



Annual Report

Progress towards our Corporate
Plan 2023-2027

January 2025

Vision statement

“North Devon will be a sustainable, inclusive community; fostering prosperity and well being for all.”

Our priorities



Financial security

Overall Objective

To reduce the reliance on core funding government grant whilst maintaining financial security by managing the council in a prudent manner, taking opportunities to increase income and by being risk aware and not risk adverse.

Actions to date

- ✓ Set a balanced budget and matched our spend to those budget restraints
- ✓ Reviewed and refreshed our commercialisation strategy
- ✓ Continually reviewed our financial plans for the next 10 years to ensure they are strong and sustainable
- ✓ The purchase of Green Lanes Shopping Centre provides additional income
- ✓ Reviewed services and how they are delivered to make them more efficient. This has included buying property for temporary accommodation rather than using hotels or bed and breakfasts
- ✓ Always looking for ways to share services, such as our Building Control Partnership with Mid Devon Council



Housing

Overall Objective

We will strategically plan and deliver housing provision to try to meet local needs and to tackle the widening imbalance between supply and demand and increase the availability of decent, affordable and accessible accommodation for residents in need.

Actions to date

- ✓ Secured £800,000 in funding to provide affordable housing in rural areas through a Community Land Trust
- ✓ Purchased land in Braunton to ensure affordable housing was available as part of a new development
- ✓ Purchased 13 properties for temporary accommodation, providing better solutions for residents needing emergency housing. We have secured £1.7m from the Local Authority Housing Fund to help support these purchases alongside our funding
- ✓ Actively reviewing options to allow us to directly provide social housing in North Devon
- ✓ Secured £2m of funding for Ilfracombe Healthy Homes. This project aims to purchase substandard properties, renovate them and re-let as an ethical landlord
- ✓ The site of the former North Devon Leisure Centre is being developed to provide 180 new homes of which 54 will be affordable (*see case study on page 9 for more information*)
- ✓ Working with developers on stalled major housing sites such as Ilfracombe Southern Extension and Westacott
- ✓ Working with landlords to improve property standards through our Private Sector Housing Team

Climate and Environment

Overall Objective

To protect and enhance our natural environment and to promote sustainable practices, reduce carbon emissions, tackle climate change and protect biodiversity within the council's jurisdiction.

Actions to date

- ✓ Planted a new section of community woodland at Frankmarsh as we continue to manage our assets with a focus on biodiversity (*see case study on page 11*)
- ✓ Exploring options to install solar panels on appropriate buildings including North Devon Crematorium building and Ilfracombe Pool
- ✓ Invested £3.7m in our recycling facilities, meaning we can recycle waste more efficiently
- ✓ Continued to review options to make our vehicle fleet more environmentally friendly. We have purchased electric vehicles for our parks team and we continue to trial and test electric vehicles and more efficient solutions for our refuse and recycling lorries
- ✓ Funding secured for energy efficiency improvements at Brynsworthy Environment Centre and The Landmark Theatre
- ✓ Administer a programme of fuel efficiency grants for the private sector



Pride of place and prosperity

Overall Objective

To promote economic development, support the regeneration of our Places and improve the quality of life for residents and visitors by making North Devon a more attractive, vibrant and successful area.

Actions to date

- ✓ Completion of the Ilfracombe watersports centre
- ✓ Work under way to improve Ilfracombe seafront, with a new play area completed and new public toilets and a bus shelter due for completion in Spring 2025
- ✓ The £12m Barnstaple Market Quarter project is under way. This has seen the refurbishment to Barnstaple Pannier Market and Guildhall completed. The redevelopment of Queen Street and Bear Street car park is under way. The renovation of 36 Boutport Street, a previously derelict Grade 2 listed building, into a new cultural hub for North Devon is progressing
- ✓ We have continued to fund town centre street marshals in Barnstaple. As a result of its success we have extended the scheme to include Ilfracombe
- ✓ Cultural strategy for Northern Devon in place, with town plans centered around Barnstaple and Ilfracombe (*See case study on page 8*)
- ✓ Neighbourhood plans in place for Braunton and Georgeham
- ✓ Ilfracombe Task Force created with partners to develop a collective action plan for the town (*see case study on page 10*)
- ✓ Administered the delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund to support investment in communities and place, local businesses and people, and skills
- ✓ Delivered an economic strategy for North Devon and Torrington up to 2029 with industry and wider partners
- ✓ Reviewed and refreshed our strategies for asset management and car parking



People matter

Overall Objective

To be seen as a vibrant, attractive employer by being an ambitious and caring council that develops and looks after its communities and delivers excellent customer focussed services that meet the needs of its residents.

Actions to date

- ✓ Developing a Customer Hub at Green Lanes Shopping Centre, giving residents greater access to our services and extending our face to face offer in an accessible and central location
- ✓ Continually improving our website, including an AI ChatBot and other online services to enable our residents to access information and request service 24/7
- ✓ Supporting our residents via the Housing Support Fund (*See case study on page 11*)
- ✓ A new community engagement platform is due to launch later this year to support engagement with our residents
- ✓ Undertaken service reviews, focusing on the customer journey
- ✓ More wellbeing support for our staff, including workshops on health matters and personal finances
- ✓ Our recruitment process is centered on our staff developed behaviour framework
- ✓ Offer a varied range of job posts and provide exciting and varied development opportunities to help our staff flourish and grow
- ✓ Refreshed our equality, communication and engagement strategies
- ✓ Developing a culture of ambition, with recent projects including building a new leisure centre and Ilfracombe watersports centre, extension to the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon, redevelopment of Seven Brethren, purchase of Green Lanes, and delivering the Barnstaple Market Quarter project



Case Studies

Flourishing Culture

Flourishing Culture: The Northern Devon Culture Strategy was adopted in 2022, setting out a vision for North Devon and Torridge that by 2027, it will be 'locally, nationally and internationally recognised as a place where creativity thrives in unison with its landscape and communities'.

Since 2022 work has moved at pace, under the oversight of a new Northern Devon Cultural Partnership Board. A Barnstaple Culture Plan was adopted in late 2022 aimed to re-establish Barnstaple as the cultural centre of Northern Devon and includes an action plan. A town team for culture has been established to drive delivery.

In April 2023, we were successful in applying for Cultural Development Funding from the Arts Council England and were awarded £3 million to support 3 capital elements:

- Completion of a visual arts/creative industries hub at 36 Boutport Street,
- Creation of a performing arts/learning hub at Bridge Chambers; and
- Wayfinding and public art, together with revenue funding for activity including community engagement, festivals and marketing.

The project is being delivered in collaboration with partners. The capital projects are progressing, and in 2024, the town has seen a range of festivals and activity including the return of Barnstaple Carnival and a website promoting cultural activity across the town has been launched.

Similarly, a culture plan for Ilfracombe was adopted in 2024 and a town team for Ilfracombe has been set up, which as in Barnstaple, is driving delivery across the town and bringing together the wide range of stakeholders that already exist. The minutes of the town team meetings are on the One Ilfracombe website and highlight the vast array of activity already taking place.

A Creative People and Places bid to the Arts Council has recently been submitted and we await the outcome; this has an initial focus on Ilfracombe.





Seven Brethren

This project, supported by £2.2 million from the Government's Land Release Fund, will enable the delivery of 180 homes and see the regeneration of a part of Seven Brethren adjacent the river.

The project is complex and has many components. A Development Agreement was entered into in late 2022 with Tarka Living Limited to deliver both the enabling works for this project and the houses themselves. The enabling works include demolition of the old leisure centre, which was completed in 2024, as well as the provision of a replacement long stay car park (which will be the long term home of the Barnstaple Fair and includes a temporary site for travellers), which opened in January 2025.

The remaining enabling works include flood defences to serve the site and wider town, and land raising. Of the 180 homes being delivered, 30% will be affordable dwellings (75% social rent and 25% intermediate tenure) and we expect to see housing delivery commence this year. The phasing for the delivery of homes is currently being finalised.



Ilfracombe Task Force

The Ilfracombe Task Force project commenced in 2023, established collaboratively to bring partners together with a focus on addressing the striking deprivation in Ilfracombe and to enable targeted discussions to 'shift the dial'.

The taskforce recognises the good work happening in the town but that there is a need to build on it, bring it together to ensure all partners are working together in the most effective way and to understand why activity is not being as impactful as we might have hoped. It is recognised, across the partners that a different approach is needed for Ilfracombe. The governance of the town has been reviewed and a recommitment of partners to One Ilfracombe has been confirmed, which will enable the Board to act strategically and influence strategic decisions affecting the town.

A work plan has been drawn up across a number of agreed themes, which will help drive delivery in the most impactful areas. This will be monitored through One Ilfracombe.



The Household Support Fund

The Household Support Fund was launched in October 2021. The fund is designed to provide rapid short-term financial support to address economic vulnerability and financial hardship.

Since 2021, North Devon Council has administered six schemes, with the current scheme due to end in March 2025. In that time it has dispensed nearly £2million to those most in need.

Mrs X is a retired widow who brought up her two children alone. She worked until she was 68 and has never claimed any benefits. As she qualifies for Council Tax support we were able to identify she was of pensionable age and on a low income. Whilst her income was low, it was just above the limit to claim Pension Credit meaning she didn't qualify for the winter fuel allowance. The Household Support Fund allowed us to award Mrs X £200 which provided a huge boost to her income to help with increased fuel bills.

A seventh scheme is due to launch in April 2025 with the ongoing aim of targeting those most in immediate need of financial support.

Frankmarsh Woodland

We have worked in conjunction with volunteers and schools to complete the planting of 24,000 trees at the new Frankmarsh woodland extension at Yeo Valley Community Woodland in Barnstaple.

The woodland will sequester 3,500 tonnes of carbon dioxide over the next 100 years as well as increasing biodiversity and informal recreation opportunities.

