

We can all agree new investment in our area will be very welcome

I AM lucky to have lived in Torridge for a large part of my life, and never had to experience the direct hardship and trauma of war.

It's been over two years since the conflict broke out in Ukraine, causing many families to flee their homes and to head for safety. Since then, over 170 families have arrived in Torridge and have been assisted by the council and local charities.

My colleague, Claire Hodson, deputy leader of Torridge District Council, along with head of legal governance and monitoring officer, Staci Dorey, were recently invited along to an event at the Ukrainian Hub in Bideford, where they were presented with a beautifully framed painting to say 'thank you' for all the support they have been given over the last two years.

The hub opened on the May 13, 2022 to provide a safe space for Ukrainian refugees who had to leave their homes and families behind and seek refuge in other countries.

Local charity Wings created the hub as a place where fellow refugees

Ken James

An update from Torridge District Council's leader



could meet and receive advice and support. I am very proud that as a council we have been able to support Wings in delivering this valuable and essential service. Well done to all those involved!

A lot has been happening with Torridge Place Board's work with the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to assign up to £20million in funding for the area. Over the last couple of weeks, representatives from DLUHC have been in the area meeting with a range of businesses and members of the public to try and gather as many thoughts and views from local people as possible.

One of the early pieces of feedback that we have received was "how hap-



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py the community seems to be, and how "chatty" and how proud they are of the area - although equally keen to see major improvements made to really make life better for our local communities and the economy, with a real emphasis on creating job opportunities to keep young people here.

Representatives from DLUHC will use these interviews as part of their feedback to develop business cases in June, with the aim that these will be signed-off and we will receive funding confirmations shortly after. It's an unusual process, but I am sure

we can all agree that we welcome the additional investment for our area.

Once we know what proposals are successful, there will be much work to be done, as part of the agreement dictates that funding for the project needs to be spent by March 2025. Lots of hard work but worth it for the improvements the money can make.

Another welcome endorsement recently came via The Times newspaper where we came out top in a national league table of the best and worst councils in England.

The piece featured some very kind

words from local businesses and residents. Whilst really pleasing to see and read, it is only a snapshot of data covering a small number of services. Be assured that we are not going to rest on our laurels!

As you are probably aware, a by-election for the Bideford North seat took place on Thursday, May 2, the seat being made available by the sad passing of Peter Christie.

I am delighted to welcome Teresa Anne Tinsley to the council and look forward to working with Teresa in the future. As always, there is a lot to do and be thankful for.

Do we have sustainable transport solutions?

SUSTAINABLE transport is a term used to explain the different modes of transport that are low-carbon producing and positively impact communities with social and environmental gains.

The main sustainable transport choices for North Devon are bicycles, buses and trains.

For the district of Torridge, the forms of sustainable transport are even fewer as the area lacks any rail system. Some of you might say, "but don't trains and buses produce emissions?"

Yes, these forms of mass transport do make carbon emissions. However, if the service is used to capacity, they do carry the public far more efficiently and that is positive for our environment. Which is better, a road with 200 cars or 200 members of the public on one frequent public transport service?

Recently, Devon County Council and Stagecoach successfully secured a joint bid to central government's Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) programme.

This will mean the current Stagecoach operated 21/21A bus fleet that serves Bideford, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe will be replaced with zero emission electric buses in 2026 - another step towards decarbonising Northern Devon's public transport. A new bus priority lane is proposed

Tim Steer

Vice-chair of the Tarka Rail Association



in Barnstaple along the Branton road which will enable faster journey times and allow the buses to simply flow through the traffic congestion.

Our North Devon railway operator Great Western Railway has similar decarbonising ambitions and plans to phase out diesel-only fleet by 2040.

Let's look at the most sustainable mode of transport: the bicycle that also belongs to the 'active travel' group term.

The Tarka Trail is very popular with the active travel community; walkers and cyclists have been loving the reused old railway track from Ilfracombe to Barnstaple but it does disappear in distinct places.

One place is in Barnstaple where unfortunately, the beautiful, iconic, curved-iron railway bridge was scrapped in the late 1970s and sadly this missing asset challenges tourists to find how to get back onto the Tarka Trail to Fremington, Instow, Bideford, Torrington and



Granite Way by Tim Steer, above. Inset right: Barnstaple's beautiful, iconic, curved-iron railway bridge was scrapped in the late 1970s

Meeth (without some way finding).

Another place the trail is lost is near Branton; an area called Willngcott to Knowle. This area has been part of local campaigning for 19 years; many had wanted to see the completion of the Ilfracombe to Branton stretch of the Tarka Trail.

Recently, DCC successfully applied for active travel funding from the government and construction



work has now commenced on this stretch!

Anyone who uses the North Devon line is welcomed on arrival to Barnstaple railway station to see bus stops that have connecting buses to

Lynton, Ilfracombe and Combe Martin. As well as the bus services, this station has a bicycle hire service that gives the station its sustainable modal shift.

So, bicycle, train and bus are North Devon's sustainable transport choices and we all need to see further work in improved infrastructure, be it a bicycle lane, bus lane or rail link.

What are not sustainable are new housing developments with no cycle lanes, no bus stops or road capacity for buses. When Roundswell (in the Barnstaple and Fremington area), was developed, the planners made a large active travel corridor with segmented walkway and cycleway.

Looking in other areas, where is the active travel route for areas like Landkey to Barnstaple?

Sustainable transport systems can work in parallel. Anyone who has been to Exmouth will know that a fantastic Exe Trail runs next to the Avocet line all the way to Exeter and links all the communities along the route to this system. The Granite Way from Okehampton to Meldon largely follows the same-style system.

North Devon and Torridge have declared a climate emergency. What viable sustainable transport systems can be constructed to achieve that climate goal?