

North Devon Planning Policy Team
North Devon District Council
Lynton House
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Barnstaple
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EX31 1DG

please reply to:

20 Linden Close
Sticklepath
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shapetheplan@northdevon.gov.uk

tim.steer@railfuture.org.uk

Dear Planning Policy Team,

2026-08-11

A Plan for Northern Devon – Scoping Consultation

I am responding on behalf of the regional branch of our national membership organisation. Railfuture is Britain's longest-established and leading independent national voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users, to support sustainable economic growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities. We seek to influence policy makers and decision takers at local, regional and national levels to implement pro-rail policies in development and transport planning.

1 Personal information

1.1 Please provide your:

Name Tim Steer

Email tim.steer@railfuture.org.uk

Address 20 Linden Close, Sticklepath, Barnstaple, Devon, EX31 2HD

1.2 Please select whether you are responding on behalf of:

An organisation, if so, please name:

Railfuture Ltd, Devon & Cornwall regional branch

2 More about you

These questions will help us better understand who is responding to the consultation and guide you through the questions which are most relevant for you.

2.1 Which statement best reflects how you are responding to this consultation?

Organisation: Other (please describe):

Railfuture Ltd is a not-for-profit Company Limited by Guarantee.
Registered in England and Wales No. 05011634

In short, what does your organisation, business or group do? Please include details if your organisation represents the interests of people who share protected characteristics.

We campaign for a bigger better railway.

2.2 What is your role in relation to your organisation, business or group?

Chair of Devon & Cornwall regional branch

2.3 Where does your organisation, business or group operate?

Other (please describe):

Nationally across Great Britain and regionally through 14 branches eg Devon & Cornwall.

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
www.railwatch.org.uk

3 Future vision for northern Devon

The Northern Devon Place Story captures our unique identity, values and ambitions. In a similar way, and building on this foundation, our new local plan will need a vision and priorities which capture the things which are special about northern Devon, and the kind of place it should become.

3.1 What THREE things are most valuable about the area of northern Devon?

Please provide up to three words or short phrases.

Word 1 Coast and countryside

Word 2 Communities and cultural identity

Word 3 Capability to adapt, capacity to grow

3.2 The vision in our new plan should describe the kind of place we want northern Devon to become over the next 20 to 30 years. Which THREE statements best reflect the outcomes we should focus on?

Please select up to three. You can contribute your own suggestion using "other" category.

A place with stronger local jobs and skills

A place with better transport, walking cycling and digital connectivity

A place where new development is well designed and supported by infrastructure

Other (please describe):

a place which, from within and beyond, feels better-connected.

3.3 Please share any additional comments about the kind of place northern Devon should become in the next 20 to 30 years:

We want our vision to be locally distinct, with ambitious but realistic goals. Please include anything you think it is important for the new local plan to try and achieve.

A Northern Devon 'word cloud' of more increasingly positive phrases.

3.4 In 20 to 30 years, what do you think would show that northern Devon has become a better place?

Think about what evidence would help us see that our communities and places are thriving, as this will help us measure the success of the new local plan.

Improved median weekly pay and gross disposable household income per head, fewer wards among worst-deprived neighbourhoods nationally, improved housing affordability, higher educational attainment, improved health outcomes, increased economic activity levels, increased number of active enterprises and of those with 10 or more employees, increased mode share of travel by public transport, reduced housing waiting lists.

4 Priorities and opportunities

Creating a local plan gives us the opportunity to address local issues and invest in positive solutions. Managing new development often requires balancing many competing priorities, for instance the need for more homes, protecting nature and maintaining community services. We want to explore what you think the key issues and opportunities are in northern Devon.

4.1 The local plan is an important tool for addressing local issues. What are the FIVE biggest challenges facing northern Devon?

Please select up to five. You can contribute your own suggestion using the "other" category.

~ Lack of high-quality homes which suit local needs

~ Limited jobs or career opportunities

~ Low wages or seasonal work

~ Decline of town centres

~ Poor or limited public transport options

4.2 The local plan can direct how we invest in the future of our area. What are the FIVE most important opportunities which the new local plan should focus on?

Please select up to five. You can contribute your own suggestion using the "other" category.

- ~ Regenerating town centres
- ~ Better use of previously developed (now unused) land
- ~ Delivering more high-quality, affordable homes
- ~ A variety of housing to suit different household sizes and needs
- ~ Improving public transport and active travel options

4.3 Do you have any big ideas for transforming northern Devon which you would like to share?

Improving connectivity to address the socio-economic disadvantages of peripherality by modernising, and extending to Bideford, the North Devon Line's passenger rail services.

5 Growth and development

Over the next 20 years, we will likely need to plan for the delivery of approximately 26,500 homes as well as other developments such as employment, retail and leisure. We understand that the idea of new development can be scary. These questions will explore how you would like us approach growth and development.

5.1 We prioritise building on previously developed (brownfield) land. However, to meet these housing numbers, we will also have to allocate significant amounts of undeveloped (greenfield) land. Please rank these broad approaches to future development: Please write the numbers 1 to 4 next to each option so that 1 is the approach you would most support, and 4 is the approach you would least support.

- 1 Focus most growth at the main towns*
- 2 Focus growth at towns and larger villages with existing services*
- 3 Spread growth more evenly across towns and villages*
- 4 Creating new towns or villages*

5.2 Please rank these broad approaches to the size of future housing developments: Please write the numbers 1 to 3 next to each option so that 1 is your most preferred, and 3 is your least preferred approach.

- 1 Focus on larger housing sites which are more likely to carry their own infrastructure*
- 2 Focus on smaller housing sites which are more integrated into existing housing but may deliver less infrastructure*
- 3 Create a mixture of small and large housing sites*

5.3 Developers have to contribute financially to address the impact caused by their new developments. As councils, we try to direct these contributions towards the infrastructure which is most needed. Which FIVE infrastructure types matter most to you? Please select up to five. You can contribute your own suggestion using the "other" category.

Schools and education
Healthcare
Public transport
Leisure and sports facilities
Flood defences

5.4 Would you support new development in northern Devon if it clearly delivered the infrastructure, facilities and environmental improvements needed by the local area?
Yes

6. Strategic planning

Organisations only. These questions explore the strategies and plans which might influence northern Devon and help us understand how the new plan could support both your organisation's priorities and the flourishing of northern Devon as an area.

6.1 If your organisation, business or group has any studies, investment plans, infrastructure programmes, management plans, delivery strategies or future projects which will affect northern Devon, please provide details below:

Please include any titles and the years covered (where known):

A. North Devon Line modernisation

A1. Preliminary Strategic Business Case for North Devon Line modernisation (Executive Summary also available separately) – published by Railfuture

A2. “Transforming the North Devon Line: a Summary of Potential Infrastructure Enhancements” – published by Network Rail

B. North Devon Line extension

B1. “Connecting Communities: framework assessment of new station opportunities on Western Route” – published by Network Rail (Bideford one of five detailed case studies)

B2. Preliminary Strategic Business Case for a new train service connecting Bideford with Exeter and beyond (Executive Summary also available separately) – published by Railfuture

B3. “Bideford to Barnstaple Line Reopening: Economic Dimension” – by SLC Rail, published by Railfuture

B4. “Bideford to Barnstaple Line Reopening: Engineering Feasibility Review Technical Note – by SLC Rail, published by Railfuture

A and B are referenced in Peninsula Transport’s Strategic Implementation Plan 2025-50 approved in March 2025, and in the Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan 2025-40 adopted by the Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority in July 2025.

6.2 How could our new local plan support the strategic outcomes / priorities of your organisation, business or group?

Please describe the outcome or priority, the area it affects, any delivery time scales and how the local plan could help.

North Devon Line modernisation, within the existing railway boundary.

North Devon Line extension, currently envisaged as based primarily on reinstating the former rail alignment with localised variations (eg a diversion to avoid Fremington Quay) while maintaining and improving a continuous active travel corridor for the South West Coast Path / Tarka Trail.

Delivery timescales are currently expected to be within the new Local Plan period.

The new local plan could help with a policy explicitly protecting the former rail alignment between Barnstaple and Bideford for future possible shared use.

6.3 Are there opportunities for the councils to be involved in your organisation's plans for the future?

Please select the option which best describes your organisation.

Yes

6.4 If “yes”, please tell us more about how we might be able to be involved:

Both District Councils have resolved to be members of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance of around four dozen partners and other representative stakeholder organisations.

6.5 Are there any strengths, weaknesses, opportunities or threats for northern Devon which you feel we have not included in our SWOT assessment?

The assessment can be found in point 5.10 of the Scoping Document.

Strengths – the no.1 strength is the size of population in the Barnstaple-Greater Bideford built-up area, capable of commanding a wide range of public services. This status as fourth-largest centre after Plymouth, Torbay and Exeter will assume even greater significance in the new Devon Coast & Countryside unitary authority.

Weaknesses – several (“Low wage economy with income levels below the national average, Ranking for level of deprivation, Reliance on owning private transport due to rurality, Capacity of public transport links and road links providing connections outside northern Devon”) are associated with peripherality, and the associated weak integration with the economic and other opportunities available in northern Devon’s higher-order economic hub at one of the country’s most successful provincial cities, the city of Exeter.

Opportunities – integrated spatial planning, harnessing “Strong support for improved infrastructure and connectivity and Improvements to public transport” to inform choices for location of new development especially new homes; civic leadership with a new Local Plan for the most populous area in a new local authority.

Threats – growing demands for improvements coupled with increasing resistance to change, generally associated with an increasingly top-heavy demographic as the median age level both rises and is and remains around a decade older than the England average.

7 How best to involve your organisation

Organisations only.

7.1 Which methods would be most suitable to involve your organisation, business or group in our plan-making process?

Responding to formal online consultations like this one

In-person meetings with just our local plan team

Virtual meetings with just our local plan team

In-person topic-based workshops with other relevant stakeholders

Virtual topic-based workshops with other relevant stakeholders

Email correspondence

Use of a consultation platform for live informal collaboration

Reviewing relevant evidence studies

Attending stakeholder forums or webinars to receive updates

Regularly scheduled meetings (e.g., monthly / quarterly / 6-monthly)

Ad-hoc meetings or correspondence when relevant evidence or topics arise

7.2 Which topics within the local plan are most relevant to your organisation, business or group?

Public transport

Cross-boundary strategic planning

7.3 At which stages would it be most useful for your organisation, business or group to be involved?

~ Early scoping of the plan contents

~ Development of vision and outcomes

~ Evidence gathering and reviewing

~ Spatial strategy options

~ Infrastructure planning

~ Review a proposed full local plan draft

7.4 Please provide details of any other contacts in your organisation who would like to be involved:

Peter West OBE CMILT, author of both Preliminary Strategic Business Cases as independent advisor to the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance.

Email: suerbaumwest@btinternet.com

A Plan for Northern Devon – Scoping Consultation

7.5 Would you like to subscribe to our People and Place e-bulletin for general local plan updates?*

Yes

7.6 If “yes”, please confirm the email address you would like to subscribe with:

tim.steer@railfuture.org.uk

In line with legislation, anyone responding to our local plan consultations may request to be notified at a specific address when one or more of the following occur [(i) to (ix)]:

7.7 Would you like to be formally notified when one or more of the above occur?

Yes

7.8 If “yes”, please confirm the address you would like to be notified via:

Email or home address.

tim.steer@railfuture.org.uk

8 How best to involve you

Individuals only.

N/A

9 Final comments

9.1 Please share anything else you think we should include in the new plan:

We note this in para. 8.4 on page 38 of the Baseline Evidence (current Local Plan) “Reinstatement of other former railway lines will also be explored towards the objective of reducing the need to travel by car although any future reinstatement must include suitable provision of an alternative walking and cycling route where existing provision will be displaced.” and, with additional objectives, anticipate a similar statement in the new plan including the addition of ‘improved’ after ‘alternative.’

9.2 Please share anything else you think we should consider as we prepare the new local plan:

Following the announcement on 16th July of government’s intentions for local government reorganisation across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, we advocate seizing the opportunity of an emerging Local Plan to play its part in helping to position Northern Devon as the leading contender to be the administrative centre for the new Devon Coast and Countryside Council unitary authority.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Steer

Chair, Railfuture Devon & Cornwall regional branch
with

Roger Blake BA MRTPI (Rtd) MTPS

Acting Convener, Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance
Infrastructure & Networks Director, Railfuture national Board

cc shapetheplan@torridge.gov.uk

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