

ILFRACOMBE REGENERATION BOARD

Wednesday February 2026, 14.00 – 15.30

Notes

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Present: Councillor Paul Crabb (chair), Councillor Sara Wilson, Councillor Malcolm Prowse, Geoff Fowler, Rod Donovan

In attendance: Laura Donovan, Keir Duffin, Matt Brown, Charmain Lovett, Kara Stevens, Dominie Dunbrook, Clare China (notes), Louise Woodruff (for item 3 only)

Apologies: Alison Mills, George Carlo-Paat, Councillor June Williams, Councillor Malcolm Wilkinson, SarahJane Mackenzie-Shapland, Steve Seatherton

2. Agree notes and actions from last meeting

The notes from the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record. There were some matters arising that aren't on this agenda:

Action: Refer additional Hirst sculpture opportunity to the Culture Club for development: this was done via Charmain and there has since been a meeting with Damian's team and looking at options to have a temporary instalment of some of his smaller pieces as part of the 'town for culture' bid.

Action: Write to the Environment Agency regarding the safety issues: this action needs to be carried forward as not complete

Action: SarahJane Mackenzie-Shapland to provide the methodology behind the revised housing targets: this action needs to be carried forward as not complete

Action: Keir to speak with SJ to explore learning opportunities, particularly around managing the arrival of homeless individuals from larger cities such as Bristol: this action needs to be carried forward as not complete

Other matters arising raised from the Board:

GF – report from culture club who are funding silk crystal for art works that were intended for Rapparee but as that area is not safe, they are looking at alternative places such as the hut on Hillsborough and other sea front locations.

GF – asked for any update on Rapparee survey that was commissioned by NDC – concerned that together with the Tunnels being closed, this will impact tourism in Ilfracombe – and wider issues about unstable cliff edges and the state of the

coastline. **Action:** DD to invite the NDC Senior Engineer to an IRB to give a briefing on the issues raised here.

DT – Tree planting at Brimlands – have they been considered in terms of location and possible future developments, as it would be wasteful to have to dig them up or cut them down in future years. **Action:** DD will ask NDC parks team if they can provide a response.

Response from NDC Parks Manager: *The Parks Manager emailed (NDC) members last year asking for their views on a community orchard in the swimming pool field (although the exact location hadn't been decided at that point) and gained consensus. The agreed location for planting is in a gap in the "millennium woodland". They are all on dwarf or semi dwarf rootstock so will not get above 4m tall. This should not conflict with any short-medium term development plans, not that we are aware of any for this site (which sits just outside the development boundary). There was the talk of a MUGA in that area, but much closer to the existing car park. However, this was looked at with a contractor last year and agreed that the cost of groundworks here were prohibitive.*

3. Whitbread Update on Ilfracombe Premier Inn site – Louise Woodruff

Louise Woodruff provided an update on behalf of Whitbread regarding the proposed Premier Inn development in Ilfracombe. Unfortunately, due to viability challenges and continued increases in construction costs, Whitbread has taken the decision not to proceed with the scheme at this time. The decision was described as very last minute, following a brief session with the team, and was made despite recent revisions bringing the proposal close to agreement. Another £100,000 would be required to update the existing plans, which was deemed unviable in the current climate. As a result, the site will now be disposed of. Louise expressed her disappointment at the outcome but was now working with agents JLL on processes for disposal. She offered to speak with partners directly about the disposal, otherwise it would go onto the open market.

Board members echoed this disappointment, recognising the considerable time and effort invested in progressing the scheme. The offer to speak directly to Whitbread/JLL was welcomed as concerns were raised about the dormant site and the risk of it becoming derelict. Cllr. Prowse offered support to help accelerate development where possible, including exploring possible funding partners such as Homes England to bring forward a residential scheme.

4. Council Updates

Ilfracombe Town Council

- High Street Regeneration

The ONE Ilfracombe Secretariat has analysed the regeneration objectives, which will now be presented to the Board for approval.

A nine-day Spring Clean event is being organised. Participating organisations will each take responsibility for a specific job or area of the town, leading activity and requesting support where necessary.

Work is also progressing on a database of properties on High Street and Church Street, including landlord contact details. Properties have been graded from poor to good condition to help prioritise those most in need of improvement. Agents have been contacted regarding vacant properties to open dialogue with landlords. In some cases, landlords have already been approached to encourage improvements, and access has been granted at agreed times to improve the appearance of premises. While this represents a positive start, further work is required to develop a longer-term strategy.

A free paint scheme will be introduced as part of the regeneration programme, using a newly developed town colour palette.

It was noted that retail activity alone is no longer sufficient to drive footfall, it was noted that the Partnership Council should consider alternative activities to attract people into the High Street, including meanwhile uses and pop-up initiatives.

- War Memorial Project

Ilfracombe in Bloom presented a seven-step project proposal for the War Memorial. The group reported feeling overwhelmed by the scale of the project and approached Ilfracombe Town Council for assistance in structuring the work. The intention is to break the project into smaller, manageable tasks while identifying available skills, volunteers and funding to support delivery.

- Culture Club

The recent Culture Club meeting was attended by around 30 people, with 100 members currently involved in total. Updates were provided on a number of cultural initiatives.

Planning is progressing well for Ilfracombe's Shanty Festival, which will include musicians from both national and international locations and is expected to support local hospitality businesses.

An initial meeting for a Photography Festival attracted around 40 attendees. A plan for the event has been developed, although funding will be required in order to deliver it. An update was also provided in relation to the museum.

UK Town of Culture Application

Members discussed the UK Town of Culture programme, which this year has been opened to towns for the first time rather than cities. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is seeking applications that highlight local stories and their contribution to national narratives. The successful town will receive £3 million to deliver a cultural programme, while runner-up towns will receive £250,000.

Ilfracombe has a strong case based on its rich history, with potential stories including the 1208 defence involving King John, early settlement histories such as Bowen, and stories such as the Red Petticoats, alongside many other untold local narratives. Collectively these contribute to a story of over 800 years of shaping history.

The application is currently being prepared by a team of four, with the main challenge being to communicate the town's vision within the required 400-word expression of

interest. Proposed themes include coastal identity, hidden histories, new creative opportunities for the future, and bold contemporary culture in unexpected places. The Hirst team are contributing to the bid.

The expression of interest is due at the end of March. In spring 2026, ten towns will be shortlisted and asked to develop detailed plans. The judging process will be led by Phil Redmond, with site visits forming part of the assessment. The cultural programme itself would be delivered in 2028.

The Culture Club discussed how potential funding might be used, noting that investment would need to build on existing activity and help tell Ilfracombe's story. ONE Ilfracombe will lead the bid and is considered to be in a strong starting position. It was noted that Barnstaple is also considering an application but does not currently have a similar coordinating organisation in place.

Discussion also took place about the Ilfracombe Tunnels, including their history and original use by a private sea bathing company. As the tunnels are currently closed, questions were raised about how this might affect the application, particularly as they are a notable feature frequently searched for online.

DCMS expects bids to demonstrate sustainability beyond the grant funding.

Work is under way to secure the loan of Hirst's smaller temporary pop-up artworks, lasting around three months, this could still be delivered even if the Town of Culture bid is not successful and could form part of a wider art trail. The cultural programme should therefore be viewed as a longer-term plan leading towards 2028.

Action: Slides from the presentation to be circulated.

North Devon Council

- Harbour

Diesel was recently reported in the harbour. Although the situation appeared significant, officers confirmed that it is less serious than it first appeared. The source of the issue has been identified and is being addressed. In addition.

Repairs to the harbour wall are planned.

- **Current Planning Updates**

- Leigh Bay Hotel – application for discharge of planning permission relating to the car park within the wider parish application.
- 96 High Street – planning application submitted for a flat, viewed positively for regeneration.

- **Untidy / Development Sites**

- Tinker Tailor – noted.
- Flat roof site – scaffolding has now been erected and work has commenced.
- Belgrave Promenade – Section 215 notice being issued relating to canopy condition.
- Devon Bay Hotel – leases have now closed and the property is back under single ownership.
- Montpellier – works ongoing.
- Emmanuel – site considered untidy; scaffolding present.
- no update on Osborne
- Storage was offered to Ilfracombe in Bloom but has not been taken up.

- **Road Closure**

- A road closure is currently in place due to a Devon County Council considered culvert unsafe.

Action: Gold Coast - send letter of concern.

Members also discussed whether Heras fencing at some sites could be covered with mesh to improve the visual appearance while reducing wind risk. A question was raised as to whether deterioration at some sites might be deliberate in order to force redevelopment.

Devon County Council

current works being undertaken are part of the wider regeneration plan.

5. AOB – any other updates for the Board (All)

It was noted that the car park behind the Landmark Theatre is currently closed. Repairs are not considered feasible at present and the council is awaiting an engineer's report.

In addition, part of the cliff edge area has been closed for safety reasons. A request was made to consider reopening any remaining sections that can safely be made accessible.

Coastal Erosion Strategy

It was noted that a clear strategy is needed in relation to coastal erosion, particularly given the potential impact on seasonal attractions and tourism activity in the town. Members agreed that a more proactive approach is required rather than reacting to issues as they arise. Consideration should be given to alternative approaches and actions where erosion may affect access or attractions.

Action: Invite Tara, NDC's Senior Engineer, to attend a future meeting to discuss coastal erosion and potential strategic responses.

Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 18 March 2026, 2:00pm