

Calls for action to make rail link more resilient

PAGE 4



What a load of rubbish! Clean-up success

CENTRE PAGES



Vehicles crushed following collapse of wall

PAGE 5



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2026

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Shipyard pledge to take on 20 more apprentices



Navantia UK announced on Monday that it's recruiting 20 apprentices this year at its Appledore shipyard

Expansion creates opportunities

ELLA SAMPSON
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SHIPBUILDER Navantia UK announced on Monday that it is recruiting 20 apprentices this year at its Appledore shipyard.

This is part of an overall intake of 90 apprentices at the company's four shipyards in this country.

Navantia UK has set a target of hiring a total of 500 apprentices by 2030 to support the business's expansion plans for shipbuilding, engineering and supplying the offshore energy industry.

Following its purchase of Harland & Wolff's assets last year, Navantia UK is investing in building a new

generation of industrial skills in three of the UK's four nations – England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The target of 500 by 2030 was announced on the first day of National Apprenticeships Week. The company was named by *The Sunday Times* last year as one of the UK's Top 100 apprenticeship employers.

Navantia UK offers Level 2 and Level 3 apprenticeships. Of the 90 apprentices to be hired in 2026, 35 are likely to be at Harland & Wolff Belfast, 20 at the Appledore shipyard here in North Devon, 20 at Methil in Fife and 15 at Arnish on the Isle of Lewis.

FULL REPORT: PAGE 11



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Emergency chemists

Barnstaple

Boots, High Street, 10.30am-4.30pm

Bideford

Asda, Clovelly Road

Sundays and Bank Holidays 10am-4pm

South Molton

N L Wade, Medical Hall, Tuesday and

alternate Wednesday 5.30-6.30pm.

Thursday 5.30-6pm. Boots, Broad Street,

Monday, Friday and alternate Wednesday

5.30-6.30pm.

Woolacombe

Barton Pharmacy Mon-Fri 9am-6pm,

(closed 1-2pm), Sat, 9am-4pm.

Sunday 10am-4pm bank holiday

weekends



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NORTH DEVON HOSPICE LOTTERY
This week's £1,000 jackpot winner:

Mrs SH
from Barnstaple

Join for £1, support your hospice:
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A view from yesteryear, taken only last week by photographer Graham Hobbs, at Bideford, where the station, which closed to passengers in 1965, is now a heritage railway site and visitor centre managed by the Bideford Railway Heritage Centre. The old railway line is now part of the Tarka Trail **TARKA LINE RESILIENCE FEARS: PAGE 4** Picture: Graham Hobbs

Race against time for £65m council projects

ALISON STEPHENSON

Local democracy reporter

COUNCILLORS in Torridge have agreed a whopping £65 million capital programme of projects as they enter the last two years of governance before district authorities are scrapped.

Torridge District Council has a list of nearly 50 projects, large and small, to progress. More than two thirds of the funding for these comes from external sources.

In 2028 district and county councils will be abolished and replaced with larger unitary authorities with responsibility for all local services from waste to housing and social care.

So it may well be a race against time to get as much done as possible before Torridge District Council ceases to exist.

Councils' workloads including the five year capital programme, budgets, reserves and any debts or borrowing will be passed onto the new authorities.

Included in the capital programme for Torridge are 12 regeneration projects funded by government to the tune of £20 million, including the Bideford Pannier Market modernisation, the Hatchmoor Industrial Estate at Torrington, The Globe Hotel refurbishment in Torrington and the Holsworthy Agri-Business Centre.

Some of the projects are being de-

livered by partners but the money administered by the council and there is a deadline for most of the cash to be spent by March 2027.

It's going to be a busy year for the council.

This week the council's community and resources committee added a number of energy saving projects for buildings and facilities and improved back office systems and IT technology to the capital programme.

There is money set aside to replace more small diesel vehicles with electric but the committee has decided to hold off using renewable hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) in large waste and recycling vehicles as it was not sold on its reliability or sustainability.

Members will return to the subject in a year's time after more research as the changeover would result in a 90 per cent reduction in CO2

emissions from vehicles at a time when the council has reconfirmed its ambition to be net zero by 2030.

This week the committee also recommended that £70,000 be spent on 400 trees to increase biodiversity in 15 parks and public spaces across the district.

Members approved a balanced revenue budget of £13.6 million and a maximum council tax increase of 2.99 per cent, which will mean the district's part of the council tax will rise from £195.17 to £201.01 for households in a Band D property in April.

Council tax along with a central government grant, business rates and fees and charges pay for services delivered by the authority.

A "fairer funding review" carried out by the government has favoured urban deprived areas and resulted in a reduction in the grant for many rural or shire councils. Torridge is predicting a budget gap of £1.5 million by 2028/29 because of this.

The committee was told that local government reorganisation required the council to maintain organisational and financial stability through the transition.

"Our strategy must bridge the financial gap without undertaking major service redesign that would be superseded when Devon moves to unitary authority status," said TDC's finance manager in his report.



It may be a race against time to get as much done as possible before Torridge District Council ceases to exist

Rainstorms spark more sewer spills

SOUTH West Water has been listed as one of the main contributors to sewage pollution in new analysis from The Rivers Trust, which campaigns to protect rivers across England and Wales.

The organisation told the *North Devon Gazette* that while South West Water currently has the highest number of combined sewer overflows (CSOs) discharging, the percentage of overflows in the Thames Water network is higher.

"It is not easy to compare the performance of one water company with another at any given time because much of the variation will be driven by weather patterns across the country, as well as the wetness of the catchments in their area," The Rivers Trust said.

CSO discharges are designed to operate during extreme weather events to prevent sewage from backing up into homes.

The South West has seen heavy rainfall this month, contributing to the high number of spills.

"What we can say with confidence is that the number of CSO spills at the moment is too high and is indicative of a changing climate and a sewerage system that is not able to cope with the 'new normal'," the trust said.

They added that during drier periods, such spills can indicate underinvestment and poor maintenance in the water system. The impact of spills varies depending on both the level of pollution and the volume of water discharged, information that water companies do not always provide.

The Rivers Trust encourages citizen scientists to monitor river health to identify the areas most affected. This data can then guide investment in green infrastructure, such as nature-based solutions that help rivers and sewerage systems better cope with heavy rainfall.

South West Water said it is responding to the issue.

A spokesperson said: "We are experiencing heavy rainfall across the South West. This has caused some storm overflows to activate as they are designed to do, to help prevent flooding to homes and businesses.

"We are serious about tackling storm overflows and change of this scale takes time, ambition and increased investment. We are working hard to actively reduce our use of storm overflows across the region as part of our £2.5 billion investment programme and are already seeing results, with spills reducing significantly in 2025. There is more to do, and we are moving in the right direction driven by our determination to deliver on our customers' priorities."

Figures show that the South West received 159 per cent of its long-term average rainfall in January, the highest in the country.

Tarka Line lack of resilience is 'ruining daily lives of many'

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NORTH Devon's Tarka Line has once again been thrown into turmoil following recent storms, with closures leaving passengers struggling to travel between Barnstaple and Exeter.

For communities across North and West Devon, the repeated disruptions have caused widespread disruption to daily life, leaving residents isolated and businesses struggling to operate.

David Northey, chair of the North Devon Line Rail Promotion Group, also known as The Passengers' Voice, which campaigns for rail travellers, businesses and communities between Barnstaple and Exeter, told the *North Devon Gazette* that since the start of winter, rail services on the North Devon and Dartmoor lines have been disrupted or suspended for nearly 20 days due to flooding, wash-outs, infrastructure failures, signalling and points faults, and rolling-stock availability issues.

Recent incidents have included failures at Eggesford, alongside damage caused by prolonged rainfall overwhelming drainage systems. Replacement bus services are often limited, indirect, or unavailable, leaving Barnstaple effectively cut off from the national transport network.

Repeated disruptions on the Tarka Line have left passengers and businesses struggling to cope.

Tim Steer, a North Devon resident and chair of the Devon and Cornwall branch of Railfuture, a voluntary organisation campaigning for better railways, said the repeated closures were causing chaos for passengers and businesses alike.

"The lack of resilience in the North Devon Line's infrastructure is continuing to ruin the daily lives of so many people and businesses who need to be able to rely on it," he said. "Getting to and from work, education, health and other appointments such as job interviews, public events and even social activities are being thrown into chaos because our rail line is not a fit-for-purpose life-line."

Passenger numbers on the line have reached record levels, putting extra pressure on infrastructure that Mr Steer says is no longer adequate.

"The record-breaking numbers of passengers who use the line are rightly demanding long-term investment to fix our broken railway, not just more patch and mend," he said.

The impact extends beyond commuters. The railway is vital for ed-

ucation, with more than 600 scholar tickets issued each year to sixth-form students travelling between North Devon and colleges in Exeter. Recent closures have disrupted attendance, increased journey times, and in some cases prevented access to education altogether. For families without access to a car, the loss of rail services removes their only viable route to further education.

In response to the disruption, North Devon's Liberal Democrat MP, Ian Roome, handed a petition to Parliament on February 4 — as reported by the *Gazette* — calling for investment to improve the line.

The petition has been signed by more than 3,000 residents.

"I was proud to hand in North Devon's Tarka Line petition to Parliament, backed by more than 3,000 people who are fed up with disruption and want lasting action. We need a service we can rely on, and that means a serious commitment to resilience," Mr Roome said.

Network Rail has confirmed that three branch lines in Devon and Cornwall, including the Barnstaple route, will remain closed until further notice to allow for safety inspections following severe storms.

Engineers have repaired visible track damage, but specialist dive teams are now required to inspect submerged structures, including bridges and viaducts.

Water levels remain too high for safe inspections, leaving services suspended.

Cllr Peter Leaver, deputy leader of North Devon Council, said: "We're working closely with operators and partners to improve reliability, but it's increasingly clear that major investment is needed to make the line more resilient, especially in the face of extreme weather."

Mr Steer added: "Getting to work,



Maintenance and repair work on the Tarka Line



The line becomes vulnerable to torrential rain, above. Rail campaigner Tim Steer, above, and MP Ian Roome, below, are calling for action



education and appointments is being thrown into chaos because our rail line is not a fit-for-purpose life-line. The case to secure transformational investment has never been stronger."

Mr Roome has said he will meet with Network Rail to press for a plan to strengthen the line against flooding and extreme weather, while urging residents to continue sharing their experiences to support the case for investment.

The North Devon Line has evolved significantly over the decades. Once threatened with closure, the line remains open, but its fragility is now a more complex and damaging challenge. Rather than closure, the railway suffers from repeated disruption caused by ageing infrastructure, vulnerable bridges and track beds, outdated signalling, and insufficient capacity to cope with both climate pressures and growing demand.

Expansion ambitions, including reopening the railway to Bideford, have further underlined the need to strengthen the existing line.

Without sustained investment, closures will continue to undermine confidence in the railway and restrict economic growth across the region.

While North Devon does not have the major cities or high-profile tourist destinations of other parts of the South West, the scale of need is no less pressing.

Barnstaple, Braunton, Bideford, and the wider North Devon and Torridge area are home to over 200,000 people who rely on the railway for access to jobs, education, health-care, tourism, and national rail connections via Exeter.

Mr Northey said: "Investment in the North Devon and Dartmoor lines is not about prestige projects, it is about basic reliability, fairness and ensuring that rural and coastal communities are not left behind. A resilient railway is essential if North Devon is to thrive economically, support its young people, and remain connected to the rest of the country."

The group works with Network Rail, Great Western Railway, local councils, the Peninsula Transport sub national transport body, community rail partnerships, local MPs and residents to improve services.

Since the 1990s, services have transformed from just seven trains a day to hourly operations, increasing annual passenger numbers from 190,000 to nearly 800,000 and securing rolling-stock upgrades to meet demand.

Bus links from Barnstaple to coastal resorts such as Lynton & Lynmouth and Ilfracombe & Combe Martin have further improved connectivity.

The group's goals include: increased capacity, including more seats and longer trains, improved access to stations via bus, walking, and cycling, adequate parking at rural stations, better connectivity with the rest of the UK via Exeter, more frequent services and optimised calling patterns.

Their vision is a railway that serves North Devon reliably, connecting communities and supporting growth for decades to come.

Without targeted funding to improve resilience, the region will continue to face disruption, lost opportunities, and avoidable isolation.