

## **Press release – August 2026**

### **A Plan for Northern Devon – Railfuture responds to Scoping Consultation**

*“The Bideford to Barnstaple rail link is considered as part of the People and Place project”* – so resolved the North Devon and Torridge Joint Planning Policy Committee back in July 2022. Four years later and the Devon & Cornwall regional branch of national rail development campaign group Railfuture has contributed to the first of three public consultations on the successor to the current North Devon and Torridge Local Plan 2011-2031, which was adopted in October 2018.

This month happens to coincide with the anniversary of the Bideford Extension Railway securing its legal powers in 1853. The first station opened just two years later at Cross Parks, now Ethelwynne Brown Close and so named after the Bideford Mayor at the time the last scheduled passenger train services ran in and out of Bideford’s second station, now the Railway Heritage Centre at Station Hill, 110 years later in 1965.

As a starting point, the Local Plan currently in force already contains “Policy ST10: Transport Strategy - the Transport Strategy for northern Devon will: (1) Provide good strategic connectivity by: (f) safeguarding routes and exploring opportunities for the reuse and reinstatement of former railway lines;” and paragraph 4.66 includes this statement: “Reinstatement of (“other” - ie other than Lynton & Barnstaple) former railway lines will also be explored towards the objective of reducing the need to travel by car although any future re-instatement must include suitable provision of an alternative walking and cycling route where existing provision will be displaced.”

The Economic Strategy 2024-29 says “it is also hugely important to not just “settle.” Early-stage feasibility work is now underway for the Barnstaple - Bideford line to be reconnected as a follow-on to improvements from Exeter, in turn servicing new growth stimulated in and around Bideford and the wider Bideford Bay.”

Chair of Railfuture’s Devon & Cornwall regional branch Tim Steer commented “Thanks to the foresight, ambition and leadership of the Borough Council in a neighbouring district we have just witnessed the opening of another station in West Devon, for a town barely one-third the size of Bideford. The reopening of Okehampton’s first station in November 2021 provided much of the inspiration for the work of Railfuture and its many partners and other representative stakeholder organisations which have since come together in the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, founded in December 2023. Four recently published reports, three from Railfuture and one by Network Rail, together with inclusion in Peninsula Transport’s Strategic Implementation Plan to 2050 and the 2025-40 Local Transport Plan adopted by the Devon & Torbay Combined County Authority, have all built on the foundations of Local Plan 2011-31’s Policy ST10 (1) (f) by “exploring opportunities for the reuse and reinstatement of former railway lines” for Bideford.

In response to “*How could our new local plan support the strategic outcomes / priorities of your organisation, business or group?*” Railfuture has requested a policy explicitly protecting the former rail alignment between Barnstaple and Bideford for future possible shared use between active travel and rail.

The next consultation - on content and evidence for ‘A Plan for Northern Devon’ - will start on 10<sup>th</sup> February.

Railfuture is Britain’s leading and longest-established, independent national voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for better rail services over an expanding network for passengers and freight, to support sustainable economic growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities. Its independence is based on funding solely from members’ subscriptions and legacies.

Full details of Railfuture’s Devon & Cornwall regional branch: [Railfuture | Devon and Cornwall Branch](https://www.railfuture.org.uk/devon-cornwall)  
Contacts - Chair: [tim.steer@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:tim.steer@railfuture.org.uk) and Secretary: [alan.clark@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:alan.clark@railfuture.org.uk)

[www.railfuture.org.uk](https://www.railfuture.org.uk) [www.railfuturescotland.org.uk](https://www.railfuturescotland.org.uk) [www.railfuturewales.org.uk](https://www.railfuturewales.org.uk)  
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