

Executive Summary

2025 was a pivotal year for the Ilfracombe & District Business & Tourism Association (IBTA).

Membership rose significantly (from ~70 to 110+), financial reserves remained stable, marketing activities expanded, and the organisation strengthened its role as a core business voice for the town.

Key achievements:

- Successful website rebuild with major growth in web traffic and mailing list engagement.
- Introduction of pop-up TIC concept and improved TIC visibility at the Landmark.
- Stronger coordination of social events, networking, and member engagement.
- £12k North Devon Council (NDC) grant secured for business tourism, training and marketing consultancy.
- Progress on strategy development and governance realignment.

Key challenges:

- Limited engagement and unclear direction from Ilfracombe Town Council (ITC) around tourism marketing.
- Volunteer fatigue, particularly around social media and event posting.
- Clarity needed on long-term TIC strategy and IBTA's role in physical visitor services.
- High Street concerns, including scaffolding, ASB and weak visitor flow.

This document summarises all 2025 committee minutes, distils cross-cutting issues, identifies risks and opportunities, and outlines recommendations heading into 2026.

Cross-Meeting Thematic Analysis

1. Membership Growth & Engagement

Membership rose from around 70 to over 110 businesses, marking one of the strongest growth periods in recent years. Recruitment, High Street outreach and networking events were key drivers. Renewal management and communications post-October remain challenges.

2. Financial Stability

Bank balance remained consistently between £20k–£29k. Grant funding from ITC and NDC significantly supported marketing, website development and the pop-up TIC.

3. Tourism Marketing & Website Development

The Visit Ilfracombe website saw exceptional performance, overtaking Visit Exmoor in user engagement. Event posting, however, remains a volunteer capacity bottleneck.

4. TIC & Visitor Information Strategy

The association moved away from a physical TIC model, instead pivoting to:

- Landmark-based digital and leaflet provision.
- Pop-up TIC activation at shows and Waverley arrivals.
- Future potential High Street TIC hub opportunities.

A long-term position is still required.

5. Partnership & Governance Relations

Challenges persisted around ITC's approach to tourism marketing and unclear strategic direction. IBTA was proactive in pushing for a Marketing Forum and a clearer partnership model.

6. High Street Health & Regeneration

The High Street Working Group became increasingly active, addressing signage, scaffolding, ASB and promoting footfall via better wayfinding.

7. Events & Community Engagement

Multiple successful member events contributed to relationship-building. Large-scale outward events (Devon County Show, ND Show) need clearer evaluation of ROI.

8. Strategy Development

A draft strategy was produced mid-year but requires finalisation. The NDC grant now provides capacity for external marketing consultancy and business tourism development.

Risks

1. Over-reliance on volunteers for digital marketing and event posting.
2. Ongoing uncertainty around ITC's tourism strategy and decision-making.
3. Visitor flow to High Street is weak; risks to local businesses if unresolved.
4. TIC model lacks long-term clarity, risking visitor confusion and duplicated effort.
5. Social media impersonation issues highlight brand protection gaps.
6. Data insights (footfall, visitor demographics) not yet fully integrated into planning.

Opportunities

1. £12k NDC grant enables major expansion in business tourism development.
2. Potential for a High Street TIC hub in 2026.
3. Growing website traffic provides stronger advertising value and member acquisition.
4. Expanded training programme (AI, digital, marketing).
5. Partnership strengthening with ND Biosphere, SW Economy Hub and others.
6. Scope to commercialise Landmark TV screen or expand curated content.
7. 2026 Coastal Event can become a signature town-wide programme.

Outstanding Actions Tracker

Action	Owner	Target Date
Finalize strategy document	ESW, Strategy Group	Early 2026
Develop clear TIC strategy (digital + physical hubs)	PB, BC, ESW	Q1 2026
Confirm Landmark screen content model	PB, Committee	Jan 2026
Evaluate large show attendance (DCS, ND Show)	PB, AS	Before Feb 2026
Member self-service event posting process	PB + potential contractor	Q1 2026
Deploy High Street wayfinding signage proposals	High St Group	Pre-season 2026
Implement NDC-funded business tourism workstreams	ESW, PB	2026
Launch 2026 Coastal Event planning	PB, JC	Q1 2026

Strategy Alignment Review

Our committee minutes show strong alignment with the IBTA mission and aims. The following examples:

- Promoting Ilfracombe as a tourism destination — delivered via website upgrades, Devon County Show presence, leaflet distribution and digital content.
- Supporting the local economy — active recruitment, High Street initiatives, social events and business networking.
- Delivering effective marketing — social media, refreshed branding, expanded event listings, and planned consultancy support.
- Collaboration — strong ties with NDC, ND Biosphere, SW Economy Hub, local businesses.
- Sustainable tourism — pop-up TICs reduce fixed overheads; data-driven planning is emerging.

Areas requiring stronger alignment:

- Physical TIC vision and funding model.
- A unified marketing governance structure with ITC.
- Detailed KPIs and performance measurement for campaigns and events.

Recommendations for 2026

1. Finalise and publish the IBTA 2026–27 strategy with clear KPIs.
2. Establish a hybrid TIC model: Landmark + pop-up + rotating High Street hubs.
3. Invest NDC grant in business tourism product development, marketing consultancy and digital training for members.
4. Strengthen partnership structure with ITC, outlining mutual commitments.
5. Introduce a part-time digital support contractor for event posting and social media.
6. Create a High Street Visitor Flow Action Plan (signage, digital maps, shuttle options).
7. Evaluate ROI on major shows before committing to future years.
8. Expand the mailing list with seasonal lead magnets (competitions, guides).
9. Develop a commercial model for the Landmark TV screen (ads + town info).
10. Build data dashboards using Place Informatics + Google Analytics to inform planning.