

Ashburton Railway – Appraisal of Options Report (revised)

June 2015



This report sets out an appraisal of a number of options for the inclusion of greater emphasis on railway heritage matters in the Chuley Road Masterplan, Ashburton. It has been prepared with the benefit of the professional advice of parties listed in Appendix 1.

The report identifies a number of options discussed with Friends of Ashburton Station, for each option the report considers

- Principal advantages and disadvantages
- Evidence and assumptions
- Key constraints and opportunities in respect of –
 - o Environmental issues
 - o Land availability and acquisition
 - o Built environment
 - o Highways and parking
 - o Economic benefit, costs and viability
 - o Practical implications in respect of the Masterplan/local plan
- Discussion/conclusion

The options appraised are as follows:

Option 1 – The conservation of railway heritage buildings within the site, public access to those buildings where possible

Option 2 – The conservation of Ashburton Station building, and use as a railway heritage centre

Option 3 – The safeguarding of a route for the future provision of a new railway line between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton (in combination with option 2)

Option 4 – The provision of a new railway line between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton, with a station which lies short of Chuley Road (in combination with options 2 and 3).

Option 5 – The provision of a new railway line between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton (in combination with options 2 and 3)

Executive Summary

Background

DNPA prepared and consulted upon the allocation of the Chuley Road site in the Local Plan, for mixed use development; this process included consultation events in Ashburton and Buckfastleigh and a public exhibition specifically regarding the site in November 2012. This led to the allocation of the site in the local plan following a positive response from the community. The Masterplan process started in spring 2013 with a consultation on a first draft in early 2014. A second draft was prepared and consulted upon in Nov/Dec 2014 and this is the first point at which DNPA has received any significant comment on or interest in railway matters, notwithstanding the wide public consultation including the use of social media.

The existence of the mixed-use allocation in the adopted Local Plan gives significant weight to this land use proposal. Furthermore the emerging Masterplan and supporting evidence will carry a degree of weight, albeit the Masterplan has not been approved. There is now a level of interest in the alteration of the Masterplan to include the better protection of railway buildings, and the safeguarding of land to enable potential reinstatement of a railway link between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton.

Given the allocation in the local plan and emerging Masterplan, DNPA would require robust evidence to resist a proposal (i.e. a planning application) which was consistent with the allocation and emerging Masterplan. Any counter proposal relating to the railway would therefore need to be supported by strong evidence in order for DNPA to be able to consider it favourably, to support this option over the existing approach, and to defend any decision including at appeal. The report sets out an appraisal of a number of options for the further inclusion of railway heritage matters into the Masterplan. The purpose of the report is to consider the merits of the different options in order to advise DNPA Members in identifying any potential immediate changes to the emerging Masterplan.

What other information or advice has DNPA collected to inform this appraisal?

DNPA has sought advice from its own internal specialists, as well as Devon County Council (transport and highways), Teignbridge District Council (economic development, environmental health, parking, housing), South Hams District Council (economic development), Environment Agency (flood risk), Local Enterprise Partnership, Highways England, Natural England, and private consultant advice on land valuation. For further information please see the detailed discussion in the full report.

Conclusion

Outside the Masterplan, alternative models of delivery could be considered which would be more achievable. These include:

- A heritage centre without a rail connection. For example Great Torrington Station – this former station has a new use as a public house, and a short restored section of track displays a small amount of heritage rolling stock
- A mixed community and employment use building. For example Green Park Railway Station, Bath, this includes a mix of small retail and café/food outlets, with a covered multipurpose market or community space.

These 'light touch' alternatives could be considered which recognise the potential future benefit, but mitigate the significant risk. Without the benefit of detailed route identification, engineering

feasibility, costings and viability, business proposals, environmental scoping or appraisal any safeguarding in the Masterplan site or beyond currently attracts significant risk on the part of DNPA.

The costs of the scheme may have been significantly underestimated by the FoAS and the technical ability to deliver a scheme in the absence of any engineering feasibility means a more clear indication of costs is not likely to be forthcoming. Land acquisition would form a significant component of costs; in the absence of a Private Bill and specific Act of Parliament conferring compulsory purchase powers on South Devon Railway, FoAS or a successor body, the ability to negotiate land acquisition which includes, existing residential properties, businesses and an extant planning permission, has been strongly questioned. This could result in an indefinite period of safeguarding and the requirement for DNPA to robustly justify and defend this position against decision and appeals, and in the local plan long into the future.

The positive economic benefits the scheme could bring in the long term are recognised. However the realisation of these would mean an indefinite period of uncertainty and limited investment in the Chuley Road area. The proposal therefore poses significant risk on the part of the local planning authority in the short to medium term arising from its ability to defend decisions in the absence of robust and compelling evidence that land can be acquired and the scheme delivered.

Whilst minor changes or alterations outside of the Masterplan could be considered, it is not recommended that any changes are made to the Masterplan which are founded on the ability to deliver a railway in the future. DNPA's ability to defend this decision is likely to be very weak.

Of the options set out below officers recommend Option 2 as being low risk, achievable and reasonable based upon the evidence currently available, as well as being that most likely to receive the support of statutory consultees, landowners, and, in officers' opinion, the Town Council.

	Opportunities, issues and constraints	Feasibility, viability and risk	Conclusion/recommendation
Option 1 – The conservation of railway heritage buildings within the site, public access to those buildings where possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consistent with existing Masterplan - Simple approach to conservation of heritage assets - Limited public access to Engine Shed and Goods Shed - requires new use for station building; - Conservation led regeneration approach which uses heritage assets as an anchor and catalyst for other redevelopment opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full flexibility for the potential use of the buildings, meaning they are more likely to have sustainable viable uses in the long term - A link with a more viable scheme on the adjacent plot ('cross subsidy') would improve significantly the prospects for a long term viable use - Community uses alone for the station may not be sustainable and may rely on charitable or public sector grant or subsidy - Little change required to Masterplan therefore minimal risk. 	Low risk most feasible and viable approach. Little change needed to Masterplan. Perhaps does not go far enough in reflecting the current enthusiasm for railway matters from the specific interest groups.
Option 2 – The conservation of Ashburton Station building, and use as a railway heritage centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scope to offer significant improvements to the quality and character of heritage assets, their setting, and the conservation area. - The heritage/education centre approach could be consistent with the National Park purposes - Retains public access to the heritage asset. - Supports a 'conservation led regeneration' approach which uses heritage assets as an anchor and catalyst for other redevelopment opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No evidence on how scheme would be funded - No detailed evidence on impact of scheme on highway and parking issues - Limited evidence regarding the viability of this approach. A link with a more viable scheme on the adjacent plot ('cross subsidy') would improve significantly the prospects for a long term viable use - Minimal changes required to Masterplan therefore lower risk. 	Lower risk option. Requires a degree of pragmatism and flexibility regarding the viability of a scheme in the future in order to avoid become financially sustainable. Evidence around highway/parking required at detailed application stage. Potential range of economic and social benefits within the town. Could link with opportunities around heritage bus link with Buckfastleigh. Recommended option.
Option 3 – The safeguarding of a route for the future provision of a new railway line between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton (in combination with option 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most appropriate approach to achieving the overall proposal to reinstate a rail link. - Uncertainty placed upon a large area of land, with consequences for risk on adjoining land, too. - 'Interim' arrangement could impact in the short to medium term upon the built and environmental quality of the area as a consequence of a lack of investment. - Would impact upon the ability to deliver other aims of the Masterplan due to impact on viability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No evidence on future funding. - No evidence on feasibility of the future scheme. - Likely negative impact upon the area in the short-medium term. - Planning gains around flood risk, parking improvements and highway changes may not be viable. - High risk – places a great deal of trust in the ability to deliver scheme in future. - No evidence of landowner support. Little evidence of community support. - Need for DNPA to defend decision to safeguard in immediate future (i.e. current application, potential appeals against refusal or non-determination). Likely to be very weak position given lack of evidence. - Need for DNPA to robustly justify scheme to support a sound local plan in the future (and likely a number of future local plan reviews). - Inability to defend position could result in both loss of railway opportunity and loss of strategic Masterplan gains. 	Very high risk option. Safeguarding is justified only by clear evidence that the ultimate outcome is achievable. Safeguarding itself and the interim period is likely to have a negative impact upon the area in the short to medium term, leading to uncertainty and an unpredictability that could impact upon the ability to deliver the wider objectives of the Masterplan around flood risk mitigation, highway and parking improvements. Whilst it is a long term strategy, it could lead to a loss of businesses in the short term, and potentially mean residential schemes do not come forward in the short to medium term. Safeguarding cannot be carried out in isolation, if DNPA is to consider alterations to the Masterplan which may impact upon the viability of development within Chuley Road these are likely to be robustly challenged. The robust and compelling evidence around the ability to deliver the railway, and the ultimate benefits of it, is therefore crucial to justify this means, and clearly demonstrate that eventual deliverable benefits outweigh the potential negative impact in the short to medium term. DNPA would be taking on significant risk in altering the Masterplan to include a safeguarded area without clear evidence. Not recommended.

	Opportunities, issues and constraints	Feasibility, viability and risk	Conclusion/recommendation
<p>Option 4 – The provision of a new railway line between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton, with a station which lies short of Chuley Road (in combination with options 2 and 3).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removes the immediate need to act through changes to the emerging Masterplan - Retains the ability to deliver other aims of the Masterplan due to viability on site. - Land cost and acquisition smaller, though still very significant - Tourist destination which associates better with the town would clearly be preferable - Significant challenges in respect of its deliverability, with little or no information available on the route, the current engineering feasibility and costs, land availability and acquisition costs, environmental impacts and mitigation costs. - Little evidence relating to the business model, visitor projections and incomes, modes of travel and therefore how the overall costs of the scheme weigh against the potential economic and other benefits. - Lower impact on traffic and parking within town - Uncertainty regarding the viability of this approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lower risk as changes to Masterplan are not required. DNPA therefore has time to consider in more detail. - The line of the railway has been lost and there is significant challenge in a new route being identified, acquired and implemented. - The land required includes a number of residential properties, commercial land with existing businesses, agricultural land and land with an existing planning permission for retail development. In the absence of a Private Bill and Act of Parliament conferring compulsory purchase powers on South Devon Railway, FoAS or a successor body, DNPA is advised the chance of successfully acquiring all the necessary land interests by private negotiation is remote. The cost of land is estimated in the order of £14m. - Lower immediate risk than options 3 and 5, though robust evidence would be required were DNPA asked to safeguard the route in the next local plan. 	<p>Whilst risk is lower, the benefits of this approach are unclear. The option has advantages in respect of its limited impact upon the Masterplan site therefore improving its delivery prospects, and reduced impact upon the town centre. However the overall benefits of the ‘out of centre’ approach are uncertain and there is little evidence as to whether this approach is a reasonable or viable option for the town. There are significant constraints as described, around land acquisition, feasibility and viability etc. These would need to be explored robustly prior to any expectation of safeguarding in the local plan. However not needing to immediately change the Masterplan reduces the risk on the part of DNPA whilst evidence is prepared. Not currently recommended though could be explored in more detail in the future.</p>
<p>Option 5 – The provision of a new railway line between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton (in combination with options 2 and 3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potential for a new visitor attraction within the centre of Ashburton, with direct and indirect economic benefits - Heritage benefits through the sustainable future use of the station - Construction phase of a scheme of this scale would also bring an amount of temporary skilled employment - The option has significant challenges in respect of its deliverability, with little or no information available on the route, the current engineering feasibility and costs, land availability and acquisition costs, environmental impacts (including flood risk and protected species) and mitigation costs. - Little evidence relating to the business model, visitor projections and incomes, modes of travel and therefore how the overall costs of the scheme weigh against the potential future economic and other benefits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topography and existing infrastructure to the west of the A38 poses major difficulties. Including new bridges, underpasses, cuttings, and a new route through the flood plain. - Extremely challenging project with significant costs. Suggested costs appear to be extremely unrealistic. - Very little information on potential funding. - Timescale for delivery could extend significantly. - The land required includes a number of residential properties, commercial land with existing businesses, agricultural land and land with an existing planning permission for retail development. - In the absence of a Private Bill and Act of Parliament conferring compulsory purchase powers on South Devon Railway, FoAS or a successor body, DNPA is advised the chance of successfully acquiring all the necessary land interests by private negotiation is remote. The cost of land is estimated in the order of £14m. - Very high risk – places a great deal of trust in the ability to deliver scheme in future. - No evidence of landowner support. Little evidence of community support. - Need for DNPA to defend decision to safeguard in immediate future (i.e. current application, potential appeals against refusal or non-determination). Likely to be very weak position given lack of evidence. - Need for DNPA to robustly justify scheme to support a sound local plan in the future (and likely a number of 	<p>Very high risk option. At this point effectively equates to the safeguarding option risks above, justified only by clear evidence that the ultimate outcome is achievable. Issues around impact of safeguarding for an indefinite period, no evidence regarding technical feasibility, strongly question ability to acquire, significant environment assessment required (likely EIA development). Significant changes within the Masterplan site could impact upon the ability to deliver the wider objectives of the Masterplan around flood risk mitigation, highway and parking improvements. Whilst it is a long term strategy, it could lead to a loss of businesses in the short term, and potentially mean residential schemes do not come forward in the short to medium term.</p> <p>If DNPA is to consider alterations to the Masterplan which may impact upon the viability of development within Chuley Road these are likely to be robustly challenged. The robust and compelling evidence around the ability to deliver the railway, and the ultimate benefits of it, is therefore crucial to justify this means, and clearly demonstrate that eventual deliverable benefits outweigh the potential negative impact in the short to medium term. DNPA would be taking on significant risk in altering the Masterplan to include a safeguarded area without clear evidence. Not recommended.</p>

	Opportunities, issues and constraints	Feasibility, viability and risk	Conclusion/recommendation
		future local plan reviews). - Inability to defend position could result in both loss of railway opportunity and loss of strategic Masterplan gains.	

Background and engagement process around the Masterplan and railway proposal

During consultation on the Draft II of the Masterplan clear themes have emerged around railway heritage. An online petition with 2,153 signatures was received calling to include the Railway Station Building as a protected building (and 're-list' as a listed building) as part of the Chuley Road Masterplan.

The identification of this site comes from the DNPA local plan. DNPA prepared and consulted upon the allocation of this site in the Local Plan, for mixed use development; this process included consultation events in Ashburton and Buckfastleigh and a public exhibition specifically regarding the site in November 2012. This led to the allocation of the site in the local plan. The Masterplan process started in spring 2013 with a consultation on a first draft in early 2014. A second draft was prepared and consulted upon in Nov/Dec 2014 and this is the first point at which DNPA received any significant comment on or interest in railway matters.

The existence of the mixed-use allocation in the adopted Local Plan gives significant weight to this land use proposal. Furthermore the emerging Masterplan and supporting evidence will carry a degree of weight, albeit the Masterplan has not been approved. There is now a level of interest in the alteration of the Masterplan to include the better protection of railway buildings, and the safeguarding of land to enable potential reinstatement of a railway link between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton.

Given the allocation in the local plan and emerging Masterplan, DNPA would require robust evidence to resist a proposal (i.e. a planning application) which was consistent with the allocation and emerging Masterplan. Any counter proposal relating to the railway would therefore need to be supported by strong evidence in order for DNPA to be able to consider it favourably, support this option over the existing approach, and defend any decision (i.e. at appeal).

DNPA Members at a meeting of the Planning and Sustainable Development Working Panel in December 2014 recognised the level of interest in the railway proposal, but were also keen to ensure the process of adopting the Masterplan was not delayed unnecessarily. It was therefore proposed that FoAS/the South Devon Railway be given an opportunity to prepare a proposal and bring forward evidence which might support the case for a change to the emerging Masterplan.

Whilst it is recognised this is onerous, DNPA is under pressure to move the Masterplan forward and even if minded to give FoAS more time to prepare a detailed feasibility study and proposal, DNPA would require robust evidence in the meantime to resist applications consistent with the adopted local plan and emerging Masterplan.

In January 2015 DNPA provided FoAS with the following suggested list of issues/evidence desirable to present a robust case in respect of railway heritage issues in the Chuley Road Masterplan. FoAS was given until the 30 March 2015 to build a case for changes to the Masterplan. In the meantime DNPA officers attended meetings with FoAS and the South Devon Railway to provide advice and support. Suggested considerations were:

- An understanding of land take – in particular the need to understand what land within the Masterplan area would be necessary to reinstate a railway link. It may be helpful to subdivide this into 'essential' and 'desirable'.
- A detailed plan showing the route identified for a new line between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton, together with information regarding land ownership and any progress or understanding of this to date
- Information regarding specific civil engineering/infrastructure required for a scheme on this route, and cost estimates for this, including the track itself

- Evidence, information, expectation or assumptions on land cost estimates within the Masterplan site, and on the route of the new line
- Evidence on constraints to delivery (DNPA may be able to advise on planning/environmental issues), and risk
- A business case – proposals for Buckfastleigh, Ashburton and the wider line – how could the line will operate? What function (recreational or wider) will it serve? Is there a projection of visitor numbers? Are there any other revenue projections, or estimates of secondary benefits? What consideration is there of different approaches or scales of work, including costs and projected visitor numbers, for example:
 - Public access to the Station Buildings, with interpretation around its history
 - Railway Heritage Centre at the Station, a visitor attraction, but not with a physical rail link
 - The opening of a line to the edge of Ashburton (as per the earlier feasibility study)
 - The opening of a line to the original station
- What is the preferred proposal, and how is it intended that it is funded?
- Over what timescale is it expected that the project might be delivered?
- What assumptions have been made in putting together the information? What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the project?

DNPA received the proposal from FoAS on the 30 March 2015. FoAS will be attended the Planning and Sustainable Development Working Panel meeting on the 17 April 2015 in order to present their proposal direct to Members.

It is important to note that the Planning and Sustainable Development Working Panel is not a decision making body, but it will provide officers with a steer on planning matters.

Following the Panel meeting and any steer or formal view being provided by DNPA Members, a meeting of the Masterplan Steering Group will be convened to consider the final draft Masterplan, including any changes proposed relating to the railway. DNPA Members will then be asked to formally consider the approval of the Masterplan at an Authority Meeting.

Option 1 – The conservation of railway heritage buildings within the site, public access to those buildings where possible

Description

This Option would focus upon the conservation of specific railway heritage buildings within the Masterplan site (namely the old Engine Shed, the old Goods Shed, and the old Station). This option is effectively the current position in the Masterplan.

The old Goods Shed and old Engine Shed currently have private business uses which are unlikely to change. A new use could be identified for the old Station building which enables the building to be conserved and enhanced to protect this local heritage asset. A degree of pragmatism may be required in order to secure a viable use for the building, this may mean a flexible approach to the setting of the building and certain aspects of its form where this secures a long term future for the building. The opportunity to secure a public use or public access to the old Station building in future could form part of the Masterplan proposals. It is unlikely that internal access would form part of the other buildings, though uses should be sustained or identified which enable the buildings to have a viable use into the future. The Goods Shed was recently converted to an office use in such a way which could form a model for securing viable uses for these building. Investment in a sensitive scheme to enable a continued and improved use of the Grey Matter offices is also a good example of a pragmatic approach to the conservation of buildings of heritage merit.

Evidence and assumptions

The key heritage assets are the former station building, the engine shed and goods shed. However other buildings are of heritage merit within the site, such as the building at Prigg Meadow housing Grey Matter etc, and the Masonic Hall (both not directly railway related). There is currently limited evidence assembled relating to the value of many of these buildings, albeit it is recognised that a significant amount of information may be available in the form of local and records, and personal archives and memorabilia.

Where planning permission and/or listed building consent is necessary for proposals to change buildings identified as heritage assets, clear evidence would be required in order to understand the heritage significance of the building or area, as well as the impact of that proposal upon other heritage assets. In making a decision DNPA will consider any harm which may come as a result of the proposal, and the scale of that harm. Where substantial harm is identified, consent will not be granted unless the proposed development will secure substantial public benefits which outweigh that harm. A pragmatic approach may be applied to new uses which enable a viable future use for a building, where the building is conserved in such a way which outweighs any negative impact of the changes required.

In summary, it is important to note that the discussion is therefore around high level principles, is without the benefit of detailed building survey or Assessment of Significance, and that such information would be required to inform decisions on any future applications.

Key constraints and opportunities in respect of –

- **Environmental issues**

This option, focusing upon building conservation, is likely to have limited impact upon wider environmental matters.

Ecology – opportunity may exist in respect of enhancement of, for example, bat roosting or bird nesting features. These opportunities may link within others within the Masterplan Draft II

in respect of the enhancement of the river corridor. Impacts are likely to be minimal and therefore outweighed by potential gains.

Landscape – impact of the conservation of individual buildings within an existing built up area will have little or no impact upon the landscape character and quality. Opportunities through the Masterplan Draft II for the removal of larger buildings (e.g. large buildings at the current Tucker's site) could improve the setting of these buildings, and the local landscape (townscape) character.

Flood risk – new uses for buildings of heritage merit will need to meet clear criteria in respect of the safety of their use, and the impact of any changes to the building or its curtilage upon the local flood issues. It is expected that changes to buildings of heritage merit will also contribute towards the wider strategic flood risk improvements to the area, including through financial contributions and 'in kind' works within a site where appropriate. Where viability of a conservation-led scheme may already be marginal this may present a significant challenge, and further supports the need for a pragmatic approach to conversions and development.

- **Land availability and acquisition**

This option would not seek the change of use of the Engine Shed or Goods Shed for public or community uses. The Station Building is already identified in the Draft II Masterplan as an opportunity for a multifunctional community/retail/event space. The achievability of such a scheme will be dependent on identifying a long term viable use for the building.

- **Built environment**

This option has a positive impact upon the buildings of heritage merit, their setting, the setting of other buildings of heritage merit and the social and historic value of the area in respect of its railway heritage. Impact upon the built environment is therefore largely positive.

- **Highways and parking**

This option has limited impact upon highway and parking matters. However specific uses proposed for buildings may require a Transport Assessment to support any planning application. This would enable a greater understanding of any potential highway issues as necessary.

- **Economic benefit, costs and viability**

Achieving a sustainable viable future use for the buildings of heritage merit is the most favourable approach to building conservation. As noted above this may require a pragmatic approach to conversion or conservation works, however it represents the most viable conservation model, where a new use justifies future investment in the maintenance of the property. Conservation of heritage buildings does of course attract a greater cost than the redevelopment of a site and a 'new build' proposal.

- **Practical implications in respect of the Masterplan/local plan**

This option is wholly consistent with the current Masterplan and does not require alterations to the Masterplan or subsequent changes to the Local Plan at future review.

- **Advantages** – In respect of the Station Building would be consistent with existing Masterplan, no changes would be required. This is a simple approach to conservation of heritage assets, and provides full flexibility for the potential use of the buildings, meaning they are more likely to have sustainable viable uses in the long term. Option 1 supports a 'conservation led regeneration' approach which uses heritage assets as an anchor and catalyst for other

redevelopment opportunities.

- **Disadvantages** – Public access would be challenging if not unlikely in respect of Engine Shed and Goods Shed, which have private business uses (however as businesses these buildings are more 'open' than private residential uses). In respect of the old Station such an approach requires a new use of the building to be identified; community uses alone may not be sustainable and may lead to a reliance on charitable or public sector grant or subsidy. An approach linked with a more viable scheme on the adjacent plot (a degree of 'cross subsidy') would significantly improve the prospects for a long term viable use. Conservation in the absence of interpretation would give limited improvement to the understanding and enjoyment of the buildings internally.

Discussion/conclusion

A focus upon the conservation of heritage assets is wholly consistent with National Park purposes, and the current prevailing policies. This option could lead to opportunities for the sustainable future use of buildings of heritage merit through a pragmatic approach to their conservation. This leads to a viable scheme with buildings worthy of future investment by virtue of their continued use.

The conservation of the Station building requires a careful balance. A 'pure' conservation is likely to be not viable without either grant funding, or cross subsidy from the adjoining site.

The potential for cross subsidy has been considered; the option of linking the redevelopment of the two garages (Station Garage and Chuley Road Garage) could result in a scheme which supports the conservation of the Station building, whilst also adding to the quality and attraction of a building at the rear (proposed food store) and potentially providing a better frontage and approach. Alternatively a use could be found for the Station building which attracts grant funding. However unless a viable use is found for this building it could remain dependant on future grant or donations for ongoing maintenance.

Option 2 – The conservation of Ashburton Station building, and use as a railway heritage centre

Description

This Option would focus upon the conservation of the former Station building (currently Station Garage) and use as standalone railway heritage centre. This option could be consistent with the current Masterplan.

Friends of Ashburton Station's (FoAS) proposal, describes the opportunity at Ashburton Station to establish a heritage centre, museum and educational resource facility which would:

- 1) be based in a refurbished Ashburton Station building
- 2) be available for community uses
- 3) offer an educational experience based on the history of the branch line railway
- 4) provide an opportunity for volunteer work, and training
- 5) link with the South Devon Railway via a vintage bus service

Evidence and assumptions

There is an absence of evidence around funding in the FoAS proposal, which relies on the principle that similar projects have been achieved elsewhere previously. FoAS was invited to consider the different options identified in this appraisal but has chosen to focus solely on the full reinstatement of a rail link; it's members have expressed reservation around the ability of a standalone heritage centre to attract funding to the same degree, in the absence of the prospect of future reinstatement.

Matters discussed in respect of Option 1 (evidence required to assess the harm a proposal may have upon a heritage asset, and the consideration of that harm) are relevant in this Option. The discussion is around high level principles, is without the benefit of detailed building survey or Assessment of Significance, and that such information would be required to inform decisions on any future applications.

There is also an absence of information around visitor number projections relating to this option, reference is only to the existing visitor level for the South Devon Railway and an understanding on the part of FoAS that there is a great deal of interest in Ashburton Station from within the railway heritage arena. This in turn means that an understanding of economic benefits and scheme viability is very limited. There is also little understanding of potential highway (vehicle movement and parking) implications.

Key constraints and opportunities in respect of –

- **Environmental issues**

This option, focusing upon building conservation, is likely to have limited impact upon wider environmental matters.

Ecology – opportunity may exist in respect of enhancement of, for example, bat roosting or bird nesting features. These opportunities may link within others within the Masterplan Draft II in respect of the enhancement of the river corridor. Impacts are likely to be minimal and therefore outweighed by potential gains.

Landscape – impact on the conservation of changes to an individual building (consistent with its historic use) will have little or no impact upon the landscape character and quality. It will however provide a notable opportunity around townscape, and the quality of the built

environment (both the building and its setting).

Flood risk – new uses for buildings of heritage merit will need to meet clear criteria in respect of the safety of their use, and the impact of any changes to the building or its curtilage upon the local flood issues. It is expected that changes to the Station will need to play a role in the wider strategic flood risk improvements to the area, including through financial contributions and ‘in kind’ works within the site where appropriate. Where viability of a conservation-led scheme may already be marginal this may present a significant challenge, and further supports the need for a pragmatic approach to conversions and development.

- **Land availability and acquisition**

The Station Building is already identified in the Draft II Masterplan as an opportunity for a multifunctional community/retail/event space. The achievability of such a scheme will be dependent on identifying a long term viable use for the building. In particular a key aspect of the viability is the potential cross subsidy with the adjoining garage site. This presents an opportunity to improve the viability of the scheme through economies of scale, and a linkage with the adjoining site (most likely a new building on that site). This could support the additional costs a conservation scheme would attract, enable a comprehensive approach to the delivery of the site, and significantly improve the public facing aspect of the adjoining retail site.

- **Built environment**

This option has a positive impact upon the Station building, its setting, the setting of other buildings of heritage merit and the social and historic value of the area in respect of its railway heritage. The Station building is within the conservation area, thus having a positive impact through improving the quality and setting of a heritage asset. Impact upon the built environment is therefore largely positive.

- **Highways and parking**

This option is likely to have more limited impact upon highway and parking matters. It is likely that a heritage/education centre use would have mix of journey types, including potentially coaches or similar, the ability to safely accommodate those on or near the site would need careful consideration. The number of visitors will be limited by the size of the building. However as a specific use is proposed a Transport Assessment may be required to support any planning application. This would enable a greater understanding of any potential highway issues as necessary.

- **Economic benefit, costs and viability**

Achieving a sustainable viable future use for the buildings of heritage merit is the most favourable approach to building conservation. As noted above this may require a pragmatic approach to conversion or conservation works, however it represents the most viable model, where a new use justifies future investment in the maintenance of the property. Conservation of heritage buildings does of course attract a greater cost than the redevelopment of a site and a ‘new build’ proposal. A more ‘pure’ approach to a heritage centre, particularly in the absence of cross-subsidy with the adjoining site, could be a less sustainable model, most likely reliant on grant income or donation in the first instance. Provided the business model is appropriate however, the scheme could become self-sustaining.

- **Practical implications in respect of the Masterplan/local plan**

This option is wholly consistent with the current Masterplan and does not require alterations to the Masterplan or subsequent changes to the Local Plan at future review.

- **Advantages** – Option 2 supports a ‘conservation led regeneration’ approach which uses heritage assets as an anchor and catalyst for other redevelopment opportunities. It has scope to offer significant improvements to the quality and character of heritage assets, their setting, and the conservation area. The heritage/education centre approach could be wholly consistent with the National Park purpose of promoting the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park. The approach retains public access to the heritage asset.
- **Disadvantages** – There is a degree of uncertainty regarding the viability of this approach. The FoAS proposal provides little evidence on funding opportunities. There is further uncertainty around the potential highway and parking impacts of this approach, as it is to a degree dependant on the success of the scheme. The more successful the use the more viable it is, however this in turn could impact upon the traffic and parking pressure in the immediate area, and town centre.

Discussion/conclusion

A focus upon the conservation of heritage assets is wholly consistent with National Park purposes, and the current prevailing policies. A more ‘pure’ approach to the conservation (compared with Option 1) which seeks to retain the Station building with limited physical change, and have within it a heritage/education centre use presents a greater challenge in respect of viability. It is likely that this approach would offer little or no opportunity to contribute to other aspects of the site improvements, such as flood risk mitigation, instead itself being a potential draw on development value.

The conservation of the Station building thus requires a careful balance. A ‘pure’ conservation option is unlikely to be viable without either grant funding, donations, or cross subsidy from the adjoining site. A successful scheme could potentially be self-sustaining, however a better understanding of highway matters may be required to support a detailed proposal.

Alternative models of delivery could be considered which would be more achievable. These include:

- A heritage centre without a rail connection. For example Great Torrington Station – this former station has a new use as a public house, and a short restored section of track displays a small amount of heritage rolling stock
- A mixed community and employment use building. For example Green Park Railway Station, Bath, this includes a mix of small retail and café/food outlets, with a covered multipurpose market or community space.

These ‘light touch’ alternatives could be considered which recognise the potential future benefit, but mitigate the significant risk.

Potential cross subsidy has been considered; the option of linking the redevelopment of the two garages (Station Garage and Chuley Road Garage) could result in a scheme which supports the conservation of the Station building, whilst also adding to the quality and attraction of a building at the rear (proposed food store) and potentially providing a better frontage and approach.

Option 3 – The safeguarding of a route for the future provision of a new railway line between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton (in combination with option 2)

Description

This option looks to safeguard a route for a future railway line within between Ashburton and Buckfastleigh. This option breaks into two distinct parts; firstly the allocation ASH2 as identified in the local plan (the 'Masterplan area'), and secondly the stretch of largely open countryside required for a new rail line route.

Evidence and assumptions

Safeguarding for the purposes of this appraisal is considered to be the identification of an area for the future reinstatement of a rail link, and the protection of that area from any development which may prejudice or prevent the development of a rail link. The timescale of the safeguard is uncertain, though the expectation is it would be for a period of not less than 20 years.

It is assumed that the local plan would be the appropriate mechanism to safeguard the area from development, thus that safeguarding would be possible only upon the review of the local plan, and most likely be required to carry forward in future local plan reviews.

In order to identify and justify an area of safeguarding clear evidence would be required to support the identification of a chosen route, including –

- the choice of route and alternatives considered
- the scale of protection required (in terms of the type of development which might prejudice or prevent the new line)
- the extent of the route and specific safeguarded areas such as crossing points, cuttings, etc where a greater width is required
- necessary survey work such as Flood Risk Assessment, ecological survey, heritage assessments etc (commensurate with safeguarding rather than develop), to demonstrate the deliverability of the route and ensure the local plan is sound

The proposal by FoAS does not show a route for the new line between Bulliver's Way and Buckfastleigh Station. It is important to note that this is not a matter of identification of a historic railway line route; given the former line was for most of extent taken for the A38 dual carriageway, much of the route would be a new line. This line would need to be identified, and given what might be the 'preferred' route is now taken by the A38, subject to limited options in respect of the route of a new line. The absence of an identified route in the FoAS proposal means DNPA has identified an indicative route to the west of the A38 consistent with that indicated in the *Extension of the South Devon Railway to Ashburton* (1998) Exeter University undergraduate engineering study in order to consider high level issues around the feasibility of a new rail line.

Key constraints and opportunities in respect of –

• Environmental issues

This option itself does not have a direct environmental impact, it is more the outcome or consequence of the safeguarding process which would need a great deal of consideration in respect of environmental matters. Safeguarding could however have an impact in the interim. For example the expectation of future change may impact upon the value of land, and may result in an alteration of land management practice, and lack of investment or active management of land or property, and in the short to medium term result in environmental

change. This could have both a negative and positive impact, for example poor management could result in environmental degradation and an impact upon habitat quality, or the character and appearance of an area, however an abandoned building or area could also provide new opportunity for habitat creation. Such a change would be temporary however on the expectation that the development would eventually take place.

Ecology – as described the safeguarding would not be ‘development’ as such, however its imposition through the local plan could lead to a change in the use, management or upkeep of areas such as fields, woodlands, buildings etc.

Landscape – the safeguarding would itself not have a landscape direct impact beyond potential interim changes identified above. However the eventual development of a new railway line would need careful consideration; this is discussed further under Options 4/5 below.

Flood risk – the safeguarding of the site would not directly impact upon flood risk matters. The identification of the route would require evidence which supports the future deliverability of the new line, therefore a degree of detailed survey would be required. Much of the route would fall within floodplain, a large part functional floodplain. Detailed consideration would therefore be required of the protection of the rail route itself, and the potential impact of changes upon adjoining and downstream flood regime.

Land availability and acquisition

The safeguarding of land could have a significant impact upon land value, both directly for the land, but also indirectly for adjoining or nearby affected land. The acquisition of the land at this point in time would not necessarily be required, though it would need to be demonstrated that the route would be deliverable and that all necessary land could be assembled over time. Within the allocation area (the Masterplan site) the safeguarding of the historic rail line route could result in a clear impact in the interim.

A Report commissioned from Savills (March 2015) by DNPA on land valuation notes in respect of the Masterplan site that “residential developers [are] increasingly risk averse and designation of a route for the railway line will increase uncertainty and views of development risk, which will in turn have a negative effect on the value of the residential elements of the Masterplan scheme in areas DP2 and DP4 until such time as the line is installed”. Also, that during the safeguarding period “it is likely that the uncertainty attached to the effect of the rail link and concern over disruption during the construction period, will have a marginally depressing effect on values. It is also likely that the designation will serve as a deterrent to inward investment and this is likely to lead to stagnation of the area and a decline in the quality of existing built stock.” It is noted “we consider the likely effect on the Masterplan area of designating a route for reinstatement of the railway line to be largely negative and we consider that this will have a significant effect on the viability of the project and the ability to implement the Masterplan without outside funding.”

Beyond the Masterplan site the route extends some 3.4km to Buckfastleigh Station. The Savills Report notes “we understand that it is intended that the railway will be owned and operated by a private company who will acquire the land by private negotiation without the benefit of compulsory purchase powers. We are however of the opinion that the chances of successfully acquiring all the necessary land interests in this manner are remote.”

- **Built environment**

Whilst the safeguarding does not have a direct development impact, as noted above there is the potential that within the Masterplan site the safeguarding of a route could have a negative

impact upon the quality of the built environment, with the uncertainty leading to a degradation of the built environment in the interim, and a deterrent to inward investment.

- **Highways and parking**

The safeguarding will not impact directly upon highway and parking matters. In the interim there may be a reduction in traffic movements if development opportunities are not taken up or interim uses are not found.

- **Economic benefit, costs and viability**

The safeguarding aspect in its own right is likely to have a potentially negative impact during the intervening years up until the delivery of the railway. As described above the uncertainty is likely to impact upon attraction of the site; the consequences of this are that the delivery of the parts of the Masterplan site not directly impacted by the safeguarding may slow or stop. Those that do carry forward may be of lower value (i.e. residential values may be impacted negatively reducing site Gross Development Value and scheme viability, impacting therefore upon the ability for schemes to contribute towards other obligations such as flood mitigation and highway works).

It is noted in the FoAS proposal that there is an expectation that property will be acquired over time. It is proposed that commercial sites which have been purchased are let in the short term in order to fund the railway works. There is however no evidence of market appraisal, statement of expectations around the types of uses or the likely yield. Savills report for DNPA indicates that the safeguarding is likely to lead to uncertainty in the market. It is reasonable therefore to assume that given any leases are likely to be short term and with the ultimate prospect of ceasing in order to remove the commercial buildings in question, any rents achieved are likely to be low and offer limited contribution towards the overall funding of the project.

It is recognised that the appraisal of safeguarding in its own right is likely to have a negative outcome, and does not reflect a long term view. It is therefore fundamental to the safeguarding approach, that this is clearly justified and that there is a high level of confidence in the delivery of the railway proposal within a reasonable period of time.

- **Practical implications in respect of the Masterplan/local plan**

This option requires significant changes to the current draft Masterplan. The main implications would be:

- The removal of the proposal to deliver public car parking and residential development on the eastern bank of the Tucker's site. This would require new Flood Risk Assessment in order to identify whether development could be achieved on the western bank. It would require additional viability appraisal in order to identify whether the development would generate sufficient value to be viable.
- Place an embargo upon any new development within the light industrial area, potentially putting those businesses at risk, or leading to their premature vacation of premises.
- Lead to uncertainty given the business parking at Station Yard will, in time, disappear, leading to the inability of certain businesses within the Masterplan site (for example at Prigg Meadow) to continue to function on the site, and may therefore lead to their relocation elsewhere.
- Requirement for a new flood mitigation scheme which would be effective in the long term. The current Masterplan aims not just to ensure that new development would be safe, and that downstream development would not suffer adversely, but that further changes on the site would be funded to reduce the current flood problem.

- New traffic and transport surveys would need to be undertaken based upon the new proposals. These would need in particular to consider the changes resulting from the ultimate reinstatement of a rail link, and therefore demonstrate the deliverability of the scheme which justifies the changes to the Masterplan. The scheme would also need to consider the alternative access arrangements proposed by FoAS, which appear to include a through route and place a greater reliance upon Stonepark than the current Masterplan.
- Further viability appraisal of the Outdoor Experience site would be required, in order to understand the impact of the safeguarding upon the Gross Development Value of that site, and as a consequence the site's ability to contribute towards other aspects of the site such as flood mitigation and highway improvements.

As described above the expectation is that over the longer term the local plan would be the appropriate mechanism for the safeguarding of the route, in particular as the Masterplan site is limited in its area. In respect of the local plan key implications are:

- The ability to secure appropriate land at Peartree Cross. Permission has already been granted for the relocation of Tucker's to land at Peartree Cross, the realisation of both the draft Masterplan and the FoAS proposal is therefore dependant on this relocation. No information has currently been provided by FoAS of the location of the route at Peartree Cross (i.e. whether it is proposed to cross west or east of the River Ashburn. FoAS has not approached the landowners on this matter. DNPA would need robust evidence to justify a safeguarding route through this land.
 - The FoAS proposal does not identify a route between Peartree Cross and Dart Bridge. This would require careful and robust appraisal in order to safeguard the site and justify its inclusion in the local plan.
 - The FoAS proposal does not identify a route from the meadow land at Dart Bridge to the Buckfastleigh Station. DNPA would again require careful and robust evidence to demonstrate the deliverability of part of the route. This is explored in more detail below, but requires a complex engineering programme to gain access under the Dart Bridge interchange, across the River Ashburn and River Dart, gain access through current residential properties and under the A38 dual carriageway. There is currently little detail as to how this would be achieved.
- **Advantages** – Safeguarding represents the most appropriate approach to achieving the overall proposal to reinstate a rail link. Given the absence of immediate funding, without a safeguarding mechanism it is unlikely the scheme would be achieved within a reasonable period of time, if at all.
 - **Disadvantages** – Safeguarding itself has a number of clear disadvantages as noted above. Principally this is around the uncertainty placed upon a large area of land, with consequences for risk on adjoining land, too. This formalisation of this 'interim' arrangement could impact in the short to medium term upon the built and environmental quality of the area as a consequence of a lack of investment and the impending arrival of the railway and ultimate change of use. This could impact upon the ability to deliver other aspects of the Masterplan, as the interim arrangements are likely to impact scheme viability for adjoining sites, and thus the ability to realise the overall aims of the Masterplan. Safeguarding of a route also undermines the Local Plan allocation with consequent risks arising from having to defend planning application refusals and being at risk of an award of costs against the Authority.

Discussion/conclusion

It is clear that if the ultimate goal of reinstating the rail link is to be realised, safeguarding is a necessary tool. Safeguarding itself and the interim period is likely to have a negative impact upon the area in the short to medium term, leading to uncertainty and an unpredictability that could impact upon the ability to deliver the wider objectives of the Masterplan around flood risk mitigation, highway and parking improvements. It could lead to a loss of businesses within the site and potentially a lack of will on the part of developers to bring forward residential schemes in the short to medium term.

Safeguarding is therefore a potentially negative change, justified only by the achievement of the final outcome. Robust and compelling evidence around the ability to deliver the railway, and the ultimate benefits of it, is therefore crucial to justify this approach, and demonstrate that eventual deliverable benefits outweigh the potential negative impact in the short to medium term.

Option 4 – The provision of a new railway line between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton, with a station which lies short of Chuley Road (in combination with options 2 and 3).

Description

Option 4 considers the provision of a new railway line from Buckfastleigh station, on a new route between the A38 and the old A38 (Ashburton Road). This option considers whether the terminus of the station could be on the edge of Ashburton, as opposed to a full connection with the former Ashburton Station at Chuley Road. This option is considered as it presents a less complex proposal in respect of land acquisition, changes existing land uses, scale of safeguarding and the range of technical matters relating to alterations of the Masterplan and provision in the local plan.

Evidence and assumptions

FoAS was invited to consider alternatives including exploring the merits of this option, but chose to present a proposal which considered only the full reinstatement of a rail link direct to Ashburton Station. The 1998 engineering feasibility study (Exeter University undergraduate dissertation – *Extension of the South Devon Railway to Ashburton*, Harris et al 1998) explored the engineering feasibility of reinstatement of a rail link as per this option. South Devon Railway has advised the proposal was for a station at Peartree as it was not considered possible to extend the scope of the work to include the crossing of the Peartree junction at that point in time. However once beyond that junction it was considered a relatively simple engineering operation given the existence of the track bed for much of the remaining route. It was also considered that the significant cost of extending the route to Ashburton Station was beyond fundraising capabilities at that time. It has also been suggested however that Peartree is not a commercially viable destination given its distance from the centre of Ashburton, hence the FoAS proposal includes the final stretch to Ashburton Station not covered by the engineering feasibility study.

The proposal by FoAS does not show a route for the new line between Peartree and Buckfastleigh Station. It is important to note that this is not a matter of identification of a historic railway line route; given the former line was for most of its extent taken for the A38 dual carriageway much of the route would be a new line. This line would need to be identified, and given what might be the 'preferred' route is now taken by the A38 subject to limited options in respect of the route of a new line. The absence of an identified route in the FoAS proposal means DNPA has identified an indicative route to the west of the A38 consistent with that identified in the *Extension of the South Devon Railway to Ashburton* study in order to consider high level issues around the feasibility of a new rail line.

Information has therefore been drawn from the FoAS proposal, the *Extension of the South Devon Railway to Ashburton* study (noting whilst a summary report is provided, only part of the detailed study has been made available), with assumptions made around the route and its delivery in order to appraise this option. In particular the assessment of the option focusses upon the terminus of the railway being at Peartree Cross as identified in the above study. A further option may be the consideration of a terminus on Bulliver's Way, or at the current Tucker's site.

It should be noted that this option is assumed to follow a period of safeguarding, during which it is proposed that land would be acquired and assembled, and funding achieved. In order to identify and justify the feasibility of this option evidence would be required to support the identification of a chosen route, including –

- the choice of route and alternatives considered
- the extent of the route and specific infrastructure, buildings and other features such as level crossing points, bridges and tunnels, cuttings, and a terminus station and associated buildings, parking and highway changes etc as required
- necessary survey work such as Flood Risk Assessment, ecological survey, landscape assessment, heritage assessments etc, to demonstrate the deliverability of the route and ensure the local plan is sound

In summary, it is important to note that the discussion is therefore around high level principles, is without the benefit of detailed route identification, engineering feasibility, costings and viability, business proposals, environmental scoping or appraisal and that such information would be required to inform decisions on any future applications.

Key constraints and opportunities in respect of –

- **Environmental issues**

This option, involving a significant engineering operation and new rail line and associated infrastructure within the National Park, could have a range of environmental implications. A high level scoping of the likely issues which would need to be identified, considered and overcome is set out below.

Ecology – There are some significant ecological constraints associated with the proposed route between Ashburton and Buckfastleigh, and any required engineering works. In particular, the proximity of the route to the Ashburn, within a floodplain, and the requirement to divert the Ashburn, present a risk of serious environmental impacts for the following reasons:

- The whole proposed route lies within the South Hams SAC Greater Horseshoe Bat consultation zone. The proposed route is both within a sustenance zone and flyway for the greater horseshoe bats living in Buckfastleigh Caves, England's largest roost for this rare bat species. It is known from radiotracking and field survey work that the bats fly along the Ashburn to commute between their roost and feeding grounds, and use the pastoral landscape around the Ashburn for foraging purposes. The railway could result in habitat loss, obstruction of commuting ways through physical obstacles (including the culverting and diverting of the river, and any lighting). The roost and the bats are protected by international law, and embedded into UK law via the Habitats Directive, extensive survey work would be required along the entire route.
- The river Ashburn is also home to further European protected species, namely otter and salmon. According to Environment Agency data, this section of the Ashburn is a salmon spawning area. Therefore, proposals to amend the course of the river, and temporarily pump it, or other carry out other engineering works, would present a significant impact upon these species. Survey work and an impact assessment would be required.
- As well as greater horseshoe bats, numerous other bat species use the fields and rivers alongside the proposed route. There is a requirement to understand the importance of the area to commuting and foraging bats, i.e. surveys would be required.
- Further protected species known to occur in the area are dormice (a further European protected species) and badgers. One would need to carry out specialist species surveys to assess their presence and population, and assess how the proposal might impact upon them.
- There are no designated habitats (CWS or SSSI) along the route. However, habitats of wildlife interest are known to occur along the proposed route, such as wet woodland and species-rich wet grassland. There are also records of the nationally rare flower Deptford Pink in the area (around Buckfastleigh, and alongside the A38 and Peartree Cross), and

the nationally rare moss multi-fruited river moss (by Dart Bridge). Habitat surveys would be needed to assess the current interest.

Trees and Landscape – The provision of a new line between Ashburton and Buckfastleigh could have a significant landscape impact, albeit in parts it would be viewed in the context of the A38 dual carriageway. This would be a result of the line itself, the impact of cuttings and embankments as required, new infrastructure including bridges, level crossings and protective fencing. However with no information about the route or consideration of the potential impact, it is difficult to make a judgement at this point in time.

The impact of the proposal upon trees, landscape character, and tranquillity would need to be carefully considered, with mitigation as appropriate, and assessment in order to make a balanced judgement of the impacts versus the benefits of the scheme.

Flood risk – The Environment Agency has offered advice based on the very limited information provided in the FoAS proposal. Within the Masterplan site, the EA notes the proposal takes no account of the increase in flood risk associated with the outline locations of the railway proposed. The value estimates from the 1998 study take no account of the mitigation works that would be required to make sure that there is no increase in flood risk. Within the Masterplan area further flood modelling would be required in order to understand the consequences of the alternative proposal, and identify mitigation and proposed improvements; this would be required to ensure a revised Masterplan was deliverable.

Beyond the Masterplan site large parts of the proposal would be within functional flood zone. The EA would therefore object to any proposal in the absence of a detailed Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) satisfying the Agency that the proposal would itself be safe, and would not have an adverse impact upon up and downstream flood regime.

- **Land availability and acquisition**

A Report commissioned from Savills (March 2015) by DNPA on land valuation notes beyond the Masterplan site the route extends some 3.4km to Buckfastleigh Station. The Savills Report notes “we understand that it is intended that the railway will be owned and operated by a private company who will acquire the land by private negotiation without the benefit of compulsory purchase powers. We are however of the opinion that the chances of successfully acquiring all the necessary land interests in this manner are remote.”

Land within the Masterplan site has already been identified in the local plan and the emerging Masterplan has led to reasonable expectations of land owners, a number of whom have already (albeit at their own risk) undertaken to invest in future development plans in anticipation of the adoption of the Masterplan in its current form. It is considered that this option, avoiding the need to identify and acquire land therefore presents a more deliverable option by comparison.

However there are a number of specific areas which will require careful consideration –

- **A38 crossing (Buckfastleigh)** – in order to achieve this crossing (proposed in the feasibility study as a tunnel structure beneath the dual carriageway) land will be required beneath the A38, and part of Meadow Park (park homes site). This would involve the potential loss of 4 residential properties, and an impact upon a further 5 properties. This land would be critical to the scheme. The extent of land required would be dictated by the engineering structures and their associated land requirements, this would include the

emerging tunnel structure under the A38 and the bridge approach for the River Dart crossing.

- **Mogul's Palace (Dart Bridge)** – land would be required in order to achieve the bridge approach to the River Dart crossing, the crossing of the River Ashburn, and a tunnel or new bridge structure beneath the B3380 at the Dart Bridge interchange (adjacent to the River Ashburn culvert). This area has a number of engineering challenges to overcome within a relatively small area. Aside from the cost and feasibility of the engineering works, the land acquisition cost and ability to acquire such land is currently unknown. The scale of the work and land take is likely to result in little residual land value for the remainder of this site. A plan showing the potential route, and the location of the historic road against a current map of the area, is included at Appendix 2.
- **Agricultural land** – from the Dart Bridge interchange a new rail line route of approximately 2.5km is required to reach Peartree Cross. This would include land potentially associated with the Furzeleigh Mill Hotel (with the line within 50m of the hotel), a cutting in order to achieve appropriate gradient to the north (necessitating greater land take). Land to achieve a level crossing on the public highway to the east of St Boniface House, and a further crossing of the River Ashburn, a crossing of the River Ashburn east of Rosemount House, and land potentially associated with Priestaford, and Gages.
- **Peartree Cross** – the *Extension of the South Devon Railway to Ashburton* study shows a new railway terminus for Ashburton on land to the west of the River Ashburn close to the Dartmoor Motel. Plans do not give any indication of the amount of land required, though it is assumed a significant portion of this area would be required in order to construct a station and associated infrastructure as well as associated highway access and car parking. This option would likely be more deliverable than land to the east of the River Ashburn, which has an extant planning permission for an agricultural retail store. However landowners in this location have not been approached by FoAS, and DNPA has been advised that land to the west may not be available for this use.

It is also important to bear in mind that the intention is not just to achieve a rail link, but to create a heritage rail line attractive to visitors. Whilst there may be opportunities to create a route tight with the A38 in places in order to limit land take and engineering works, this may not be desirable in this respect.

- **Built environment**

This option has a limited direct impact upon the built environment. Assessment would be required of the potential scale of impact of the new route upon the setting of listed structures at Dart Bridge, Furzeleigh, St Boniface, Pridhamsleigh, Woodend, Gages, and Gages Mill, as well as other heritage assets. It is recognised that this impact could be considered in the context of the adjacent dual carriageway.

- **Highways and parking**

This option could be considered preferable to Option 5 in respect of parking and highway matters. The provision of a station on the edge of Ashburton would avoid the use of the town centre highway network and requirement for parking for tourists visiting the railway. As a tourist attraction it's accessibility and visibility may also be advantageous over the town centre location. Given the proximity of the terminus to the strategic route network (the A38) the station could be both a visible and attractive option for tourists to travel to Totnes. The FoAS proposal gives little indication of likely visitor numbers. However the FoAS proposal notes that there are 200,000 visitors a year to the South Devon Railway with Buckfastleigh station currently offering a car parking area of approximately 5 hectares. The business model proposed by FoAS appears to indicate that Buckfastleigh would remain the intended hub and starting point for visitors, who would then travel onwards from there to Ashburton and/or

Totnes, in either direction. The attraction of a new station at Ashburton and the desire for visitors to start at one end of the line, rather than part of the way along, could however outweigh the aim to attract visitors via Buckfastleigh resulting in a significant visitor draw to Ashburton Station by private vehicle. This is explored further below.

Were this option to be considered to have merit, a significant amount of further information would be required around the business model, visitor projections, and the requirements for highway improvements and parking provision at a Peartree terminus.

- **Economic benefit, costs and viability**

Given the preference of FoAS for a proposal which extends the railway to the historic terminus in the centre of Ashburton, there is little evidence around the economic benefits of this Option. It is noted that South Devon Railway has suggested that Peartree is not a commercially viable destination given its distance from the centre of Ashburton. Evidently a great deal of further study would be required in order to undertake cost benefit analysis of this option. What is evident is that little is known around the cost of implementing the scheme. The *Extension of the South Devon Railway to Ashburton* study identified a project cost of approximately £4m for the construction of the railway to Peartree. This indication will be significantly out of date, however, both in respect of the engineering now available (and its cost), the cost of raw materials and labour, and the cost and ability to undertake proposed road closures. The study does not identify any costs for environmental mitigation, or land. FoAS acknowledges this study is out of date, and has stated it would seek to update it if at a high level the project was considered possible, only on this basis could this speculative cost be justified, which is recognised.

Furthermore little information has been provided on funding opportunities. The scheme would likely not benefit from any significant local public sector or central government contribution, and would therefore be dependent upon charitable donations and its own income generation.

On this basis it is difficult to assess even at a high level the viability of the scheme, though it is perhaps reasonable to conclude that given South Devon Railway does not consider this option attractive, and FoAS would not achieve its ultimate goal of linking a new line with the former station, an additional 3km of track will potentially add little to the tourist offer of the South Devon Railway.

In respect of secondary benefits the case for economic benefit within Ashburton is weakened by a terminus poorly associated with the town centre in comparison with Option 5. The likely benefits to the town are more limited, however the profile of the town as a tourist destination given it would be the terminus of the South Devon Railway will undoubtedly have a positive impact. Opportunities to link more closely with the town centre via a vintage bus and improved foot/cycle links would benefit the town.

Importantly the potential impact upon Buckfastleigh must also be considered. It is reasonable to assume that the number of visitors travelling directly to Buckfastleigh, and potentially disembarking at Buckfastleigh along the route may reduce. As the profile of Ashburton is raised equally the tourist profile of Buckfastleigh could reduce by virtue of it being a stop along the route of the South Devon Railway, rather than the terminus and a destination in its own right. The impact would also need to be quantified for the Butterfly Farm and Otter Sanctuary, which currently benefits from close association with Buckfastleigh Station and its direct visitors. How the changing role of Buckfastleigh Station may impact on this associated destination is unclear.

- **Practical implications in respect of the Masterplan process**

This option has been considered given it would not be dependent upon changes to the Masterplan. This option would however require appropriate safeguarding in the local plan along the route identified (as explored in option 3). Whilst the Masterplan site would be excluded from this safeguarding requirement, robust evidence would be required as described in Option 3, in order to justify its inclusion in the local plan and ensure the plan is sound.

In respect of the local plan key implications are:

- The ability to secure appropriate land at Peartree Cross. This option has considered land to the west of the River Ashburn consistent with the *Extension of the South Devon Railway to Ashburton* study, rather than land to the east which benefits from extant planning permission for an agriculture retail store. DNPA would need robust evidence to justify safeguarding a route through this land.
 - As described above the FoAS proposal does not identify a route between Peartree Cross and Dart Bridge. This would require careful and robust appraisal in order to safeguard the site and justify its inclusion in the local plan.
 - The FoAS proposal does not identify a route from the Dart Bridge to the Buckfastleigh Station. DNPA would again require careful and robust evidence to demonstrate the deliverability of this part of the route, particularly given safeguarding would be imposed upon residential properties. There is currently little detail as to how this element of the route would be achieved.
- **Advantages** – key advantages of this approach are that it removes the immediate need to act through changes to the emerging Masterplan. It therefore makes this option more achievable in the long term, by comparison. In respect of wider benefits this therefore retains the opportunity within the Masterplan site to deliver a viable scheme which offers site-wide benefits. This would likely be unachievable with the impact a railway would have upon development values in this area. Given the likely (in fact required) visitor draw to the terminus irrespective of its location, a site on the edge of Ashburton has significantly reduced implications in respect of traffic and parking matters. The achievability of this option in respect of land cost and acquisition are also lower, by comparison with Option 5.
 - **Disadvantages** – A tourist destination which associates better with the town would clearly be preferable and South Devon Railway's concern regarding the commercial viability of a Peartree terminus is recognised. The option has significant challenges in respect of its deliverability, with little or no information available on the route, the current engineering feasibility and costs, land availability and acquisition costs, environmental impacts and mitigation costs, and also little evidence relating to the business model, visitor projections and incomes, modes of travel and therefore how the overall costs of the scheme weigh against the potential economic and other benefits.

Discussion/conclusion

Without the benefit of detailed route identification, engineering feasibility, costings and viability, business proposals, environmental scoping or appraisal it is challenging to justify this scheme at this point in time. The principal issues are however more around the feasibility of the scheme, and the cost benefit analysis as opposed to a range of potentially negative effects within the Masterplan site relating to interim safeguarding, and consequential impacts upon development values.

The poor association with the centre of Ashburton compared with the former station site presents a less compelling case in respect of wider economic and other benefits. The opportunity to identify how a station in this location could link with the centre of the town, or alternatively whether another location closer to the centre could be achieved, may be worthy of exploration.

The current evidence relating to this option is very limited, and therefore inadequate to justify any consideration in the local plan at this point in time.

Option 5 – The provision of a new railway line between Buckfastleigh and Ashburton (in combination with options 2 and 3)

Description

Option 5 considers the provision of a new railway line from Buckfastleigh station, on a new route between the A38 and the old A38 (old Ashburton Road). This option considers a full connection with the former Ashburton Station at Chuley Road. This option is that set out in the FoAS proposal.

Evidence and assumptions

South Devon Railway has suggested that a terminus at Peartree is not a commercially viable destination given its distance from the centre of Ashburton, hence the FoAS proposal includes the final stretch to Ashburton Station not covered by the engineering feasibility study. Whilst the 1998 engineering feasibility study (Exeter University undergraduate dissertation – *Extension of the South Devon Railway to Ashburton*, Harris et al 1998) explored the engineering feasibility of reinstatement of a rail link as far as Peartree, FoAS has provided no plan or evidence relating to the crossing of the Peartree interchange and the re-use of Bulliver's Way to approach Chuley Road. South Devon Railway has advised the proposal was for a station at Peartree as it was not considered possible to extend the scope of the work to include the crossing of the Peartree junction at that point in time, though that once beyond that junction it was considered a relatively simple engineering operation given the existence of the track bed for much of the remaining route. It was also considered that the significant cost of extending the route to Ashburton Station was beyond fundraising capabilities at that time. FoAS has not identified how this complete route is now considered to be within its fundraising capabilities.

The proposal by FoAS does not show a route for the new line between Peartree and Buckfastleigh Station. It is important to note that this is not a matter of identification of a historic railway line route; given the former line was for most of its extent taken for the A38 dual carriageway much of the route would be a new line. This line would need to be identified, and given what might be the 'preferred' route is now taken by the A38 subject to limited options in respect of the route of a new line. The absence of an identified route in the FoAS proposal means DNPA has identified an indicative route to the west of the A38 consistent with that identified in the *Extension of the South Devon Railway to Ashburton* study in order to consider high level issues around the feasibility of a new rail line (this is included at Appendix 5). However described above this study (or the FoAS proposal) does not give any indication of how the line approaches Peartree, or how the Peartree interchange is to be crossed.

Information has therefore been drawn from the FoAS proposal, the *Extension of the South Devon Railway to Ashburton* study (noting whilst a summary report is provided, only part of the detailed study has been made available), with assumptions made around the route and its delivery in order to appraise this option.

It should be noted that this option is assumed to follow a period of safeguarding, during which it is proposed that land would be acquired and assembled, and funding achieved. In order to identify and justify the feasibility of this option evidence would be required to support the identification of a chosen route, including –

- the choice of route and alternatives considered
- the extent of the route and specific infrastructure, buildings and other features such as level crossing points, bridges and tunnels, cuttings, the station premises and associated buildings, parking and highway changes etc as required

- necessary survey work such as Flood Risk Assessment, ecological survey, landscape assessment, heritage assessments etc, to demonstrate the deliverability of the route and ensure the local plan is sound

In summary, it is important to note that the discussion is therefore around high level principles, is without the benefit of detailed route identification, engineering feasibility, costings and viability, business proposals, environmental scoping or appraisal and that such information would be required to inform decisions on any future applications.

Key constraints and opportunities

Many of these will mirror those in Option 4, however they include additional/alternative considerations around the extension of the line to the former Ashburton Station at Chuley Road.

• Environmental issues

This option, involving a significant engineering operation and new rail line and associated infrastructure within the National Park, could have a range of environmental implications. A high level scoping of the likely issues which would need to be identified, considered and overcome is set out below.

Ecology – There are some significant ecological constraints associated with the proposed route between Ashburton and Buckfastleigh, and any required engineering works. In particular, the proximity of the route to the Ashburn, within a floodplain, and the requirement to divert the Ashburn, present a risk of serious environmental impacts for the following reasons:

- The whole proposed route lies within the South Hams SAC Greater Horseshoe Bat consultation zone. The proposed route is both within a sustenance zone and flyway for the greater horseshoe bats living in Buckfastleigh Caves, England's largest roost for this rare bat species. It is known from radio tracking and field survey work that the bats fly along the Ashburn to commute between their roost and feeding grounds, and use the pastoral landscape around the Ashburn for foraging purposes. The railway could result in habitat loss, obstruction of commuting ways through physical obstacles (including the culverting and diverting of the river, and any lighting). The roost and the bats are protected by international law, and embedded into UK law via the Habitats Directive, extensive survey work would be required along the entire route.
- The river Ashburn is also home to further European protected species, namely otter and salmon. According to Environment Agency data, this section of the Ashburn is a salmon spawning area. Therefore, proposals to amend the course of the river, and temporarily pump it, or other carry out other engineering works, would present a significant impact upon these species. Survey work and an impact assessment would be required.
- As well as greater horseshoe bats, numerous other bat species use the fields and rivers alongside the proposed route. There is a requirement to understand the importance of the area to commuting and foraging bats, i.e. surveys would be required.
- Further protected species known to occur in the area are dormice (a further European protected species) and badgers. One would need to carry out specialist species surveys to assess their presence and population, and assess how the proposal might impact upon them.
- There are no designated habitats (CWS or SSSI) along the route. However, habitats of wildlife interest are known to occur along the proposed route, such as wet woodland and species-rich wet grassland. There are also records of the nationally rare flower Deptford Pink in the area (around Buckfastleigh, and alongside the A38 and Peartree Cross), and

the nationally rare moss multi-fruited river moss (by Dart Bridge). Habitat surveys would be required to assess the current interest.

Landscape – The proposal could result in a notable impact upon the trees that run alongside the existing railway line route (Bulliver's Way). The trees either side of the line form a linear woodland that is heavily used by recreational walkers and is a feature of the local landscape.

The provision of a new line between Ashburton and Buckfastleigh could have a significant landscape impact, albeit in parts it would be viewed in the context of the A38 dual carriageway. This would be a result of the line itself, the impact of cuttings and embankments as required, new infrastructure including bridges, level crossings and protective fencing. However with no information about the route or consideration of the potential impact, it is difficult to make a judgement at this point in time.

The impact of the proposal upon trees, landscape character, and tranquillity would need to be carefully considered, with mitigation as appropriate, and assessment in order to make a balanced judgement of the impacts versus the benefits of the scheme.

Flood risk – The Environment Agency has offered advice based on the very limited information provided in the FoAS proposal. Within the Masterplan site, the EA notes the proposal takes no account of the increase in flood risk associated with the outline locations of the railway proposed. The value estimates from the 1998 study take no account of the mitigation works that would be required to make sure that there is no increase in flood risk. Within the Masterplan area further flood modelling would be required in order to understand the consequences of the alternative proposal, and identify mitigation and proposed improvements; this would be required to ensure a revised Masterplan was deliverable.

Beyond the Masterplan site large parts of the proposal would be within functional flood zone. The EA would therefore object to any proposal in the absence of a detailed Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) satisfying the Agency that the proposal would itself be safe, and would not have an adverse impact upon up and downstream flood regime.

- **Land availability and acquisition**

A Report commissioned from Savills (March 2015) by DNPA on land valuation notes "we understand that it is intended that the railway will be owned and operated by a private company who will acquire the land by private negotiation without the benefit of compulsory purchase powers. We are however of the opinion that the chances of successfully acquiring all the necessary land interests in this manner are remote."

Land within the Masterplan site has already been identified in the local plan and the emerging Masterplan has led to reasonable expectations of land owners, a number of whom have already (albeit at their own risk) undertaken to invest in future development plans in anticipation of the adoption of the Masterplan in its current form. On this basis expectation of potential site value has been established and investment already made in potential future plans.

There are a number of specific areas which will require careful consideration –

- **A38 crossing (Buckfastleigh)** – in order to achieve this crossing (proposed in the feasibility study as a tunnel structure beneath the dual carriageway) land will be required beneath the A38, and part of Meadow Park (park homes site). This would involve the potential loss of 4 residential properties, and impact upon a further 5 properties. This land would be critical to the scheme. The extent of land required would be dictated by the

engineering structures and their associated land requirements, this would include the emerging tunnel structure under the A38 and the bridge approach for the River Dart crossing.

- **Mogul's Palace (Dart Bridge)** – land would be required in order to achieve the bridge approach to the River Dart crossing, the crossing of the River Ashburn, and a tunnel or new bridge structure beneath the B3380 at the Dart Bridge interchange (adjacent to the River Ashburn culvert). This area has a number of engineering challenges to overcome within a relatively small area. Aside from the cost and feasibility of the engineering works, the land acquisition cost and ability to acquire such land is currently unknown. The scale of the work and land take is likely to result in little residual land value for the remainder of this site. A plan showing the potential route, and the location of the historic road against a current map of the area, is included at Appendix 2.
- **Agricultural land** – from the Dart Bridge interchange a new rail line route of approximately 2.5km is required to reach Peartree Cross. This would include land potentially associated with the Furzeleigh Mill Hotel (with the line within 50m of the hotel), a cutting in order to achieve appropriate gradient to the north (necessitating greater land take). Land to achieve a level crossing on the public highway to the east of St Boniface House, and a further crossing of the River Ashburn, a crossing of the River Ashburn east of Rosemount House, and land potentially associated with Priestaford, and Gages.
- **Peartree Cross** – the *Extension of the South Devon Railway to Ashburton* study shows a new railway terminus for Ashburton on land to the west of the River Ashburn close to the Dartmoor Motel. Stage Three of the FoAS proposal intends that a new rail line from Buckfastleigh connects to the former station at Ashburton via Peartree Cross and Bulliver's Way (the former line) however it does not give any indication of route or feasibility of this route. This area presents a significant matter to overcome for the railway; the South Devon Railway recognised that the engineering around Peartree whilst in their view possible required significantly much more work and time to develop, and therefore fell beyond the scope of the University study. Since that time land has been acquired and permission granted on the site for the relocation of Tucker's Store. Landowners in this location have not been approached by FoAS, and DNPA has been advised that land may not be available for this use.

It is also important to bear in mind that the intention is not just to achieve a physical rail link, but to create a heritage rail line attractive to visitors. Whilst there may be opportunities to create a route tight with the A38 in places in order to limit land take and engineering works, this may not be desirable in this respect.

• **Built environment**

Assessment would be required of the potential scale of impact of the new route upon the setting of listed structures at Dart Bridge, Furzeleigh, St Boniface, Pridhamsleigh, Woodend, Gages, and Gages Mill, as well as other heritage assets. It is recognised though that this impact could be considered in the context of the adjacent dual carriageway.

Within the Masterplan site there is the potential that in the long term this could achieve a positive impact upon the railway heritage buildings within the site, by providing clear context and in some cases a future use consistent with its original purposes. In the long term other buildings within the area may benefit from inward investment where they have uses which may be consistent with the new environment created by the presence of the railway, the

Savills Report (March 2015) indicates this is most likely in commercial premises, rather than residential property.

In the medium term Option 3 (above) explores the potential negative impact upon the area of safeguarding, and the potential negative impact in the medium term as a result of a lack of certainty leading to limited inward investment.

- **Highways and parking**

It should be noted that the highway and parking layout proposed by FoAS would not be achievable. The servicing arrangement for specific buildings within the site may not be acceptable, and the parking arrangements proposed were considered previously as an option in the Masterplan and dismissed on safety grounds. Whilst alternative layouts could be considered and may be achievable this would need to be informed by clear evidence and the benefit of a professional highway advice.

There is little information around the potential implications of a new heritage railway terminus in the centre of Ashburton. The comments of the Devon County Council Highway Officer note the intention of the Masterplan to improve parking and highway matters within the site with benefits also to the centre of Ashburton where possible. Indeed the community has focussed clearly upon the highway and parking problems currently in Ashburton, and therefore the opportunity for changes at Chuley Road to improve these through the reduction in large goods vehicles, fewer vehicle movements and the provision of new public parking.

Some public representations in respect of the current Masterplan Draft have been critical of the lack of a detailed Transport Assessment at this stage, and such comments would be even more relevant in this instance. The FoAS proposal lacks a clear business plan and consequently any information regarding parking requirements and highway movements. The economic benefits of the proposal are founded on an increase in visitor numbers to the centre of Ashburton, the assertion being that these visitors will arrive by train having embarked at either Buckfastleigh or Totnes. It would however be reasonable to expect that given its strategic location on the dual carriageway and at the terminus of the line, visitors will inevitably be attracted direct to Ashburton by private car. Whilst a business model might aim to encourage them to Buckfastleigh, the attraction of joining the railway at one end or the other, rather than part way along the line may well mean this aim only has limited success.

The consequences therefore could be a significant increase in visitor trips to Ashburton by private vehicle. The impact of these additional trips and parking demands upon the Chuley Road area and the wider town of Ashburton have not been quantified; it would be reasonable to expect though, that demands would in the longer term go significantly beyond what new public parking could be provided at Chuley Road.

- **Economic benefit, costs and viability**

It is accepted that a new heritage railway terminus and attraction in Ashburton could bring significant economic benefit to the centre of the town. It is recognised that at this stage the quantum of that benefit is unclear and the figures suggested by FoAS should be treated with caution. In particular it is noted that the figure quoted is a potential uplift of the South Devon Railway's current turnover, and therefore this benefit is spread across three major hubs along the route (Ashburton, Buckfastleigh and Totnes, as well as Staverton). The degree to which the increase in the length of the route would result in an increase in visitors to the South Devon Railway is also unclear. It is recognised that the opening of a new line could lead to an

immediate increase in new visitors though that this would fall away to a sustainable level following the 'honeymoon period'.

Importantly the potential impact upon Buckfastleigh must also be considered. It is reasonable to assume that the number of visitors travelling directly to Buckfastleigh, and potentially disembarking at Buckfastleigh along the route may reduce. As the profile of Ashburton is raised equally the tourist profile of Buckfastleigh could reduce by virtue of it being a stop along the route of the South Devon Railway, rather than the terminus and a destination in its own right. The impact would also need to be quantified for the Butterfly Farm and Otter Sanctuary, which currently benefits from close association with Buckfastleigh Station and its direct visitors. How the changing role of Buckfastleigh Station may impact on this associated destination is unclear.

Whilst it is clear that the South Devon Railway offers economic benefits to Buckfastleigh, there is currently no information on the secondary benefits currently enjoyed by the town which might enable a more local projection for Ashburton, and an assessment of the potential benefits and disadvantages for the tourist economy of Buckfastleigh.

The FoAS proposal relies heavily on benefits which may be forthcoming in 20-30 years. It is important these are considered together with the short to medium term benefits and costs in the town. Option 3 (above) notes an indefinite period of uncertainty is likely to impact upon attraction of the site; the consequences of this are that the delivery of the parts of the Masterplan site not directly impacted by the safeguarding may slow or stop. Those that do carry forward may be of lower value (i.e. residential values may be impacted negatively reducing site Gross Development Value and scheme viability, impacting therefore upon the ability for schemes to contribute towards other obligations such as flood mitigation and highway works).

It is also noted in the FoAS proposal that there is an expectation that property will be acquired over time. It is proposed that commercial sites which have been purchased are let in the short term in order to fund the railway works. There is however no evidence of market appraisal, statement of expectations around the types of uses or the likely yield. Savills report for DNPA indicates that the safeguarding is likely to lead to uncertainty in the market. It is reasonable therefore to assume that given any leases are likely to be short term and with the ultimate prospect of ceasing in order to remove the commercial buildings in question, any rents achieved are likely to be low and offer limited contribution towards the overall funding of the project.

The consequence therefore is that the project could generate more limited direct contributions to match its anticipated grant funding. Teignbridge District Council has advised DNPA that the potential funding streams identified by FoAS as having supported similar schemes previously may not be available, or may offer more limited funding. The Local Enterprise Partnership has advised their funding sources are unlikely to be relevant/accessible to the project. The expectation of matched funding could place a greater reliance upon income generation from the South Devon Railway and charitable donations, potentially taking longer to achieve the necessary funding for the scheme to acquire land and construct the new line.

Devon County Council has advised DNPA that the projected costs identified in the FoAS proposal that the quoted costs, even taking into account their age, appear to be extremely unrealistic when compared to other construction schemes the County Council and Highways England have built. It notes examples such as the current planned reopening of the route between Bere Alston and Tavistock along its existing alignment costing in the region of £25m

(to higher design standards, but without any significant structures within that cost) and the recently reopened Borders railway in Scotland (again along its existing alignment) with cost in the region of £10m per mile. DCC suggests the affordability of the proposals should be considered in this context.

Savills has advised DNPA that the cost of acquiring the land for the railway line will be in the order of £14m. Considered together with the above construction cost this would put the total project in the order of £40m. In addition to this must be added the potential costs of compulsory purchase even if an Act of Parliament conferred such powers in this case.

- **Practical implications in respect of the Masterplan process**

The alterations to the Masterplan proposed by FoAS would at this point in time in the process require significant work in order to undertake. As discussed with regard to Option 3 (above) the safeguarding of the route could not be carried out in isolation and clear evidence would be required in order to justify safeguarding, including the achievability, deliverability and viability of the scheme, and a clear understanding of the implications of practical changes to the Masterplan in the short, medium and long term. This includes:

- A new Flood Risk Assessment in order to identify the achievability of design/layout options
- The design and modelling of new flood mitigation proposals within the Masterplan site
- Viability appraisal of the revised scheme, in order to consider its deliverability
- An assessment of the potential impact of the proposal upon the viability of existing business in the short/medium term
- New traffic and transport surveys would need to be undertaken based upon revised proposals
- Evidence as required to inform environmental appraisal at an appropriate level
- A feasibility study to provide sufficient confidence that the scheme is deliverable in the long term

The critical factor in respect of process is that DNPA currently has a Masterplan which has neared completion, and benefits from the necessary studies and evidence to support that. Whilst the Masterplan has not been adopted DNPA would likely face applications, and potentially appeals and challenges to any potential refusals of planning permission within the Masterplan site. In order to defend these refusals DNPA would require the evidence above which currently does not exist; even if this evidence was to be forthcoming it would likely take a minimum of 6 months to assemble and would then need to be appropriately assessed and tested by DNPA and relevant stakeholders. DNPA currently has no ability to prevent the implementation of the planning permission for the relocation of Tucker's to land at Peartree Cross (see Appendix 4), – FoAS has not indicated whether it may rely on this land, and therefore it is unclear whether the scheme could be delivered if this is not made available.

As described above the expectation is that over the longer term the local plan would be the appropriate mechanism for the safeguarding of the route, in particular as the Masterplan site is limited in its area. In respect of the local plan key implications are:

- The ability to secure appropriate land at Peartree Cross. No information has currently been provided by FoAS of the location of the route at Peartree Cross (i.e. whether it is proposed to cross west or east of the River Ashburn. FoAS has not approached the landowners on this matter though DNPA has received correspondence indicating that the land may not be forthcoming. DNPA would need robust evidence to justify a safeguarding route through this land.

- The FoAS proposal does not identify a route between Peartree Cross and Dart Bridge. This would require careful and robust appraisal in order to safeguard the site and justify its inclusion in the local plan. Robust environmental appraisal would be required given the constraints upon this land noted above.
- The FoAS proposal does not identify a route from the meadow land at Dart Bridge to the Buckfastleigh Station. DNPA would again require careful and robust evidence to demonstrate the deliverability of part of the route. This requires a complex engineering programme to gain access under the Dart Bridge interchange, across the River Ashburn and River Dart, gain access through current residential properties and under the A38 dual carriageway. There is currently little detail as to how this would be achieved.
- **Advantages** – the principal advantage of this option is the potential for a new visitor attraction within the centre of Ashburton, and the direct and indirect economic benefits such a proposal may bring. Clearly the construction phase of a scheme would also bring an amount of temporary skilled employment, also. Heritage benefits will also come from this scheme, through the sustainable and viable future use of the station building and the restoration of a rail link.
- **Disadvantages** – The option has significant challenges in respect of its deliverability, with little or no information available on the route, the current engineering feasibility and costs, land availability and acquisition costs, environmental impacts and mitigation costs, and also little evidence relating to the business model, visitor projections and incomes, modes of travel and therefore how the overall costs of the scheme weigh against the potential future economic and other benefits. The achievability of this Option by virtue of the need to make changes to the Masterplan and immediately justify this stance in the absence of any current evidence make this option unachievable at this point in time without a significant and real risk on the part of the planning authority.

Discussion/conclusion

Without the benefit of detailed route identification, engineering feasibility, costings and viability, business proposals, environmental scoping or appraisal it is challenging to justify this scheme at this point in time.

The costs of the scheme may have been significantly underestimated by the FoAS and the technical ability to deliver a scheme in the absence of any engineering feasibility means a more clear indication of costs is not likely to be forthcoming. Land acquisition would form a significant component of costs, in the absence of a Private Bill and Act of Parliament conferring compulsory purchase powers on South Devon Railway, FoAS or a successor body. The ability to negotiate land acquisition which includes, existing residential properties, businesses and an extant planning permission, has been strongly questioned.

The positive economic benefits the scheme could bring in the long term are recognised, however the realisation of these would mean an indefinite period of uncertainty and limited investment in the Chuley Road area. The proposal therefore poses significant risk on the part of the local planning authority in the short to medium term arising from its ability to defend decisions in the absence of robust and compelling evidence that land can be acquired and the scheme delivered.

Appendix 1 – list of advice and evidence

Professional advice of the following organisations has been sought in preparing this report, as well as other informal advice from other parties:

- **Dartmoor National Park Authority**
Planning Officers
Ecologist
Trees and Landscape Officer
Historic Buildings Officer
Archaeologist
- **Devon County Council**
Highways Officer
Transport Planning Team
- **Teignbridge District Council**
Economic Development Officer
Environmental Health*
Parking*
Planning*
Housing Officer
- **South Hams District Council**
Economic Development Officer*
Natural Environment Officer*
- **Environment Agency**
Partnership & Strategic Overview, Flood Risk Management Team
- **Local Enterprise Partnership**
Place Leadership Group
- **Highways England**
- **Natural England***
- **Network Rail***
- **Consultant advice**
Savills (land valuation)
(* consultee has not provided a written comment, notwithstanding being specifically consulted once the railway issues had been highlighted by FoAS)

This report has been prepared with reference to the following key evidence (please note this is not an exhaustive list):

FoAS Proposal - www.dartmoor.gov.uk/ashburtonmasterplan

Heritage rail benefits paper - www.markgarnier.co.uk/files/mark_garnier/u4/HeritageRailways.pdf

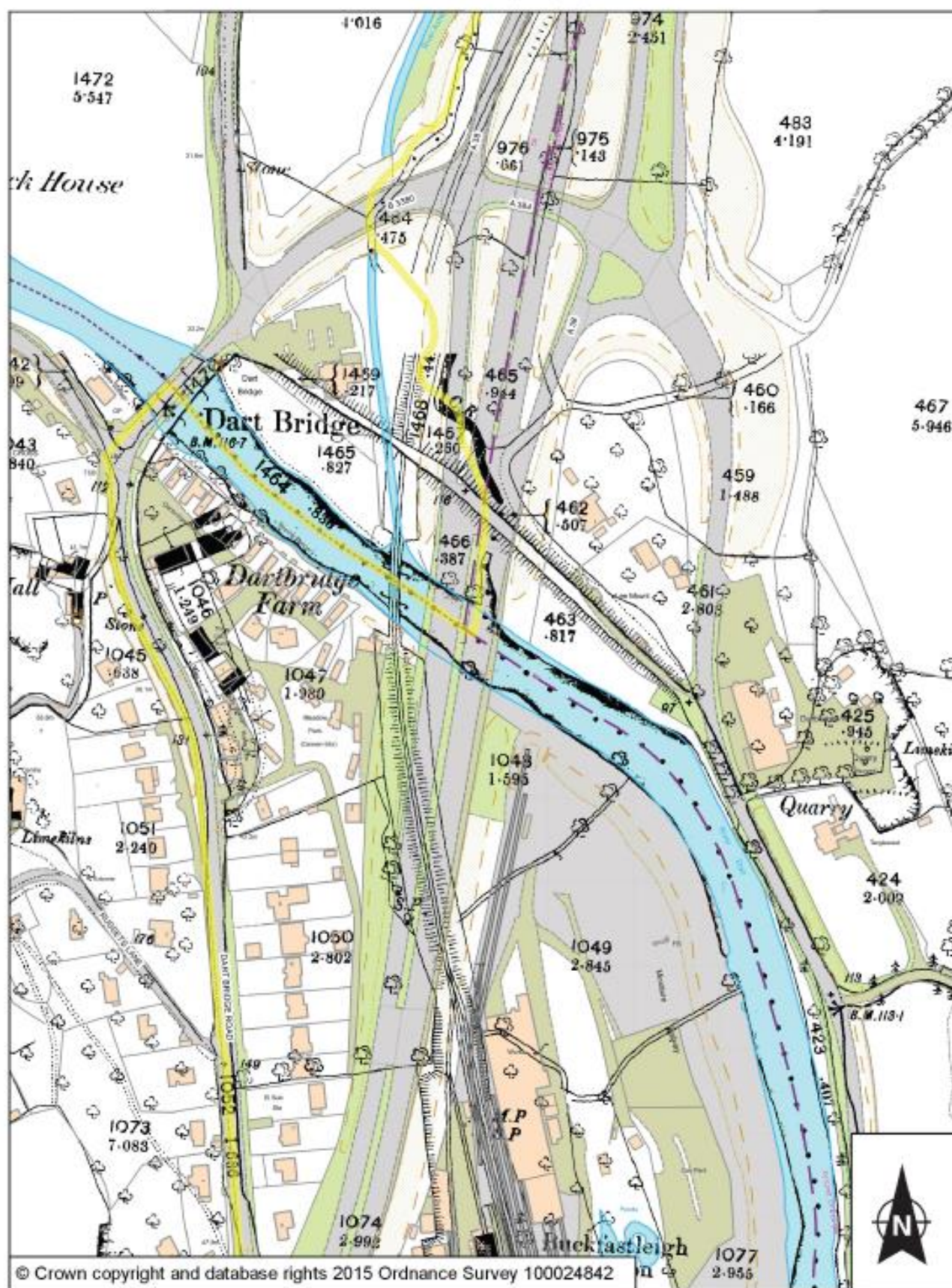
Feasibility study- Extension of the South Devon Railway to Ashburton, Harris et al 1998 (part study - unpublished)

Chuley Road Masterplan (Draft II) - www.dartmoor.gov.uk/ashburtonmasterplan

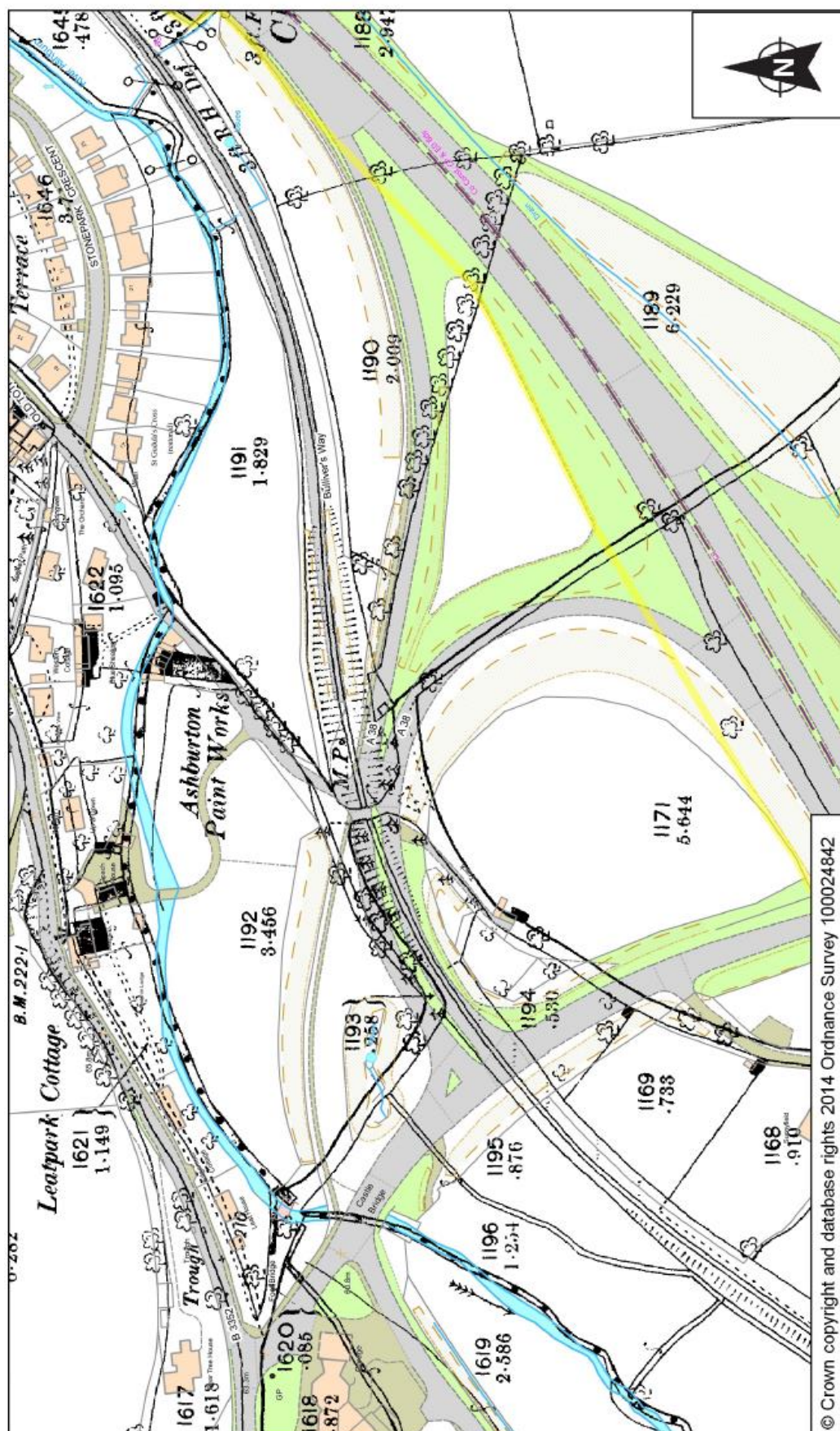
Local plan- www.dartmoor.gov.uk/planning/pl-forwardplanning

Valuation Advice to DNPA- Valuation Advice – Chuley Road Masterplan Area, Report by Savills (March 2015) (unpublished - commercially confidential content)

Appendix 2 – Plan showing historic rail route overlaid on current map – Dart Bridge interchange Buckfastleigh



Appendix 3 – Plan showing historic rail route overlaid on current map – Peartree interchange Ashburton



Appendix 4 – Plan showing extant planning permission at Peartree Cross (Tucker's Country Store)



Appendix 5 – Plan showing route as identified by 1998 Feasibility Study with addition of connection to Bulliver's Way, annotated with key infrastructure & constraints

