Report of the Lead Member for Regeneration, Economic Development and Planning – November 2026

My last report was presented to Council over 12 months ago and have now had the pleasure of heading this portfolio with such a fantastic team for another year. The 7 years that I have led in these vital areas this has proven to be challenging, but also the most rewarding. We have achieved so much, even with the worrying background with uncertainty over the shambolic process of proposed local government re-organisation in the minds of all of us. I would argue that this past year has seen more impact and positive delivery than I can recall in all my time as a councillor.

The pinnacle for me, as a Barumite, has been the last phase of our interventions in Barnstaple with the unveiling of the Boutport Street development. I realise there is much more to do, but we now can be sure there will be 2 more years for the District Council to continue the work, and I'm sure we can look forward to many more brave interventions!

Regeneration

As I hinted to earlier the Future High Street Fund project is complete – the biggest regeneration project undertaken by the Council since its inception in 1974 – a bold decision that has certainly paid off. The street scene in Boutport Street has been transformed and the new beautifully laid out car park is now open and very busy. 'Toms Walk' has stitched the elements together with a safe and well-lit pedestrian link, and we look forward to welcoming Tom Evans' family to an official opening soon to thank them for their cooperation. The provision of the 10 social rented units, 9 workshops and a hub for our creative communities within 36 Boutport Street will bring vitality and life to the town centre alongside new residents already taking up residence.

7 of the 9 workshops are now under lease and the other 2 units are being licensed to meanwhile uses. One of the units, on the car park end is a kitchen for the hospitality business and this is currently under offer. All of the spaces in 36 Boutport Street are under offer and we expect occupation to commence soon. Some pilot events have taken place in the stunning function room and it is working well.

Recognition already - the development is now officially an award-winning scheme, winning 'Place making project of the year' in 2026 at the Insider South West Property Awards. Hannah and Collette travelled to Bristol to collect the award.

Some new shopping destinations have opened in **Green Lanes** – we welcomed Sostrene Green and Toytown in October and already the Centre has reported increased footfall and sales as a result. The opening of Sostrene Green attracted long queues generating a lot of media interest!

Seven Brethren Redevelopment – The residential development is now well underway and we anticipate first occupation in January 2027. The flood defence works are nearing completion with sympathetic stone cladding for much of the riverside now complete looking good against the ancient Longbridge.

The **Healthy Homes Project, Ilfracombe** is progressing well – the works to convert 36 and 38 Oxford Grove have started on site and the contract has been let for the 37/38 High Street (the old Royal Mail building). Together they will create 14 high-quality affordable social rented units for the town highlighting what can be achieved. A funding application has been submitted to Homes England to support the project.

The project has been published as a case study in the latest Chief Medical Officer's annual report 2026: health in rural areas and small towns - GOV.UK as part of the Poverty Truth Commission's work stating:

The Ilfracombe Healthy Homes project pilots a potential solution to some of the identified housing issues. Ilfracombe has many small bedsits and units of accommodation that provide poor quality, unmaintained and unhealthy living conditions for residents. So far, the project has seen the District Council purchase 3 properties with the aim to renovate them into healthy homes and re-let them as quality self-contained flats. The PTC provided the driving force for the project, inputting into the design and specification to ensure that these homes are healthy community assets.

UKSPF/REPF – This project completed in September 2026 and the outcomes reported to the Strategy & Resources Committee. It has seen a plethora of work delivered since its introduction in 2022, we had been awarded just under £3 million and the Economic Development Team have delivered 20 projects across the investment priorities of Communities and Place, Supporting Local Business and promoting People and Skills. All monies went directly to businesses, communities or organisations delivering projects. Some of the key figures include:

- 18 jobs created,
- 229 volunteering opportunities supported,
- 945 businesses received advice, training or guidance,
- 182 people accessed basic skills training,
- 92 people entered employment following support,
- 98 businesses received grant funding.

Culture

The Cultural Development Fund has now been completed successfully – building work at Bridge Chambers completed on programme and in budget and again we must recognise the work of local builders Pearce Construction – we have helped bring the building back to life. We remain committed to working with partners to support the successful operations of the now refurbished Bridge Hall. If you haven't been there yet you are missing out!

As part of the fund, the project has delivered a number of plinths and fingerposts to assist in a more succinct system of directional signage across the town. The programme has commissioned public art and Michael Pinksy's 'Tidal triplets' has recently been installed on the Strand attracting a good deal of interest. The Heritage trail was launched in 2025 and further trails are being developed.

The revenue arm of the fund saw the delivery of 40, family friendly opportunities, which together attracted attendances of over 65,371 people - involved 258 volunteers and engaged 653 practitioners / agencies.

The fund has also provided business support to the creative sector, reaching 46 organisations and a work experience scheme delivered 48 places across 10 placements.

The Barnstaple.co.uk website is now a go to site for events happening in the town please take a look.

The **Museum** is preparing to submit its application to extend its NPO status to continue to deliver an original imaginative programme.

Strategic Planning

After awaiting the new NPPF and the new rules for making Plans for over 2 years, work on the formal process of a new Local Plan has officially commenced – hoorah! We published our Gateway 1 self-assessment on 3 November. This milestone is a readiness check where authorities detail the preparatory work that has been undertaken and get confirmation to start formally preparing our new plan.

We are still committed to get the work done in the 30-month timetable as set by the Government, this should enable us here in the north of the county to adopt a plan for the future that will be written and owned by local people.

The thematic working groups have all now met again and the members involved have given invaluable feedback already. It will soon be time to reach out again to parishes and town councils so we can ensure their

ambitions are met; there will also be a wider engagement strategy as part of the next stage of the Local Plan work.

Now is the time for members to engage with the team and ensure that the priorities of their communities are recognised as we go forward.

Wider Economy

The Economic Strategy was adopted 2 years back and the team have published an interim report which highlights the success of the Economic Strategy to date. It recognises the progress made across the 5 key clusters; and recognises the future opportunities in 2027-2029 to strengthen our work in the defence sector and to further support our town centres. This work will sit alongside the delivery of a new Local Plan.

The Team

Last time my report mentioned how fortunate I was to 'work with such an incredible team of officers' and I make no apology for repeating this. All these successes are down to this team. It is difficult to list them all individually but I hope they know I am grateful to their support and advice – they are invaluable.

Over the last few weeks, I've been involved in many forums where the extent of the work and results of this team are making a real difference all over North Devon and I know colleagues would agree.

Malcolm Prowse

November 2026