

Basildon Railway Station

At the very outset, and according to the original masterplan, Basildon would have a dedicated railway station, but its construction was beset by financial and political problems throughout the first 20 years or so and there were to be several twists and turns before the station would eventually be built.

In fairness, the Corporation made it clear that it wouldn't be built in the first ten years or so, as it couldn't be justified, particularly given the size of the population at that time and the fact that the town centre hadn't yet been built yet – it made no economic sense.



Pictured in 1960, the site allocated for a new railway station. After several years of lobbying and protests by residents and shopkeepers, it raised hopes that a station would be built in the new town fairly soon. However, British Railways were quick to point out that there was simply no demand for a new station in Basildon and that the sign was misleading, so it should be taken down immediately.

Basildon Council initially disagreed, but it also knew that funding would have to come from British Rail so they had no choice and relented. British Rail was of the view that Laindon and Pitsea stations were quite capable of handling the increase in commuter traffic for several years to come, and saw no economic benefits in building a new one at Basildon.

This was incredibly frustrating for the Corporation, as they wanted to bring people into the town centre, and without a railway station that couldn't easily be achieved. In the meantime, people from Southend or London would have to travel by bus from Laindon or Pitsea station for an, unreliable, onward journey to the town centre. Town centre traders, under the newly formed Basildon Town Centre Shop Association, chaired by Jack Shepard, were equally incensed by this stance and wrote to British Railways arguing that the town centre could never be successful without a local passenger stop.

It suggested a petition be signed by as many residents as possible, to show how much it would mean to the town, but they were told by the Corporation not to bother, on the basis that no one would take any notice. They went

ahead with it anyway and copies of the petition were placed in shops across the town centre. Within just a few days the petition held 4,000 signatures and it is thought that as many as 40,000 were collected in the next three weeks. It was then duly dispatched to the Minister for Transport, Mr Ernest Marples, for consideration.

The Corporation were right, this achieved nothing so, in late 1961, the town's traders came up with alternative solution; raise the funds themselves and ask the Corporation to contribute something out of the rates. Whilst the Corporation did allude to being able to contribute *something* towards it, it wouldn't be enough, and not many of the traders wanted to put their hands in their own pocket for something that may never happen or, even worse, fail. Once again, Basildon was left without any prospect of a railway station in the short term.

Note: The first electric trains started to run on the London, Tilbury and Southend line in November 1961. This marked the beginning of the end for steam trains on the line and the last steam service was the 18.10 from London Fenchurch Street to Thorpe Bay on 15th June 1962.

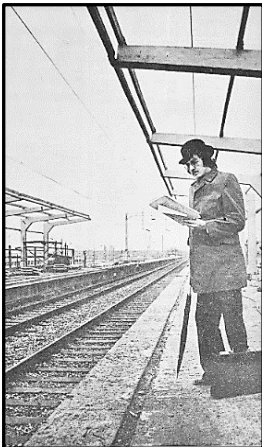
Strangely, even though there was little widespread support for the town centre traders to buy the station, an official 'Railway Fund' was started in 1962. Roy Bird (owner of Bird's DIY and Chair of the Town Centre sub-committee) received a cheque for £10 the day after it was set up. It was an unexpectedly good start, but there would be a long way to go, given the total cost would end up being in excess of £200,000. Within a week the fund was wound up, still £199,990 short.

By the end of 1962 there was still no tangible news on the railway station, despite the continued good efforts of residents and town centre traders. Basildon Council then joined the debate and also started to put more pressure on British Rail, deciding to hold a referendum on the subject. This, it thought, would add a bit more weight to the argument so, in late **1963**, the council asked the newly formed Basildon Federation (made up of six local community groups who represented the neighbourhoods closest to the town centre) to vote on the need for a 'town centre' station.

Unbelievably, every single representative voted AGAINST having a station. They, collectively, told council representatives that the current bus services should be improved instead as this, they maintained, would resolve the problem in relation to transport for Basildon as a whole, not just for the shopping area. They also made a point that, if a new station was built, there would be traffic congestion, and parking would become an issue on the estates nearest to the station.

The Basildon Federation also put forward two alternative recommendations; to have a 'peak hours only' rail service that, if the new station was built, would drop people off, but not pick anyone up. The other recommendation was simply to improve facilities at Pitsea and Laindon instead. This whole exercise, instigated by the Council, backfired massively, and they would think carefully about repeating something like that in the future.

A solution to this long running stand-off between British Rail and the local authorities was found in 1965 when it was announced that a station would, after all, be built, but this time it would not be financed by the Railways Board. It would instead be financed from the profits of a new Fords office block being built next to the station. This was fantastic news for everyone including traders, residents and the council. It was, at that time, expected that a station would be built within five years but the station didn't actually open until 1974.



The picture on the left was taken in January 1974, ten months prior to the official opening day.