

Network Rail colleagues help out on a blooming good station project

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Passengers at Barnstaple will now enjoy an award-winning and brighter looking station after volunteers from Network Rail joined forces with the local Barnstaple in Bloom group to tidy up the disused platform at the north Devon station.

After Network Rail installed a new fence and gate to allow volunteers from the local community safe access to the platform, the team got to work removing overgrown vegetation, planting new flowers and giving 'Barney' the mini train a fresh new makeover. They were joined by Network Rail colleagues who used their company-approved volunteering days to help with the revamp.

Máedóc Ellis, Network Rail's community support manager for community rail, said: "It was great for our volunteers to get involved and assist members of the local community with their tidy up of the disused platform at Barnstaple station – and even better to hear that they've won such a prestigious award.

"Working with community groups to enhance station environments brings further social benefits to the railway and helps to promote sustainable travel while bringing people together on projects that benefit the wider community.

“Passengers travelling through Barnstaple or visiting the station café now have a more appealing view from the window and we hope that the new plants and flowers on the platform enhance local biodiversity.

“We’ll continue to work with the Barnstaple station volunteers on future improvements to the platform so that these enhanced benefits will be felt for years to come.”

The station makeover received a huge seal of approval from Britain in Bloom, winning the 2022 Neighbourhood Award for Barnstaple with a grade of ‘outstanding’.

Tim Steer, Tarka Rail Association lead for Barnstaple station volunteers, said: “Thanks to Network Rail, we have an entire redundant station platform that we have turned into an award-winning dazzling display for all passengers and customers to see.

“With Network Rail’s training and permission, on a weekly basis we have been able to maintain the old fixed planters, make a new rockery and visually alter the existing railway planter to leave an ever-lasting impression for arriving and departing passengers. We have an aspiration to see it one day being used again to pick up passengers bound for Bideford.”

Mike Day, Tarka Rail Association chair, said: “For many years working with Network Rail, GWR, Devon and Cornwall Community Rail Partnership and various volunteer groups, we have undertaken to protect and enhance the redundant platform at Barnstaple.

“We have seen this as key for how the passengers view the railway, particularly as it is opposite the operational platform and everyone that leaves the station stands and looks at the platform whilst they wait for their train to arrive.

“The volunteers have been out every week, weather permitting, to constantly maintain and enhance not only the platform but the whole station area. This is key to help lift the overall station ambience whilst it also helps protect a critical piece of infrastructure.”

Frances Bell, Barnstaple in Bloom organiser, said: “Barnstaple in Bloom is an organisation packed with people who are passionate about our town. We thoroughly enjoy working in partnership with Tarka Rail Association and the joint team has made a huge impact on the improvement of Barnstaple’s only railway station.

“Visitors and locals alike have commented on how attractive the station looks and how it gives a robust welcome to everyone using it as a gateway to north Devon.”