



Barnstaple Place Partnership board

Friday 4th July 2025 09.30am – 11.00am

Guildhall, Barnstaple

1. Welcome and introductions

Attendees: - Jess Foy, Jon Rodney Jones, Alison Mills, Mike Matthews, Sarahjane Mackenzie-Shapland, Hannah Harrington, Cllr Malcolm Prowse, Craig Bulley, Matthew Brown, Andy Wills, Joe Bryan, Mike Matthews, John Gay, Tony Foster, Jude Jeal, Lee Baxendale, Naomi Laurenson, Janet Coates. Oliver Sugare (online)

Notes from previous meeting agreed.

2. Apologies

Apologies – Cllr David Clayton, Louise Flagg, Katalin Fulop, Helen Bone, Ella McCann

3. Improving the look and feel of the town centre: Vacant Units

- Vacancy rate update - HH presentation – showed the goad map with the colours with vacant units, indicating the various vacant properties, those that have enforcement and those that have planning permission or have applied for PP.
- Vacant unit action plan update
- Planning / enforcement update – no new cases
- Commercial agent engagement
 - i. The Wright Property (JG), Webbers (TF) and Praxis attending
- Identify actions to lessen the impact of vacant units

TF – recent lets are all local people, sales are also local people opening craft businesses, rents have not gone up, business rates are still causing a problem. Most tenants looking for short term lets 3-5 years. The economy is not good at the moment, Barnstaple is fairing much better than other towns.

JG – Nationals are unreliable, they come and go. The cost of works is higher than before, regulations have changed to be much more strict. Banks are not lending for properties on the high street. Developers need help to develop by way of guarantees either from NDC or government. Residential units above the retail pay for the building development. JG is the process of buying 25 High Street – 12k pa rent is affordable for a small property.

OS praxis – look after 20 shopping centres – there are not enough retailers to fill all of the units. Barnstaple doesn't have a lot of local competition compared to other towns. Business rates again – profits being squeezed, retailers are going to the major centres in the country.

MP – suggested looking at the local plan zoning areas.



MB replied that the LPA are not holding anything back and are being flexible – the high street is huge and they are supporting residential on the upper floors and may have to start looking at ground floors in the outer areas.

JG says if residential allowed it could bring life back to the high street. But the cost of conversion is high. Anything that can't be bought online needs to be available in the high street.

HH we need to be more positive as footfall hasn't fallen, encourage ND + to promote Barnstaple more.

JRJ said that arts community have a role to play as small businesses to take on the smaller premises.

MM – the town is not busy from 7pm – try and take away as much red tape as possible to encourage more people to invest in the town.

MP – can we give free pre apps for properties in the high street as an incentive.?

SJ – we can lobby for banks to lend on the high street as this is not a local problem. JG said that there is residential demand on the high street and all properties were easily let.

AW – what happens when the upper floors are let and there are still too many empty retail units
TF demand for retail is limited that's why there are empty units. JG – needs to be affordable 3k – 5k with rate relief is the most lettable.

HH – actions to take are our lobbying role – more advertising/marketing and incentives to attract new businesses such as a free pre app scheme for high street properties.

LB – we tried to do a meanwhile use but it fell through, there are 12 groups that are wanting units to use properties for pop up galleries / restaurants or swap shops this will help show what the unit can be used for. Surrounding premises could benefit from the additional footfall. Getting hold of the landlord and getting a suitable useable premises is an issue. HH – asked agents how we do this TF replied he would be happy to approach the landlords – would need to offer the land lord something in return. (Jess Reed to send out the pack or speak to the agents)

4. Community Networks / Projects and Programme updates – key updates or issues that need escalating:

JF – gave Ellas updates from the community groups –

Here is a bullet point list of requests that respondents would like raised to strategic boards such as **One Northern Devon, Barnstaple Place Partnership Board, or Northern Devon Futures**. Please do raise any if there is appropriate opportunity to do so:

- **Sam Ismael** (Primary Care):
 - Raise awareness of **housing and poverty** as major themes coming through Wellbeing Team caseloads.
 - Highlight **waiting lists for services** not inline with timescales of community members need.



- Suggest **assistance with form filling and advocacy** capacity needs to be increased / more accessible.
- **Rosie Mahoney** (Barnstaple Town Council):
 - Encourage attendance or representation at the **Youth Network** by board members or their teams.
- **Sharon Gale** (Studio KIND.):
 - Inform all boards that **education around menopause, perimenopause, and early onset menopause** is urgently needed, as highlighted by frontline healthcare professionals.
- **Nicola Jenner** (The Pickwell Foundation):
- Emphasize the need to **build bridges between local community services and refugees** to support integration and economic contribution.
- **Marcella** (Skills and Employment Hub)
 - Help to increase advertising and awareness of what the Skills Hub does and is doing in the coming weeks. There are several workshops and opportunities which community members are not hearing about due to limited outlets / capacity afforded to the hub for advertising / sharing details of what's happening.

NHS Neighbourhoods

The NHS Neighbourhoods were featured in the news this morning (Thursday), so we may start hearing more local conversations about them.

Key points included:

- 12-hour opening, 6 days a week
- Hospital outpatient clinics moving into neighbourhood health centres
- VCSE sector involvement in wraparound support

This could unsettle some local groups, especially as recent meetings have felt a bit rushed. A calm, practical approach that ensures people feel heard will be crucial.

I spoke with Nicola Frost on Monday—she and DCF are echoing the idea I raised about looking at how other areas (including education and LAs) define their geographical patches. Nicola and Ian will stay in touch on this, especially as Ian is involved in East Devon's work and may have useful insights.

It'll be interesting to see how the location of the Barnstaple NHS Neighbourhood Team and potential venues fits into everything else being developed. Have those conversations already started?

If Place Partnership isn't the right forum for this, it might be worth checking who's attending other meetings where it is being discussed, to ensure the right people are informed and OB Members stay in the loop.

Vacant Spaces

There are a few ideas being explored that could make positive use of vacant units while giving local groups a visible, pop-up-style presence:

- Board games hub (linked to a local group at TM Fitness – full disclosure: my husband is involved, and I’m part of a CIC that may support it)
- Gardening sessions to connect with nature and share produce
- Creative arts/makers workshops
- “Pride of Place” photo competitions and exhibitions
- School art coursework displays – a great way to showcase student work to the wider community
- Drop-in sessions – especially where budget-friendly, neutral venues are lacking

If a couple of units could be made available for short-term or ad hoc bookings, that would be brilliant—especially if they’re safe, blank spaces with basic furniture.

How are things progressing with landlords and agents? Is there anything we can feed back to OB Members?

AW – will be working in town centre hub when IT equipment is installed.

LB – new brochure is available, public art is underway. EOI – Boutport street is going out to businesses first. Carnival is 20th September.

AM – Pearce have started work in Bridge Chambers.

JC – Theatre Lane bins are blocking access to the Hub on the strand.

5. DOnm

- 22nd August 2025