



Judi Spiers on Monday

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Those vegan pies are well worth a taste

WHO doesn't like a nice pie? I'm not talking mince or fruit pies. I'm not talking pasties. I'm talking pies. A pastry base with pastry sides and a separate lid. Well, I do, and I was fortunate enough a couple of weeks ago to be invited to be a pie taster at Clive's Pies, just outside Dartmouth. There I was, seated at the table with a tray of 21 newly baked pies, before being told to 'fill me boots' by Esther, the managing director!

"You look like Sweeney Todd," my friend laughed! Funny but hardly appropriate as these were vegan pies, many gluten-free! Now take that look of your face, just because you like meat. I am neither vegan nor vegetarian but can tell you I tasted each and every one of those pies and would happily do so again!

It's funny how, even in this day and age with a growing number of vegetarians and gluten-intolerant people out there, 8.5 million according to latest figures, some of us still have fixed ideas on how 'these people' look.

I remember years ago doing my teaching practice at a school in Kent and a rather scary teacher homed in



on me and tried to convert me to vegetarianism. She showed me lurid pictures of the innards of cows and meat eaters, which apparently highlighted why humans shouldn't eat

meat! I hate to be shallow, but what really put me off was her appearance. She was bone thin and pale-faced, wore drab, badly hand-knitted cardigans and a stained tweed skirt,

thick surgical stockings with open-toed sandals, and always seemed to be surrounded by a cloud of boiled cauliflower! Well, happily, things have changed since then, with a greater understanding of nutrition and health, if not fashion, which means there is no reason why vegetarians should not be healthy and look any different from meat eaters. But it seems, when it comes to veganism, well, many still think it's the work of the devil!

As if to illustrate this, Esther told a funny story about going out to lunch with her husband and two children, one of whom has not quite made the move to the 'dark side', and they ordered the only vegan option on the menu, which happened to be burgers. They watched as the waitress came out of the kitchen with a tray loaded with their food, looked around, then went back into the kitchen repeating this another three times before Esther stopped her to tell her it was their order. The shocked waitress looked

her, and her family, up and down before declaring: "You don't look like vegans!"

In fact, just back from far parts, Esther sported a golden glow that put my pasty face to shame! That waitress was out of touch because things are changing with veganism on the rise and something like 12,000 restaurants now offering 'vegan-friendly' options. Well, Esther's staff is very friendly. It might

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help that they are encouraged to take home as many pies as they want to every night! They were only too pleased when it was suggested that I might join them on the production line.

Decked out in my white coat, hair net and rather snappy rubber shoes, I was encouraged to fill the pastry cases to the brim with an ice-cream scoop as they rotated on a machine in front of me

That's another job ticked off my list of dream jobs. Now, if anyone can offer any ice-cream tasting, please feel free to get in touch!

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Government's Levelling Up agenda needs some more energy

FOR the first time in 50 years, commuters will this morning be letting the train take the strain on their morning journey into Exeter from Okehampton. The restoration of the Dartmoor Line will see two-hourly seven-days-a-week train services from the Dartmoor town into the city. There will even be a stop in Crediton.

Anyone who has ever sat in the commuter traffic heading for Cowley Bridge from Crediton in the morning will know how important a development this is.

This type of infrastructure investment - the Government put in £40 million - is exactly the sort of deliverable that can make a real differ-

ence - and chimes with the Government's oft-repeated and much-doubted Levelling Up agenda.

This good news - and it really is good news - clashes with the mood in the north of the country.

Yesterday, Lord O'Neill, who is vice-chairman of the Northern Powerhouse partnership, said the Government had managed to 'disappoint virtually everybody' with its rail announcements made last week.

The former minister's comments came after the Government announced that the eastern leg of the HS2 between the Midlands and Leeds would be cut, while a promised Northern Powerhouse Rail Link

between Leeds and Manchester would run partly on existing tracks.

Despite the Dartmoor Line, this region knows all about disappointing Government support on rail. Ever since the region's only main line railway was washed away in 2014, the region has been campaigning for faster, more resilient train services in and out of the region.

The South West has also been calling for its own equivalent of the Northern Powerhouse under the banner of the Great South West.

Only last week, the Prime Minister told this newspaper and the region that it will have to wait for the Government's White Paper on Levelling

Up to be published. Today, the director general of the CBI, Tony Danker, will give a speech in which he will highlight that parts of the UK have been neglected over decades, leading to a 'branch line' economy.

He says delivering economic growth across the country will be the determining factor in whether the Government's Levelling Up agenda will be a success. He says: "What the UK needs to level up is economic growth in every place. Growth that in turn provides better-paid jobs, skilled work, firm-level success and creates the kind of virtuous circle that helps a place to prosper. We've spent the past decades living with

these consequences, but now we've got a shot at redemption."

He names biotech, space and cybersecurity as areas of opportunity, as well as off-shore wind, carbon capture and other net-zero solutions. This region has been very clear in its ambition to be the UK's natural powerhouse. Its natural assets, combined with already established expertise and a collaborative and innovative spirit, make the region a huge opportunity for the Government to make significant 'levelling up' impact.

Waiting for a White Paper is not on. The Government should do what it did with the Dartmoor Line. Back the region and let us get on with it.