

New signal box bug house brings a buzz to Barnstaple station

Barnstaple railway station unveils new signal box bug house built by Braunton Men's Shed in collaboration with FOBRS to enhance wildlife and community engagement



MP Ian Roome and Barnstaple Mayor Janet Coates at the unveiling of the bug house.

Photo by Tim Steer.

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By Ella Sampson

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Email: 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.



ABOVE: The group take part in a picture together. *Credit: Rob Dark*

The unveiling was attended by the Mayor of Barnstaple, Cllr 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 enhancements.

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. 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, described 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 is also campaigning 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.

The campaign, titled "Future-Proof the Tarka Line," calls for structural improvements, additional train carriages, better drainage, and more resilient 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!"