

Revamped bus station forgotten

SPOT the omission: “Two-metre-high wayfinding signs will list... cultural points of interest and directions to places such as car parks and the train station.”

You've got it — the bus station, just five minutes from the southern end of Barnstaple's historic High Street in northern Devon's principal economic and hospitality hub (*Scheme for new town centre signs, June 11*).

Since my young family moved to the area a couple of years ago, more than £11million has been spent by the local council (North Devon Council) on Barnstaple, plus £500,000 on an already existing car park which will now be signposted (as above) at an additional cost of £20,000.

As for the bus station, £50,000 was spent on its refurbishment which — surprise surprise — NDC owns but clearly doesn't consider a worthy transport facility.

The money fountain doesn't stop there. Together with a “broader 'family of signs' and interpretation boards [sic], the wayfinders are part of a £3.6million Flourishing Barnstaple project, an NDC initiative which aims to establish [the town] as a cultural centre of northern Devon”.

It includes the cost of refurbishing nearby Bridge Chambers, another heritage site — also only minutes from the High Street's southern end (*North Devon Gazette, June 18*).

Can Barnstaple really said to be ‘flourishing’ if thousands of the region's rural residents can reach the town by bus only once a week — if at all — for a time-limited two-hour turnaround visit? The bus station upgrade won't benefit them.

A disenfranchised population that can't get to its regional town centre daily is no laughing matter. Art and tourism may well help boost the local economy but increasing the footfall of northern Devon's constituents and residents must be the priority.

Transport policy is the responsibility of Devon County Council, now part of the climate change and biodiversity brief held by the Green Party's Jacqui Hodgson. Significant internet digging was required to discover that hidden in the small print of Cllr Hodgson's remit is ‘improvements to the bus network across the county’ (Devon County Council News, May 22).

Is the new administration trying to downplay the importance of public transport, particularly rural buses? Strange, given the £10.3 million DCC was awarded in March to support Devon's Bus Service Improvement Plan for the 2025/26 financial year (*North Devon Gazette, March 19*).

An excellent tool at Ms Hodgson's disposal will be the Bus Services Bill which became law last month. This lifts the ban on local authorities setting up their own bus companies, enabling Devon County Council to make some far-reaching public-transport decisions across the county.

It's to be hoped the transport boss

Farewell to the day



Sunset at Clovelly, captured by Bideford photographer Graham Hobbs

and her colleagues will make full use of these powers. While Stagecoach's decision to introduce electric buses across North Devon is environmentally welcome, it will do nothing for those not already on a bus route any more than the proposed rail link between Barnstaple and Bideford will empower car-free rural households to get out and about (*North Devon*

Gazette, April 2, 2025 and April 12, 2024).

Back to North Devon Council: more cash was splashed in April with a further £315,000 under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Amongst the aims of this central government pot of money is “Take back our streets”. What better way to do this than by the full pedestrianisation of

Barnstaple High Street, currently closed to vehicular traffic from 10am to 4pm only. Pedestrians who find the road suddenly reopened to cars and vans are forced back on to narrow pavements. This can lead to confusion and increased risk, particularly for the elderly and young children. Visitors to any new cultural centre will not be immune.

After all, the scheme under which Barnstaple received more than 50% of its £11million funding was the Future High Streets Fund.

Time to do what it says on the tin — upgrade High Street to a safe pedestrianised route, with daily buses to and from the bus station. Studies increasingly show that traffic-free streets lead to increased footfall and economic growth.

With town-centre shops already closing, including in the council-owned Green Lanes shopping centre, a coherent public-transport plan is urgently required for this regional hub. Splashing taxpayer cash on visitor ‘heritage’ assets, as FHSF funding has done to date, won't breathe life back into the struggling market town. Wasting public taxpayer money should not be an option. Localism matters.

If Devon County Council “is focused on creating a fairer, greener Devon”, as Cllr Hodgson's Exeter party colleague Thomas Richardson has refreshingly asserted, the transport boss needs to get to work without delay to improve active travel measures to, from and within northern Devon's main shopping and hospitality centre.

Meg Howarth
Ellington Street, London

Social housing

MORE than 230,000 people are on waiting lists for social rented homes in rural England.

This number is increasing year on year. CPRE has long called for ambitious and enforceable targets for new social rented homes, so the new Social and Affordable Homes Programme is a step in the right direction. We now urge the government to bring in specific targets and planning policies for rural areas to make sure that they don't miss out.

Paul Miner
CPRE

Jams today

IT surely must be time for some budding entrepreneur to produce and re-introduce the “Barnstaple Home Of The Traffic Jam” car sticker of yesteryear.

The amount of cars jamming up the streets of Barnstaple is getting incredible, even out of holiday season. So called planners have been warned over and over again that the amount of house building going on in North Devon will eventually lead to the present situation, but no notice has been taken. Living in Landkey, for example, it feels less like a village, more a large building site.

Do these planners take into account the effect their decisions have on local communities? North Devon used to be a pleasant place to live but the amount of building going on is rapidly making it less so. Amenities are suffering, as we know, and will only get worse if it carries on.

Malcolm Papworth,
Landkey