

*The Thinking Woman's Railway
Centre of the Campaign for Real Railways
Home of the Camping Vans, TOAD & TADPOLE*

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Dartmoor National Park Authority,
Parke,
Bovey Tracey,
Newton Abbot
TQ13 9JQ

RAILWAY RECONSTRUCTION

For the attention of Louise Barattini, Planning Case Officer

Dear Ms. Barattini,

**An Objection to the Application for
Outline Planning Permission by Edwin Tucker & Sons Ltd.
for Change of Use to Residential Development
at Brewery Meadow, Ashburton**

**Being more particularly an objection
to the proposal to build four homes on
the course of the Ashburton Branch Railway**

Although the masterplan for the area, against which this application must be considered, was adopted by the authority on 3rd July, it is very seriously flawed and in all likelihood would not withstand a legal challenge, if one were to be mounted by railway interests.

The architects of the "Chuley Road Masterplan" made two fundamental mistakes:-

- ☞ They failed to identify the central architectural and historical feature and chose to call the area by a name that would not be generally recognizable; and
- ☞ They failed to consult the neighbouring railway authority or anybody with specialist knowledge and expertise.

It should be noted that the planning and development consultancy acting for Edwin Tucker & Sons Ltd. mentions in its Planning Statement accompanying the application that the site is part of Ashburton Station:-

2.2 *The site is part of a larger area of mainly low density commercial buildings and car parking which previously comprised the Ashburton railway station and goods yard.*

Indeed, Edwin Tucker & Sons Ltd. is found where it is today because of the railway, having moved from East Street in 1876, not long after the opening of the branch line.

Why, when everyone else seems readily to identify Ashburton Station, the authority's forward planning team chose to call it Chuley Road is yet to be explained.

It is not suggested that failing to identify Ashburton Station as the dominant feature was deliberate obfuscation, only that it was extremely unhelpful in attracting the attention of the wider community which affectionately regards the place as a classic Great Western branch line terminus.

The authority completely failed to research the subject of the railway, even within its own files and reference library. Moreover, when the railway interests were finally alerted to what was proposed and made their submission, the National Park, under pressure to finalize the masterplan, again failed to consult any railway authority and failed adequately to gauge local opinion, the economic potential of a rail link and its value as future public transport.

This far into the new century, with full awareness of the fragility of energy supplies and with the environmental imperative guiding the best design, it is incredible that an application should come forward for housing, on a site but a short, level distance from the centre of a small market town, which still assumes, or provides for, universal car ownership; and further, that the application seeks to obstruct the course of a railway whose reinstatement would put what may well become a national rail station on the doorstep.

All the glib references to policies aiming to reduce the need to travel, encourage public transport use and break the dependence on the private car do not disguise the sad fact that this proposed development is stuck firmly in the rut of 1970s transport thinking, having to provide more than one car parking space per house, as well as providing for town visitors' cars.

And this is being done to fund Edwin Tuckers' desertion from the station and town to a road junction site, a move the firm may regret in future.

If the masterplan is nullified as a result of a judicial review and provision is made for railway reconstruction in a revised version, the greater part of the present application, that is the area west of the river, would be unaffected.

So it follows that the objection is only to the outline proposal for four homes on the course of the former branch railway.

The revised application submitted in August includes three more dwellings squeezed in west of the river and one less on the course of the branch railway. If the remaining four here were to be omitted from the plan, this would only mean two fewer overall than was originally applied for in January; seemingly a small sacrifice for a firm having a long association with Ashburton and one claiming to be concerned for the town's future.

In view of the vulnerability of the masterplan, surely it would be better if Edwin Tucker & Sons Ltd. withdrew, if only for now, this least element of their application.

The state having absented itself from anything other than flamboyant, environmentally destructive projects, it seems that the best hope for railway reconstruction for the time being comes from the so-called heritage sector. But it should not be thought that a railway built in the first instance primarily for leisure travel is of less value than one intended to be functional, like the planned extension to Tavistock. For what the steam enthusiasts are doing, perhaps unwittingly, when rebuilding and extending, is laying the ground for the future.

In seeking to block the line of railway at Ashburton, Edwin Tucker & Sons Ltd. want to deny the town this future; to condemn the town to being left out of the coming transport revolution.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Burges