



Supporters and volunteers join MP Ian Roome and mayor councillor Janet Coates, at the signal box unveiling. Pictures: Rob Dark

New arrival on platform two is a special service for insects only

ELLA SAMPSON

ella.sampson@clearskypublishing.co.uk



PASSENGERS at Barnstaple railway station may have done a double take when they spotted a signal box — made entirely for bugs!

The new structure, installed on platform two, has been designed in the style of a traditional signal box, recalling the days when the station was known as Barnstaple Junction.

The project was commissioned by the Friends Of Barnstaple Railway Station (FOBRs) and built by Braunton Men's Shed, following approval from Network Rail.

Funding came through this year's GWR Customer and Community Improvement Fund, and it took around six months of design negotiations before the installation was completed. The unveiling was attended by the Mayor of Barnstaple, councillor Janet Coates, and the North Devon MP, Ian Roome.

Volunteers from FOBRs and Braunton Men's Shed guided the guests onto platform two and highlighted recent improvements at the station.

Barnstaple was recognised as 'Outstanding' in the South West in Bloom 'It's in your neighbourhood' category.

Cllr Coates described the event as a special moment for the community.

"It was an honour to officially unveil the Barnstaple Junction Bug House, created by the Braunton Men's Shed with the local community in mind. This addition complements the ongoing improvements at Barnstaple Railway Station thanks to the 'FOBRs' and reflects the Town Council's strategic priority on its commitment to a cleaner, greener Barnstaple."

The new bug house is part of a wider programme of station en-

hancements. Harriet Sergent, Network Rail Customer Support Manager, said the installation "is a delightful enhancement to the Community Rail licence area, creating a welcoming environment for both regular passengers and visitors".

She added: "It stands as a true testament to the dedication and hard work of the Friends of Barnstaple Railway Station, whose projects are consistently delivered with efficiency and a strong focus on community benefit."

Built inside a repurposed railway carriage, Braunton Men's Shed created the bug house to complement earlier improvements, including two carriage planters installed earlier in the year.

Roger Byrom, chair of the Men's Shed, said: "Another great day for the Men's Shed, when we finished off the last of our projects at Barnstaple Railway Station. The FOBRs commissioned the Shed to make a bug box in the shape of a signal box, which was to go alongside the two carriage planters we installed earlier this year. FOBRs volunteers look after the planters at the station and keep things looking good all year around. When they asked us if we would be interested in this project we were delighted to say yes; our Shed is in a refurbished railway carriage so making items for a train station felt just the right thing to do."

The project also incorporated recycled materials.

Tim Steer, chair of FOBRs, said the base is made from Marland bricks donated by the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway group, recycled from when the viaduct was restored in 2000. He added that the North Devon line has seen growing usage, with total footfall across its 12 stations up 63 per cent compared with the year before the pandemic.

Local MP, Ian Roome, who was in attendance at the unveiling, de-



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scribed the new bug house as "superb" and "such a fun, clever addition to the station to go alongside the two carriage planters that went in earlier in the year."

He said: "Little projects like this make a big difference in both sprucing up the station and supporting local wildlife — it shows the pride people have in our town."

The North Devon MP also recently campaigned to improve the Tarka Line, which runs between Barnstaple and Exeter.

Mr Roome's campaign explains that the line has faced disruption due to overcrowding, record passenger numbers, and flooding in November 2025 that forced three bridges, Nymet, Popes and Scoop, to close for inspection.

His campaign, "Future-Proof the Tarka Line," calls for structural improvements, additional train carriages, better drainage, and more re-

silient infrastructure to make rail travel in North Devon more reliable.

He said: "Recent closures and constant disruption on the North Devon Line have shown that a fare freeze on its own isn't enough, which is why the campaign to improve it is so important. More than 1,500 people have now signed our petition to future-proof the Tarka Line against the overcrowding and bad-weather chaos we've seen in recent weeks. I recently met the Managing Director of GWR and am calling on the Government to back a long-term plan for a reliable, affordable railway. My thanks to all the local authorities and councillors, regional and local rail organisations (including the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance) who've agreed to work together on a joint effort. Let's push for a service that actually works for North Devon!"

Extra dates to get a flu vaccination

EXTRA flu vaccination drop-in clinics have been set up to run over the winter flu season at several locations across North Devon and Torridge.

The NHS has added the extra clinics to its schedule as it continues to deal with an increase in the rates of flu and other respiratory infections, putting pressure on local hospitals and health centres, writes *Tony Gussin*.

The flu vaccination is offered free to those aged 65 years and over, pregnant women, at risk groups with a clinical condition such as asthma, COPD, kidney, heart and liver disease and those with a BMI of 40-plus.

It is also available to those living in care homes, carers who meet certain criteria, frontline and care workers, those in close contact with people with an immunosuppressant condition and school-aged children as well as two and three-year-old children. The child vaccine is delivered as a nasal spray.

The additional pop-up vaccination centres will be running at various locations in December and January — see below for the current January dates and locations.

The NHS has said more clinic locations, dates and times will be published regularly during the programme, so check the NHS website if the current list does not include a clinic near you, or at a time and date suitable.

Dr Alex Degan, Medical Director for Primary Care at NHS Devon said: "Every year, I see how much illness and suffering the flu causes, and how much of it is preventable. The vaccines we're offering are safe and well-established. They are given to millions of people each year, and they're one of the simplest things you can do to protect yourself and the people you love this winter."

To book a vaccination appointment at one of the clinics, or search availability, please visit <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/vaccination-and-booking-services/book-flu-vaccination>

In Torridge, Holsworthy Hospital will be holding a drop-in on Monday, January 5 from 9.30am to 12noon.

Torrington Community Hospital will be offering vaccinations on Wednesday, January 7 from 9.30am to 12noon.

The pop-up is back at Barnstaple Tesco Extra on Thursday, January 8 and on January 15 and January 22 from 9am to 12noon and again at South Molton Community Hospital on Tuesday, January 13 from 9.30am to 12noon.

The Tyrrell Hospital in Ilfracombe will be providing vaccinations on Thursday, January 15 from 9.30am to 12noon.

The drop-in is back at Holsworthy Hospital on Monday, January 26 and Torrington Hospital on Wednesday, January 28, both from 9.30am to 12noon.