

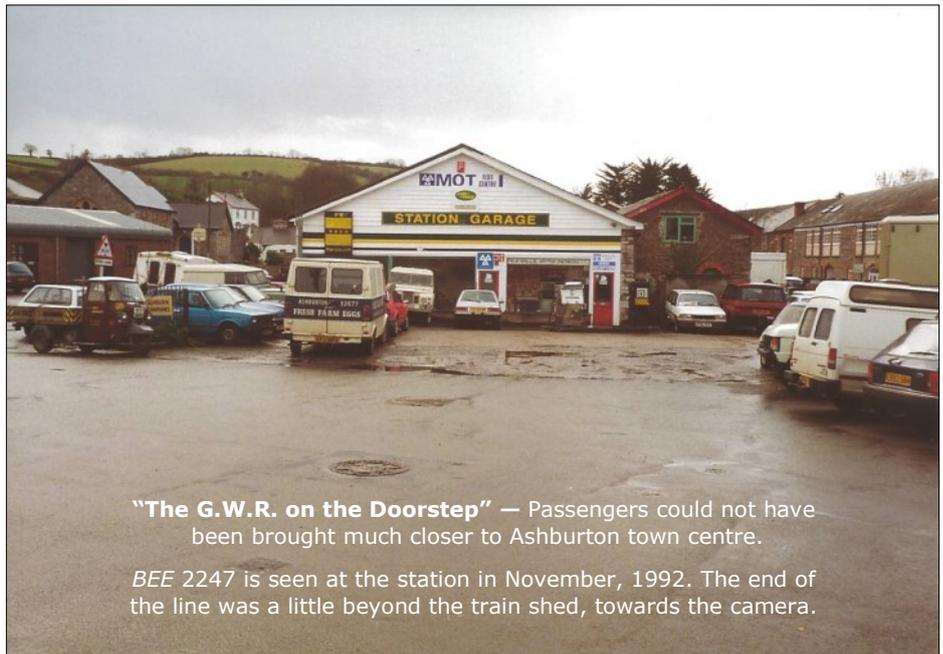
Friends of Ashburton Station

Aiming to save a model Great Western terminus

After three years' work, including much consultation, by the Dartmoor National Park Authority on a masterplan—to which future planning applications would have to conform—for the Chuley Road area, some members of the South Devon Railway at last became aware of the threat to Ashburton Station.

Having been pressing for a long time, and the urgency of the matter since April, this railway was happy to submit some words of support to the Park Authority, delivered by hand along with a copy of Peter Kay's history of the Ashburton Branch to stimulate the planners' imaginative juices, twelve days after the public meeting held in Ashburton Town Hall at which a railway mob thrust its views before officials and townsfolk.

Time will tell whether, as Yamamoto is supposed to have remarked after Pearl Harbour, "a sleeping giant" has been awoken; or whether a tired old dog has been disturbed from its stupor.



"The G.W.R. on the Doorstep" — Passengers could not have been brought much closer to Ashburton town centre.

BEE 2247 is seen at the station in November, 1992. The end of the line was a little beyond the train shed, towards the camera.

Letter to the Dartmoor National Park Authority: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/Lett3182.pdf>

(This and the history book were not acknowledged, which has become standard practice with this authority.)

January, 2015

"There are railways up Snowdon and Snaefell. Would it be so bad to have ours to Princetown rebuilt?"

Correspondence with Dr. Kevin Bishop, National Park Officer: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/Lett3207.pdf>

July, 2015

From the early euphoria of being amongst a gang of railwaymen fired for action, afterwards retiring to the *Silent Whistle* (formerly the *Railway Hotel*) for a beer and going on to the exotic *Mogul's Palace* for a late supper, it was always likely to end in disappointment.

The railway group had arrived very late to the fray, was ill-prepared and faced one of the most morale-sapping authorities in the land. Nevertheless, a process followed which, to the uninitiated, gave some hope that, in true British tradition, victory could be snatched from the jaws of Dartmoor defeatism.

The Friends of Ashburton Station was formalized under the chairmanship of Alasdair Page, with David Sheppard, of B.B.C. Radio Devon fame, as secretary. A plan was hastily drawn up and over the coming months was presented to the planning team, Buckfastleigh and Ashburton town councils, and a meeting of the Dartmoor National Park Authority.

Not having any experience of this authority, the group sensed that they were being received with some enthusiasm and that the senior forward planner was quite friendly and supportive.

At a meeting of the National Park's Planning and Sustainable Development

Working Panel in December, the level of interest in the railway was recognized and it was proposed that the Friends be given an opportunity to prepare a case which might justify alterations to the Masterplan. In January, the Friends were asked to do in three months what would have taken a professional consultancy a year or more to produce; the authority admitted that the task was "onerous."

On the deadline, they submitted a lightweight report¹, requesting two principal alterations to the plan: namely, the omission of the housing proposed to be built on the course of the line and the retention of the Chuley Road Garage building next to the train shed. The group envisaged the three stages that could result in trains running from Buckfastleigh and the station eventually brought back to life.

Aiming to come up with the answer they wanted, the National Park's planners pretended to conduct a serious study of whether railway reconstruction was possible, who wanted it and what benefits it would bring. They issued their report in April, 2015, clearing the way for the Masterplan to be presented to the authority on the first Friday of June. The "Ashburton Railway - Appraisal of Options Report"² was the bundle of denials and distortions expected of an authority that excels at finding the spark of an imaginative idea and pissing on it.

The Station Friends responded³, expressing their extreme disappointment.

Always be unsettled when their warm embrace is felt: it's them feeling for your ribs so they know where to stick the knife.

The matter was deferred on 5th June because Ashburton Town Council had yet to make its decision. No one was at Parke to represent the station friends' group, which ably demonstrates the belief at large that endless outpourings on internet chat pages substitute for human presence and action on the ground.

At its meeting on the 9th, Ashburton councillors voted to

support the adoption of the Masterplan. Teignbridge District Council, which until 1997 was the planning authority for this part of the National Park, had already given its approval, which was no surprise, it being another anti-rail council. All opinion having been gathered, the matter was again put to the Dartmoor authority.

The showing for the railway was better on this occasion and three men were booked to speak on its behalf. Charlie Dennis, Ashburton Town Councillor and S.D.R. volunteer driver, referred to his canvassing of Ashburton traders and their almost universal desire to see trains return. Vernon Coon (who had been prepared to speak at the earlier meeting), an independent railway supporter, was cut short after saying: "rarely in the history of town planning has an authority got something so spectacularly wrong, spurning a golden opportunity for some very short term limited gain."

Dick Wood, the former General Manager of the S.D.R., had brought 25 copies of *Heritage Railway* to the meeting; he was ordered not to hand them out but to leave them on the table. The magazine contained a damning editorial by Robin

Jones, who drew attention to

local authority support for schemes in Cornwall, Dorset and elsewhere, and asked: "So what on earth is going wrong in Ashburton?" He also stated: "For reasons I and others are struggling desperately to comprehend, Ashburton's big

chance has been transformed into the dampest of squibs." [Yes, that's what this authority does so well. - Ed.].

Mr. Wood informed the members that 18 local authorities around the country were working with private railways on development plans. He spoke of the economic benefit that steam railways brought and cited figures for the South Devon. His speech was also cut short.

It was obvious from the first question about car parking that members were minded to approve the Masterplan. After a brief "debate," during which several members feigned sadness that the railway could not be accommodated, and one saying that it would be better to have a new station outside town, they voted unanimously to follow the officer's recommendation.

¹ F.o.A.S. Requested Alterations to the plan: <https://teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/RequestedAlterationstotheChuleyRoadMasterPlan.pdf>

² D.N.P.A. Appraisal of Options Report: <https://teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/AshburtonRailway-AppraisalofOptionsReport.pdf>

³ F.o.A.S. response to the above: <https://teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/FoASResponse.pdf>

On 29th June, this railway sent each of the 18 authority members (17 to their home addresses) an individual letter, a copy of the original letter above, the leaflet "There were once 31 stations ..." (hastily altered and printed, before being handed out at the Town Hall meeting in 2014) and a promotional mouse mat.

"Please try to picture the gentle wave of people that would emerge from St. Lawrence Lane after the arrival of a train—the passengers looking for grub and gifts and things to do. Imagine the town's traders eyeing the clock in expectation of the swell. And all without a single extra car pushing into the narrow streets."

Letter to individual members of D.N.P.A.: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/Members.pdf>

"There were once 31 stations ... ": <https://teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/31Stations-Ashburton.pdf>

Churchill once said: "The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter." But he hadn't spent a morning listening to the Dartmoor National Park Authority.

Wrong Name and Failure to Consult

In short, the need for a masterplan at Ashburton Station arose because three sizeable businesses wished to sell up or relocate, and thus to redevelop their sites. The Dartmoor planners were afraid that pocket schemes might not work together and so they viewed the site as a whole and tried to produce an area redevelopment that would benefit the town. Planning applications would have broadly to conform to a framework masterplan; necessary, it was said, to ensure that chaotic, piecemeal development was avoided.

Actually, what makes British townscapes so delightful is their very randomness—the differing rooflines; the changes in level; the add-ons and adaptations; the varying styles and materials; and all the years of history encapsulated in architecture. But it was never done all at once, which is what happens now under area redevelopment, which somehow never blends at the edges. But that was then; it must be accepted that Dartmoor had to face the challenge using modern methods.

Like a council is governed by its councillors, the Dartmoor National Park Authority is the members, who "employ" and control the officers. It is democratic but none of the members is elected, although most are there by virtue of being elected to other authorities.

What Vernon Coon would have said, had he been given a full three minutes:-

"The plan as it stands is a one trick pony, addressing the needs of one company and their objective of moving from Brewery Meadow to Pear Tree.

"I would urge members to include the option to retain the track bed and safeguard the whole route into Ashburton Station for the benefit of business and the whole town but also to consider the option of a Public Enquiry which would give the benefit of allowing all interested parties the opportunity to put their case to an independent hearing chaired by an accountable inspector rather than the limited forum this important document has so far received."

The initial failing was a fundamental one. Upon entering this area of the town, the officer had first to establish a name for it which properly defined its character.

Immediately in front of anyone coming from the town centre along St. Lawrence Lane is the train shed, to this day "Station Garage." Attached to the right of it is the station building. Behind it is the goods shed; beyond is the locomotive shed. All but the train shed is solid masonry. This is Ashburton Station—or just "the station," since, when the rail transport system was the prime mover, "station" in general use

meant "railway station." Other stations—bus, police, fire—had to be explicitly qualified. Station Roads across the country testify to this; they never led anywhere but the railway station. Ashburton does not have a Station Road, but its railway remnants are substantial and unmistakable. Had this, for instance, been the site of a castle, a mill, a factory or an ecclesiastical building, then surely this would have decided the historical name.



Twenty-three years after the previous photograph was taken, BEE 2309 waits at the railway terminus. Chuley Road is seen at left.

The Expunging of Railway History

In Budleigh Salterton, East Devon, on the *Green Line*, a stranger might be forgiven if he failed to identify it, as Station Road does not lead all the way and the station itself has become *Norman Crescent*, commemorating the later bargain food store that occupied the site.

But, no, the modern town and country planner who lives his life in his car, who goes everywhere by road and is detached from history, chose to call the complex "Chuley Road," a name that would be meaningless to anyone outside Ashburton who did not have dealings with firms there.

The big questions that have to be asked then are: four years ago, when the first discussions began about

what would amount to major upheavals on the site, if it had been called Ashburton Station, would not the railway interests immediately have been made aware of what was going to unfold? And, given that start, how advanced might have been the railway's plans today?

It could be argued that the first fundamental failure led to the second one. If it had been decided to refer to the complex by its rightful name, it may have woken up the officers to the need to consult railway authorities and to research its history. Not, in this case, its operational history, but only the 43 years since abandonment.

Ashburton Station was the terminus of the Ashburton Branch. The planners might have asked themselves: Isn't seven miles of this branch still in use? And isn't the present terminus, Buckfastleigh, only 2½ miles away? And isn't the operator of that railway a statutory body?

Had the planners done any research, they would have discovered the traumatic amputation of the lower limb that occurred in 1972, the work done in 1998 on possible reconstruction and the never quite extinguished desire among many to reconnect to the historic terminus.

And so, whereas normally not just immediate neighbours are consulted about proposed developments, but government departments and anyone else likely to be interested or affected, in this case the planners did not think to consult the railway authority just down the line or indeed anyone with specialist knowledge.

Parke, the National Trust-owned pile on the edge of Bovey Tracey, has been the headquarters of the Dartmoor authority since 1979. The estate borders the former Moretonhampstead Branch. Most of the staff coming to work in their cars will pass the roundabout which marks the position of Bovey level crossing; no longer of road

and rail, but of Station Road/Haytor Road and Monks Way, the bypass built on the course of the line. The Bovey station building still stands, as does the goods shed which is owned by the National Park.

There were once 31 stations on and around Dartmoor; there will not be a planning officer in post who remembers when the last one, Okehampton, closed in 1972. Modern men, passing over that "level crossing," will either see railways as yesterday's transport or, as likely, have no thoughts whatsoever.

It was for this very reason that a copy of the Railway Development Society's (now *Railfuture*) 300-page *South West Rail Strategy* was sent to the former National Park Officer in 2004. There is no guidance from government, there are no internal policies; an individual should be able to deposit information to fill this void and although it was not done with Ashburton in mind, it was for just such an eventuality.



Could this be the closure notice pasted to the office door of Bovey goods shed?

But National Park officers, it is said, do not read material in their reference library any more. After the meeting in June, the Teign Valley scout went to reception with the railway's copy of the document and asked the young lady if she could say whether it was in the building. She said she would look after lunch and took a name and telephone number. She informed the scout that there was no library catalogue. She never telephoned and it can be seen from the letter sent by Dr. Bishop, the current National Park Officer, that he would not say whether it could be found.

So, either the document is not in the building, meaning that the only source of information on railways was thrown out; or it is in the building and nobody thought to see what it had to say about the Ashburton Branch and its terminus.

"The trouble is that DNPA is making decisions in a vacuum — without any deep historical knowledge or understanding of the place. As nobody within DNPA is interested in reading anything about Dartmoor, and their library has now been defunct for at least 10 years, this is perhaps not surprising."

Insider

A Granite Rock and a Hard Place

From the day the station friends' group made themselves known in early November, 2014, there could only have been one outcome, and all that happened between the meeting in Ashburton Town Hall and the one at Parke on 3rd July was a convoluted exercise involving the National Park being seen to follow procedure and save face. No organization, including a department of the state, could have produced any meaningful plan in the short time available. Devon County Council, for example, has been working on reinstating the six miles of track between Bere Alston and Tavistock for nearly 25 years (35 years in 2026).

Why was this? Because as a result of the original failures, the narrow ideas of the Masterplan had been discussed for too long for it to go on any longer. Plans for a convenience store, some houses, a bit of public space and more car parking—a scheme straight out of a town planner's university course work—had been promoted, amended and consulted upon until it had become stagnant.

Meanwhile, one of the businesses that intended to relocate on the edge of town had submitted a planning application and rightly, for itself, having only its own interests to consider, demanded determination of the

application without further delay, the new homes it included being outlined in the draft masterplan, a promise it would now be hard to revoke.

The authority was stuck between a bog and a shit place. Because it had pursued only the one unimaginative use for the site, completely ignoring its former purpose, it was now being pressured to deal with a planning application which would enable a firm, which no doubt bought the railway formation for a few thousand pounds from the B.R. Property Board in the mid 1970s, to fund its

Dartmoor National Park Authority sold part of the track formation, now called "Bulliver's Way," to the town council with a covenant giving the vendor a 50% share of any increase in value, such as would happen with a grant of planning permission.

What a pity British Rail did not impose such covenants on all the land that was flogged off in the 1960s and '70s and later was hugely uplifted in value by supermarkets, industrial premises and housing estates.

Of course, the best covenant of all would have been one allowing the state to take the land back as of right, continental fashion.

move to the out-of-town location. The authority knew very well that if the firm appealed a refusal, the inspector would likely find in the applicant's favour, there having been no work done on a railway scheme sufficient to give reason to protect the alignment. The authority has too small a budget to expose itself to an enquiry and can thus be browbeaten, not by the likes of *Tessie Cohen*, but by an ordinary town trader.

From the start, the authority knew that the station friends' efforts would be futile. The authority knew the reasons it would use to demolish whatever work was done. Members filing into the meeting room at Parke on 3rd July had worked out, or more likely bluntly been told, that they could give only one answer. The debate was a sham; the result was predetermined. No weight of submissions, no speaker or professional consultant could have made a difference.

The equivalent of patting baby's head at election time?

Mel Stride, the identikit Tory M.P. for Central Devon who has a constituency home in Ashburton, did not answer two letters from the railway on the subject of the inland diversionary routes but was there like a shot when the station friends' group asked for his help and promised some publicity.

After the Dawlish débâcle in February, 2014, the spotlight was cast upon two Dartmoor railways: the Teign Valley Branch and the former Southern main line. By November, a third was picked out. Yet, is any indication given in the letter from National Park Officer, Dr. Bishop, that his authority is now cognizant of these transport routes and is aiming to form some policy for these and any other railway issues that may arise? Has the authority given any sign that it would know what to do in future? Is there the remotest possibility that Dr. Bishop's non-communicative, distant, complacent, tired, incompetent authority will admit that it has fouled up Ashburton Station?

"I can well imagine DNPA being taken by surprise—last Friday I asked Stephen Belli (Director of Planning) what DNPA policy was on railways and he said 'We haven't been asked' (!) so I said that he didn't need to wait to be asked! Clearly it's yet another aspect of Dartmoor which has not yet impinged on their consciousness."

Insider

Chuley Road Masterplan Second Draft: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/ChuleyRoadMasterplan.pdf>

Chuley Road Masterplan Second Draft - Authority Report: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/AuthorityReports.pdf>

Chuley Rd, Ashburton Revised Master Plan October 2014

The Chuley Road proposals by the Dartmoor National Park planning authority would see much of the former Ashburton station site covered with new housing. Although Railfuture has no plans to campaign for reopening at the present time it would seem wrong for the opportunity to be lost for the future or needing to buy numerous homes for demolition. An alternative route alongside the A38 bypass would be possible, but require civil engineering work to reduce the gradient as the road is rising towards Alston Cross at this point.



The former Ashburton terminus (left picture) in use as a garage and viewed towards Buckfastleigh. Beyond (right picture) only a few industrial buildings occupy the trackbed, such as the white building next to the old goods shed. Photo 4 May 2013.

As also mentioned in the April Railwatch No 143, we wrote to the Dartmoor National Park planning authority on 12th December 2014.

The growing use of the local railway network in Devon suggests that Ashburton with a population of just over 4,000 and Buckfastleigh around 3,600 together have future potential to support a daily rail service. This could be every 2 hours to Totnes, Ivybridge, Plympton (new station) and Plymouth, Assuming a 45 mph top speed between Ashburton and Totnes the journey time to Plymouth would be 50 minutes. This would open up employment, educational and leisure opportunities for local residents, in Plymouth, and also give them convenient access to London and northbound trains at Totnes. The South Devon Railway might also wish to run heritage steam services into Ashburton so bringing tourists to the local shops and cafes.

Ashburton is little more than two miles from the existing track at Buckfastleigh, but the Chuley Road plans make no mention of provision for a restored rail service. Railfuture requests that this aspect of the plan is revised to leave space for a railway. From a heritage perspective the old station would be the first choice, but an alternative might be to re-route the line alongside the A38 to provide a single platform station close to the proposed medium/short stay car park with 23 spaces (labelled site 9 on page 8 of the Chuley Road, Ashburton Revised Master Plan). This would be convenient for all the proposed new houses and still be within a short walking distance of Ashburton town centre.

We also realise that a station on the south side of the development would be physically possible around the area marked 20 and allocated for 56 long stay parking places. However, we would be concerned that this would be further from the town centre and be too isolated for passengers alighting there after dark.

It is therefore the considered opinion of Railfuture that the Chuley Road Master Plan is redesigned to take into account protection of a corridor of land for a restored railway into Ashburton. This could be the old railway route or a new route.

The Masterplan Community Newsletter

The National Park Authority published six of these, between May, 2013, and March, 2015. The railway is mentioned in the last issue.

The Masterplan Community Newsletter, Issue 6: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/ChuleyRoadMasterplanNewsletter.pdf>

The view from the back row ...

Whom do they represent? What do they protect?

Sitting on the public benches in the meeting room at Parke to hear the speakers and witness the enacting of a foregone conclusion, my eye ranged over those around the tables.

The head of planning was there, dressed like a Cuban pimp. The chief executive passed for a humourless meerkat. The chairman ... Ah, the chairman, one of three members I once reported to the Standards Committee, accusing them of speaking untruths.* The house lawyer was sat preening himself as if he were about to hold the floor at the Old Bailey.

At each side of the room the members face each other across the floor. There is an overwhelming sense of dullness about the place. It's the grey, the frowning, the specs on strings, the excess of cartilage, the gender imbalance, the crippling conservatism. You half expect one of them to have become a stiff by the end of the meeting.

They sit there doodling or feigning interest in the agenda and appear not to be listening as speakers pour out their heartfelt pleas.

They don't catch buses or ride bicycles or do shitty jobs. They don't have to worry about the bills. Their detachment is not the kind that might produce wise decisions, like the elders who once went into the wilderness to contemplate in isolation.

Whatever these men are individually, and there must be some with ability, their strength is sunk in the collective mire.

One of them continued to sit there in judgement over the lives of others while he faced criminal proceedings for allowing a crook to grow dope on his farm—a "diversification" he thought would aid its profitability—and is still only "given leave of absence" after admitting his guilt and being sentenced.

My hope in writing to them all was that possibly one free thinker might break ranks and say: "I am going to vote for this because I have to but I believe that as an authority we are making a monumental mistake." Or even: "It is obvious that our officers have blundered." But not one really cared a damn about signing the death warrant for Ashburton Station.

And when it was over and I found myself talking to railway advocates in the courtyard, the grinning members started filing out with plates laden with sandwiches and cake. The ranger service cut, a load of functions scrapped, funding slashed, but a caterer still brings a buffet lunch for the members—on top of the £130 each they get for turning up.

The impression is given that those who work at Parke believe they are guests at an Edwardian country house party which plebs should never get near. I think that the National Park would have been better administered from a nondescript office building in town, with a token moorland scene hanging on a wall.

Many argue that the Dartmoor National Park Authority serves no useful purpose; indeed, that National Park designation has been a handicap and failed to deliver any worthwhile result that could not have been achieved by other means. I had clung to my indoctrination, convinced that the detractors were wrong, but I can no longer shrink from admitting it: this authority is a shower of shit. It must be dismantled and any useful roles transferred to other, existing bodies.

* They were naturally found to have done no wrong.

C.B.

"I particularly like your masterly summation of a DNPA planning meeting."

Insider

"Trashburton," by Robin Jones: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/Trashburton.pdf>

August, 2015

There being no objections forthcoming from the army of S.D.R. supporters to the proposal (D.N.P.A. Ref.: 0045/15) to build five homes on the course of the branch railway, the E. & T.V.R. submitted a brief letter.

Letter to the Dartmoor National Park Authority, 21.8.15: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/Lett3310.pdf>

On 23rd August, a request was made under the Freedom of Information Act, 2000, for the D.N.P.A. to advise the amount of money paid to the Building Design Partnership (BDP) and other outside consultants in connection with work on the Chuley Road Masterplan.

If the figure is revealed, it may show why the authority is so determined to ensure that the Masterplan is not undone. It should be understood that, had the railway interests been consulted in the first instance, and plans for reconstruction instituted - or, at the very least, the railway land protected for the future - a masterplan would not have been necessary because the other sites would then have been only peripheral.

September, 2015

January's application for outline planning permission to build 30 homes, with five on the line of railway, was withdrawn and another (D.N.P.A. Ref.: 0441/15) was submitted, this one seeking permission for 32 homes with four on the track. This railway immediately sent another letter of objection.

Letter to the Dartmoor National Park Authority, 7.9.15: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/Lett3326.pdf>

At the same time it was revealed that the Dartmoor National Park Authority, in response to an approach from a law firm acting for the South Devon Railway Trust, had, after being advised by its own hired counsel, decided to return the Masterplan to the final draft stage and conduct more procedural covering. Six weeks were allowed.

On the 17th, Mr. Walledge, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, was kind enough to reply to the railway's F.o.I. request, providing an analysis of the payments made to outside agencies so far. It is entered here without comment, except to say that Dartmoor clearly is under pressure from a higher power.

Response to Freedom of Information Request, 17.9.15: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/FoIJPEG.pdf>

In **October**, the opportunity was taken to canvass support among the enthusiasts on a charity H.S.T. special. After a disagreement, the Teign Valley did not take part. <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/whats-new.php#charity>

The Spiritual Terminus

The hour has come; where are the men?

Unlike the railways which have from the beginning, or for a very long time, fanned the flames of an ambition to reach some distant point, whether the revival of a complete railway or an extension to make a line whole, the Buckfastleigh crowd, in all honesty, have never had any real desire to reach across the gap to the stranded terminus at Ashburton.

It is fully accepted that nothing could have been done at the time to save the branch; it was the height of road mania when it was intended that railways be destroyed. Perhaps it was too much to expect that any yearning would develop while the line was run by the Dart Valley. But for all the years that the branch has been under the present control, there should have been amongst real men a growing urge to put right a gross injustice, culminating in the widespread belief that, come what may, there would be only one end: Ashburton would be reconnected.

But there never has been any conviction. Anyone who had questioned or listened and who had felt the pulse at Buckfastleigh would have concluded the same. A former General Manager once openly admitted that returning to Ashburton made no sense as Buckfastleigh would still be the effective terminus. Honour played no part; the heart had no say.

A recap of the events of the last five years proves the lack of spirit. In 2013, Tucker's were granted planning permission to build a new complex on 12 acres of pasture the firm had bought speculatively in 2010 for around £100,000. Within this was the course of the railway. Not a bleat or a bah was heard from the local railway people about this or when the land opposite was being talked about as the site of a new market to replace the one at Newton Abbot.

At the same time, the National Park authority published its masterplanning exercise for Ashburton Station. Although this was disguised as "Chuley Road," it is hard to see how it escaped the notice of so many railway people that the station and any hope of reinstating the line was in jeopardy.

Even when the Teign Valley alerted the Friends to the danger the station faced in April, 2014, it was November before anyone acted, and then the fledgling campaign was led, not by a gang of old hands, but by one of the youngest members of staff and a local radio presenter.

Considering the lateness of the hour and the forces by then arrayed against the railway, the Friends did extremely well to come up with a set of plans and promote them as best they could in the time available. The committee members said to start with that they could only do this much and that it would be up to others to take forward the campaign. It is unfortunate that they baled out at such a critical moment but they should be commended for doing the groundwork and setting up a momentum.

Out of the thousands of staff, volunteers, supporters and associates of the South Devon, fewer than 50 could be bothered even to do the least thing and object to houses being built on the track, when the first of the planning applications came up for consultation. Earlier this year, at the authority meeting at which the Masterplan was to be ratified, no Friends were present; on the next occasion when the plan was adopted, there was only a small contingent.

Had a latent force been unleashed a year ago, its cry by now would have been deafening; there would have been meetings and fund raising and press releases; studies and research would have been underway; the South Devon would have been at long last making an heroic push.

But no matter what musings and bold talk there might have been about Ashburton in the cabins and pubs, the truth is that there is not and never has been any real belief in a return to the spiritual terminus.

And in this they have failed not just the locality, not just the railway brotherhood: they have failed the nation.

The *Mughook* Experiment

Does the medium used by people to lay bare the dreary minutiae of their lives for others to view have any value in campaigning?

The railway's penman reluctantly signed up to *Mughook* so as to read what was being written by the Ashburton friends group in the only area where there seemed to be any activity.

What he found seemed like an endless scroll of disjointed, disorganized entries in a virtual scrapbook, much of it with poor spelling and grammar, tapped out in the small hours by people with eyelids propped up by matchsticks. The group was actually constituted in January, 2014, but its jottings are useless as a journal or an action report or archive.

When the Teign Valley joined, the group had around 700 members and none had noticed that there was a planning application before the National Park Authority for the first of the developments affecting the station; in fact, the application had been submitted in January. This was withdrawn and another submitted on 18th August. It was this one that the Teign Valley brought to the attention of the Friends in an initial post on *Mughook*.

The call to arms was quickly acted upon and the railway exposed its own web pages and letters to the authority as a source of inspiration.

In the case of Tuckers' relocation to Peartree, Mr. Churchward, the Managing Director, had mobilized his customers by encouraging them to write or fill in pre-printed pro forma letters. It was reasonable to assume that a great many of the 700 Friends could do better than the 1,562 identical letters submitted in support of Tuckers'.

The planning file at Parke did begin to grow, most submissions being wired rather than written, despite the railway's suggestion that paper has more weight; it has a physical presence, the presentation on the file is better and the act of writing a letter is a mark of greater commitment.

However, the effort soon faltered. This was put down to a failing of the *Mughook* mechanism which does not necessarily notify dormant members of new strands.

Shortly afterwards, the Teign Valley agitator, being unused to dealing with people he had not met and had never spoken to, and finding the whole thing completely alienating, quietly left by the ethereal back door.

Interestingly, the first mention of the Chuley Road Masterplan appears on 12th April, 2014, five days after the railway had telephoned Alasdair Page to advise him of what was proposed and the effects it would have on the station. The diary entry the following day reads: "Tel. D.N.P.A.—put through to Dan Janota, Sen. Forward P.O.—No reply." Another call was made a few days later, again there being no reply. And there the matter was left until the Friends group girded their loins in November.

The planning authority will normally accept comments on an application until shortly before it is put to the committee, but the last objection was received on 13th October, from someone who had appealed to Michael Portillo. Fifty-four objections are listed, including seven letters, but not all are from station friends.

2026: It must be confessed that the scribe did creep back later. He had some difficulty in rejoining which necessitated a brief correspondence with a chap called Ross, who was most helpful. The scribe often remarks that he has no "friends" on *Facebook*, but that he has a friend *at Facebook*.

Subsequently, the fellow who created the "Teign Valley Railway" page invited the scribe to be the joint administrator. The scribe now makes most of the posts, which are reliably informative or just for fun, and he has control over other posts and those who comment.

Only one man has made an unpleasant comment. It wasn't deleted; instead it was used as an example in a short criticism of the "social" medium.

Same principle as pulley profiles to stop belts from coming off. Nothing new. its not surprising anyone shows indifference.....

Conicity: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/whats-new.php#conicity>

Around Ashburton on a grey day

The northbound carriageway of the A38 is taken over Chuley Hill by the bridge built for the 1933 Ashburton Bypass. The southbound carriageway, beyond, opened in 1974, has a concrete bridge adjoining the original.

Gulwell Tunnel, reputed to lie buried at Peartree, not far to the south, was of similar construction. The road bridge has a segmental concrete arch with granite voussoirs; photographs of the tunnel show Candy's bricks were used.





Above Gulwell Tunnel

The 1933 Ashburton Bypass at right is now the northbound entry slip road. The road junction here was in the immediate foreground and the northern portal of the tunnel was where the sign is at left. The railway cutting going towards the terminus is behind "Old Totnes Road."

Before the bypass was built, Old Totnes Road crossed the railway on its own bridge.

The 47-yard tunnel was named after the nearest farm, whose buildings now lie beneath the dual carriageway.

The 1933 bypass between Old Totnes Road and Castle Bridge remains only as a footpath.

Bringing this formation back into use is the key to providing a passage for the railway through the extravagant road interchange.

Imagine the early cars, coaches and lorries tearing along this new stretch of road at a time when there was no testing of drivers and little regulation of vehicles.

The improvement of the trunk roads, provided practically free for users out of the public purse, caused a great deal of harm to the railways, whose every move was fettered by a century of legislation.



Roughly on the course of the railway looking towards Buckfastleigh

The exit and entry slip roads on either side of the camera join the road from Chuley Cross and Pridhamsleigh to Peartree Cross at centre. Beyond is the site of Tuckers' new development, including a 627m² steel-framed building for three unspecified uses which will straddle the course of the former line.

From a little to the right of the previous photograph, the twelve acres which effectively is to become a retail park can be seen. Its wide-splayed entrance will be here.

On the very edge of the Dartmoor National Park, the site now has full planning consent, won after the second application, contrary to policy.

The railway once divided this land, presumably part of Gulwell.



The continuation of the 1933 bypass beyond the abandoned length towards Buckfastleigh is now reduced to a "C" road. The Dartmoor Lodge junction is beyond the parked cars.

The field at left, bounded by the River Ashburn, is owned by Rendells the auctioneers and would be the only way around Tuckers' retail park for a new line of railway.



The start of the 1933 Ashburton Bypass at The Dartmoor Lodge (formerly *The Pear Tree*). The old Plymouth to Leeds road used to go left towards the town.

The land at right is owned by Rendells, which firm has vague designs on relocating Newton Abbot livestock market.

Off camera to the right is where the 1998 study by Exeter University envisaged the new branch terminus, Ashburn Station, would be.





From the modern Pridhamsleigh Bridge looking towards Ashburton

Public transport campaigners have to deal with a system that is destined to collapse as if it were going to last for ever, while trying to make a case for the only mode of transport that gives any hope for the future.

And looking towards Buckfastleigh, part of which can be seen at centre right even on a grey day. There was a small limestone quarry at Pridhamsleigh but it was never rail connected.



It is not difficult to imagine a new railway sharing the overbridge at Pridhamsleigh.

Was the bridge built wider so as to accommodate a railway?

Or, more realistically, was it to allow widening of the road?

In the mid-1990s, there was great pressure to make the A38 "Devon Expressway" into a motorway and this bridge would have spanned two more lanes.



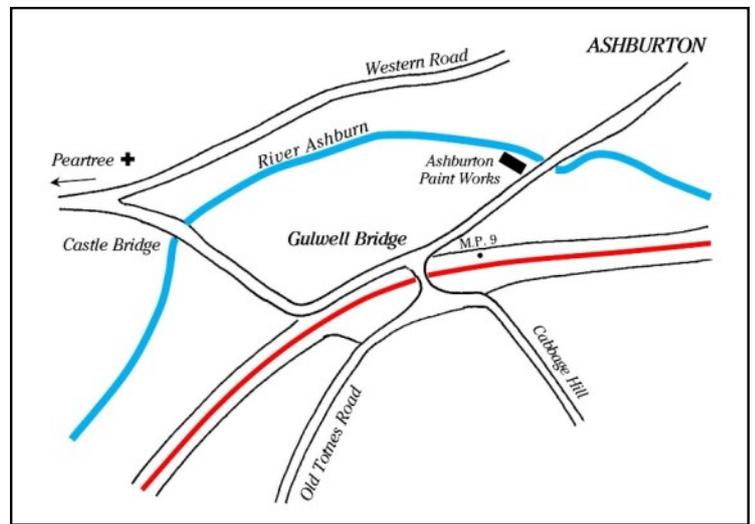
The Changes Around Gulwell

One of the two major obstacles to be overcome by engineers if a new line of railway is to be built from Buckfastleigh to Ashburton.

1872

The building of the branch railway entailed crossing Old Totnes Road and the road from it to Castle Bridge. The latter was diverted north of the line to an overline bridge, leaving the railway with a piece of gentle slope which became an allotment.

The Chudleigh to Brent road through Peartree Cross and the Buckfastleigh to Totnes road had been turnpiked at the beginning of the century.

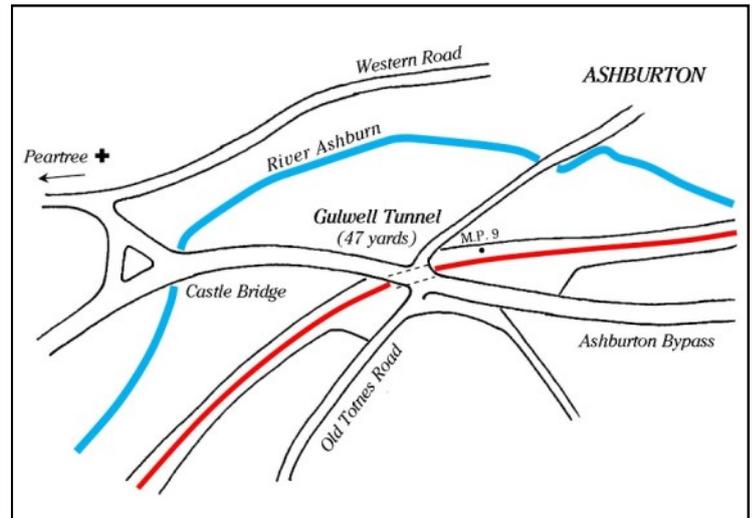


1933

As part of government public works expenditure intended to alleviate unemployment, a 1¼-mile bypass of the A38 through Ashburton was made from the north end of Eastern Road to the future site of *The Pear Tree* (Dartmoor Lodge). This crossed the branch railway over the new 47-yard Gulwell Tunnel on the site of the former bridge.

Most of this roadway is still in use today: as a "C" road from Pear Tree to Castle Bridge; as a footpath from there to Old Totnes Road; as the entry slip road, the northbound carriageway and the exit slip road at the junction north-east of the town.

By the late 1920s, chronic congestion was blighting many town centres, exacerbated by trunk road hauliers, free to set their own rates and choose their loads, taking traffic away from the railways.



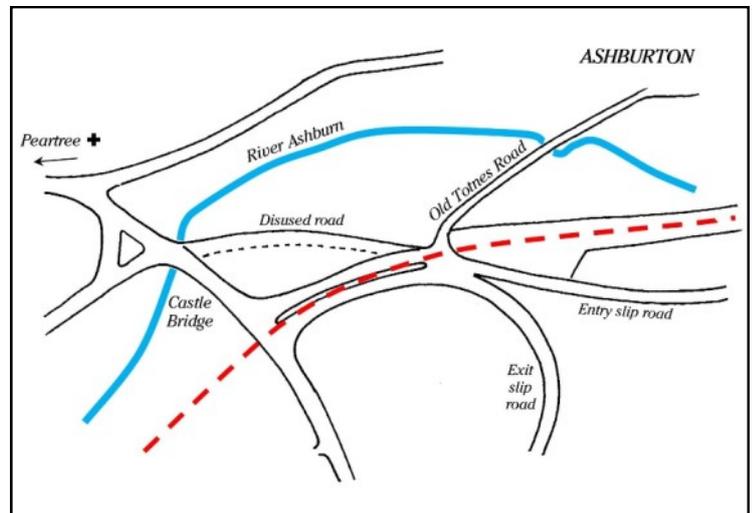
1974

By 1977, the A38 had been made into a dual carriageway all the way from the end of the M5 motorway in Exeter to Marsh Mills, Plymouth.

From the point where the Ashburton Bypass had curved towards Castle Bridge, an entirely new road was built, with a lavishly laid out junction. Not much further to the south-west, the road smothered Gulwell and then the course of the branch railway between Ashburton and Buckfastleigh.

The new junction severed the railway at Gulwell Tunnel, which reputedly was backfilled, not demolished.

This ample provision and highest specification, no doubt preparation for conversion to a motorway, was at a time when the railways and other public transport were being run down and having to make do with the least.

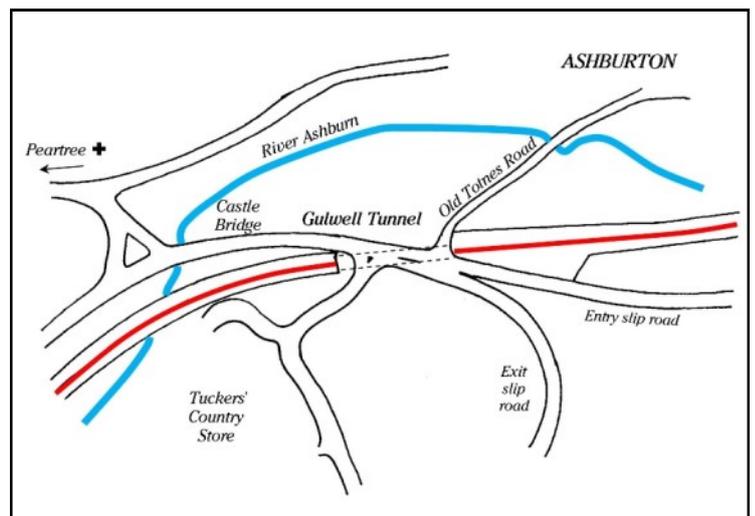


2020?

Since Edwin Tucker & Sons were granted planning permission for a retail park on 12 acres of land adjoining the dual carriageway, the former course of the railway can no longer be recovered. Therefore a new route would have to be taken to the west of the river over land owned by Rendells the auctioneers, who it is thought harbour plans to build a livestock market to replace Newton Abbot.

Providing for a new Gulwell Tunnel on a different alignment is quite possible. All the road alterations, including access to the new retail park could be achieved by using existing formations, the key being the disused length of the original bypass.

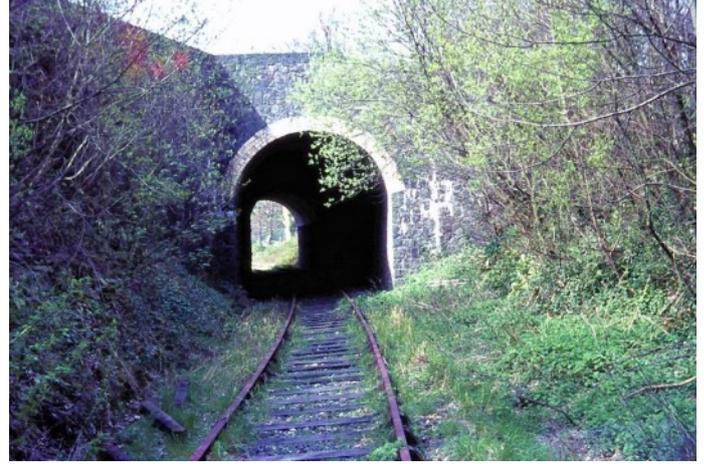
It is estimated that tunnel and road works alone would cost £1-million.



Gulwell Tunnel, one of the shortest in the West Country, replaced Gulwell Bridge in 1931. It is of similar construction to the road bridge on Chuley Hill. The line is clearly disused, so these photos may have been taken between 1964, when goods traffic ceased, and 1969, when the nascent Dart Valley Railway leased the line; or after 1971, when it closed in readiness for its destruction. It is said that the tunnel, shorn of its parapets, was filled, not demolished.



This is looking towards the terminus. The Ashburton Bypass is above the wing wall at left. Fence posts mark its course above the tunnel. Old Totnes Road is at right, above the allotments, which continue to be tilled.



Looking towards Totnes.

Because of the several inches of cant, the line is not centred in the tunnel.

The approach to the terminus

The line passed to the left of the locomotive shed at centre-right.

The building at left, part of Tuckers' yard, will be demolished.

This is where the first four of a possible ten homes will be built on the course of the line.

From here to Gulwell Tunnel is a public path known as Bulliver's Way, after the colloquial name given to the branch train.



Parke, belonging to the National Trust, is the headquarters of the Dartmoor National Park Authority and where the future of Ashburton Station and its rail link will be decided.

Curiously, there is a South Devon connection.





Peartree Junction

The Ashburton Branch passed across the picture here, where the slip roads are together.

In the decade or so before the highway kings had been able to make this fabulous, highly-engineered provision, the railways had been systematically ruined.

The road closest to the camera, going off right, is Cabbage Hill, which once used to join Old Totnes Road at Gulwell Bridge.

From the same vantage point, the town can be seen, with the dual carriageway bypass climbing towards Caton. Made of oil, for the unlimited mobility that oil promised.

It was the greatest folly, allowing vested interests that shouldered no responsibility for the future to dictate transport policy.

These photographs were taken in November, 1992, and are from the "Roads Madness" file kept at Christow.



18th November, 2015

There being no greasy spoon in Ashburton, the E. & T.V.R. scout repaired to the Royal Oak for lunch. After a pint of ale and some pork pies, he asked the landlord how he felt about the railway reopening. The reply was detailed and articulate and his support was gratifying to hear. He even offered the use of his back room to campaigners free of charge.

Round the corner in North Street is one of those gems that only survive in places like Ashburton. The scout wanted a jar of Stone's furniture cream (made in Crediton to a 1760 formula) and Church's Ironmongers, trading for over 100 years, did not disappoint. It was known that the owners had written in support of the railway and they were thanked for doing so. They said that they were by no means alone in wanting to see a rail revival.

Later, at the National Park headquarters, Dan Janota, the Senior Forward Planner, whom the scout had met twelve months before in Ashburton Town Hall, was good enough to come to reception for an amicable discussion of the case in hand and wider railway issues.

He seemed genuinely to want the Friends to work with the authority and provide the concrete evidence he had requested. "Give us something to work with," he said, adding, "don't keep telling us what others are doing: tell us how it can be done here." The scout remarked that a year ago his advice to the Friends had been to put a strong emphasis on public transport: "you can get your steam thrill from a working railway." And also to get the engineering study out of the drawer, get it updated and costed and into the public arena.

When it was mentioned that there had been no canvassing of opinion in Ashburton regarding railway reconstruction, Mr. Janota said he felt that the townsfolk were weary of consultation. But he said that any scientific market research done by the Friends would be accepted as evidence.

Perhaps the most heartening intelligence was that the authority, mindful of the talk about reopening the

Southern route to Plymouth, had commissioned a scoping report: "Devon Main Line Route Options." Let no one dare criticize this. Stick it to the fridge like a child's first drawing which a doting parent thinks is a work of art.

Mr. Janota kindly returned Peter Kay's Ashburton Branch history and he was thanked for his courtesy and for being so candid.

DNPA Scoping Report: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/DevonMainLineRoute.pdf>

Eleven years later, the story is continued

A new name started appearing among the *Mughook* posts at around the time this account was paused and it soon became clear that the man had specialist knowledge and experience. He had been waiting in the wings for some time but those on stage, the well intentioned but clueless players who had led the campaign thus far, were reluctant to step aside or bow out, despite the call for a new cast having been made.

The fellow did not live locally. He was not known to anyone involved with the campaign or chattering about it. Railways were only one of his interests. He did not come out of that decrepits' day centre at Buckfastleigh. But he was exactly the man needed; it really was a "Cometh the hour" instance. He was Robert "Rob" Kinchin-Smith, Senior Historic Environment Consultant at R.P.S., a top flight firm which began as Rural Planning Services and is now part of the giant Tetra Tech Group.

Rob first flexed his muscles in July, when he urged having a whip-round to raise the fee needed to instruct a barrister in the matter of the legitimacy of the Masterplan's adoption. Rob went so far as to recommend a brief who must have acted for R.P.S.

Bravely, Alan Taylor, Chairman of the South Devon Railway Trust authorized a loan of £2,000 for this purpose and agreed that the barrister would act for the railway.

As stated earlier, the result of this challenge was that the authority decided to return the Masterplan to the final draft stage and commence further consultation.

It is thought that only £500 was raised towards the brief's £1,500 fee and that the South Devon held little hope of the balance being reimbursed.

Rob was a seasoned campaigner and knew what talent and expertise would be needed. In an appeal, he detailed ten desirable, if not essential, roles.

The Teign Valley at this stage was unknown to Rob. The junior clerk picked out some amusing posts which showed Rob's curiosity.

To function as an organ of the new Campaign Committee, a separate *Mughook* page was created. The Community Organisation and original Public Group rather confusingly both went under "Friends of Ashburton Station."

In his inaugural post, Rob set out his mission.

Friends of Ashburton Station

11 October 2015

We believe the station site is a historic asset to the town, and has potential to be exploited for the education, learning and enjoyment of future generations.

Our immediate aims are to safeguard the former Ashburton Station site, to protect the surviving railway infrastructure and ensure that any future development of the site does not compromise its heritage potential. We also aim to protect the original formation of the line from the station to Pear Tree Cross.

In the medium term, we aim to establish a heritage and educational centre at Ashburton Station to celebrate the heritage of Ashburton and its railway.

Looking to the future, we wish to further study the options for reconnecting Ashburton Station to Buckfastleigh and examine how this might be achieved so that future generations retain the ability to realise the original vision of the preservationists in the 1960s.: 'a quintessential West-Country branch railway, complete in all respects'.

Rob Kinchin-Smith

8 July 2015

... there are strong legal grounds for a Judicial Review to DNPA's decision, as I alluded to in my objection to DNPA.

Promptness in appealing the decision is absolutely essential, certainly within three months of the decision, more likely within 6 weeks.

As a built heritage and planning consultant, I'd be 'in', pro-bono.

...

Is anyone else game to help challenge this crass and short-sighted decision?

A complaint in "The Mughook Experiment" was that the medium was "useless as a journal or an action report or archive." Nevertheless, there were posts buried in the seemingly endless scroll that were valuable and so the junior clerk was made to clip the record almost in its entirety and paste it up on foolscap. When he'd done this—it amounted to 43 pages of small, faint text—his task after lunch was to extract the little that might be useful to this history.

Rob Kinchin-Smith

With the existing Committee saying that they cannot re-run the campaign alone, and with an obvious need to markedly up our game, there is a clear and URGENT need to identify a number of dedicated volunteers to form a new/expanded Committee, specifically tasked with pursuing the objective of the return to Ashburton and to establish a fighting fund.

Amyas Crump

If you are looking for impetus from new blood, how about inviting the man who roused the SDR to action, a lifelong professional railwayman, a local with extensive experience of dealing with the DNPA.

Rob Kinchin-Smith

... who is the man who roused the SDR to action? ... He sounds useful. Who is he?

Rob Kinchin-Smith

... it was the Exeter & Teign Valley Railway Society who first brought our attention to the current planning application on the Tucker's site. Indeed, they were the first to object to the Tucker's application and it was they who first spurred us into doing likewise!

...

The Exeter & Teign Valley Society are a crowd we should be working closely with!

It was not long before the new leader was able to get to grips with the authority. He attended a meeting at Parke on 2nd December and took along some station friends for company. He quickly established a rapport with

Dan Janota, who must have delighted at the presence of a professional. Rob clearly understood the authority's position and what was needed, and went away knowing what he had to do.

Draft Note of Meeting, 2.12.15: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/DraftNote.pdf>

The challenge set was to meet with the bodies whose approvals were needed for there to be as much as talk of reconnecting the historic branch terminus. These were:-

Environment Agency	To obtain permission in principle for a new River Dart Bridge and recognition that a reinstated railway from Ashburton to Castle Bridge would act as a flood channel.
Highways England	To find whether a new railway tunnel could be built beneath the A38 and whether a railway running close to the northbound carriageway would be possible.
Devon County Council	To discuss a road layout at Castle Bridge that would accommodate a new railway.
Historic England	Principally, to consider the historic railway buildings at Ashburton and how they could best be used.

A few days after the meeting at Parke, Rob telephoned the "crowd" at Christow to introduce himself and a long conversation ensued. Later, he invited the scout to join the meeting he had arranged with Simon Hickman of **Historic England**.

The scout met Rob at Chudleigh Station (the road junction, sadly) and the two motored to Ashburton. Simon, the South West Office's Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas, proved to be a most affable fellow. The scout quickly took to Simon after he remarked that the best furnishing for a station was a train.

Dan Janota joined the meeting and the day was spent going over ideas and following the route to Buckfastleigh. Over coffee and cake at Buckfast Abbey, Dan advised the scout that the opinion survey he had suggested was not necessary at this stage.

Simon wired a report of his meeting to Rob on 18th. He wrote that keeping an "alignment" clear to the old terminus would be advantageous. It would be a path and a flood channel in the short term, and would allow the buildings to be viewed. Reinstatement of the railway would then be possible in the long term. He advised that: "You might want to consider the new route as a sustainable transport corridor rather than just a railway."

"In regards to the former Ashburton Station, the site is remarkably well-preserved despite not having seen railway use since 1971. The complete ensemble of railway sidings - the station, the goods shed, engine shed, warehousing and railway cottages all survive in a legible state, despite incremental light industrial development around them. Such a complete assemblage of buildings is rare even in a National context, and it would be appropriate to seek extension of the Ashburton Conservation Area to include all structures associated with the former railway."

Without the extended Conservation Area and with only the Goods Shed Grade II listed, there was not much he could do. However, he was keen to help—on a personal basis if necessary—as the proposals developed.

In 2019, the scout advised Simon that the Goods Shed at Moretonhampstead was to be demolished. The developer's later decision to make the shed into four dwellings may have been the result of a personal letter from Simon.

The next meeting Rob attended by himself. It was on 8th February with Sally Parish, Planning Manager, **Highways England** (it became National Highways in 2021), at Ash House, where there is oddly no car parking for visitors. The office is only a quarter of a mile from Digby & Sowton Station and closer still to the former Clyst St. Mary & Digby Halt, which, if it had been open, would have been the nearest to where the scout was born.

An eavesdropper may have found the meeting amusing, for Sally was one of those women who brings her personal life to work. Rob wrote: "Sally Parish is a divorcee whose ex father-in-law is an old-school enthusiast and railwayana collector. It was clear that she had as little time for her ex father-in-law and his hobby as she has for her ex husband."

It was Sally's opinion that heritage railways would die with the trainspotter generation and that the railway would fail if it relied on a commuter service in future. A steam railway beside the A38 would not only be a driver distraction, but that drifting smoke could obscure driver visibility. She was very conscious of the 2011 Taunton M5 crash, where drifting smoke from a fireworks' night bonfire combined with fog to cause havoc. No fog lights were activated by Highways England and seven people died.

Even if the railway were allowed immediately beside the northbound carriageway—where it would need to be in order to take advantage of Pridhamsleigh Bridge—the land needed would first have to be offered to the original landowners.

There is no mention in the wires of a tunnel through the road embankment at Buckfastleigh, but it was later established that thrust boring concrete segments, as long as the work involved no disturbance of the road surface and disruption to traffic, would be an acceptable method.

According to LinkedIn, Sally Parish became Planning Manager for the Greater Exeter Area in 2013 and was still in post 13 years later.

Before describing the next meeting, which occurred only two days later, the small team that Rob had by now gathered needs to be announced.

- Maryann Soper** A well-connected heritage consultant and enthusiast, she had created the new *Mughook* page and had worked with Rob before.
- Amyas Crump** A railway historian and author, very well known and influential in heritage circles. He had gone through the charity H.S.T. special in September, canvassing support for the Ashburton project.
- Alan Hayward** A celebrated bridge engineer and by far the most valuable team member, he had been working in retirement on the Rother Valley extension when Rob recruited him. Without Alan's skill and generosity, it was unlikely that a convincing case could have been made for rebuilding the railway. Alan had been one half of Cass Hayward & Partners, founded in 1983. His firm had replaced the River Exe Bridge at St. David's in 1997, the last to be rolled in on steel balls. He produced a rationale and sketch drawings for three possible ways of overcoming the obstacles of road and railway at Buckfastleigh.

Preliminary Schemes for Bridges: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/AlanHayward.pdf>

In a paper, published in the International Journal for the History of Engineering and Technology, Alan Hayward describes (p.80) the methods of thrust boring and mentions the early example of abutments being slid beneath the G.W. main line at Alphin Brook Bridge in 1967. Incidentally, when the spans were installed, it was the last time that trains were diverted via the Southern.

"The Construction of Railway Bridges Then and Now": <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/ThenandNow.pdf>

Rob's exhaustive preparation reaped rewards at the meeting on 10th February with Simon Dart, Area Flood Risk Engineer at the **Environment Agency**. Rob brought Jonathan Morley, Principal Engineer at R.P.S., who had advised on hydrology. Present also were Alan Hayward, Amyas Crump, the Teign Valley and Dan Janota.

The stipulation that any railway crossing of the Dart had to be at very nearly the same height as the immediately downstream road bridge made a line rising at around 1:55 from a tunnel beneath the dual-carriageway to a single river span bridge the only option; one which Alan had outlined.

Rob and Alan were treated to lunch on the T.V. expense account at the motorway services canteen, which was handy to Manley House. Rob then rushed Alan to Pinhoe for his return train.

The Environment Agency's £441 charge (V.A.T. had been levied but was later reimbursed) for the meeting was paid by the Teign Valley. It should be noted that Rob and the professional expertise he had mobilized on this one occasion would have cost a fortune at their normal per-hour rates. Would the South Devon and the people of Ashburton ever know this truth? And if they did, would they show any gratitude?

A week later, Rob received a letter from the Agency confirming what had been agreed. These are extracts:

"... at this stage there do not appear to be any fundamental flood risk problems along the route to prevent a railway. It appears that with the right design, the railway route can be either outside of the floodplain or designed in such a way to be above the flood risk or be compensated nearby.

"Using the railway route as the flood corridor through the first part of the master plan area was a useful idea. If the floodwater (Balland Stream and River Ashburn overland flooding) can be directed into the track area near the mini roundabout (with additional enter points along Chuley Road), and then exit back into the river near the Umber Works, then a solution may be feasible.

"Any proposed railway route is going to cross the floodplain, which without proper compensation would impact upstream property and the approved Tuckers Seeds Development. However a new tunnel could offer a new flood route, which along with lowering of land downstream may offer a neutral effect.

"The new bridge design at the height of the current A38 is the only acceptable solution. There should be room to lower the bridge if necessary by 1-2m, but a flood level and a clearance gap would need to be agreed.

"The proposed route on the western side of the valley, mostly just out of the floodplain, should be acceptable."

Alan's sketches and drawings were brought to life by his delightful watercolours; he must be the last of the engineering school that did not rely on computer generated images. His colour and imagination also enlivened the campaign pages of a medium whose viewers can dwell momentarily on a picture but mostly do not have the concentration needed to absorb more than a few lines of text.

Possibly ever since the road bridge was built, laymen have thought that a line of rails could pass along the flood shelf and then be taken across the Dart on a low curved bridge. Alan worked up this arrangement for the exercise. Thought was also given to a skew bridge beneath the roadways and to a bridge that could be lifted in times of flood, but these ideas were soon eliminated.



The very last Down passenger train, the 0825 Paddington to Ashburton on 2nd October, 1971, crosses the bridge.

The road to Ashburton. Beyond is the bridge carrying the road from Dart Bridge to Totnes.

The building is much closer to the river than the *Mogul's Palace* of 2014 or today's *Strawberry Fields*.



The flood shelf viewed from the opposite bank with the remains of a railway bridge pier at right.



The opening that some imagined could be used to take the railway beneath the road before it bridged the river.



Dart Bridge was built in the 14th or 15th centuries and was widened in the 19th and 20th.

The Environment Agency's insistence on a railway bridge being as high and as long as the A38 road bridge ignores the historic restriction just upstream.

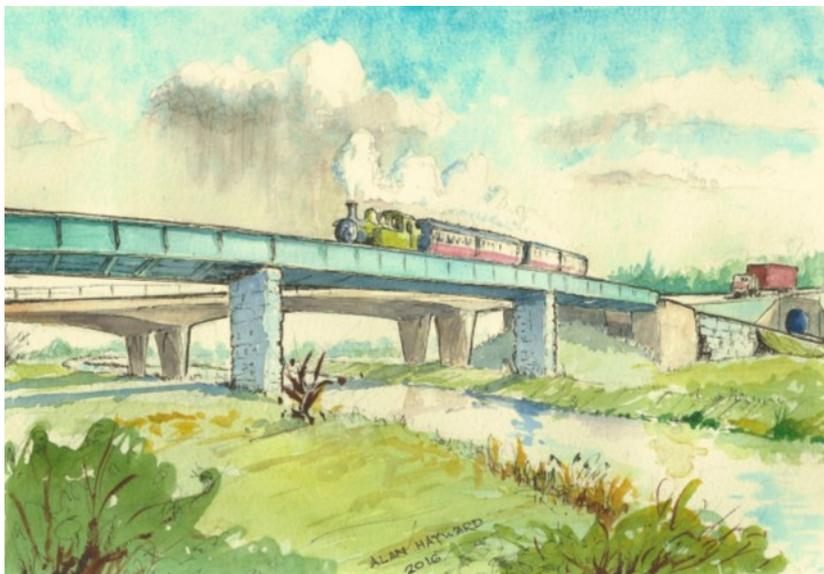
The railway bridge can just be made out through the left hand arch.



Alan's vision of a continuous truss bridge . The line is seen curving towards the station beyond the road bridge.

From being given his head on 6th December to the meeting at Manley on 10th February, Rob had made reinstatement of the branch to Ashburton a feasible proposition—a quite remarkable feat.

It is not known why a meeting was never arranged with Devon County Council. In a long letter to the transport supremo, Dave Black, the scribe brought up the subject, but the officer, unlike his predecessor, was uncommunicative.



Left: Alan's approved bridge. The branch train depicted has passed beneath the A38 and climbed to a summit on the bridge.

Above: Would a new bridge use this original pier foundation?

The scribe advised that the national park authority had come to see that railway reconstruction, if proven to be viable, would solve many of the hitherto intractable problems at the station and that lately there had been a good deal of co-operation.

"The next authority we are hoping to meet with is yours, principally to consider how a new line of railway would intersect the roads in the vicinity of Castle Bridge (Peartree), but also to discuss the project with officers responsible for tourism and the economy."

Just prior to the National Park Authority meeting on 1st April, at which members would be asked to vote for the officers' recommendation to discontinue work on the Masterplan, Rob summarized progress (right).

In the event, members dutifully voted to "Cease the current Masterplan process, consider applications largely consistent with Local Plan Proposal ASH2 in the absence of a Masterplan and review the position within 12 months." Rob had hoped that his aspirations could have been wrapped up in the Masterplan but the outcome on April Fools' Day made no real difference.

The £110,000 Chuley Road Masterplan was effectively buried.

Dave Black - Vassal of the road lobby, yesterday's man:

<https://www.teignrail.co.uk/political-campaigning.php#daveblack>

Rob Kinchin-Smith

Ashburton Masterplan
1 April 2016

Dartmoor National Park Authority today agreed to take the bold step to stop work on the Ashburton Masterplan.

...

Following the approval of the Masterplan the threat of a legal challenge on a technicality forced DNPA to withdraw the adopted Masterplan and review again its position. Since this time DNPA has carefully considered how best to move forward to ensure the needs of the community are met. A planning application on the site has revealed flood work requirements beyond that originally anticipated; furthermore DNPA recognises a more evidence led case for considering the railway option is now emerging.

...

Whilst evidence which supports the feasibility of railway reinstatement may come forward in this time, this does not mean a railway would necessarily form part of any future strategy for the site. It would however enable the community to consider this subject on the basis of whether it supports safeguarding a rail route or reinstating a line, rather than debating whether it is technically achievable.

Friends of Ashburton Station

27 March 2016

... the adoption of the Masterplan was 'paused' in September 2015. At the same time, the faces of 'old FoAS' stepped aside, allowing a new team to emerge.

Following the 'pause', it became apparent that the two residential elements of the Masterplan and the planned convenience store were not financially robust enough to underwrite the very substantial costs of the promised 'public realm' works throughout the remainder of the Masterplan area. These unfunded elements included site-wide flood alleviation works, ecological mitigation, hard and soft landscaping and car-parking, as well as the planned community/heritage centre in the old station itself. Further, the first post-Masterplan planning application on the site revealed flood work requirements significantly beyond those originally anticipated. The fatal flaw in this case was the planned houses on the railway trackbed, which lay within the River Ashburn floodplain.

Recognising that the railway heritage provided the potential to deliver the public benefits and unifying influence that the planned residential developments alone would not, DNPA met with the South Devon Railway and 'new FoAS' in December 2015. Encouraged by the direction of 'new FoAS' and its professional engineering, environmental, transport and planning expertise, DNPA encouraged the new railway group to meet with the Environment Agency, Historic England and Highways England to identify whether the significant doubts over the realism of the Buckfastleigh rail-link could be overcome. If the rail-link could be shown to be deliverable, then there was an argument to safeguard the railway trackbed within the Masterplan area.

The meetings elicited significant support from Historic England and produced no insurmountable issues on highways and flooding. Indeed, it emerged that there was not a single option for the rail-link, but multiple permutations, greatly increasing deliverability. Third-party land with extant planning consents could also be avoided. Further, the rail-link could offer significant public benefits along the route, including environmental enhancements and the potential for flood attenuation and a parallel, car-free foot/cycle path, extending Bulliver's Way to Dart Bridge, with links onward to Buckfastleigh and Buckfast Abbey.

If further emerged that the railway could provide an effective flood corridor through the Chuley Road site to Castle Bridge and beyond (as it did previously) and that it would, as a matter of course, free up the land needed for dedicated car parking for residents and local businesses. It would also, of course, provide for the restoration of the station building and trainshed.

There is now a more positive and constructive relationship between DNPA and the railway project. In the short time that there has been professional input, much of the fundamental case DNPA encouraged from the South Devon Railway and 'old FoAS' in January 2015 has now come together. Whilst this does not mean that the railway should or will form part of the future development of the Chuley Road site, it does mean that decisions by the community or DNPA may now be based upon a sound understanding of the potential benefits the railway could bring and its deliverability.

There is much to be done, not least in terms of overcoming past preconceptions, building bridges and in establishing a vision that marries local concerns with the railway's potential to leverage in the substantial external funds that the station site needs sooner rather than later. With a fair wind, open minds and a clear understanding that Ashburton's priorities for Chuley Road must also be the railway's priorities, there is a way forward.

Heritage and Community Rail Tourism Innovation Competition

In February, the chance had arisen to win a grant from this Department for Transport competition. The last paragraph of the Application Guidance stated:

This competition seeks to support more visitors discovering the UK outside of London with heritage and community rail. This competition provides an opportunity specifically to heritage railways and community rail partnerships to improve the tourist experience.

Under the title, "Ashburton Station Project and Rail Link Feasibility," the Devon and Cornwall Branch of *Railfuture* and the Friends made a joint application for £63,500 to fund in part the completion of a full Feasibility Study to re-establish the historic Ashburton Station and build a new two-mile rail link and cycle path to the South Devon Railway at Buckfastleigh. Using her project management skills, Maryann managed the application, with assistance from Rob.

The bid was unsuccessful. Among the three South West winners announced in May, the Swanage Railway was awarded £75,000, which it would put towards extending its steam services onto the main line. For this purpose, it was awarded another £50,000 by the D.o.T. in 2020. In 2024, the Swanage announced that it would not be running trains through to Wareham because the connection was too expensive to operate without a subsidy.

Application Form: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/HeritageAppl.pdf>

The Christow scribe contributed some text which lacked the detail needed for the proposal. Nevertheless, it served as a useful summary of the position at the time.

Dartmoor is very poorly served by rail transport. When it was designated as a national park in 1951, there were 31 stations on or around the moor. Twenty years later none remained and only Ivybridge has since reopened.

Ashburton was one of the four Devon stannary towns on the edge of the moor and today is the largest town centre in the national park. It is home to a multi-award winning computer software company, one of the South West's fastest growing businesses.

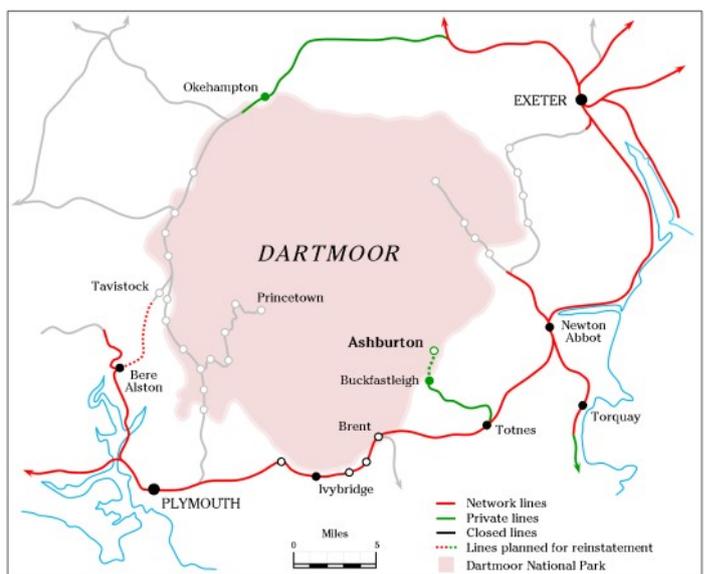
The town lost its rail passenger service in 1958 and the extremity of the Ashburton Branch was buried beneath the A38 dual carriageway in 1972, a loss that would not have occurred had the fledgling Dart Valley Railway been able to establish itself.

It is not true that Ashburton has suffered a decline since then but it is fair to say that a train service to Dartmoor's south-east "gateway" town would have made a great difference to its fortunes over the years and would be particularly advantageous today with the resurgence of public transport use.

The latent desire to reconnect Ashburton's rail terminus was awakened in 2014 by plans for area redevelopment which held the danger of blocking the course of the line near the station. Railway promoters realized that these plans had to be opposed and a group was formed, which, latterly under the capable leadership of a planning professional, eventually managed to persuade the national park authority that not only could a new line of railway be built, but that a reopened station at the heart of the development area would be the best solution to some of its otherwise intractable problems.

The major challenges to be faced in the construction of a new railway from Buckfastleigh to Ashburton have been addressed fully with the various authorities. Highways England has agreed in principle to tunnelling beneath the A38 dual carriageway at Buckfastleigh. The Environment Agency sees no insurmountable obstacles to crossing the rivers Dart and Ashburn, and skirting the latter's floodplain. Historic England considers that the best "furnishing" of the unique ensemble of railway and associated buildings in Ashburton would be trains.

From being still only a vague idea last year, it is now proven that a railway and an adjoining shared-use path can be built and the question for the people of Ashburton is therefore whether they want their town to be again connected to the national rail network and whether they want the added and not always anticipated benefits it would bring. There is evidence of strong support, especially among traders, for a reopened railway but as yet no scientific survey has been conducted.



It is not known whether this map, provided by the railway, was attached to the application.

In the last six months there has been significant investment in the project. The senior consultant with a blue-chip firm, had he not been working *pro bono*, would have billed around £20,000 for his work so far. Similarly, the celebrated bridge designer who was 'volunteered' to come up with a set of tunnelling and bridging possibilities for Buckfastleigh, would have accrued substantial hours. Other fees and expenses have been paid out of individuals' pockets and lay people have given freely of their time. Thus it can safely be said that prize money from this competition would allow the continuation of a body of work already done.

It has been shown often enough that trains win people back to public transport more than buses, and although what is being talked about here is an extension of a heritage railway, it would have a functional role, one that could be developed in time to confuse the difference. The crossover has led to private railways providing park-and-ride and school services, and surely the next step is for them to carry commuters.

And excursion traffic should not be overlooked: in October an HST special from Paddington to Buckfastleigh would have worked through to Ashburton had it been possible and its many passengers would have set the tills ringing in the sleepy town.

It is undoubted that people would go to Ashburton from far and wide by rail who would not otherwise be enticed. A wave of people would enter the town each time a train arrived, its passengers looking for grub and gifts and things to do. The town's traders would eye the clock in anticipation of the swell. And all without a single extra car pushing into the narrow streets.

As befits its gateway status, some rail passengers would be geared for onward exploration on foot, or by bicycle or bus. And in time it should become possible to reach other rail-served gateways.

To fund a hydrological survey of the new route from Buckfastleigh to Ashburton, and to conclude the studies required by the Dartmoor National Park Authority to enable it to present a complete railway case for consultation, an award of £75,000 is requested.

If tenders are let as early as possible and reports come in by summer's end, then the process of returning rail transport to Dartmoor will have begun in earnest. Without a prize from this competition, the work done so far may lead to nothing.

Mid-Devon Advertiser, 15th April, 2016.

What may have been headed: "Waiting for the Miracle Train to Pull into the Station."

Call for councillor to quit as Chuley Road plan is put on hold

by **PAUL JAMES**

A CRITIC of delays in implementing Ashburton's Chuley Road redevelopment has called on town councillor Charlie Dennis to quit.

Outspoken John Fisher made his dramatic resignation call after a fierce denunciation of the Friends of Ashburton Station who want to revamp the controversial site with a steam railway heritage centre and reconnect the town's track link to Buckfastleigh.

He accused them of being responsible for Dartmoor National Park Authority's decision last week to put the so-called Masterplan for the run-down area on ice for 12 months.

As reported in last week's *Mid-Devon Advertiser*, DNPA have stalled the proposed housing and shopping plans because of three stumbling blocks—the threat of a legal challenge over the authority's approval process, greater recognition of the steam railway plan and Environment Agency concerns over potential flood risk problems at the

location.

Mr Fisher, blaming the steam railway for the delay, told councillors at their monthly meeting on Wednesday night: 'By their selfish self-interest they have put back development for who knows how long? In the meantime the town stands poised, waiting on the platform with baited breath, for the miracle train to pull into the station'.

He added: 'Meanwhile established businesses are being sidelined, ignored and frustrated in their attempts to modernise and expand—or even retire—whilst others make decisions about their future. What consideration is being given to them?'

Mr Fisher called on Cllr Dennis, who he claimed was the Friends' spokesman, to leave the council.

Cllr Dennis insisted afterwards he was staying put.

He fired back: 'The people of Ashburton elected me. It is up to them to remove me if that is what they want—not one man with a contrary view'.

He claimed Mr Fisher's diatribe was replete with factual errors, including the

erroneous suggestion that he was a spokesman for the Friends of Ashburton Station.

Both were anxious to stress they were good friends, although they did disagree over Masterplan ambitions.

At the same meeting another member of the public, Peter Kemp, said he was disappointed that no one from the council made representations at the DNPA meeting on April 1 when the Masterplan was shelved for a year.

He complained: 'The DNPA appear to pay little regard to comments expressed by residents of the town. If the town council cannot make its voice heard loud enough within the DNPA, what chance do residents have of making any difference?'

He felt if the council adopted a more robust attitude it would pay dividends for its townspeople.

Mr Kemp feared that Chuley Road may follow Dolbeare Meadow in being an eyesore.

He said he was not a supporter of the railway project but he did defend the action group's right to have their say on the Masterplan.

Chuley Road Masterplan: councillor's only crime was he expressed his personal opinion

COLIN BURGESS, of Christow Station, Doddiscombsleigh, writes:

THE Friends of Ashburton Station (FoAS) have been following with interest and amazement the correspondence in the *Mid-Devon Advertiser* series regarding Cllr John Fisher's extraordinary demand that Cllr Charlie Dennis be forced to resign.

Councillor Dennis' crime appears to be that he expressed his personal opinion that there may be merit in re-examining the proposal that the South Devon Railway might return to the old station site in Ashburton, following DNPA's cessation of further work on the Chuley Road Masterplan.

The proposal to stop work on the masterplan has caused significant concern in Ashburton, the community fearing that the suspension will result in planning blight on the former station site. We note, however, that the suspension will not prevent the two housing developments contained in the masterplan coming forward. As for the remainder of the site (the station and railway trackbed), recent flooding has revealed that the development of this part of the site would be extremely problematic without a comprehensive, site-wide flood-alleviation scheme. The trackbed has, in short, already revealed itself to be blighted as development land.

Advertiser readers may recall that during the public consultation on the Chuley Road Masterplan, the (then) newly constituted Friends of Ashburton Station (FoAS) made representations to DNPA, seeking the safeguarding of the railway trackbed through the Chuley Road site.

While DNPA recognised the clear benefits that a rail-link to Buckfastleigh and Totnes could bring to Ashburton and the national park, the lack of a credible scheme for the rail-link between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton meant that DNPA had no option but to

press ahead with the adoption of the masterplan unaltered.

The adoption was countered by FoAS, who observed that the adoption process was flawed, which would have resulted in any planning permissions granted on the back of it being potentially unlawful.

DNPA could simply have re-run the adoption process, but instead chose to 'pause' the masterplan, as it was becoming clear that it was unviable and undeliverable. Renewed flooding also revealed that much of the site would prove hugely difficult to develop without crippling expensive flood works that the prospective developers were unable or unwilling to pay for.

It also became clear that the two residential elements of the Masterplan and the planned convenience store were not financially robust enough to pay for the promised 'public realm' works throughout the remainder of the Masterplan area, including site-wide flood alleviation works, ecological mitigation, hard and soft landscaping and public car-parking, as well as the planned community/heritage centre in the old station itself.

Recognising that the railway heritage provided the potential to deliver the wider public benefits that the planned residential developments and convenience store could not, FoAS held meetings with the Environment Agency, Historic England and Highways England, to identify whether significant doubts over the realism of the Buckfastleigh rail-link could be overcome. If the rail-link could be shown to be deliverable, then there was an argument to safeguard the railway trackbed within the masterplan area.

The meetings elicited significant support from Historic England and produced no insurmountable issues on highways and flooding. Further, the rail-link could offer significant public benefits along the route, including an effective flood corridor through the

entire Chuley Road site (as the railway did previously) and that it would, as a matter of course, free up the land needed for dedicated car parking wanted by local residents and businesses. It would also naturally provide for the restoration of the historic station building (currently Station Garage). It also offers the potential for a car-free cycle route/footpath between Ashburton and Buckfastleigh and environmental enhancements in the Ashburn valley.

There is now a more positive and constructive relationship between DNPA and the railway project. In the short time that there has been professional input, much of the fundamental case DNPA encouraged from the South Devon Railway and FoAS has now come together. Whilst this does not mean the railway should, or will form part of the future development of the Chuley Road site, it does mean that decisions, by the community or DNPA, may now be based upon a sound understanding of the potential benefits the railway could bring, and its deliverability.

With a fair wind, open minds and a clear understanding that Ashburton's priorities for Chuley Road must also be the railway's priorities, there is a way forward that should be a win-win all round. There is much to be done, not least in terms of overcoming past preconceptions, building bridges and in establishing a vision that marries local concerns with the railway's potential to leverage in the substantial external funds that the station site needs sooner rather than later.

Given the potential for a rail-link to deliver substantial public and environmental benefits for Ashburton that cannot be delivered by the Chuley Road Masterplan, it seems absolutely extraordinary that an elected councillor would face calls for his scalp, merely for suggesting that the railway option is worth a second look.

N.B. John Fisher was not in fact a councillor.

As the future of Ashburton Station once again hangs in the balance, Adrian Knowles examines the prospects for this quintessential G.W.R. branch line terminus which was so nearly saved 45 years ago.

"So Near, and Yet So Far," *Great Western Echo*, Spring, 2016: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/SoNear.pdf>

Councillor's only crime was he expressed his own personal opinion

COLIN BURGESS, for Friends of Ashburton Station, writes:

The Friends of Ashburton Station have read in the Advertiser about John Fisher's demand that Cllr Charlie Dennis resign after he gave his opinion that, following DNPA's suspension of work on the Chuley Road Masterplan, there was merit in re-examining the proposal for the return of the railway.

DNPA dropped the masterplan as it was clear that while the housing developments could proceed, the remainder of the plan was largely undeliverable. Renewed flooding last winter showed that much of the site would be impossible to develop without crippling expensive works.

The two residential elements of the masterplan were not financially robust enough to pay for the promised 'public

realm' works, including ecological mitigation, landscaping and public car parking, and the planned adaptation of the old train shed.

FoAS held meetings with Historic England, Environment Agency and Highways England to see whether a Buckfastleigh to Ashburton rail-link could be built. If it were possible, there would be grounds for safeguarding the railway trackbed within the masterplan area.

The meetings won support from Historic England and proved there were no insurmountable issues with highways and flooding. It was demonstrated that the railway would form an effective flood corridor through the entire station site and release the land wanted for car parking.

A new railway would offer a cyclepath to Buckfastleigh, a park-and-

ride facility for Ashburton, environmental enhancements in the Ashburn valley and the restoration of the historic station building.

There is now a constructive relationship between DNPA and FoAS. With professional input, the feasibility of the railway has been established. While this does not mean the railway should necessarily form part of the development of the station site, it does mean that community decisions may now be based on the known viability of the rail-link and the benefits it could bring.

Given the potential for the railway to deliver substantial gains for Ashburton that the masterplan promised, but could not deliver, it seems unfair that there should be a call for a councillor's scalp, merely for his suggesting that the railway option is worth another look.

The 1998 Study

Extension of South Devon Railway to Ashburton

This report, commissioned by the then South Devon Railway General Manager, Richard Elliott, was mentioned in the National Park's "Appraisal of Options Report" because it had identified a possible route for a new railway between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton.

The author was Jasper E.P. Hillaud, a postgraduate at Exeter University's Department of Engineering. He was assisted by three students.

The report was scant in some respects but went into considerable detail when it came to the A38 "underpass"; 22 of the 56 pages were devoted to this, it obviously being a real-world test for the team.

The construction cost estimate was £4,026,639. The Bank of England Inflation Calculator put this at over £8-million in 2025. Nearly half was taken up by the underpass, which was to be built using the cut and cover method, requiring successive 12-month closures of each carriageway.

The branch would terminate at Ashburn Station, built in the field next to the southern junction of the 1931 bypass with the old turnpike.

The South Devon had specified a ruling gradient of 1:50 and a minimum curvature of 10 chains. The railway was to have minimal earthworks and the smallest requirement to purchase private land.

The report has not been published but a copy is kept at Christow.

"Ashburton Comeback," *Steam Railway*, 1998: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/AshburtonComeback.pdf>

Richard Elliott once told the Teign Valley scout that it would make no sense returning to Ashburton because, if the line were extended, Buckfastleigh would continue to be the effective terminus. Passengers would most likely go to both ends of the line from Buckfastleigh.

The Myth of the Open Corridor

That the designers of the A38 dual carriageway had cruelly severed the branch at Buckfastleigh, yet beyond the incursion had left a path open to Ashburton, over the years became a myth, mostly founded upon the wide span over the northbound carriageway of Pridhamsleigh Bridge. Naturally, the story was amply propagated on the *Mughook* pages.

According to Anthony R. Kingdom in his "The Totnes to Ashburton Railway," the County Surveyor, Mr. Henry Creswell, at a meeting of solicitors acting for the D.V.R. and the Devon Roads Committee, was quoted as saying: "If the line were closed it would facilitate improvements to the A38. If not it would cost £60,000 more for other improvements."

The man best placed to confirm this was Barry Cogar, who was General Manager of the Dart Valley Railway at the time. When asked about the idea that earthworks were done by the contractor to facilitate a return to Ashburton while the road was being built, he said that discussions had taken place about such an arrangement; he, together with Managing Director, Terry Holder, and Civil Engineering Director, Bob Saunders, pondered over

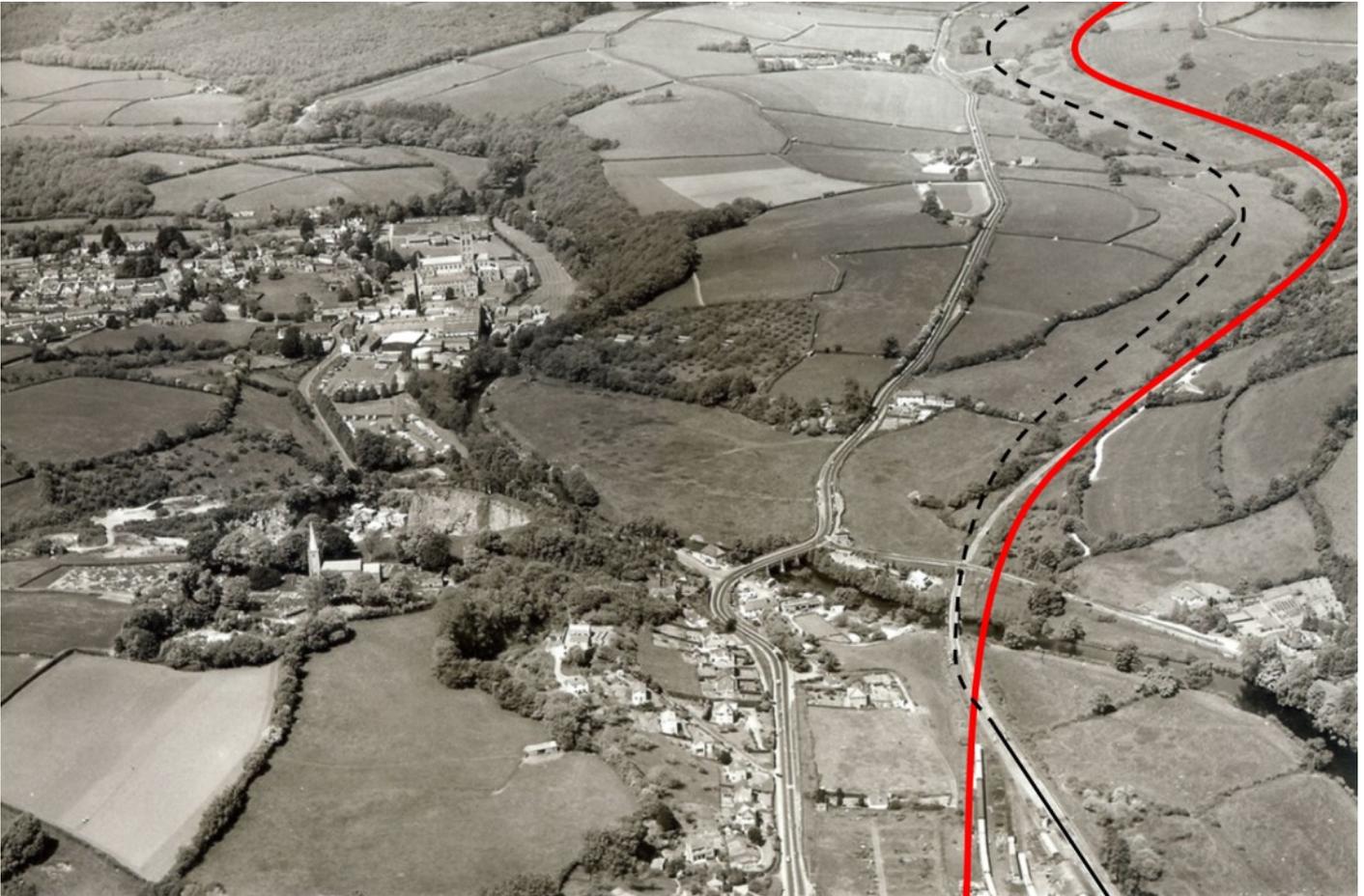
several routes in 1971/72. In the end, a route might have been achievable but the Department of Transport wanted a large sum of money in advance.

The Dart Valley Railway Company declined to make such a payment, so the design work for a return to Ashburton was not done and what is seen today as a "shelf" is not a designed formation for a railway.

The Teign Valley requested a quote for copying the relevant files (MT 127/28) held by The National Archives. The reply advised:

"In view of the large number of pages to count in this request your estimate cannot be completed. Our initial search indicates that the cost of copying would be in excess of £500."

Anyway, even if a path had been kept beside the trunk road, Highways England would not have allowed it to be used, lest it add to the telephone, in-car entertainment, navigational aids and other playthings which take the feeble modern motorist's attention away from the road.



The view above predates the new road, but could have been taken in the 1950s or earlier.

Buckfastleigh Station is at bottom right. It can be seen where the Ashburton Branch was taken by the dual carriageway, marked in red.

The course of the turnpike, then the A38, is obvious. Buckfast and St. Mary's Abbey lie to the left, beside the River Dart.

Holy Trinity Church and Bullycleaves Quarry are seen to the left of Dart Bridge.

The black broken line is not far from the only possible course a new railway could follow towards Ashburton.

The four miles of the Ashburton to Buckfastleigh Diversion, with its nine major structures, were completed in 1974 at a cost of £7.4-million.

Ashburton Rail User Group

For fun and the publicity value, in June the Teign Valley paid for *Railfuture* to list "Ashburton RUG." There had never been a group formed so far in advance of the train service commencing, it was said.

It was hoped that *AshRUG* would encourage some discussion of how the railway might be purposefully used. Groups lucky enough to have a train service discuss timetables, tickets, journeys, facilities, reliability etcetera; would-be Ashburton passengers could have started dreaming and making suggestions.

A letter was sent to Mr. Germon, the Town Clerk, which introduced the ideas of "heritage-plus" and "functional heritage."

Letter to Town Clerk: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/AshburtonClerk.pdf>

'Little engines' plan for South Devon Ashburton revival

By Robin Jones

REVIVALISTS planning to restore the GWR branch into Ashburton have asked for help from similar groups throughout the country.

The Friends of Ashburton Station has drawn up a proposal which would not only offer a visitor attraction, but also offer a solution to the intended redevelopment of the Chuley Road area of the town.

It is planned to extend the South Devon Railway from its current Buckfastleigh terminus along a new formation to the outskirts of Ashburton, from where it would pick up the old trackbed into the original terminus, which is of paramount historical importance to the locality as it was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

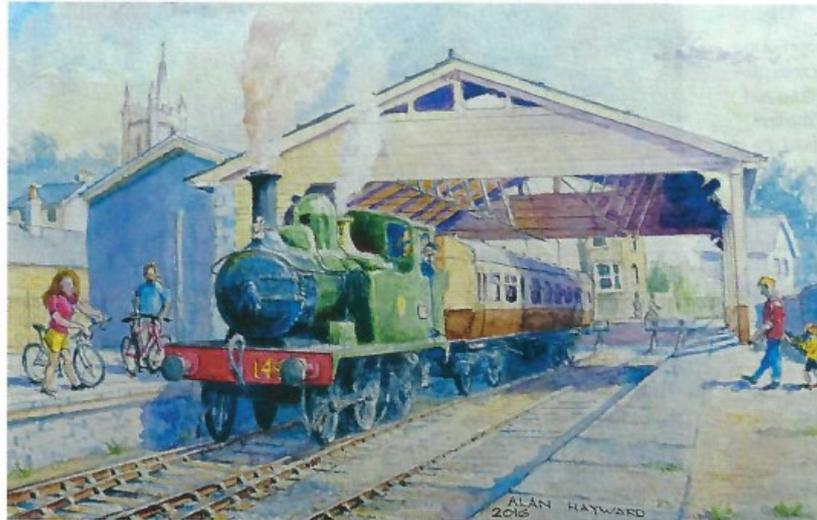
The Friends group opposed the Dartmoor National Park Authority's Chuley Road masterplan because the trackbed would have been used for housing, leaving the old station isolated.

The masterplan has been put on ice for 12 months while other options are explored.

National fundraising appeal

The South Devon Railway Trust board had previously reaffirmed its commitment to the £20million project and voted to support the Friends to develop a national fundraising appeal for the proposal and buying land if opportunities arise.

Rob Kinchin-Smith, from the Friends group, said that other benefits of its blueprint proposal would include car parking in the Chuley Road area for local residents and businesses, a park and ride



Artist Alan Hayward FREng CEng MICE MIStructE has produced this new impression of a revived Ashburton station. Alan, a keen amateur watercolourist, is The Friends of Ashburton Station's main civil/structural advisor, and is also civil engineer to the Rother Valley Railway Bodiam-Robertsbridge rail-link project. He is a former partner at bridge engineers Cass Hayward. FOAS

service into Buckfastleigh, the possibility of a safe off-road cycle link between the two towns, and flood mitigation and drainage work necessary for the locality.

He said: "Having got to a position where the rail link has been shown to be feasible and of potential benefit to the local environment and economy, the steering group would be very keen to compare notes with comparable groups whose projects are further advanced."

Rob also stressed the "small but often" trains aspect of the Friends proposal, which would see Collett 1400 auto tanks and auto-train push-pull sets – a historic feature of the Ashburton branch – being a mainstay of services.

He added: "We appreciate that, depending on suitable curvature and gradients, Ashburton would be served by normal South Devon Railway service

trains were the extension to be built, but we believe that the auto-train shuttle service has much to recommend it as a unique selling point for the project.

"For the enthusiasts and the Heritage Lottery Fund it would revive the old Dart Valley Railway vision of 'the complete quintessential GWR West Country branch line', and provide a unique experience as a regular timetabled service.

Far more useful

"It would also allow the historic Ashburton terminus to be re-created authentically, smooth any impact of passenger footfall on the community of Ashburton, and make the Buckfastleigh to Ashburton service far more useful as a 'park and ride' compared to less frequent, longer trains.

"Following professional engineering

and environmental input and the meetings with DNP and statutory consultees, the viability and deliverability of the rail link is now established beyond doubt. Renewed flooding last winter showed that much of the site would be impossible to develop without crippling expensive works.

"It also became clear that the two residential elements of the masterplan were not financially robust enough to pay for any of the promised 'public realm' works, including flood attenuation, ecological mitigation, landscaping and public car parking, as well as the planned heritage centre in the old station itself."

The last Dart Valley Railway passenger train entered Ashburton in October 1971, after which the northernmost two miles of the line was severed to allow the dualling of the A38 trunk road.

Returning to Ashburton

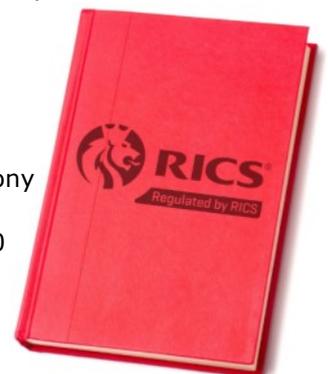
The station building and train shed were owned (and remain so in 2026) by Frank Mills. The abutted Chuley Road Garage, straddling the former platform and track, was owned by his brother, Terry Mills. Two car parks to the south, on the course of the line, were also owned by Terry Mills, one of them being let to Grey Matter.

Both men had said that they wanted to sell their businesses and retire. Both had imagined that their garage premises may one day be wanted by railway revivalists. When the Friends group was formed, the values the proprietors attached to the scruffy garages became quite ridiculous.

On 1st August, 2016, seeking a professional opinion, the Teign Valley consulted old friend, Tony Noon, of Noon Roberts in Exeter. With the agreement of the Wills brothers, Tony arranged for a "Red Book Valuation" to be done by Jon Stone, F.R.I.C.S., who, as a concession to Tony and the Friends, kindly reduced his rate from £1,000 to £750 (plus £30 for the maps).

Nine days later, Jon sent his reports, which valued Station Garage at £300,000; Chuley Road Garage and its yard at £345,000; and the car park let to Grey Matter at £175,000. He had allowed for the premium that would likely be paid by the market due to the redevelopment potential.

Jon's fee was mostly raised by the Friends alone. Nick Dudman, a Great Western enthusiast, very generously donated £250.



The Friends had by now been joined by Vernon Coon and Charlie Dennis, whose names are mentioned on page two. Vernon would become the Company Secretary of the South Devon Railway Trust in 2017.

Station Garage Report by Jon Stone: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/AshburtonStation.pdf>

Chuley Road Garage Report by Jon Stone: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/AshburtonChuley.pdf>



John Fisher [A post on "Disused Stations" in 2025.]

Allen Williams Indeed I live in Ashburton. Apparently students from Exeter University did a feasibility study some years ago and worked out how it could be done. That then caused a group of rail enthusiasts to lodge an objection to the Chuley road Master Plan dreamt up by Dartmoor National Park, which would have seen this part of Town rejuvenated and with it Frank and Terry would have been able to retire. That has all died the death over the course of time and they are still there. Bringing trains back to Ashburton is not feasible, there simply is not enough parking, which is amply covered at BFL. There has always been local animosity between Ashburton and BLF and speaking to an elderly Ashburtonian on this subject they replied, Who would want to catch a train to BFL anyway.

The National Park planners, in their wisdom saw that the defining feature here was Chuley Road, not the railway station.



www.britainfromabove.org.uk/image/EPW033029

© Historic England

The neat, compact stannary town of old, as it was in 1930, with the station partly hidden by trees.

The road bypass was soon to be commenced, but West Street and East Street, going left to right at centre, still carried the ever-growing motor traffic. The bypass would sever Whistley Hill, going off picture at right.



www.britainfromabove.org.uk/image/EPW033030

© Historic England

"The G.W.R. on the doorstep." All the features of the station (or Chuley Road, as the Park would have it) are in view: the train, goods and engine sheds; the market and malthouse; the umber and gas works; Tuckers; and not forgetting the Railway Hotel. Imagine the traffic of today's dual carriageway bypass fighting its way through those narrow streets. Or a horse-drawn coach being turned towards the narrow alleyway of an inn, the first overnight stop from Plymouth.



Despite the realistic valuation and the extinguishment of the Masterplan, the brothers held on to the belief that their garages would be bought by a developer who would pay them a huge sum—a million or more pounds. Their intransigence made it difficult for the Friends to manoeuvre.

There was talk of the lighter parts of the South Devon's carriage repair business being established at Ashburton, so as to gain a foothold and return some railway activity to the station. Chuley Road Garage, if bought, could have been let in the short term while work on the train shed and station buildings was being done. Premises could perhaps have been found elsewhere for the brothers' businesses.

On Midsummer's Day, 2017, the group met at the Blue Ball Inn, less than 200 yards from the M5, in what had once been the unspoilt valley of the Clyst between Exeter and Clyst St. Mary. The sun shone and some members came face to face for the first time. Lunch was booked as an expense, as there was a surplus in the bank after the surveyor's account had been settled.

It was resolved to form a limited company and then to pursue a grant to allow the purchase of Chuley Road Garage.

Some of the group met in September at The Dartmoor Lodge, which had begun as The Pear Tree, on the junction of the Ashburton Bypass with the turnpike, where Ashburn Station might have been built. Tony Noon and Alan Hayward attended.

The Teign Valley withdrew from the front line in October; its intention to rouse and write letters had been far exceeded. This caused Rob a little consternation.

"I remain saddened and dismayed that you still wish to part from us. Personally I see you as a key ally and friend and certainly someone far from 'just a supernumerary'. You have brought us some excellent contacts, provided many great ideas and you keep us on track with the goal of providing a viable transport link, rather than just a toy train. Your stewardship of the E&TVR also provides us with a strong connection with a local transport and heritage campaign that has been invaluable in the past and would continue to do so in the future."

Rob was assured that the Teign Valley would continue to assist when it could be useful. The specialists he really needed, he had.

"Look at the team of pros you've assembled, with planning, engineering, heritage, property and finance covered by some of the best in their fields. Just imagine if a wealthy fellow stepped in and gave you your heads: enabled you all to pursue Ashburton as you would any other paying work, instead of doing it for love out of hours."

Station Approach Holdings (Ashburton), Ltd., Community Interest Company, was incorporated on 17th January, 2018, with its Nature of Business disclosed as "Other service activities not elsewhere classified." Vernon was the Company Secretary and Director; Amyas, Rob and Maryann were Directors. The Registered Office was Christow Station.

The discreet name of the company was intended not to make it obvious that the station site was being acquired by the railway interest, were it to be successful in its bid.

In March, Charlie Dennis, an Ashburton resident, ever with his ear to the ground—although he'd managed to miss the significance of the unfolding Masterplan in 2013—heard a rumour that Terry Wills had a buyer for Chuley Road Garage. Rob reacted:

Rather disturbingly this is looking like Blackmoor Gate.

I think as we all know and understand, here, in order to buy a crucial asset (the station and formation), the Lynton & Barnstaple revivalists are obliged to buy the (highly profitable) restaurant business in the old station as a going concern, needing to raise £1.8 million through a bank loan and a share scheme to purchase the business outright and to carry out refurbishments.

The reality of the restaurant having been extended out over the platforms and the economics of buying a valuable business is forcing the revivalists to maintain the business in the station and to build a new station off-line. If the railway is to ever fulfil its promise of reinstating the railway 'as built' in the long term, I guess that the pub/restaurant will have to remain, at least until it has paid back the 'added value' of the business over the value of the land.

We've made the fatal mistake of thinking Terry would sell for the land value only, but one can hardly blame him for trying to get what he can for his life's work.

I have no idea what Terry's business is worth, on top of the value of the buildings and land, but being the go-to garage in Ashburton for budget repairs and MOTs must have value, as it's been keeping a roof over the heads of Terry and his family for the last 50 years. Indeed, one could excuse him if he were to be rather insulted that we've considered his life's work in building up the business to have no value at all.

Worse, no doubt Frank Wills also believes his Land Rover repair business at Station Garage has some capital value as well.

In fact, until we get off the station industrial estate, it's possible that the only land that

we might possibly get within Ashburton for the value of the land alone might be Tuckers' store, given that Tuckers are taking their business with them to their new site.

Happily, with Tuckers flood-prone overspill/staff car park, the land Tuckers would like to sell us not only has a ready-made engine/carriage shed, there is enough land for some sidings and a temporary station. At least this would give us a presence. A presence AND a stake in the station estate would give us real credibility.

It would be interesting to know how the L&B propose to sustain the Blackmoor Gate restaurant business (whether they proposed to run it themselves, or whether they are proposing to let the business to someone else) but they clearly believe that it's not credible to spend £1.8 million on the business, only to close it down.

I'm not suggesting that we go into the garage business ourselves, but should we perhaps be looking at a model where we raise the necessary funds to buy the business and then let it out to one or another of the people who might otherwise be competing with us?

The Teign Valley scribe answered this.

There's a great difference between the Old Station House Inn at Blackmoor Gate and Chuley Road Garage: the inn's value is its location whereas the garage could be set up anywhere.

Chuley Road Garage as a business has goodwill, that is its reputation and customer base, and its stock-in-trade, the apparatus needed to test and repair light vehicles. Look inside any garage: they're not railway workshops with the likes of wheel lathes and overhead cranes. The equipment is minimal: a hoist, a *Krypton* tuner, a selection of *Snap-On* tools and muck that most car nuts have in their sheds at home; even the dedicated M.o.T. area doesn't amount to much. It's all easily detachable from the premises.

Amyas and I were in the place next door recently.* There was one fitter at work, a woman in the office and Bro. Wills scratching about. Everywhere was filthy and untidy; nothing was kept up. I was constantly thinking that the railway, with its public service obligation, with its duty of care, with its responsibility to place and with the perfect order of its construction, couldn't continue here but look at what has taken its place. It's palaces to pig sties; it's the stoats and weasels occupying Toad Hall; it's a higher civilization sunk into savagery. It pains me being around such places and the philistines that infest them. And there was a dirty great *Wankmobile* parked outside, with personalized number plate and tinted glass.

It still does not make sense to me. There are two existing garage businesses willing to pay £400,000 above the value of the premises for a name, the books and some removable kit. Why not ask Charlie to find out who they are and then get them to look at the big grey shed just down the line?

* Amyas had been allowed to measure the former station building for some reason.

Rob responded:

Points well made about the difference between a mucky backstreet garage and one of Devon's premier roadside eateries.

Certainly the location, buildings, reputation, customer base and stock-in-trade of the Old Station House Inn are worth well in excess of those of Chuley Road Garage, but to be fair, the best price the L&B could secure for the inn is a staggering £1.8 million.

Having discussed our conundrum with the Architectural Heritage Fund, I have to say they are not enthusiastic about paying over the red book valuation for Terry's garage. Indeed, they cannot. They are in the business of funding projects that revive heritage buildings for the benefit of local economies. Normally the buildings they support are derelict and with no economic value. Groups that they support are those who wish to give those buildings value again. They are certainly not in the business of giving money to people who wish to shut down or displace viable local businesses.

Indeed, it has always been our intention to lease out Terry's garage until such time as we needed the land. Here it seems we may have not one, but two possible tenants.

Any rail revival is in a difficult position, as every piece of land is a potential ransom strip, if ransom means 'the going rate'. This is obviously the case without CPO powers, but it is also the case with CPO. Even HS2 has to pay full price, plus compensation, plus full relocation costs for displaced businesses.

If we're not to be outbid on this and future land acquisitions we will have to accept that we will need to pay the going rate, whatever that is. We then have to find a way of making the economics stack up.

Amyas had suggested calling Terry's bluff and the scribe agreed.

Mightn't it be best to let Terry's garage go for now? I know how strongly you feel that this opportunity must be taken if possible, but letting it pass would allow a stringer position to be gained.

Seeing what Chuley Road Garage *actually* made would more or less establish the value of Station Garage. If this is much lower than Terry thinks it is, then Frank too would be sobered.

The great danger is that you throw everything at Chuley Road and then find yourself unable to mount a bid for Station Garage and its architectural gems, when Frank decides to sell his place.

Holding back now would allow time to muster for the purchase of the station buildings, the only bit of the complex that might attract funding, whether from the A.H.S. or a body of supporters.

If this course were taken, another opportunity to acquire Chuley Road may present itself sooner than you think. Motor transport is about to change radically. In a few years the future of the trade may be clearer. Even if *robomotors* remain on the test grounds, electric propulsion will have become widespread and the tipping point will no doubt be hastened by tax measures. Vehicles that need scarcely any servicing will not need backstreet garages. Aren't all *Teslas* monitored from the factory?

And there's always the possibility that Terry's buyers don't materialize and he comes crawling to you. Like Amyas suggested: call his bluff.

From Bro. Wills' continuing proprietorship of the garage in 2026, it would seem that the buyer was fictitious or that there was only a casual enquiry about a sale.

In 2025, several years after the purchase of Old Station Inn by the Lynton & Barnstaple, the scout made it an appropriate lunch stop on one of his route refresher rides.

Scroll to "Blackmoor," the station name: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/scouting/xxx-lynton-barnstaple/>

Tuckers' and Tom's

Blaming the delays and uncertainty brought about by the failure of the Masterplan, Tucker's announced in the autumn of 2018 that it would be closing the Ashburton Store at Christmas and would not be building a new store at Pear Tree.

Late in the old year or early in the new, the Friends' man on the ground reported seeing shelving and stock being taken across the river from Tuckers to Pollard Landscapes, a shed and yard occupying the course of the line on the station side of the engine shed. Tom Pollard, the owner, has a yard near Christow Station and a lot of activity had been noticed. The scout was told that Pollard was bringing materials and equipment from Ashburton because he intended to start a retail business there in the hope of capturing some of Tuckers' former customers.

By mid-January, *Tom's Country Store* had opened. The railway wrote to Dan Janota at Parke.

The FoAS group is naturally wary of any new operation starting around the station and is especially unsettled by the prospect of a new Tuckers developing on the course of the railway. But this must also be of concern to your authority. In return for the extinguishing of Tuckers' commercial activity at Brewery Meadow, a new site at Castle Bridge (Peartree) was granted permission for a country store and associated trades. This surely was heavily swayed by a desire to keep Tuckers close to Ashburton. Now there is the prospect of a new country store opening on Chuley Road, where it was hoped that traffic would be reduced.

Asked how a landscaper's premises had so easily become a retail outlet, Dan advised that Pollard had been granted a two-year permission for the retail of goods from the site.

Tory Boy Stride, a supposed railway supporter, dropped in to wish the new venture well in March.

The Friends were reminded of this unexpected turn of events in a September memo.

A further development at the station will be included in a summary at the end, when the story is brought fully up to date.

Memo to the group, 29.9.19. "Tucker's": <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/Tuckers.pdf>

Railways in the Local Plan

This subject came up in January, 2019. The Teign Valley wrote to Dr. Tom Greeves, author, folk hero, partisan, and founder and Chairman of *The Dartmoor Society*. He had been granted an audience with the National Park Authority and so he was sent some information to support any pitch he may have been able to make for more recognition of the railway.

He was once the National Park archaeologist and then became its most cutting critic.

Correspondence with Dr. Tom Greeves: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/DartmoorSociety.pdf>

The railway wrote to the Campaign for Better Transport in January, asking that the organization endorse the Friends' submission to the park authority. No reply was received and another letter in February, which included a £100 donation, went unanswered.

The submission was not retained in the file at Christow.

Letter to Campaign for Better Transport: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/TVRtoCBT.pdf>

4.3 Transport

4.3.1 It is a strategic objective of national planning policy and the Local Plan to ensure development occurs where people can use sustainable transport, reducing their need to travel and minimising our impact on climate change. This is particularly challenging in a National Park. Dartmoor's isolated nature, dispersed settlement pattern and low population density means its residents are heavily reliant on the private car. Bus services are available in Dartmoor's larger settlements and are an essential service for many. However, lack of work-time connections, limited destination choice and people's preference to travel by car means these services are generally under-used. Walking and cycling are popular, but often the distances people need to travel mean they cannot be relied upon. Despite the challenging context the Local Plan seeks to ensure development supports provision of sustainable transport opportunities and that development which prejudices these opportunities is refused.

Rail

4.3.2 None of the National Park's settlements have direct national rail network access. The nearest railway stations are at Ivybridge and Okehampton, though the mainline rail service passes through South Brent, and a recreational heritage line links Buckfastleigh with Totnes, where there is a mainline service. There are currently four potential rail opportunities for Dartmoor National Park:

- There has been a desire to explore whether the Buckfastleigh to Totnes heritage line could be extended to its original Ashburton terminus. The option for this exists through the identification of land at Chuley Road for redevelopment.
- A small portion of land beside the rail line at South Brent is safeguarded for the potential re-opening of South Brent station. This is the only land option which could enable future rail access returning to South Brent.
- Long term options (2030+) include reopening the Okehampton, Coleford Junction, Tavistock to Plymouth route north of Dartmoor.
- Outside Dartmoor work is on-going to provide a regular Exeter to Okehampton service supported by a parkway station at Okehampton.

This is what National Park Authority rail transport policy amounted to in 2026.

The Exeter to Okehampton train service commenced in 2021 and Okehampton Interchange Station opened in 2026.

In May, 2019, Ashburton Friends were invited to join the **Exmoor Associates** annual meeting in Goodleigh Village Hall. In the event, the scout rode out from Barum to attend on his own. The meeting was followed by a visit to Snapper Halt, where a token length of track was being laid.

In 2025, the Teign Valley became involved with *Exmoor Associates*, now *Yeo Valley Trust*.

Snapper: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/scouting/snapper/>

Yeo Valley Trust: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/whats-new.php#yeovalleytrust>

Neighbourhood Plan Meeting

At the suggestion of Pete Webb, a sympathizer and member of the Ashburton Neighbourhood Plan committee, a public meeting was arranged in the Town Hall on 25th September, 2019, in an effort to gauge what support there was for the railway's return.

Leaflets were printed at Parke, where they were collected by Amyas and the scout on Monday, 23rd. The morning was spent speaking to shopkeepers and asking if they would put the leaflets in their windows. Some were put in letterboxes around the station. The one the scout handed in at *Tom's Country Store* was not at all well received, he recalls, but at the other businesses the two canvassers were met amiably or with some enthusiasm.

The railwaymen retired to the Royal Oak for lunch. This was where the scout had eaten on that grey day in 2015 and where Rob and the scout had gone for refreshment after the first of the meetings in 2016.

On the night, Rob's presentation was followed by Sean Wilson, the owner of Grey Matter, whose imagined hegemony over the station area must have made him think he could also speak for the town; when in fact he had only the view of a businessman who didn't want to lose his staff car park and didn't want his fragile operators and their delicate instrumentation to be shaken by the arrival of steam trains.

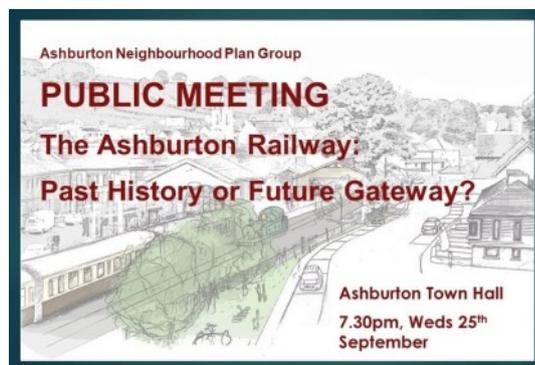
Robin Jones, the Editor of *Heritage Railway*, wired Christow the next morning, asking: "How did the meeting go? We all so desperately want to see this happen."

The scribe promptly sent Robin a report, which was followed by a wire from Rob adding that "a highly-vocal group of climate-change activists" had been on the floor. He warned of their reported infiltration of the South Devon.

Rob would have preferred to have put the railway's case to the Town Council first, but took a chance with the public meeting.

I had rather approached the matter of this meeting with the assumption that Town Councillors would be impartial and balanced in their preconceptions, hence my original suggestion to meet with them first. Given my experience of elected representatives, this presumption was clearly a schoolboy error!

Whilst it was clear to everyone in the room that by far the majority of the town was not there to express an opinion, if the Neighbourhood Plan committee took one thing away from the meeting it will have been that the railway is controversial and divisive. This is exactly the result the antis hoped for.



I gather some shopkeepers are already aggrieved about Wilson representing the interests of the firms at the station over their own businesses. I've suggested to Pete Webb that now is the time for the shopkeepers to make it clear that Wilson was not speaking for them and that it might be an idea to do a re-run of the petition done previously, which 100% of shopkeepers signed.

The petition Rob referred to was organized by Charlie Dennis and was one of his few contributions. In a memo to the group, the Teign Valley considered the wider context.

The state is failing to enable the expansion of the rail network in the West Country; even the cast iron case of Portishead has been fouled up and will be delivered as a compromise. Tavistock, on present trends, may as well be forgotten. Even the least difficult task of reinstating the service to Okehampton is being painfully drawn out. And yet every informed commentator agrees that the country's emission targets cannot be met without a very substantial increase in public transport, principally the guided systems.

This was followed by a paragraph that could have been adopted as a mission statement.

A small group, whose members share a great fondness for Ashburton and a belief in the power of rail transport to uplift communities, has come up with a way effectively to reconnect the town to the national network. The process of doing so would not be without environmental impact and some upheaval. The trains proposed would not be perfectly clean. But once the railway was back at the old doorstep terminus, it would hold the potential to fit with whatever changing times demanded. The revitalization of a decaying area of town into possibly its greatest asset would be an incidental gain.

In 2026, the Ashburton Neighbourhood Plan was still not finalized and the draft remained typically unambitious.

Eat Your Greens

This deluded type conveniently overlook their flights, their cars, their dependence on Far-East-manufactured goods and that the A.I. servers attempting to satiate their thirst for "knowledge" may one day match the energy used by industrial Britain, and instead pick on a little steam railway so that they can go home glowing with righteousness. They're like the passenger on a *Jumbo* jet moaning about the one-use straw that comes with his cocktail, while ignoring that he's sitting on 45,000 gallons of kerosene.

Anyone who has held deep environmental concerns ever since he was able to make up his mind, must find the current hysteria tiresome. Soon it will be: "Right, who hasn't declared a climate fucking emergency? And the next thing will be bodies trying to outdo each other with "climate, ecological, societal, existential dire bastard emergency!"

Loathe them or feel uneasy about them, these are people that have to won over. The environmental opposition seen at the meeting, muddled and unsound though much of it was, has to be faced. They need to be convinced that the less than perfect railway being promoted is the only deal on offer and that if they buy it they can make it anything they want it to be in future, powered by stardust or dodo droppings if need be.

Industrial Areas

Chuley Road Business Park

Chuley Road has a range of Businesses from industrial vehicle repairs to retail premises and offices. Their diversity reflects the development of Ashburton since the arrival of the railway in 1872.

The railway, historically, provided daily links to the outside world. Now, however, access to industrial premises via St. Lawrence Lane and Whistley Hill (past the Primary School) by LGVs and others creates problems of damage to heritage assets such as pavements and kerbstones.

Some businesses on Chuley Road have purpose-built premises, others have established a customer base at the same location over many years and would have no desire to move. Others are overcrowded and would welcome relocation to larger units with easier access for delivery and service vehicles.

Chuley Road has a collection of railway heritage buildings, one of which is listed. Most buildings have been converted into offices and small workspaces. They are ideally placed close to the centre of town and within easy walking distance of the recreation ground.

Housing development is proposed on the former site of the Caravan and Camping sales area (Outdoor Experience) which will add to the diverse nature of Chuley Road.

The proximity to the town centre should offer a positive incentive for the location of elderly person's dwellings.

Possibly one of the buildings could become a 'railway heritage centre', housing memorabilia, photographs and an exhibition of Ashburton's connection with the former railway.

Along the existing Bullivers Way a cycle/foot path linking Ashburton with the South Devon Railway at Buckfastleigh, using what a s part of the old track bed, could provide a link for local people, pass the proposed new businesses at Pear Tree. Additionally, it would provide visitors and railway enthusiasts with the opportunity to see the former line of the railway and its unique heritage buildings.

To reinvigorate Chuley Road area, small office units, craft workshops and additional public parking, should be encouraged, with any new buildings sympathetic to the existing vernacular, being both a practical use of historic buildings and create an interesting environment.

The possibility of a regular market should be explored, possibly on a Sunday, so as not to compete with the local weekly traders.



Restoring Your Railway (“Reversing Beeching”)

In an October, 2019, memo to the group, the scribe had written:

At some point after 1972 the road builders would have had to provide for the railway and the connection to the terminus would not have been lost. If Dart Valley had won a light railway order for the whole branch and become established, today its position would be unassailable. It’s possible that in (slightly) more enlightened times, even the prospect of railway reinstatement might force a road builder to accommodate a route. The point being that this project is very much about reversing a past injustice.

In January, 2020, government pledged £500-million for the Restoring Your Railway Fund, to deliver on its manifesto commitment and start reopening lines and stations.

Ideas Fund - development funding for early-stage ideas to explore options to restore lost rail connections. The Department for Transport would fund 75% of costs, up to a maximum of £50,000, to help successful projects carry out transport and economic studies.

Advanced Proposals - support for lines and stations already being considered for restoration
Proposals for New Stations and Restored Stations

Funding was split into three categories to support different projects at different phases of development.

Heroically, in a bid to reverse the past injustice, Rob submitted a proposal to the Ideas Fund. He had won the support of Ashburton Town Council and the Chamber of Trade. Entries had to be sponsored by local M.P.s.; those for Mid-Devon and Totnes obliged.

The submission was made to Round Two. This was evaluated by Atkins, the D.f.T.’s consultant, and returned with a review, intended to aid understanding of where the case needed further work.

Rob resubmitted the strengthened proposal to Round Three. In the Restoring Your Railway Fund Programme Update, published in June, 2022, the Ashburton & Buckfastleigh Junction was listed with 100 other proposals in “Appendix C: Unsuccessful Bids to the Ideas Fund.”

There was no further opportunity to bid and Restoring Your Railway was axed by the new Labour government in 2024.

Ideas Application Form (Final): <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/RyR119FINALIdeas.pdf>

Route Map (Final): <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/RyR119Routemap.pdf>

Round Two review: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/ABJR.pdf>

Programme Update, 2022: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/pdfs/restoring-your-railway.pdf>

Heath Rail Link: <https://www.teignrail.co.uk/whats-new.php#heathrailink>

A Missed Opportunity?: <https://bettertransport.org.uk/blog/restoring-your-railway-a-missed-opportunity/>

It was not until after the Restoring Your Railway submission that Rob made what was to be his last post on the Friends’ *Mughook* page.

He had been understandably hurt by the hostility and unreceptiveness of some at the meeting. The Teign Valley scout, standing at the back near Amyas, afterwards wondered whether he should have spoken up, as he had done at the same place in 2014 as part of a “railway mob.” But it would surely only have become a bitter slanging match, which would not have helped the cause. The meeting may have been a necessary catharsis; the wretched Wilsons of this world can only do so much damage.

Missing from that Town Hall room were a sufficient number of curious, open-minded townsfolk; some of the traders who had signed the petition; railwaymen and enthusiasts keen to get involved; and faces from the South Devon.

A year ago, a reader asked if there would be any more posts. Rob replied: “Maybe not. It seems Ashburton doesn’t want its railway back.”

It is a great shame that the town was content for this impression to have been given.

If it were a failing of the railway that it did not make the prospect of trains seem attractive, then this too would be sad, for Lord knows it tried.



Friends of Ashburton Station

9 July 2020

Please accept our sincere apologies for the lack of posts since the 25th September public meeting at Ashburton Town Hall. The meeting was challenging, but useful nevertheless! Anyone who has looked through the videos posted of the night’s proceedings will have seen that those who attended fell largely into three camps:

- The owners of businesses that own or lease land and buildings on or adjacent to the old station site and their friends. Other local businesses and shops were largely unrepresented.
- The local (and not-so-local) green lobby, and
- A small number of supporters and local residents simply wishing to know more.

The meeting was also attended by Town Councillors, who arrived after a planning meeting at about half-time, thus missing the presentation in favour of the railway’s return.

Rob Kinchin-Smith presented the case for the railway’s return to Ashburton, stressing the importance of the old station buildings and citing typical economic uplifts generated by similar extensions to heritage railways.

Sean Wilson (then Chair of Ashburton Chamber of Trade) opposed the motion, presenting the case for the businesses on the station site, describing these as the ‘Engine House’ of Ashburton’s economy. The figures presented included one business with c. 100 employees, most commuting daily by car, which is not directly affected by the scheme, which was thought rather unfair. Whilst the railway has never proposed compulsory purchase and allowed a 20-year timescale for the acquisition of the station parcels as businesses outgrow their premises or cease trading, it was clear from the floor that these business stakeholders still regard the railway as a direct threat to their livelihoods and well-being.

Continued below

The scout completed a **route refresher** over the whole branch in 2025. On Chuley Road, he found that Tucker's had reopened, using the shed which had taken the place of the old malthouse.

One of the aims of the Masterplan was to reduce the traffic on Chuley Road, if only to allow for more to be generated by the convenience store and housing on the Ashburn Caravans site. Yet now there are two country stores on Chuley Road.

In 2014, Tuckers were granted permission for a new store on a site alongside the A38, which was outside the Ashburton development boundary. Tuckers agreed that the new site would be developed ahead of them vacating the old store.

Minimum works were done in 2017 to implement the permission. An application to vary the permission was submitted in 2022. The decision was: "Declined to Determine Article 40 (13)."

The D.N.P.A. Report to Committee in 2014 stated: "The objectors consider that this is a proposal to effectively create a substantial out of town retail outlet. There are no guarantees that the site will be developed by Tuckers, leading to concerns that other retail users may be attracted to this site if permission were granted."

Ashburton Branch:

<https://www.teignrail.co.uk/scouting/118-ashburton-branch/>



Tom's Country Store on Chuley Road in 2025.



Tuckers back in business in the big grey shed, seen from Chuley Road in 2025.

The loco shed is at right. The course of the branch lay between the two buildings.

Those representing the railway interest have listened carefully and taken away four key messages:

- The town strongly values the railway buildings on the station site and is as strongly committed to the protection and enhancement of these buildings as the railway's supporters. The local community nevertheless remains to be convinced that the best use of the station site is as a railway station.

- Given the benefits of the scheme in terms of car-free footfall to the town and national park and the environmental benefits of the scheme in terms of flooding and nature conservation, the highly vocal opposition of the green lobby was unexpected, notwithstanding the known declaration of a 'climate emergency' by the National Park and corresponding ambition for a 'carbon-free Dartmoor' by 2025. In this context it is essential to double down on the railway's mission to be a national and international leader and exemplar in environmentally-positive light heritage rail.

- The third lesson learned is that the 'station first and the railway will follow' strategy has to be abandoned. The timescales are simply too long and the strategy has resulted in the alienation of too many key stakeholders. Whilst 'railway first' may be a harder 'sell' to potential funders, including the enthusiast community, it is essential to turn the strategy to be 'railway first', as without the certainty of a rail connection in place, it will prove extremely hard, if not impossible to raise the funding necessary to not only acquire the station parcels, but also to provide alternative business accommodation for the town, on site or elsewhere. This is not an abandonment of the station. It is simply an acceptance of the reality that a relentless focus on the station is causing hurt, uncertainty and delay.

- Lastly, despite bench-marking with comparable schemes elsewhere, both completed and proposed, the lack of scheme-specific data has meant that we are failing to demonstrate beyond doubt the potential benefits of the railway scheme to the local community and economy. Without such data, it is not possible for the local community to know for sure what the scheme's benefits will be, nor whether these benefits are offset by other disbenefits, notably any loss of employment that might result from a sustainable transport use of the station site.

To this end, we have applied for £20,000 grant funding to commission a business case and socio-economic impact assessment of a railway from Buckfastleigh to a location just short of the Ashburton station site.

Should the bid be successful and the study indicate typical benchmarked yields for similar schemes elsewhere, we would then seek further grant funding from the same sources for the environmental studies necessary to demonstrate to the local community, the National Park and others, the environmental benefits that are aspired to and believed to be achievable.

This balanced, fact-led initiative has the backing of Ashburton Town Council, the (new) Chair of the Ashburton Chamber of Trade and local MPs, Anthony Mangnall MP (Totnes) and Mel Stride MP (Mid-Devon) as it is regarded as an important and valuable study for the town.

Whether we have been successful in our grant application will be announced in the late summer.



Tuckers' site at Peartree, on the course of the line.

The firm, exceptionally, was granted permission to build a new store here to replace the one whose site was sold for housing.

