

Bideford rail campaigners face long wait for first train

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A TRANSPORT planner who has spent years championing the idea of a new rail link between Bideford and Barnstaple told Torridge and North Devon councillors last week that the project is advancing through formal government planning stages, though it could be decades before a train runs.

Roger Blake, infrastructure director for Railfuture and acting convenor of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance (NDRDA), addressed the Torridge and North Devon Joint Planning Policy Committee on Friday, April 24 to update elected members on progress towards a potential reinstatement of rail services to the town.

Mr Blake, who has lived in London for 43 years and spent 30 of them working as a transport planner for a London borough, was first drawn to Bideford in December 2021 after being approached by local people keen to explore the prospects of restoring a train service.

His visit followed the Department for Transport's approval of funding to reinstate services on the Dartmoor Line, a decision that reignited hopes for rail revival across the region.

The idea has been on the council's agenda since July 2022, when this same committee resolved that a Bideford to Barnstaple rail link should be considered as part of its

People and Place project.

This morning's address was the first time Mr Blake had appeared before the committee since that resolution.

The NDRDA, founded in December 2023, now brings together around four dozen partner and stakeholder organisations.

Mr Blake was clear that the alliance has not committed to building a railway; its role is to gather and test evidence.

"We don't have a timetable," he told members, "but we do have a scheme development programme."

That programme follows the Treasury and Department for Transport's Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline.

The alliance has so far published a Preliminary Strategic Business Case, reported to Torridge's external overview and scrutiny committee on April 1.

The next required step is a formal Strategic Outline Business Case, which the NDRDA hopes to complete by March 2028, in time to align with the Local Plan timetable and give weight to the council's 2022 resolution.

Government approval of that document would then need to be secured before any Outline Business Case could be developed, and detailed engineering work would only follow after that.

The scale of what is being proposed was not understated.

If a new rail link were eventually approved and built, Mr Blake noted,



Roger Blake, infrastructure director for Railfuture, main picture, says a railway link to Bideford is still a long way off
Picture: John Henderson

it would arrive roughly half a century after the North Devon Link Road, the Torridge Bridge and the Tarka Trail, all of which were under construction in the 1980s.

Any eventual application for a Development Consent Order would face independent examination by the Planning Inspectorate, likely within the Local Plan period.

Railfuture is the UK's leading independent voluntary organisation campaigning for a larger and improved railway network for passengers and freight.

39 homes rejected by inspector

PLANS to build up to 39 homes at Bloody Corner in Northam have been rejected for a second time, in what campaigners have described as a rare planning appeal dismissal, writes Alex Haynes.

A developer had appealed against a previous refusal by Torridge District Council, arguing the scheme should go ahead due to a lack of a five-year land supply for new homes.

However, a planning inspector has now upheld the council's decision, concluding that the development would cause significant harm to the area.

In the ruling, the inspector said the proposal would "detract from the unspoilt nature of the undeveloped coast" and would harm the appearance and character of the landscape. This was given "substantial negative weight" in the planning balance.

The inspector also recognised that the development would have a damaging impact on a nearby heritage asset — the grade II listed stone tablet at Bloody Corner.

The stone tablet is said to commemorate the location of a viking battleground, and the report concluded that new housing would



Bloody Corner. Picture Rob Purvis

undermine the site's historical significance.

In dismissing the appeal, the inspector decided that "the adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits."

A statement from Torridge District Council said: "The council welcomes the inspector's decision and the recognition of the value and importance of upholding local and national planning policies which seek to protect the undeveloped coast."

The Campaign to Protect Rural England backed the outcome noting that appeal dismissals are uncommon and that the decision reflected both local opposition and planning policies.

Devon CPRE director, Penny Mills said: "The inspector's considerations make interesting reading in the respect of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan and the perceived harm to the semi-rural setting of the historic stone tablet."

The proposal had included a proportion of affordable housing, and while CPRE acknowledged the need for homes in North Devon and Torridge, concerns over landscape impact, planning policy, and heritage proved to be decisive."

New homes 'will generate less traffic'

CONCERNS that a new housing development could add to traffic congestion on key routes in North Devon have been dismissed by developers, writes Alex Haynes.

Baker Estates originally had permission for 61 homes at the site in East-the-Water, but revised the scheme to 26 bungalows.

The firm claims the reduction, and the fact that bungalow buyers are often 'downsizers', will significantly lower the number of daily car trips.

As a result, the developer said a fresh transport assessment was not required for the project, as the impact is now expected to be "substantially lower" than the plans already approved for the site.

Tom Biddle, senior development manager, said the original transport statement was based on a "significantly larger level of development" than what is now being built.

Mr Biddle explained: "Given this context, an additional transport as-



Baker Estates argues that fewer homes and downsizing buyers will generate less traffic than earlier proposals

essment was not required for the 26-unit scheme, as the approved development represents a substantially lower level of traffic generation

than that previously assessed and considered acceptable."

The company argues that because the 61-home scheme was approved

with traffic impacts taken into account, a smaller development would place less pressure on the road network.

Baker Estates also suggested that peak-time traffic may be lower based on the type of homes being delivered.

"In addition, experience shows us that many of our customers who purchase bungalows are typically downsizing, and, as a result, the level of traffic associated with this type of development is generally lower, and the overall impact on the local road network is expected to be minimal," Mr Biddle added.

Despite this, congestion remains a regular concern for residents in East-the-Water, particularly along routes such as the A386 and Bideford Long Bridge.

The Chapel Green development will deliver a mix of two and three-bedroom bungalows, and the first homes are expected to be ready this summer.