

Chairman's Report & Annual Review 2025–26

Presented at the Annual General Meeting, 25 June 2026

Good evening, everyone, and thank you for joining us tonight.

It's been a busy, often challenging, and genuinely rewarding year for the Chamber. With our new name, the South Hams Chamber — we've worked hard on widening our remit, been open to collaboration with other business networks, but, we hope, kept the same commitment to the businesses and communities at our heart.

I want to use these few minutes to recognise everything we've achieved together, and say thank you to the people who made it happen.

Our website, and how we connect

We love our new website, the improved business directory, and the opportunities it allows us to share news, grants, promote events, job and volunteer vacancies and connect with each other. It's a platform we can, and will, keep building on, supported by our social media and e-newsletters. Thanks to Scot Baston and Kim Willis for their work on this area.

Speaking up for local business

A big part of our job is making sure local business has a voice where decisions are being made, and this year that voice got louder.

Most notably, we forced Devon County Council into admitting how long the Kingsbridge Fore Street roadworks would go on for, so that businesses could plan and prepare. We ran a survey on the impact this was having and continue to support businesses by lobbying for compensation, and by practical actions such as installing new signage and running promotions.

Earlier in the year, we pushed back hard on South Hams District Council's parking proposals, after visiting each and every business on Kingsbridge, Salcombe and Modbury high streets with our own Parking and Commuting Survey.

We objected to the closure of Whitestrand car park, contributed to the South Hams tourism business consultation, and took part in shaping the Kingsbridge's community economic plan consultation.

These are all examples of the Chamber doing what it exists to do: standing up for the people who run businesses here. Huge thanks to new committee member Bradley Gerrard for the energy, ideas and media know-how he's brought to the committee table since joining, and to Nicola for creating, delivering and analysing the survey results, for crafting our responses to the press, and for helping me navigate the balance of also serving as a local Councillor — a dual role that takes careful handling, but one that, I hope, gives us a more direct line into the council chamber too.

Keeping the high street busy and the community connected

It hasn't all been policy and surveys — we've had a lot of fun too. Our Business Club at the Thurlestone Hotel was hugely popular, and our "Post-Budget" Business Breakfast at the Winking Prawn allowed everyone an opportunity to vent.

We saw the re-launch of the Kingsbridge Breakfast Club at the Regal, and in September we will start one in Salcombe at the Ward Room, and a "Coffee & Chat" session at the Curator in Modbury.

We continue to bring members together for proper networking, and we already have lots more Business Club events planned this year, with Verse booked in for July, Gara Rock for October, Salcombe Brewery for November and more.

This year we launched our "pay-it-forward" offer to local community-interest-companies, we continue to work with community partners, events and organisations. Because the Chamber's role goes beyond commerce alone and because this is why business is done differently in the South Hams.

Thank you to our committee, officers, and Secretary

None of this happens without people giving up their evenings, and a good deal of their time. My thanks go to every member of our committee and our officers for another year of hard work and for their personal support of me.

I want to give particular thanks to Nicola whose passion for this Chamber and tireless advocacy for local business have been a constant over the last few years, and tonight's AGM runs as smoothly as it does because of the work she put into organising it. We are enormously grateful.

Looking ahead

We go into the new year with real momentum: a stronger identity, a louder voice on the issues that matter to our members, and ambitious plans. New breakfast clubs are starting in Salcombe and Modbury, our Business Club calendar is already filling up into the autumn, and we're looking seriously at how best to put Chamber funds to work supporting local businesses directly — whether that's a grants scheme or something else entirely. To help shape that, and to look after our finances more broadly, we are actively recruiting a new Treasurer; if that's you, or someone you know, please come and talk to me tonight.

Thank you all for your continued membership, your trust, and your support over the past twelve months. I look forward to another year of working together for businesses across the South Hams.

Samantha Dennis

Chairman, South Hams Chamber of Commerce