the town's then mayor quipping that what he really wanted was the return of the town's railway.

The local Tarka Rail Association with its 'ACE Rail' campaign supported by national lobby group Railfuture has since been developing local support for just that, culminating in the formation of the new alliance.