Building prosperity together

The Sussex and Brighton Strategic Authority Policy Prospectus

Evidence, choices and action to advance prosperity

Draft for consultation

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1. Understanding our places and economy

This Policy Prospectus supports the Prosperity Strategy for Sussex and Brighton. It provides fuller evidence, analysis and policy choices, explaining the Strategic Authority's contribution and how it will work with partners. We welcome consultation responses on both documents. An Outcomes Framework and Delivery Plan will accompany final adoption.

The Sussex and Brighton economy

Sussex and Brighton has a large, diverse and resilient economy. It generated £51.75 billion in gross value added in 2023 and supports around 74,000 businesses, ranging from sole traders and family firms to major employers, international companies and research-led ventures.

Its breadth is a source of stability. Sussex and Brighton is less dependent on a small number of industries than many comparable economies, and its businesses are rooted in a varied network of cities, towns, ports, coastal communities and rural areas. Gatwick provides international connectivity and supports a major concentration of aviation and business activity; Brighton and Hove combines strong productivity and a varied economy with universities and an international reputation that support the region's investment proposition; and advanced engineering, manufacturing, energy, health, visitor industries, food production and land-based enterprise are distributed across East and West Sussex.

This variety has produced valuable combinations of knowledge and capability. Creative production intersects with digital technology and games. Advanced engineering connects with aviation, photonics, semiconductors and quantum technologies. Strengths in health, life sciences and environmental innovation draw on universities, hospitals and research networks. Visitor industries benefit from the landscape, culture, food and heritage.

The Foundational Evidence Base records nominal GVA growth of around 59% between 2013 and 2023. This is growth at current prices, including the effect of inflation. Productivity, measured by real GVA per hour worked, rose from around £30.6 in 2004 to £39.4 in 2023 in 2022 prices, narrowing the gap with England and the South East. The scale and direction of progress provide a strong base, while differences between places remain substantial.

Most businesses in Sussex and Brighton are small. Average employment is around ten people per business, compared with twelve across England, and microbusinesses account for a particularly large share of the business population. Their prevalence reflects Sussex and Brighton's industrial structure, rural geography and culture of independent enterprise.

This is reflected in the scale of the foundational economy. Activities that provide the goods and services required for everyday life account for around 62% of employment across Sussex and Brighton, compared with 59% in the South East and 57% in England. The performance of these businesses has a direct effect on household security, service quality and the resilience of places.

However, the economic value created from these assets remains below its full potential. Sussex and Brighton forms and sustains many businesses, but too few achieve sustained high growth. Research and innovation are strong in some institutions and locations, but their commercial effects are uneven. Investment in productive assets is relatively low, access to growth finance is uneven, and suitable premises and infrastructure are difficult to secure in several places.

Most commuting takes place within Sussex and Brighton, alongside important flows across its boundaries. Analysis of Census 2021 data shows that 82% of commutes stay within

Sussex and Brighton. Crawley and Gatwick, Chichester, Brighton city centre and several coastal town centres draw workers from surrounding communities. London exerts a strong pull in parts of the north and centre, while Hampshire, Surrey and Kent form part of labour markets around the western, northern and eastern edges.

London provides access to a major labour market, research, customers and investment. Gatwick and the ports connect Sussex to international markets, while relationships with Hampshire, Surrey and Kent shape economic life around its boundaries. These relationships create opportunities to attract investment, retain growing firms and strengthen local supply chains.

Understanding our places and shaping our approach

Sussex and Brighton's economy works through a network of connected cities, towns, villages and countryside. Jobs, housing markets, services and supply chains connect places across council boundaries, while links with London, Hampshire, the Solent and Kent shape opportunities across our area. Understanding these relationships, and the different circumstances of our places, is essential to turning a shared ambition for prosperity into effective policy and investment.

The five emerging place profiles offer a practical way to bring this understanding into the Strategic Authority's work. They draw together places with shared economic, social and physical characteristics, reflecting how people live and work, where businesses and assets are concentrated, and the opportunities and pressures communities face. A manageable set of profiles can help the Authority and its partners respond to this diversity consistently across policy, planning, investment and delivery.

The profiles have been developed by bringing together evidence on settlements, economic activity, labour markets, population, need, access to opportunities and infrastructure and environmental constraints. They have been tested and refined with partners through policy sprints, officer input and further analysis. They will continue to evolve alongside the Strategic Authority and its evidence base.

How the profiles could be used

We are seeking views on how the profiles could support our work. Potential uses include:

- **Developing policy positions** that respond to shared opportunities and challenges in similar places across Sussex, including urban, rural and coastal communities.
- **Shaping future programmes and interventions**, using the profiles as potential geographies for coordinated activity, testing approaches or bringing partners together around shared priorities.
- **Supporting proportionate analysis** of differences and variation across our area, where other geographical scales or analytical lenses are unavailable or less suited to the question, and where the evidence supports meaningful comparison.
- **Informing the Authority's wider work**, helping teams consider how policies, services and investment choices will affect different types of place, who can benefit and where approaches may need to vary.

Connected places with overlapping characteristics

The profiles provide a starting point for discussion and decisions. Their edges are indicative and overlapping: some places share characteristics with more than one profile, and important differences remain within each. They do not attempt to describe every town and

village or replace the Sussex and Brighton-wide picture, detailed local knowledge or other useful ways of understanding our geography.

Connections between places remain central. An opportunity in one place may depend on workers, homes, infrastructure or services elsewhere, and its benefits may extend across several profiles. The appropriate geography for any policy, programme or analysis will therefore depend on its purpose.

We will continue to consult on both the profiles and how they might be used. We welcome views on whether they capture the relationships and distinctions that matter, where they could improve policy and delivery, and where a different approach would be more useful.

Northern Gateway

Economic role and strengths

Gatwick, Crawley and connected towns and employment centres around Horsham town, Haywards Heath, Burgess Hill and East Grinstead form an international gateway and major draw for workers. Aviation, logistics, engineering and business activity benefit from the airport, Manor Royal, one of the UK's largest business districts, and strong north-south connections. The opportunity is to connect this strength more closely with supply chains, technical learning and residents whose circumstances do not reflect the value generated nearby.

The 2023 employment analysis identifies advanced manufacturing employment in Crawley at around twice its national concentration, and life sciences at more than four times. Horsham also has above-average concentrations in both sectors, while Mid Sussex has a financial-services concentration. These specialisms sit alongside aviation, logistics, hospitality and the services supporting a major international gateway. Crawley has a greater presence of larger employers than much of Sussex, where microbusinesses dominate.

People, connections and capacity

The Brighton Main Line and M23/A23 connect this economy with London and the coast. Burgess Hill's growth programme and science and technology park proposals create opportunities for employment and investment alongside new homes. Universal Quantum in Haywards Heath connects university research with commercial technology development. Together, these towns contribute to the Gatwick–Mid Sussex–Brighton economic and innovation corridor. Technical routes, including the Sussex and Surrey Institute of Technology, provide a base for connecting residents with practical and specialist opportunities.

Northern West Sussex shows how these relationships cross administrative boundaries. Horsham and Mid Sussex have accommodated substantial growth within a housing market shared with physically constrained Crawley. Future housing growth needs to be considered with employment opportunities, infrastructure investment and services, including the implications of airport growth for neighbouring communities. Horsham town's links to the Northern Gateway overlap with the wider district's rural communities and economy. The area remains under significant water stress, even though the former water-neutrality position was withdrawn in October 2025. Infrastructure constraints can be changed through coordinated action, investment and regulation, but growth still depends on adequate water, energy, transport, schools, health services and environmental mitigation. In Crawley, major employment concentrations sit alongside housing pressure, skills needs and

neighbourhood inequalities; investment in infrastructure and access can help more residents benefit from that economic strength.

Opportunities for shared progress

Gatwick's reach extends well beyond the airport boundary. It supports a major cluster of jobs and businesses, links the region to international markets and provides an arrival point for millions of visitors. The opportunity is to connect that gateway more deliberately to the wider economy, so that local firms can enter supply chains, residents can gain the skills needed for new jobs, and visitors can be encouraged to explore more of Sussex and Brighton.

Realising that value will require coordinated decisions on transport, housing, business support, skills, visitor information and the environment. The Gatwick Region Airport Economic Zone provides a further partnership through which to connect trade, tourism and investment opportunities.

Brighton and Hove and its connected coastal and commuter economy

Economic role and strengths

Brighton and Hove is Sussex's largest city and a major centre of employment, enterprise and research. Its diverse economy and international reputation provide a platform for growth and investment across Sussex. The city and its connected coastal and commuter communities, including Lewes, bring together universities, research, creative and digital businesses, financial and professional services, and Shoreham and Newhaven ports.

Financial and professional services, health and education underpin the city's economy alongside creative and digital industries, games, digital production, immersive technologies and health innovation. An internationally recognised visitor offer, conferences and business events extend its reach, connecting local firms and institutions with wider markets.

The Foundational Evidence Base records real GVA per hour worked of approximately £49 in Brighton and Hove in 2023, measured in 2022 prices, above the England and South East averages. Metro Dynamics' BRES 2023-based economic complexity analysis ranks Brighton and Hove 18th among the 363 districts in that analysis, indicating a broad base of productive capabilities. Its 2023 employment analysis identifies financial services at around 1.7 times the national concentration and creative industries at around 1.4 times. These measures illustrate a productive and varied economy with strengths extending beyond its cultural profile.

The surrounding coast adds manufacturing, engineering and life-sciences capability. Worthing has a particularly strong concentration of life-sciences employment, while Adur and Lewes have above-average concentrations of clean-energy employment. Shoreham and Newhaven connect the urban economy with freight, marine enterprise and offshore energy. These activities contribute different capabilities to a connected coastal economy.

People, connections and capacity

Brighton and Hove attracts students and young adults and has a strong professional skills base. High housing costs and shortages of suitable workspace affect whether people and growing firms can remain. Poor mental health and substantial neighbourhood inequalities also mean that a productive economy does not automatically provide security or opportunity for every resident.

The city has the highest business birth rate in Sussex and Brighton, alongside a five-year survival rate of around 30%. This combination of enterprise and business churn reinforces the importance of sustained support, suitable premises and routes into finance and markets.

Opportunities for shared progress

University research, specialist manufacturers, creative and digital firms, financial and professional services and the ports provide complementary routes to growth. Connecting the city's research, businesses and international networks with commercial partners, finance, skills and premises across Sussex can help more firms expand and more residents benefit from the city's economic strengths. Affordable housing and dependable journeys remain essential to making that growth accessible.

West coast and Chichester

Economic role and strengths

Chichester, Bognor Regis, Littlehampton and the western coastal plain combine horticulture, food production, manufacturing, culture and the visitor economy, with connections towards Hampshire and the Solent. Chichester draws workers from surrounding communities, while other coastal towns have stronger outward commuting patterns.

The 2023 employment analysis identifies advanced manufacturing in Chichester at around 1.5 times the national concentration. Clean-energy employment is also relatively concentrated in Arun. These capabilities complement horticulture, food production, culture, leisure and marine activity, with employers and markets extending across the coastal plain and into Hampshire.

West Sussex horticulture supports more than 9,000 jobs and over £1 billion in annual sales. This is an established productive industry whose future depends on labour, water, energy, technology and access to markets, alongside the land and climate that make the coastal plain distinctive.

People, connections and capacity

Public transport from Chichester town centre can reach around 782,000 people within 60 minutes in the interim accessibility analysis, reflecting its connections towards Hampshire as well as within Sussex. That wider reach matters for recruitment, customers and access to services. It should not obscure weaker local access in surrounding rural and coastal communities.

An older population in places such as Arun creates replacement demand for skills and increases the importance of health, care and accessible services. Housing affordability, pockets of poor health and lower skills shape residents' ability to share in economic opportunity. Water, drainage, environmental protections and transport capacity affect where development can proceed.

Opportunities for shared progress

The opportunity is to connect productive food and horticulture businesses, manufacturing, culture and the visitor economy with investment in skills, infrastructure and town-centre renewal. Chichester Harbour adds marine enterprise, recreation and internationally important habitats. Its economic and environmental roles need to be considered together, alongside the prospects of Bognor Regis, Littlehampton and their surrounding communities.

Eastern coast

Economic role and strengths

Eastbourne, Hastings, Bexhill and Rye have distinct economies linked by coastal relationships and connections into Kent. Specialist manufacturing, creative businesses, heritage and the visitor economy provide assets on which investment can build, alongside health, care and other services. Better premises, skills routes and connections can help local firms expand and more residents share in that opportunity.

Hastings, Bexhill, Eastbourne, Lewes and Newhaven have specialisms in advanced manufacturing, precision engineering, insurance, creative and digital activity, tourism, food and drink, and port-related enterprise. The vacuum and engineering cluster around Hastings, Bexhill and Hailsham is a nationally significant capability rooted in specialist firms, supply chains and technical knowledge. Newhaven's port and industrial land create opportunities in clean energy and the circular economy.

The employment evidence identifies advanced manufacturing in Hastings at around 1.7 times the national concentration. Rother's financial-services employment is around 2.1 times the national concentration, reflecting the presence of Hastings Group's headquarters in Bexhill. These specialisms demonstrate an economic base that includes internationally traded expertise alongside health, care, construction and visitor services.

Foundational activities account for around 70% of employment in Hastings and 73% in Eastbourne in the evidence pack's 2024 analysis. Their performance matters directly to household incomes, service quality and the resilience of these places. Specialist growth and improvements in everyday enterprise therefore both have a substantial role.

People, connections and capacity

East Sussex combines persistent business survival with weaker business formation than Brighton and Hove. Specialist firms serve national and international markets, but shortages of industrial and expansion space can limit their growth. Connections westwards remain weaker: the interim analysis places around 336,000 people within a 60-minute public-transport catchment of Hastings town centre, substantially fewer than from the main western centres.

Poor health and housing pressures affect the opportunities residents can take up, with substantial differences between neighbourhoods and towns. Hastings has a younger population than East Sussex as a whole (22% of residents aged under 20, compared with 20.5% across the county). Connecting this potential with local employers, technical learning and routes into skilled work can strengthen the coast's future workforce and enterprise.

Opportunities for shared progress

Newhaven connects Sussex to European markets and provides a base for marine enterprise and offshore-wind activity. Eastbourne and Hastings are driving ambitious plans for the future, attracting investment into town centres and seafronts, homes and jobs while protecting the character that draws people here. Better premises, technical routes and connections can help existing specialist firms expand and strengthen opportunities across the coast.

Rural heart

Economic role and strengths

The Weald, Ashdown Forest, South Downs, market towns and villages connect land, food, wine, nature and visitor economies. Midhurst, Petworth, Pulborough and Uckfield serve wider rural communities, where affluence can conceal isolation and disadvantage. Transport, digital access and local services shape whether residents and businesses can realise their potential.

Farming, viticulture, horticulture, forestry, food production, landscape services, tourism and home-based businesses are woven into the wider economy. The wine industry shows how natural assets, production, skills, tourism and place identity can combine in a higher-value proposition. Commercial horticulture, agri-tech and food innovation link rural production to research, skills and markets. The Rother Wine Triangle, developed as a Sussex Winelands pilot with district council support, illustrates how vineyards can collaborate on wine tourism, signage and visitor routes.

Land-based industries employ around 16,600 people across Sussex and Brighton, or 2.2% of employment, compared with 1.6% in England. Agriculture accounts for about two-thirds of those jobs and landscape services a further 21%. These are Sussex-wide figures; the evidence identifies particular importance in Chichester, Horsham, Lewes, Rother and Wealden.

Rural economies also contain professional services, specialist manufacturers, construction, care, home-based businesses and social enterprises. Microbusinesses are especially prominent in rural districts such as Wealden. Their contribution extends beyond activities directly dependent on land, and their ability to trade and recruit depends on connections with towns, cities and wider markets.

People, connections and capacity

Affluent averages can conceal low incomes, poor health and limited access to services. Smaller settlements often depend on cars, while residents unable to drive can face restricted choices. Digital coverage is weaker in parts of Chichester, Wealden and Rother, limiting its ability to offset distance. Housing costs and availability also affect whether workers and younger households can remain.

Farmers and land managers are being asked to produce food, restore nature, improve water quality, reduce flooding and adapt to climate change, often with narrow margins and uncertain income. Smaller farms can find it difficult to enter environmental schemes or assemble viable projects. Declining farm viability would weaken landscape management, while poorly designed environmental investment could displace production without securing lasting change.

Opportunities for shared progress

Local food, forestry, regenerative farming, nature restoration, water management and low-impact tourism can support new markets and skills. Catchment and landscape-scale programmes can aggregate smaller projects, reduce transaction costs and create investable propositions with several benefits. Good land management needs to be economically durable, with measurable improvement from public and private investment. Better mobile connectivity, access to technical learning and links with nearby employment centres can help smaller rural firms participate in these opportunities.

What this means for policy

Sussex and Brighton has substantial assets distributed across its cities, towns, transport corridors, coastal communities and rural areas. It now has the opportunity to create a more connected economic system that helps these assets realise their full potential. This will require responses to varied conditions: accommodating demand and relieving infrastructure pressure in some places, while overcoming weak investment, low productivity and persistent disadvantage in others.

Economic issues operate at different spatial scales. Business support, skills and regeneration often depend on detailed local knowledge. Labour markets, transport corridors, supply chains and housing pressures cross local authority boundaries.

Action at Sussex and Brighton level will have greatest value where coordination can change an outcome: where fragmented decisions have limited investment, infrastructure serves several places, institutions can combine their assets, or a larger geography creates sufficient scale and visibility. It should reinforce local relationships and delivery capacity.

This points towards a layered model. Sussex-wide action can set strategic priorities, assemble investment propositions and coordinate infrastructure. Functional economic areas can connect transport, housing, employment and skills. Local institutions can shape delivery around the circumstances of places and businesses. Clear roles will help the Strategic Authority reduce fragmentation and add value.

These place relationships will help the Local Growth Plan, Spatial Development Strategy and investment approach identify where coordinated effort can achieve most, while drawing on local evidence and respecting the different roles and choices of each place.

2. Evidence and policy through our pathways

The four pathways and strong, safe and healthy communities provide a shared focus for policy and the twelve priorities.

Housing, skills, infrastructure and culture contribute to more than one pathway and interact in people's lives, business decisions and the functioning of places.

Connecting people and places

The change we seek

Our ambition is to connect people to good jobs, learning, services and one another through dependable, affordable journeys. We will bring homes, employment and infrastructure planning together. Better connections between our cities, towns, coast and countryside will help more communities share in Sussex and Brighton's prosperity.

Strategic priorities

1. Make east-west journeys faster and more dependable
2. Make everyday journeys work better for more people
3. Deliver affordable homes with the infrastructure communities need

What the evidence tells us

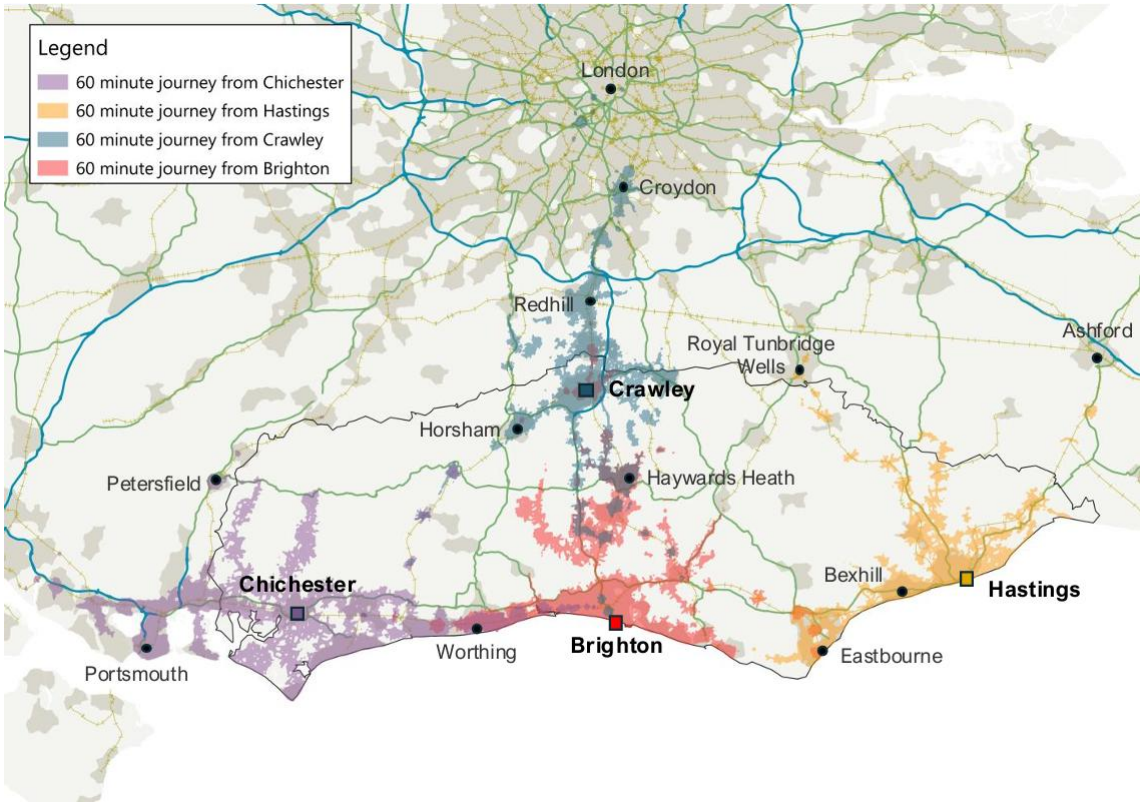
Connection is valuable when it widens practical access

Sussex and Brighton has important connections with London, neighbouring economies and international markets, but their strength and practical value vary sharply between places. Proximity to a station, road, broadband network or service does not by itself secure access. What counts is the range of jobs, learning, markets and services that can be reached reliably, affordably and with sufficient confidence to be used.

A porous area with unequal internal reach

Rail use shows several external orientations alongside internal connections. More than 46.6 million journeys were made from stations in Sussex and Brighton in 2024/25. Around two-thirds of station usage is concentrated at London-facing stations; this describes where rail activity is concentrated, rather than the proportion of journeys going to London. Connections towards Solent, Surrey and Kent also shape the network. These flows support the view of several overlapping labour markets and travel relationships, with weaker east-west connections limiting how readily places can draw on one another.

The opportunities reachable within a reasonable time vary sharply. Public transport from Chichester town centre can reach about 782,000 people within 60 minutes, Brighton about 752,000 and Crawley about 698,000. The equivalent catchment from Hastings is around 336,000. The scale of difference helps explain why businesses in some places can draw from a much larger labour pool and why residents in others face a narrower choice of employment and services.



Public-transport catchments from selected town centres. Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of UK Travel Area Isochrones and ONS population estimates (2024). Interim analysis; town-centre starting points differ from other stations in each area.

North-south connections are generally strongest along the Brighton Main Line and M23/A23 routes. East-west movement is more fragmented. The A27 and A259 carry local, regional and visitor traffic through constrained corridors, while the coastal rail network requires changes or reversals on some journeys and includes capacity, electrification and resilience constraints. Issues including reliability, speed, interchange, frequency and the ability to make end-to-end journeys determine whether Sussex and Brighton's centres function as a connected system.

Everyday access depends on more than the main network

The greatest inequalities appear below the level of the strategic corridor. Car ownership illustrates the point. In 2021, 37% of households in Brighton and Hove had no car or van, compared with 19% in East Sussex and 16% in West Sussex. The proportions were higher among one-person households, older people living alone and lone-parent families. Urban residents may live closer to jobs and services, yet many depend on walking, wheeling and public transport. Rural residents usually have access to a car, but those who do not can face very limited alternatives. Private vehicles act as an equaliser for households that can afford and use them, while increasing congestion and excluding those who cannot.

Bus evidence shows both the depth of this problem and the scope to improve it. Across parts of Sussex and Brighton, service frequency fell substantially between 2008 and 2023, and frequent networks remain concentrated in the larger urban centres and main interurban corridors. In East Sussex, only 16% of rural residents were within a 30-minute scheduled bus journey of a station in the 2025 Bus Service Improvement Plan analysis, compared with 69% of urban residents. Fixed-route access to further education, hospitals and town centres was particularly limited in rural areas.

Recent investment has begun to change this picture. More than 35 East Sussex routes now run more frequently, Flexibus covers 90% of the county and passenger numbers in 2025 had recovered to 98% of their 2019 level. Adding demand-responsive services substantially increases the share of rural residents able to reach key destinations within 30 minutes. Cross-boundary enhancements to routes 17 and 273 between Brighton, Horsham and Crawley seem to have also been followed by substantial patronage growth. The pattern suggests that frequency, coverage and service hours can release demand and widen access without waiting for major infrastructure.

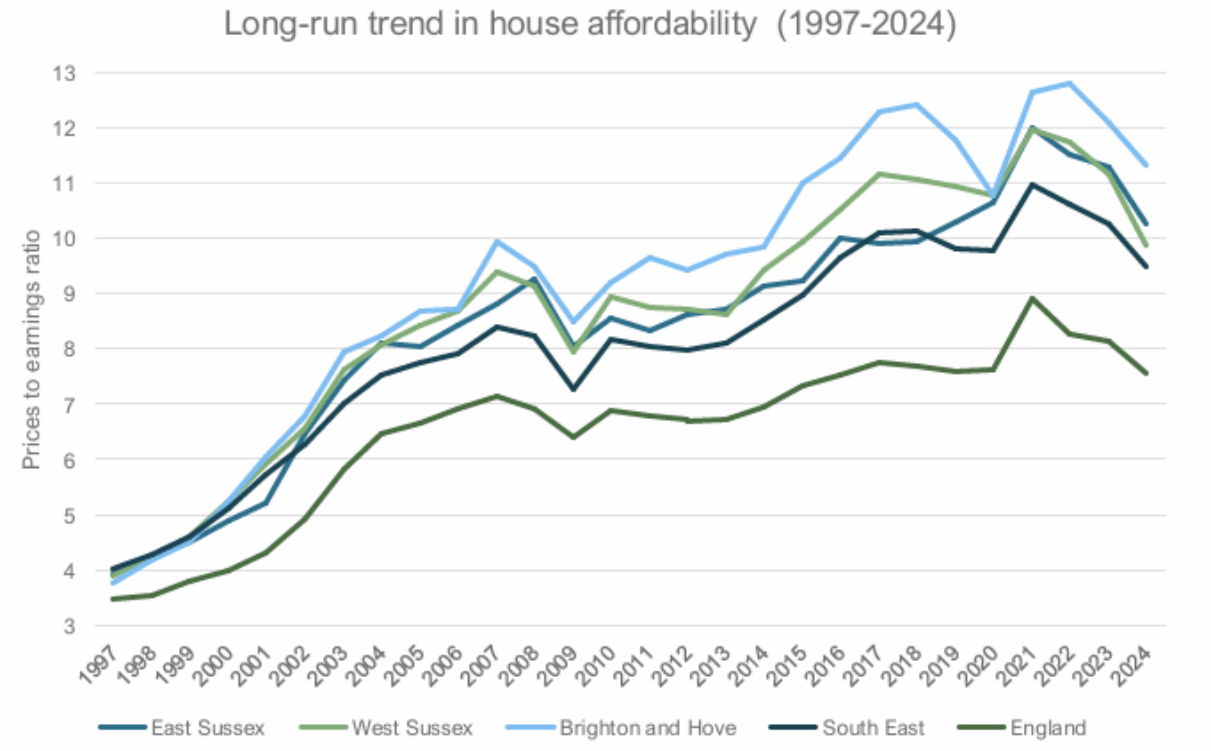
Active travel completes many local journeys and provides access to bus and rail. The evidence identifies gaps in continuous walking, wheeling and cycling networks, severance created by roads and railways, inconsistent accessibility and significant maintenance backlogs. Safety and the condition of streets affect who is prepared or able to make a journey, particularly disabled residents, women, older people and children. The quality of local connections therefore determines how much value people can obtain from strategic investment. Transport choices also affect health through air quality, physical activity, road safety and access to healthcare and social connection. Service hours, safe interchanges and the needs of rural learners require attention alongside strategic capacity.

Housing and infrastructure determine who can live near opportunity

The geography of housing is inseparable from the geography of access. Across the planning areas covered, current local housing need totals about 14,600 homes a year, while average net additions between 2021/22 and 2023/24 were about 7,200 a year. That gap intensifies competition for homes in the places from which opportunity is easiest to reach and pushes more households into longer or more complex journeys. Housing undersupply therefore constrains the effective labour market as well as the supply of homes.

Affordability has deteriorated over the long term across every part of Sussex and Brighton and remains worse than the national benchmark. The effects are economic as well as social. Brighton and Hove's transport evidence links its constrained housing supply with movement into neighbouring parts of East and West Sussex, increasing the likelihood of longer commutes into the city. High prices near successful centres can restrict recruitment and retention. Low values in other places can make regeneration and affordable housing harder to finance. A simple call for more homes does not resolve either problem unless their location, tenure, quality and infrastructure connect residents to opportunity.

The strategic opportunity lies in joining spatial and transport decisions early. Higher densities may be appropriate around well-connected centres and stations where local services and infrastructure can support them. Other places may need bus priority, demand-responsive transport, active travel links or digital provision before growth widens access. The Spatial Development Strategy can make these relationships explicit, while the transport and investment programmes can sequence the enabling infrastructure. Reuse and appropriate density should make room for employment as well as housing, retaining suitable business space where its loss would constrain jobs and increase commuting.



Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Housing Affordability Ratios

Digital and institutional connections shape whether opportunity is used

Digital connectivity can widen access to work, learning, healthcare and markets, especially where physical journeys are difficult. The government has committed to making Gigabit-capable broadband available to 99% of homes and businesses by 2032. Ultrafast broadband, with download speeds of at least 100Mbps, is already widely available across the UK through fixed wireless access and satellite broadband and many remote and rural premises already use those services.

Gigabit-capable broadband was available to around 83% of premises across Sussex and Brighton in 2026, below the UK figure of 88%. Coverage was highest in compact urban districts such as Adur and Worthing and materially lower in Chichester, Wealden and Rother. Rural and hard-to-reach areas therefore remain least able to use digital access as a substitute for distance.

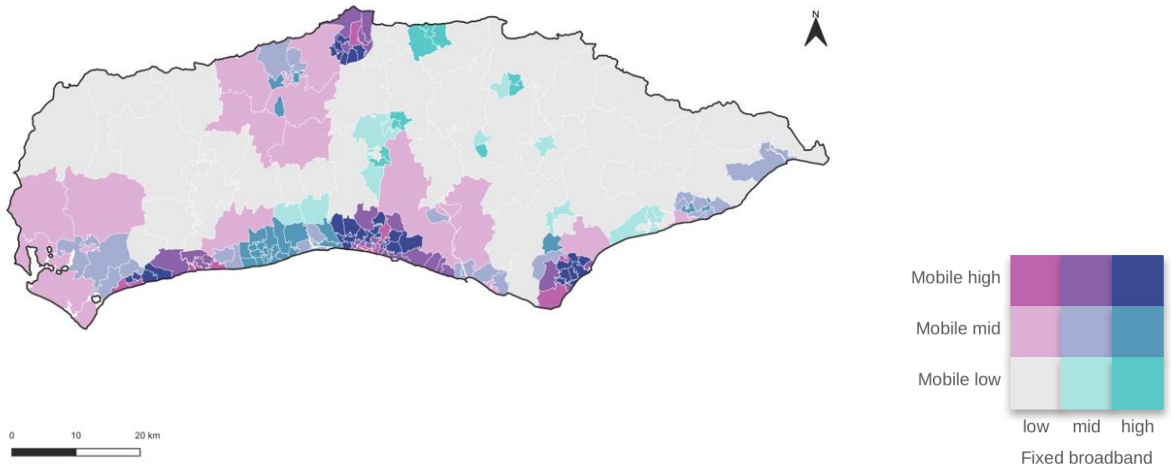
Public action can influence this market.

West Sussex's OpenDigital programme has used public assets, open-access infrastructure, aggregated demand and relationships with network providers to extend projected commercial investment. The Greater Brighton Economic Board pursued similar principles through shared fibre, breakout points and coordinated public-sector demand. Together they show how the public sector can lower deployment barriers and make investment in marginal places more viable.

Following expanded commercial rollout, the redesigned Project Gigabit contract concentrates public funding on around 13,000 premises across East and West Sussex.

OpenDigital projects also connect advanced wireless technology with commercial growing, high streets and public services, including work with Brinsbury and Plumpton colleges.

Fibre, mobile and other advanced connectivity need to inform spatial planning and the region's offer to telecoms investors.



Fixed broadband and mobile connectivity. Source: Metro Dynamics; Ofcom Connected Nations Spring 2026 update (January 2026 data) and Ookla Open Data Q2 2026. Dark blue indicates stronger connectivity on both measures; grey indicates weaker connectivity on both.

Coverage is only the first condition of digital access. Affordability, suitable devices, skills, confidence and accessible service design shape whether residents and businesses can use it. Libraries and local support services can help address these barriers. Sussex and Brighton lacks a consistent measure of digital exclusion and take-up. Digital provision should therefore be assessed by the opportunities it enables, including participation in learning, work and public services, alongside coverage and speed. Mobile capacity and reliability matter alongside fixed broadband for firms, visitors, agriculture and public services. Digital infrastructure can support productivity, innovation and more accessible services across sectors.

Get Sussex Working, the Local Skills Improvement Plan and established transport and planning partnerships connect organisations around shared problems. Yet people with complex needs can face repeated handovers and disconnected employment, health, housing, skills and community services. Smaller firms report similar difficulty navigating support and forming sustained relationships with providers.

Physical and digital access creates the possibility of participation. Institutions help convert that possibility into a college place, a suitable job, business investment or effective support. The Strategic Authority can strengthen this conversion by aligning funding, data, referral routes and employer relationships across boundaries, then measuring whether people progress rather than counting the number of programmes or partnerships created.

What this means for policy

The central finding is that connectivity depends on the relationship between strategic networks, local access and the circumstances that enable people to use them. Better connections can increase the effective scale of labour markets, services and business ecosystems, but their value depends on who gains practical access and which places are brought within reach. This creates wider choices about which connections will unlock the greatest opportunity, how major and local investment should be sequenced, and where digital or institutional change can deliver earlier gains.

These pressures create choices about land, density and infrastructure sequencing. Concentrating growth around existing centres and transport connections may offer the greatest benefits, provided higher density is supported by services, safe and high-quality public space and resilient infrastructure. Infrastructure investment will have greatest economic effect where it aligns with realistic plans for housing, employment and regeneration.

Developing the priorities

A connected transport network

Sussex and Brighton needs a network in which bus, rail, roads, walking, wheeling and cycling work together. Stations and interchanges should connect with colleges, employment sites, town centres and new homes. By better integrating fares, information and timetables we can make moving from place to place easier and simpler. Housing and employment growth also need to be planned with transport, energy, water and other infrastructure, so new development adds to opportunity without deepening congestion or car dependency. Planning for electric vehicles and charging needs to be aligned with grid capacity and future demand, including within existing urban areas.

Housing, access and regeneration

Bringing neglected buildings and underused land back into use can create affordable homes and renew the neighbourhoods around them. We should aim for existing residents to share in that improvement, with better housing options that help them remain connected to their communities. Public land and assets, alongside land assembly where needed, can help unlock opportunities whose value depends on coordinated regeneration rather than an individual development alone. Coordinated intervention can address barriers spanning sites and landowners, particularly where public land, infrastructure costs and development viability need to be considered together. Long-term stewardship and maintenance of community assets should be considered alongside design and placemaking.

A warm, safe home gives children a healthier start and eases the pressure of energy bills. Insulation, ventilation and protection from overheating and cold can improve health and resilience, while timely adaptations help people remain independent as their needs change. Working with councils, housing providers and other partners, we will bring improvements to existing homes into the wider regeneration effort. Connecting housing, health and family support can also help prevent people losing their homes, working within councils' statutory housing responsibilities.

Wider connections and local benefit

The Strategic Authority can also build relationships that individual organisations struggle to establish alone. Collaboration with neighbouring regions can improve transport, labour market and infrastructure choices that cross boundaries. A clearer regional account of Sussex and Brighton's strengths can support inward investment, trade and tourism while allowing each place to retain its own identity.

The visitor economy shows how these connections can create wider value. Many visitors encounter Brighton, the South Downs, the coast, historic towns, vineyards and cultural institutions as separate destinations. Coordinated travel information, itineraries and promotion can help people stay longer and explore more widely, supporting year-round work and spreading spending in and beyond the best-known locations. The Sussex and Brighton Local Visitor Economy Partnership and destination organisations provide existing infrastructure for joint work, including international visitors, conferences and business events and higher-value, year-round demand.

Further development

The transport, spatial and growth plans will need a common account of access, housing and infrastructure, alongside the options emerging through the Bus Reform study. The evidence should distinguish major corridor improvements from the local connections that allow people to use them. Digital exclusion also needs a more consistent Sussex-wide baseline, covering affordability, devices, skills and take-up as well as coverage.

Helping every generation build a future here

The change we seek

Our ambition is for every generation to build a good life here: young people finding their path, adults developing skills and changing direction, and older people living independently and contributing their experience for the greater good. We will connect support across places and services to help everyone stay active and involved, with security and dignity throughout life, recognising the care people give and receive and the many ways they contribute beyond paid work.

Strategic priorities

4. Build skills for secure futures and changing working lives
5. Rewire support around people, families and neighbourhoods

What the evidence tells us

Sussex and Brighton begins from a position of strength: employment is high, unemployment is relatively low and the workforce is comparatively well qualified. Yet advantage and disadvantage accumulate through education, health, housing and work, with some people losing ground at predictable transition points.

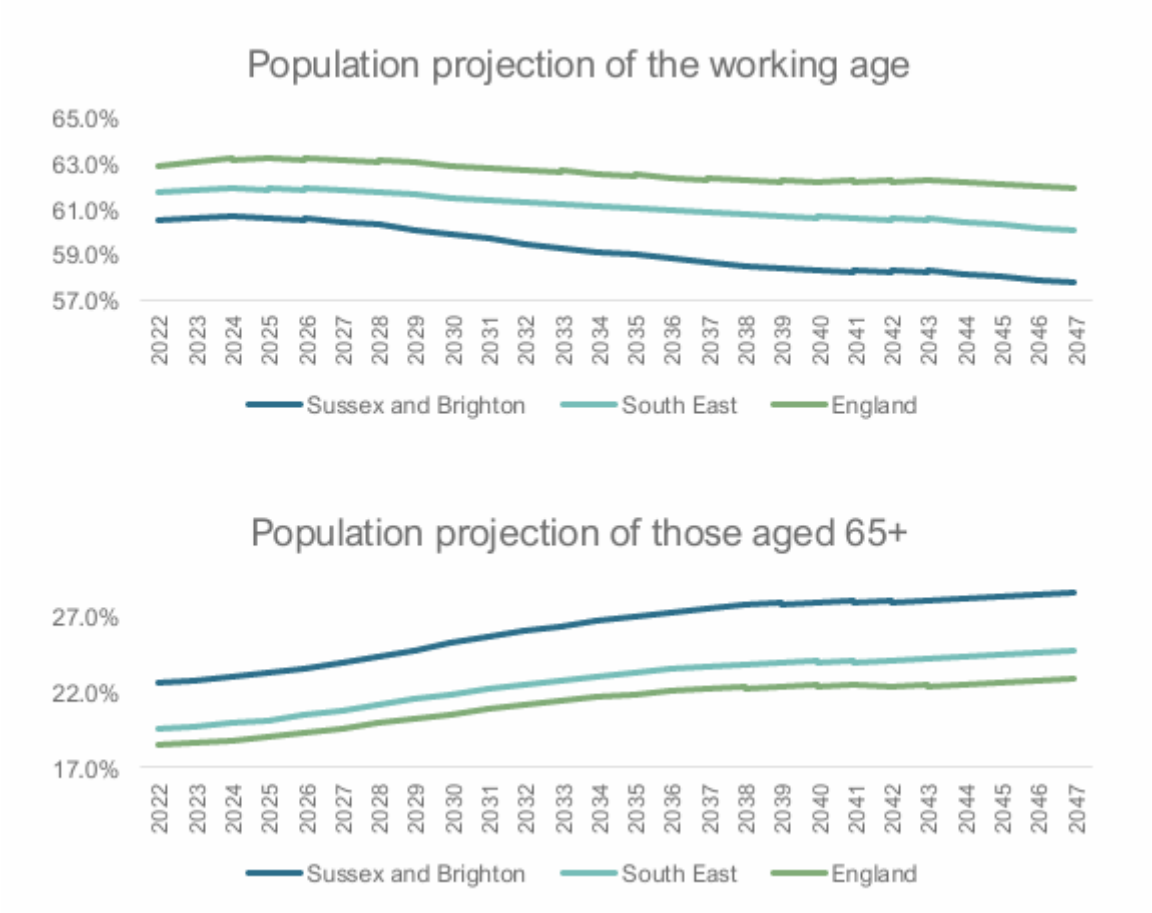
A strong starting point under demographic strain

Sussex and Brighton's labour market is buoyant and tight. Around 79% of working-age residents are in employment, compared with 75.8% in England, while economic inactivity is lower than the national rate. More than a third of working-age residents hold qualifications at Level 4 or above and the occupational profile contains a relatively high share of managerial and professional work. The immediate regional challenge lies in the uneven quality and accessibility of opportunity within a labour market that has limited spare capacity.

Demography makes that constraint more significant. Only 60.5% of the Sussex population is of working age, compared with 62.9% nationally, and the balance differs sharply within Sussex and Brighton. Brighton and Hove has a much younger profile, shaped in part by its universities, while East and West Sussex already have lower working-age shares and much older populations in places such as Rother and Arun. By 2035, the post-working-age population is projected to increase by more than 94,000 as the working-age cohort begins to decline. By 2047, more than a quarter of Sussex and Brighton’s population is expected to be aged 65 or over.

An older population changes the balance between labour supply and demand, increases replacement needs in already stretched sectors and makes retention of skills more important. It also places greater weight on unpaid care. Longer lives are an asset when people have the health, security and flexibility to contribute for longer.

The universities provide a substantial flow of graduates and current evidence indicates that more than a quarter of University of Sussex graduates find work in the wider local area. Housing costs, suitable work and visible routes for progression influence whether young adults remain, return or leave. Older residents also contribute through care, volunteering, mentoring and accumulated skills.



Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Subnational population projections for England: 2022-based

The foundations of participation are laid early

Evidence shows broadly positive outcomes in the early years, followed by a gradual weakening through childhood and into young adulthood. School readiness is close to the national rate overall, yet this hides large gaps. By Key Stage 2, attainment across Sussex and Brighton is below England, and the share of 16 and 17-year-olds recorded in education or training is also lower.

These gaps are not confined to places usually described as deprived. The widest differences between pupils receiving free school meals or with special educational needs and their peers include parts of relatively affluent West Sussex. East Sussex combines lower overall attainment with pronounced challenges in Hastings and other coastal communities. Brighton and Hove has a highly qualified adult population, yet substantial attainment gaps for pupils with SEND and those eligible for free school meals. The pattern is one of disadvantage within places as well as between them.

The transition after compulsory education is the point at which these accumulated differences become most visible. DfE management information suggests 5.5% of 16 and 17-year-olds as NEET in East Sussex and 5.2% in Brighton and Hove, compared with 3.4% in England. West Sussex records a lower known NEET rate of 3.0%, but the activity of a further 6.7% is unknown, making its apparent advantage uncertain. Across all three areas, young people with special educational needs are much more likely to be NEET than those without them.

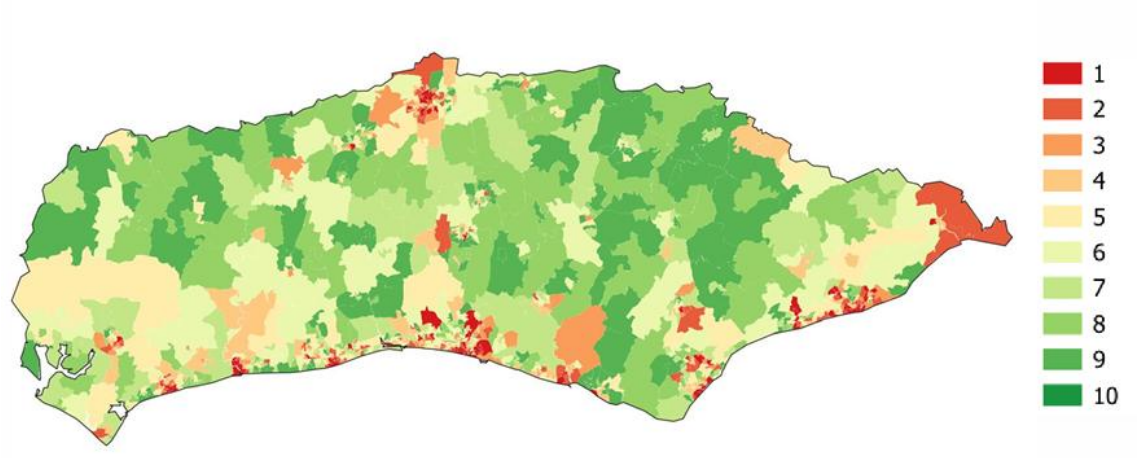
The labour market is also making this transition harder. Employers report fewer traditional junior roles, higher expectations of work-readiness and less capacity to provide informal training. This affects young people most, especially those who need supported entry, but it also narrows routes for career changers and people returning after illness or care. The strongest response is a clearer sequence from careers information and meaningful employer contact to work experience, supported internships, apprenticeships and jobs with visible progression. Employers need to help create those routes, particularly where smaller firms lack the capacity to do so alone.

Work, health and security form one system

Get Sussex Working's 2025 evidence reports around 147,500 economically inactive residents aged 16–64 after excluding students. Its reasons-for-inactivity analysis, using 2024 Annual Population Survey data for all economically inactive residents, attributes just over a quarter to long-term sickness, around 17% to early retirement and almost 16% to looking after family or home. These shares use a different denominator from the student-excluded total. Sussex also has around 145,000 unpaid carers, nearly half of whom provide more than 20 hours of care each week.

More than 311,000 residents report a disability that limits daily activity. Mental health and musculoskeletal conditions are leading causes of sickness absence, and the employment gap for people with a long-term condition is particularly wide in East Sussex. Among adults aged 18–64 with learning disabilities receiving long-term social care support, recorded paid employment is very low, ranging from 2.8% in West Sussex to 8.6% in Brighton and Hove. These figures suggest a loss of independence and opportunity as well as unused workforce capacity.

Work can protect health through income, purpose and social connection, but only where it is secure and sustainable. 14% of workers across Sussex and Brighton earn below the Real Living Wage, rising to more than 18% in East Sussex. Coastal economies contain a greater concentration of seasonal and lower-paid work with weaker progression, while high housing and living costs reduce the security that employment would otherwise provide. Poor work can aggravate ill health and financial strain; a period of illness can then push somebody out of a job that offered little flexibility or support.



Employment deprivation across Sussex and Brighton. Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

This points to a different relationship between health, skills and employment services. Support should help people stay in work before a health condition becomes job loss,

provide a coordinated route back where work has already been lost, and work with employers on job design, flexibility and progression. Get Sussex Working's evidence reports that 37.5% of economically inactive residents in Brighton and Hove want work, compared with 21.2% in West Sussex and 14.9% in East Sussex. These survey estimates have wide confidence intervals, but indicate why a single participation offer may miss differences in readiness, health and circumstance.

Opportunity changes with place and stage of life

East Sussex combines an older population, lower job density and concentrations of health and education disadvantage. Brighton and Hove attracts students and young adults and has a strong professional skills base, alongside higher unemployment, housing pressure and poor mental health. West Sussex has the highest employment rate and generally stronger health outcomes, with significant gaps including early-years disadvantage, uncertain destinations after 16 and very low employment among adults with learning disabilities.

The common pattern is a mismatch between the geography of people, opportunity and support. The highest household incomes are not always found where most economic value is produced. Young adults may live near universities without finding a route into suitable local work. Residents in coastal or rural communities can face weaker access to training and employment, while people in prosperous districts may be overlooked because their disadvantage is less geographically concentrated. Administrative averages are a poor guide to where a transition is failing.

Sussex and Brighton nevertheless has substantial assets: universities and colleges, strong community organisations, anchor institutions, employers in growing sectors, an established health and care partnership and new pan-Sussex plans for skills and employment. The problem is fragmentation between them.

What this means for policy

The evidence shows that participation is shaped by a sequence of transitions through education, work, health and care. Disadvantage deepens where those transitions fail and services respond only after people have lost contact with learning or employment. The wider choices concern where earlier action could prevent lasting exclusion, how skills and employment investment should respond to demographic change, and which combinations of support are best organised across Sussex and Brighton. Earlier, coordinated support can improve life chances, wellbeing and participation, and may reduce future demand for intensive services. The scale and timing of any financial benefits will need to be tested.

A secure future includes the care people give and receive, independent living, volunteering and contribution to community life. Policy must recognise these forms of participation alongside routes into good work, and provide security and dignity throughout life.

Developing the priorities

Clear routes through learning and work

Young people need a credible route into adult life and a reason to imagine their future in Sussex and Brighton. Technical and vocational education, apprenticeships, further and higher education, enterprise and creative work should form clear and respected pathways. Contact with employers should begin early enough to inform choices and should reach young people who lack family or professional networks. Care leavers and young people with SEND may face additional barriers at these transitions. Supported internships, inclusive employer practice and lifelong careers guidance can connect opportunities with different needs and circumstances.

Future government policy may give the Mayor a larger role in shaping technical pathways from age 14 and influencing 16 to 19 technical and vocational funding. This creates an opportunity to connect learning more closely to Sussex and Brighton's economy while preserving the breadth that young people need as their ambitions and the labour market change.

Learning and progression throughout life

The Adult Skills Fund will give Sussex and Brighton a significant new lever from August 2027. Used alongside Skills Bootcamps, apprenticeships, employment support and investment by employers, colleges and universities, it can support essential skills, retraining and progression. Adult and community learning can provide an accessible first step, helping people build confidence, essential and language skills, social connections and a route into further learning or work. Universities' continuing professional development and higher-level retraining also support changing industry and public-service needs.

Employers should help shape this system and create learning within work. Larger organisations and public bodies can share expertise, support supply chains and open routes that smaller firms cannot provide alone. Employer engagement should make provision easier to navigate and shape, using shared arrangements that reduce the burden on smaller firms. Inclusive recruitment, reasonable adjustments, flexible work and progression can widen participation and help retain people with health conditions or caring responsibilities.

The NHS is an anchor for skills and opportunity, employing around 60,000 people across Sussex and linked to about one in every 14 jobs. Its clinical and non-clinical training, apprenticeships, research and procurement connect workforce development with local supply chains and health and life-sciences growth. Clinical research infrastructure and partnerships with universities and industry can provide settings to evaluate and adopt innovations. Councils and emergency services are also anchor employers and purchasers whose choices can strengthen local skills and supply chains.

Support that fits people's circumstances

The Strategic Authority can work with councils, the NHS, voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations and communities on public service reform, exploring how learning, employment, housing, physical and mental health support can connect around people's circumstances. This should complement the NHS shift towards neighbourhood-based care. Any joint commissioning will require agreement on responsibilities, resources, risk and assurance with the relevant statutory bodies. Equality-informed policy development, engagement and co-production where appropriate will help identify barriers faced by people less well served by existing arrangements.

Further development

The Strategic Skills Plan, employer-led Local Skills Improvement Plan and Get Sussex Working partnership provide a basis for aligning learning, employer demand and support. Further work should identify where transitions fail, how provision can fit work and caring responsibilities, and how employer practice can support retention and progression. Young people whose destinations are unknown need to remain visible alongside those recorded as outside education, employment or training.

Enriching our living landscape

The change we seek

We will connect nature recovery, productive land and sea, secure water and energy, and creative activity to sustain thriving communities and viable businesses. Our ambition is a healthier natural environment and a flourishing cultural life, caring for the assets on which Sussex and Brighton's future depends.

Strategic priorities

6. Lead a movement for nature and prosperity on land and at sea
7. Secure the water and energy infrastructure our future depends on
8. Make culture a stronger part of every place's future

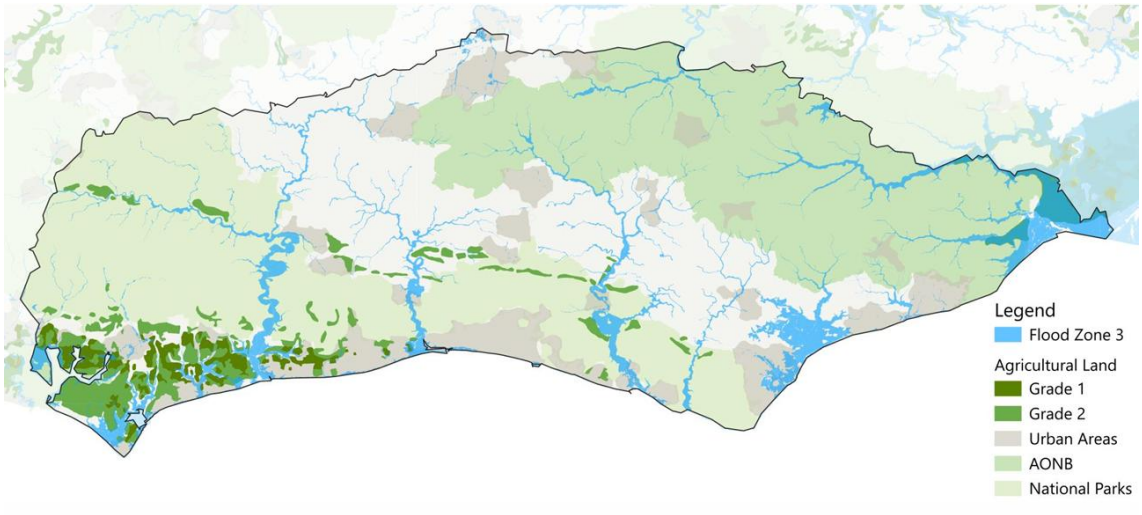
What the evidence tells us

Sussex and Brighton's living landscape is both physical and cultural: shaped over generations by its coast, downland, woodlands, rivers, farmland, towns and villages, and by the people who have lived and worked within them. It is a source of beauty, identity, belonging and renewal in its own right.

It also supports Sussex and Brighton's prosperity, supplying water and food, sustaining health and wellbeing, supporting businesses and jobs, and attracting people and investment. Culture and heritage bring our landscapes to life, helping people understand, experience and care for the places they share.

One connected landscape

Sussex and Brighton contains a remarkable variety of landscapes within a relatively small area. The High Weald, South Downs, coastal plain, river valleys, urban centres, harbours and marine environment each have a distinct character, yet they operate as an interconnected system. Water moves from chalk uplands and catchments through settlements and rivers to the sea. Habitats cross farm boundaries and administrative borders. Towns and cities depend on their rural hinterlands for water, food, recreation and protection from climate risks. Urban habitats, street trees and accessible green spaces form green infrastructure within this connected landscape, contributing to cooling, biodiversity and wellbeing within built-up areas. Their protection and recovery need to inform urban growth so residents retain access to nature as places develop.



Protected landscapes and environmental designations. Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of Ordnance Survey and MHCLG planning data.

The South Downs provides drinking water for around 1.2 million people and Brighton and Hove depends heavily on the chalk aquifer. Water availability influences development, while abstraction can affect chalk streams, wetlands and other sensitive habitats. Pollution from wastewater, agriculture and urban runoff travels through the same system. Intense rainfall, groundwater, constrained drainage and coastal conditions can combine to flood homes, businesses and infrastructure.

Regional water-resource plans forecast that, without action, the South East could face a supply shortfall of nearly one billion litres a day by 2035, rising to 2.7 billion litres a day by 2075. The response will involve new infrastructure and transfers, alongside leakage reduction, lower demand, water reuse and less abstraction from environmentally sensitive sources. These measures cannot be separated neatly into supply, development and environmental policy. Decisions about housing and employment growth need to reflect water availability and drainage capacity, while investment in catchments can improve river, groundwater and coastal water quality, restore habitats and reduce flood risk.

Our existing Local Nature Recovery Strategies adopt the same connected logic. West Sussex uses a source-to-sea approach, while the East Sussex and Brighton and Hove strategy links uplands, river catchments, urban areas and the coast. Both seek to protect the strongest remaining habitats, improve their condition and reconnect them.

The pressures and opportunities take different forms in different places. Brighton and Hove's growth depends closely on the condition and capacity of the chalk aquifer. West Sussex combines productive farmland and development pressure with substantial surface-water and coastal flood risk. East Sussex includes fragmented habitats, river catchments and coastal communities exposed to erosion and flooding. The system is connected, but the interventions required will vary by place.

A productive landscape

Land-based industries employ around 16,600 people, accounting for 2.2% of employment across Sussex and Brighton, compared with 1.6% in England and 1.9% across the South East. Agriculture accounts for about two-thirds of these jobs and landscape services a further 21%. These activities are particularly important in Chichester, Horsham, Lewes, Rother and Wealden. They produce food and materials, manage much of Sussex and Brighton's land and help maintain the qualities that attract residents, visitors and

investment. Maintaining productive soils, water and viable farming and fishing activity is also part of food security. Resilient production and supply networks can help communities withstand climate pressures and disruption while sustaining the landscape's economic contribution.

The visitor economy extends this contribution. 2019 estimates suggest that tourism generated £5 billion of economic impact and supported 74,000 jobs in 2019. The strongest route to growth in this sector lies in increasing value, length of stay and visitor spend, rather than relying on higher volumes. Staying visitors accounted for only 11% of visits but half of visitor spending. This places a premium on the quality of the whole offer, including landscapes, food, heritage, culture, accommodation, transport and public realm.

Farmers and land managers are being asked to produce food, restore nature, improve water quality, reduce flooding and adapt to climate change, often with narrow margins and uncertain income. Smaller farms can find it difficult to enter environmental schemes or assemble viable projects. Declining farm viability would weaken landscape management, while poorly designed environmental investment could displace production without securing lasting change.

There is an opportunity to connect stewardship more directly to rural enterprise and investment. Local food, forestry, regenerative farming, nature restoration, water management and low-impact tourism can support new markets and skills. Catchment and landscape-scale programmes can aggregate smaller projects, reduce transaction costs and create investable propositions with several benefits. The aim should be to make good land management economically durable, while ensuring that public and private finance produces measurable improvement rather than a collection of short-term schemes.

The South Downs receives around 19 million visits a year and 2 million people live within ten kilometres of the National Park. Public transport, income, disability, confidence and awareness shape whether people can enjoy it. Better connections can widen participation and spread visitor spending while managing pressure on sensitive places. Accessible green and blue spaces also support activity, mental wellbeing and social connection.

A creative and culturally alive place

Farming, fishing, industry, architecture, settlement and recreation have shaped the places people recognise today. Artists, writers, performers and cultural organisations continue that process. Culture contributes to the visitor offer, town-centre renewal and local identity, while giving communities ways to understand change and shape it.

Across Sussex and Brighton, employment in culture is 27% more concentrated than the national average, and this concentration rises to over double in Brighton and Hove and over three times in Lewes. This strength is supported by a broad network of festivals, venues, heritage organisations and independent practitioners. It is also unevenly distributed and often depends on small organisations or freelance work, so a strong public profile can coexist with insecure livelihoods, gaps in infrastructure and communities whose cultural participation remains limited.

Culture supports skills and enterprise, animates high streets and visitor destinations, and can help people engage with nature, heritage and climate risk in ways that formal consultation rarely achieves. Cultural and creative activity is especially valuable where it allows distinctive places to develop on their own terms, rather than compete through a uniform offer.

Nature recovery and climate resilience

Environmental designation is one of Sussex and Brighton's defining features. Nevertheless, many habitats are small, disconnected or degraded, with characteristic species in decline. For example, even within one of Sussex and Brighton's most protected landscapes, Chichester Harbour lost 58% of its saltmarsh between 1946 and 2016, an average of 2.54 hectares a year.

A key task is to improve ecological condition and restore connection across the wider landscape. Protected sites remain central, but their resilience depends on what happens around them. Nature recovery needs to extend through farmland, river catchments, towns, transport corridors and the coast. This will also determine whether the landscape continues to provide clean water, productive soils, cooling, flood management and access to nature as conditions change.

Climate change is increasing pressure across the whole system. Heavier rainfall and rising groundwater increase flood risk. In West Sussex, for example, more than 65,000 properties are in areas susceptible to surface-water flooding. Sea-level rise and erosion affect coastal communities and infrastructure. Changing growing conditions and hotter, drier periods place pressure on farming, food production, water supply, health, soils and habitats, while increasing the risks of wildfire, pests and disease. These effects are not felt evenly across communities: coastal settlements, areas with constrained drainage, people in poor-quality housing and businesses dependent on land, water or seasonal visitors are particularly exposed. Drought and disruption to production and supply can affect food security; household food insecurity also reflects incomes and affordability. Climate pressures can increase physical and mental health risks, particularly for people with fewer resources to adapt.

Adaptation needs to be built into decisions about development, infrastructure and investment. The location and design of new homes, the management of catchments and coasts, the resilience of utilities and transport, and the ability of businesses to prepare will all affect the scale of future disruption. Mitigation should be pursued through the same practical choices. Better soils can retain water, store carbon and support productivity. Wetlands can restore habitat and reduce flood risk. Trees and green space can moderate heat, improve health and make urban areas more attractive. These benefits are strongest when they are planned together.

What this means for policy

The living landscape is part of Sussex and Brighton's productive base, but its future value depends on its condition, the viability of those who care for it and the capacity of natural systems and infrastructure to support change. Decisions about development, water, energy, climate resilience, nature, culture and access therefore cannot be made independently. The choices concern where capacity can be expanded, where limits must shape the pace or form of growth, and which investments can create lasting environmental, economic and social value together.

Environmental assets are also part of Sussex and Brighton's productive base. The coast, protected landscapes and rural environment support the visitor economy, food production, quality of place and the attraction of people and businesses. Nature recovery, regenerative land use, climate adaptation and natural capital investment can create activity and increase resilience. The underlying choice concerns which forms and locations of growth can strengthen environmental and economic value together. Where objectives compete, the Local Growth Plan, Spatial Development Strategy and investment appraisal will make

choices explicit, considering statutory requirements, environmental capacity, public benefit and long-term resilience. This allows trade-offs to be assessed in context rather than setting a blanket hierarchy between economic and environmental aims. Appropriate development can support these assets through good location, design and mitigation, while some environmental limits constrain the scale or form of growth.

Developing the priorities

Productive land, sea and nature recovery

Farmers and growers are using technology, data and new production methods. Food and wine can connect local produce with hospitality and tourism. Marine and clean-energy businesses can draw on the ports, universities and coastal location. Better access to finance, research, skills and markets would help firms modernise and retain more value locally. Storage, flexible demand, community energy and local supply chains can connect the energy transition with enterprise and skills. These opportunities require coordination across generation, heat and electricity networks, without assuming local generation automatically reduces bills.

Environmental improvement can itself create skilled work and viable income. Nature recovery, soil restoration, woodland creation and water management all require long-term stewardship. Markets for natural capital may help finance this work when they deliver measurable gains and work for land managers and communities.

Offshore wind has already made clean energy visible from the Sussex coast. The proposed expansion of Rampion could generate enough electricity to power more than one million homes. This opportunity for Sussex and Brighton includes generation, ports, engineering, construction, skills and supply chains, as well as the careful management of effects on marine habitats, landscapes and communities.

Sussex's pioneers show what we can build on. Knepp connects ecological restoration with research, food and visitors. Sussex Bay brings partners and communities together around marine recovery. Wakehurst and the Millennium Seed Bank connect global science with education and public experience. We will build from Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Weald to Waves and existing landscape and catchment partnerships to connect action at a wider scale.

Water, energy and resilient places

We will connect water and energy planning with housing, transport and economic priorities, building on heat-network work and existing partnerships. This energy-systems approach will build on councils' existing energy and climate work through a cross-sector partnership and Local Area Energy Plan, linked to the Spatial Development Strategy and infrastructure planning, alongside Sussex Energy's role in connecting partners. Bridging support for Sussex Energy is intended to conclude time-limited activity and mainstream ongoing work. Detailed delivery and resource arrangements will be addressed through the delivery plan. Existing urban areas, public buildings and business sites also need capacity for electrification, efficiency and resilience. Potential Warm Homes responsibilities will be considered as devolved powers and resources become clear.

Good planning must recognise the capacity of land and water, guide development to suitable locations and improve nature through the design of homes, infrastructure and public space. Healthy soils, trees, wetlands and coastal habitats can reduce risk alongside engineered defences. Reducing emissions belongs in the same decisions, through energy-efficient homes, lower-carbon journeys, resource-efficient businesses and land

management that stores carbon while sustaining production. Nature-based solutions should be assessed alongside or in combination with engineered options, considering effectiveness, cost and wider benefits.

Culture and access

More than 10,000 creative businesses operate across Sussex, alongside a large freelance workforce and cultural organisations of very different scales. Their work contributes to employment and visitor spending, and also shapes how places feel and how communities understand themselves. The strength lies in the connections between recognised institutions, independent producers and activity rooted in towns, villages and neighbourhoods.

Access to nature and culture remains uneven, including in communities close to celebrated places. Safe routes, welcoming spaces and affordable transport can widen participation. Citizen science, stewardship and creative activity can bring local knowledge into decisions. Widening access should allow more people to share the health and wellbeing benefits while safeguarding the natural capital that sustains them.

Brighton's festivals, Chichester's theatre, Glyndebourne, Charleston, Bexhill's De La Warr Pavilion, Goodwood and local practitioners strengthen identity, enterprise and the visitor economy. Income, access and transport affect participation. Culture also helps communities interpret change and shape their places.

Further development

Further work should connect nature recovery, growth and infrastructure across catchments, landscapes and the coast, strengthen cultural participation and freelance evidence, and test investment propositions for measurable benefits, viable stewardship, commercial returns and public value.

Backing business across Sussex and Brighton

The change we seek

We will connect Sussex and Brighton's research, industrial and creative strengths with the skills, finance, premises and markets firms need to invest, innovate and grow. Our ambition is more good work and more value retained locally, with smaller businesses across the economy able to adapt and prosper.

Strategic priorities

9. Turn Sussex and Brighton's innovation strengths into local growth
10. Enable more local businesses to invest, adapt and reach new markets

What the evidence tells us

Most firms are small, specialist advice and finance are relatively thin, and knowledge does not always flow to businesses and communities that could apply it. Connecting firms and places within a productive business ecosystem is central to realising their potential.

Businesses recruit, trade and collaborate across administrative boundaries. Universities and colleges serve firms across Sussex and Brighton, while workers travel between homes, employment centres and transport corridors.

The strength of these relationships varies. North-south connections towards London are generally more established than east-west connections within Sussex. Business networks often follow historic local authority, programme or institutional boundaries. Firms outside the largest centres can be physically close to expertise and opportunity while remaining weakly connected to them.

Most businesses in Sussex and Brighton are small, including a substantial microbusiness base.

Everyday enterprise

These firms are central to the way the economy functions. Independent retailers, care providers, builders, manufacturers, farms, hospitality businesses, professional practices and social enterprises provide employment and services across Sussex and Brighton. They sustain town centres and visitor destinations, form local supply chains and create opportunities in places that do not host major employers.

Five-year business survival across Sussex and Brighton is slightly above the national rate overall and substantially higher in East and West Sussex. This indicates persistence and adaptability, including through a period of pandemic disruption, higher energy costs and changing patterns of demand.

Business formation is less strong. The regional business birth rate is 9.3%, below 10% in the South East and 11.2% in England. Brighton and Hove records the highest business birth rate in the area, but also the lowest five-year survival rate, at 30%. East and West Sussex have fewer starts and appreciably higher survival. This creates different local dynamics: rapid formation and churn in Brighton and Hove; a more stable, slower-changing stock across much of the rest of Sussex.

Owner-managers frequently lack the time and internal capacity to navigate finance, regulation, technology, skills provision and public support. A major investment may depend on one individual having the confidence, information and headroom to proceed.

These constraints are significant because productivity increasingly depends on adopting capabilities developed elsewhere. Digital systems, artificial intelligence, automation, energy efficiency and better management can raise productivity well beyond the technology sector, but smaller firms often lack the time, skills and organisational capacity to use them effectively.

Similar barriers affect the transition to a lower-carbon economy. Many businesses could cut costs and improve resilience through greater energy and resource efficiency, but struggle to identify credible options or finance upfront investment. Leased, older or shared premises can further limit what firms can do.

Conditions also vary by sector and place. Rural firms face weaker connectivity and smaller markets; coastal economies more seasonal demand and lower-paid employment; and high streets are adjusting unevenly to changing retail and working patterns. Construction, care, hospitality and agriculture continue to face recruitment pressures and tight margins.

Sussex and Brighton's business base is therefore resilient but constrained. It supports substantial employment and local value, yet many firms have limited capacity to invest and adapt. Small productivity gains across a large number of established businesses could therefore have a significant cumulative effect.

Innovation and growth

Sussex and Brighton has a strong base of research, creativity and technical expertise. Its universities undertake internationally recognised research, while businesses have distinctive capabilities in quantum technologies, advanced engineering, digital production, games, health and life sciences, semiconductors, energy management and environmental innovation.

Some strengths are rooted in dense local relationships. East Sussex's vacuum technology cluster reflects decades of specialist knowledge and supply chains; Brighton's creative and digital economy draws on links between freelancers, studios, universities and larger firms; and advanced engineering around Gatwick and Crawley benefits from aviation demand and international markets. Emerging quantum activity links University of Sussex research with commercial development in Mid Sussex.

Investment in facilities such as Plus X Innovation, the Advanced Engineering Centre and 5G infrastructure has helped businesses access equipment, expertise and networks, while university-SME and clean-growth programmes have supported products, collaborations, employment and environmental improvements.

Innovation includes applying creative capabilities, engineering, data, design and new production methods in established businesses as well as start-ups. Equity investment is concentrated in Brighton and Hove and parts of West Sussex. Innovate UK-supported businesses are more widely distributed, suggesting that innovative capability extends beyond the places attracting most private growth capital.

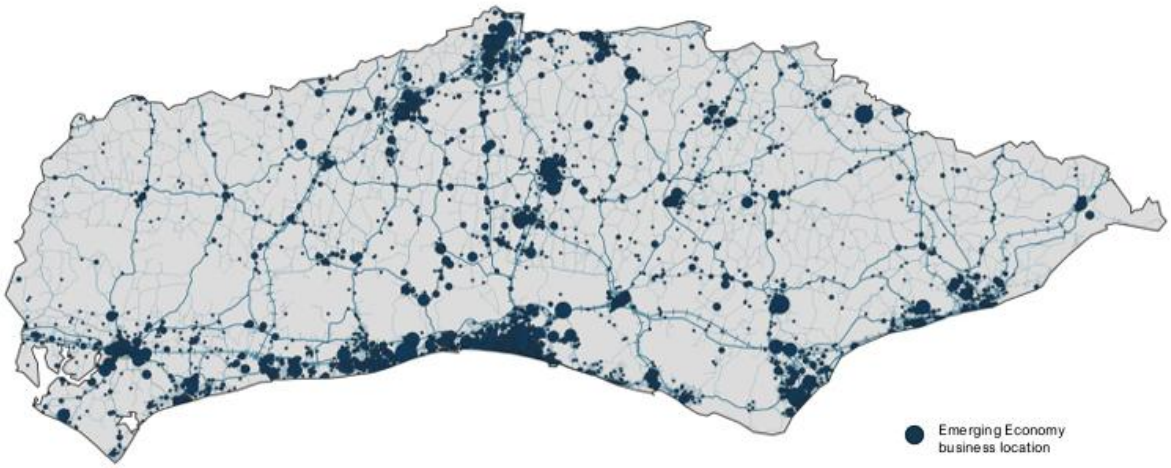
The evidence points to relatively strong process innovation and market-new products, but weaker internal R&D and product innovation than the wider South East. This suggests significant ingenuity, but fewer larger firms able to sustain substantial innovation functions.

Scale remains a persistent weakness. Sussex and Brighton produces fewer high-growth businesses relative to its business population than the South East or England. Moving from start-up to established growth company requires experienced leadership, specialist skills, patient finance, premises, customers and new markets. Weakness in any of these can interrupt growth.

Firms may be created locally but find it difficult to progress or move elsewhere for finance, staff and premises. Others remain viable without achieving their potential productivity or investment growth.

Finance illustrates this problem. Sussex and Brighton is close to London's financial markets and Brighton attracts equity investment, but access is thinner outside established networks, for firms seeking modest growth capital and for established businesses that do not fit conventional venture models. Proximity to capital does not always create investable relationships.

Commercialisation also depends on stronger links between universities, businesses, investors and public institutions. The challenge is therefore one of conversion and diffusion: turning research into commercial activity, helping firms progress through successive stages of growth, and spreading new technologies and practices across the wider business base.



Metro Dynamics analysis of Data City (2026). Note: Size of each point is the natural log of the number of companies registered at a postcode. Larger points represent locations with multiple businesses like office buildings, business parks etc and/or the locations of large corporates with multiple registered companies.

Unlocking investment

Business investment depends on several conditions aligning: confidence in demand, finance, premises, infrastructure, skills and delivery certainty. Sussex and Brighton contains strong opportunities, but these conditions do not align consistently.

Fixed capital investment per person is below national and South East levels, limiting the equipment, technology, buildings and infrastructure available to businesses. Investment is stronger around Crawley and north-eastern West Sussex, influenced by Gatwick and larger employers, while parts of East Sussex and coastal West Sussex attract less.

Commercial property is part of the constraint. Sussex and Brighton has around 25 million square feet of office space, but only 9% is Grade A, compared with 13% across the South East, and little new office space entered the market in 2025. Brighton and Hove combines relatively high vacancy with shortages of affordable, flexible and specialist workspace, reflecting a mismatch between available stock and business need.

Industrial space has grown modestly, but only 5% is Grade A. East Sussex faces acute shortages of industrial and expansion space in several locations, while West Sussex combines some vacancy with pressure for modern space and well-connected strategic sites.

Without suitable next-stage premises firms may be unable to expand or may relocate. Land values, construction costs and achievable rents affect development viability, while grid capacity, water, transport, digital connectivity, planning and remediation determine whether sites are investment ready.

Sussex and Brighton has investment propositions around Gatwick, Brighton and Hove, the West Sussex growth corridors, Newhaven, coastal regeneration and strategic employment sites. These are currently presented through multiple local and subregional identities, making their relationship less clear to external investors.

Business support is similarly fragmented. Growth Hubs, local authorities, universities, chambers, sector bodies and national agencies provide advice and specialist programmes, but successive funding rounds have created different eligibility rules, geographies, brands and timescales. Businesses often experience the system as temporary schemes rather than a continuous route from advice through to specialist support, finance and investment.

The same applies to inward investment. Sussex and Brighton has strong assets, international connections and quality of place, but converting interest into investment requires credible sites, timely information, workforce solutions and continued support. Existing investors are especially important because expansion, reinvestment and supply-chain activity can generate value quickly.

Together, these conditions help explain why significant private wealth, entrepreneurial activity and research strength coexist with relatively weak productive investment. Capital exists, but the routes connecting it to firms, projects and places remain incomplete.

What this means for policy

The business evidence describes an economy with widely distributed enterprise and specialist capabilities, but weaker connections between firms, knowledge, finance, skills, premises and markets. Its future performance will depend on how far these connections enable more firms to invest, innovate and grow while raising productivity across the wider business base. This creates choices about the balance between established strengths and emerging opportunities, the places in which investment could unlock the greatest value, and the sequence in which business support, infrastructure and growth finance are developed.

The Local Growth Plan will establish the balance between focused support for firms and sectors with strong potential to scale and wider improvements in management, technology and workforce capability. These approaches serve different purposes, with different expected returns and timescales. Creative and digital industries, life sciences and MedTech, and advanced manufacturing offer distinct routes to higher-value work. Their supply chains, technologies and skills can also improve productivity and progression in foundational sectors.

Equity investment is concentrated in relatively few businesses and places, while Innovate UK-supported firms are more widely distributed. Stronger routes into specialist advice, commercial partners, premises and investment can broaden access while maintaining competitive concentrations of expertise.

Health and care, tourism, retail, hospitality and culture remain major sources of employment. Procurement, digital adoption, workforce progression and local supply chains can connect these sectors to innovation strengths and improve productivity and pay.

Developing the priorities

A stronger innovation ecosystem

Around 62% of jobs sit within the foundational economy, with 22% in the eight sectors identified nationally as having particular potential for innovation, exports and productivity. The boundary is fluid. Business policy should encourage innovation across the economy while concentrating specialist support where Sussex and Brighton has genuine capability.

Businesses need easier routes into research, technology, specialist skills, finance and suitable space. Researchers need opportunities to test ideas with industry, while founders need experienced peers, early customers and patient investment. Public bodies can support innovation through procurement, facilities and data where appropriate. Stronger relationships can help more ideas become commercial products and allow growing firms to remain in Sussex and Brighton. NHS research, clinical evaluation and adoption complement university and business capabilities, including in health and life sciences.

University of Sussex research, Universal Quantum in Haywards Heath and specialist vacuum and mu-metal manufacturers provide different parts of Sussex's quantum proposition. Shared facilities, coordinated skills pathways and a clearer offer to investors and government could connect these strengths and retain more investment and skilled work locally.

Sustained relationships with local businesses

Town and city centres concentrate employment, commerce, culture and public services. Retail and hospitality face changing patterns of demand, making their adaptation and regeneration part of the wider business agenda. Independent firms give places character and provide accessible work. Their success depends on spending power, public space, transport, safety and the mix of homes and services around them. Regeneration should help existing traders adapt, bring empty space back into use and create room for new firms and social enterprise. Lancing Business Park and Manor Royal illustrate the role of established employment hubs alongside smaller premises. Public estates, reuse and suitable new space can support a better balance of homes, jobs and services.

The conditions for investment

The Strategic Authority will align planning, transport, infrastructure and skills around clear opportunities, guided by the Local Growth Plan, Spatial Development Strategy and investment framework. Devolved funding can support project development and enabling infrastructure. Public procurement and major investment can also open opportunities for local workers and suppliers and secure social and environmental benefits appropriate to the proposition. Business engagement should reach diverse founders and established businesses, including LGBTQ+ and other underrepresented business communities, to understand barriers to investment and growth.

The Strategic Authority will support Crawley Borough Council's case for reviewing the continued safeguarding of land south of Gatwick Airport for a possible additional runway. Releasing land no longer required for that purpose could create a significant opportunity for employment space and wider economic growth. Any future development would need to be tested through the relevant spatial and local planning processes, including its infrastructure requirements and environmental effects.

Further development

The Local Growth Plan will identify the specialist opportunities where focused support can achieve most, alongside ways to improve productivity across everyday enterprise. Growth Hub transition provides an opportunity to connect general advice with specialist support, finance and investor relationships. Premises, utilities, skills and market access need to be considered together when assessing firms' expansion plans.

Strong, safe and healthy communities

The change we seek

Our ambition is for people to feel safe, find trusted support, contribute to community life and influence decisions that affect them. We will build on the relationships, good health and preparedness that underpin all four pathways, helping people participate, businesses trade and places respond to shocks and recover.

Strategic priorities

11. Connect community organisations to the decisions that shape Sussex and Brighton
12. Pioneer a place-led approach to community safety and resilience

What the evidence tells us

Strong, safe and healthy communities shape whether people can learn, work, travel and use public space, whether businesses can trade with confidence, and how well places respond to shocks. These conditions depend on local relationships, health, safety and the capacity to adapt.

Social infrastructure creates capacity within places

Communities draw strength from the relationships, organisations and shared spaces through which people meet, exchange knowledge and act together. Community centres, libraries, faith groups, sports clubs, cultural organisations, charities, social enterprises and informal networks help people find support and make a contribution. They also carry knowledge about local circumstances that is difficult to reproduce through regional datasets or formal consultation alone.

Feeling part of a neighbourhood, trusting the people around you and giving time to others are foundations of community life. The Community Life Survey, a national survey of adults in England, asks people about these experiences, including belonging, trust and volunteering. Its local estimates for 2024/25 suggest that around 53% of Crawley residents feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood, compared with 71% in Mid Sussex. Neighbourhood trust ranges from 29% in Crawley to more than 60% in Chichester. In most places across Sussex and Brighton, around three or four people in ten volunteer formally or informally at least once a month. As estimates drawn from a sample of residents, these figures give a broad picture rather than a precise ranking. They point to considerable differences in how connected people feel and how far they participate in community life.

Local evidence adds depth to this picture. Brighton & Hove's Health Counts survey (2024) found that 53% of adults felt a strong sense of belonging to their immediate neighbourhood, while 13% said they would have nobody to ask for help if they were ill in bed. In East Sussex, the Community Survey (2019, as reported in JSNA 2026) found that around a quarter of residents felt lonely often or some of the time. West Sussex's Your Health Matters community survey (2024, reported in the 2024/25 JSNA) found a deprivation gradient in mental wellbeing: 15% of respondents in the most deprived neighbourhoods had very low wellbeing scores, compared with 7% in the least deprived. Across these sources, the common finding is that connection is related to health, confidence and the practical ability to cope when circumstances change.

The voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector is central to this capacity. For example, current evidence from East Sussex shows organisations contributing to financial inclusion, neighbourhood health, support for children and families, loneliness and befriending, as well as representing community knowledge across dozens of strategic partnerships. It also records pressure on the time and resources needed to sustain that role.

Health is shaped through the conditions of everyday life

Healthy life expectancy varies markedly across Sussex and Brighton. In 2022–24, it was lowest in East Sussex, at 59.2 years for men and 59.9 for women, compared with 63.1 and 64.5 years respectively in West Sussex. Brighton & Hove recorded 61.1 years for men and 62.6 for women. Across Sussex and Brighton as a whole, healthy life expectancy was 61.5 years for men and 62.6 for women, illustrating significant variation in the number of years people can expect to live in good health.

Variation within each area is as important as the regional position. Using pooled 2018–20 data, West Sussex recorded life-expectancy gaps of 6.9 years for men and 5.8 years for women between its most and least deprived areas. Brighton and Hove's corresponding gaps for the same period were 9.1 and 7.7 years. East Sussex's 2026 JSNA reports life-expectancy differences of more than ten years between neighbourhoods. The pattern reflects differences in housing, employment, environment and access to support.

Poor health can narrow people's capacity to earn, care, learn and take part, while insecure housing, low income and isolation can further damage health. Brighton and Hove has high reported mental-health need and more than 50,000 adults with multiple long-term conditions. East Sussex combines an older population with coastal inequalities. In West Sussex, poorer health and mental wellbeing, higher smoking rates and greater loneliness are reported in more deprived communities.

Safety is uneven and affects participation

Sussex remains relatively safe on several headline measures. In the year ending March 2026, police recorded 130,298 crimes excluding fraud, equivalent to 74.0 crimes per 1,000 residents compared with 83.45 across England. Crime Survey estimates also suggest that around three quarters of adults trust their local police and around two thirds have overall confidence in them. These regional figures provide useful context, while concealing substantial differences in demand, experience and confidence.

Recorded crime rates ranged from around 41 to 45 per 1,000 residents in Wealden, Horsham and Mid Sussex to around 100 or more in Brighton and Hove, Crawley, Eastbourne and Hastings. The higher-rate places include town centres, visitor economies, transport gateways and concentrations of retail and night-time activity, so resident-population rates do not capture every source of demand. They also include communities experiencing deeper deprivation and vulnerability. Rural and commuter areas face a different mix of harms, including domestic abuse, fraud, exploitation, road danger, rural crime and under-reporting, which can be less visible in headline totals.

Sussex recorded a higher shoplifting rate than England in 2025/26, with particularly high rates in several urban and coastal areas. Stalking and harassment also increased, while police evidence shows rising antisocial behaviour and recorded hate crime during 2024. Serious sexual offences, domestic abuse, exploitation and mental-health-related incidents can cause lasting harm, and place complex demands on police and other services, adding an important dimension to the headline crime figures.

Sussex-wide survey evidence offers a further perspective on how safety is experienced. In the Crime Survey for England and Wales for the year ending March 2026, around 39% of adults reported experiencing or witnessing antisocial behaviour, while 19% considered it a significant problem locally. Fewer than half agreed that the police and councils were dealing effectively with local crime and antisocial behaviour. These estimates carry wide confidence intervals, and the experience question changed in April 2025, but together they reveal an important distinction: relatively low regional crime rates do not necessarily translate into confidence that local problems are visible, understood and being addressed.

Perceived safety also determines the practical reach of economic and social opportunity. Transport links, jobs and town-centre amenities may be available in principle while becoming less accessible at particular times or to people who feel more exposed to risk. For businesses, persistent antisocial behaviour and retail crime create cumulative pressures through security costs, demands on staff, reduced dwell time and weakened confidence in a location. Investment in transport, high streets and the visitor and evening economies will therefore achieve more where safety is treated as part of how places are designed, managed and supported.

Prevention depends on connected institutions and trusted relationships

Harm rarely develops within the boundaries of a single service. Trauma, school exclusion and insecure housing can increase a young person's exposure to exploitation. Poor mental health, financial pressure and social isolation can make people more vulnerable to abuse or fraud. In each case, opportunities to prevent harm arise before it becomes a policing or emergency-service matter. They depend on professionals and communities recognising changes in risk, sharing intelligence and providing support that people trust enough to use.

Sussex already has a substantial prevention network. Community Safety Partnerships bring together councils, policing, health and probation, while safeguarding arrangements, public-health teams and specialist partnerships focus on particular forms of vulnerability. Fire and rescue services use their contact with households, businesses and communities to identify risk and prevent emergencies. Voluntary and community organisations often provide the trusted relationships through which people disclose problems, accept support or remain connected during periods of difficulty.

Trust is more likely to endure where people can see that concerns have been heard, responsibility is clear and action is followed through. Council regulatory services contribute through licensing, environmental health and place management. Coastal partnerships need to anticipate seasonal demand, while rural communities may face less visible exploitation and barriers to reporting.

The Strategic Authority's emerging responsibilities create an opportunity to connect strategic public-safety oversight with transport, housing, health, employment and investment. Shared intelligence can identify accumulating vulnerabilities and opportunities for earlier action. Clear accountability, operational independence and strong local partnerships remain essential.

Resilience protects lives, services and livelihoods

Resilience concerns the ability of places to continue functioning when normal systems come under pressure. The Sussex Community Risk Register identifies threats ranging from severe weather and infectious disease to infrastructure failure, cyberattack and major transport incidents. These risks can combine and cascade. Flooding can interrupt transport, power and care services at the same time; a cyber incident can disrupt businesses, public

services and communication with residents. The severity of an emergency therefore depends partly on the strength of the systems and relationships around it.

Coastal communities face flooding, erosion and rising sea levels. Rural communities can be harder to reach and depend on private transport, local utilities and small networks of support. Gatwick, ports and major corridors connect Sussex to wider systems while transmitting disruption. Ageing and poor health increase the support some communities need during evacuation, service failure and recovery.

Climate change is increasing the likelihood that several pressures occur together. Heat and drought affect health, water supply, agriculture and wildfire risk; heavier rainfall and rising sea levels threaten homes, businesses and infrastructure. The consequences are shaped by existing inequalities. Households in poor-quality accommodation, isolated residents and businesses with limited reserves usually have less capacity to prepare, absorb losses and recover. Resilience investment can therefore reduce future costs while protecting participation and economic confidence.

Community organisations, businesses and residents hold knowledge about vulnerable people, premises, communications and practical capacity. These assets are most useful when relationships are established before emergencies and sustained through recovery. Preparedness should build local capability alongside professional response, recognising pressures on voluntary organisations and informal networks.

Development, transport, energy, water, digital connectivity and community infrastructure can reduce exposure or embed vulnerabilities for decades. Considering resilience within existing appraisal and planning arrangements can connect adaptation with the Sussex Resilience Forum, councils and emergency services, helping protect services and support recovery.

What this means for policy

Sussex and Brighton has strong civic, community and institutional capacity, but the protection it provides is uneven. Where poor health, insecurity, weak trust and limited access to support overlap, people have less capacity to participate, and places are more exposed to harm and disruption. Prevention and resilience can strengthen the foundations on which investment, employment and community life depend.

The strategic task is to identify where coordinated action can change several conditions at once, connect Sussex-wide responsibilities with local knowledge, and make prevention part of investment rather than a separate service response. Progress should be judged by whether people across Sussex and Brighton can use their communities with confidence, find trusted support when circumstances change and rely on systems capable of anticipating and responding to risk.

Developing the priorities

Community knowledge and capacity

Deepening connections between community organisations, public services, businesses and local institutions can help more organisations share their knowledge, shape decisions and sustain the work that helps people and places thrive.

The East Sussex Commissioning Excellence Programme brings voluntary organisations, the County Council and NHS partners together to improve service design and commissioning. Developed by the East Sussex VCSE Alliance and County Council, it shows how community knowledge can shape support and strengthen relationships with public bodies.

Safety, cyber security and resilience

Cyber security protects businesses, public services and essential infrastructure from disruption, fraud and loss of trust. It is also a growing economic activity supporting skilled jobs. Sussex and Brighton can connect its strengths in digital, creative, life science, aviation and advanced industries with the skills and supply chains that this work requires.

Safety depends on the design and upkeep of streets and shared spaces, reliable services, prevention and the work of local partners. It also depends on how well communities and institutions respond to violence, abuse, antisocial behaviour and hate crime. Council regulatory services help create safe, healthy and well-managed high streets and visitor destinations. Rural and coastal approaches need to reflect dispersed communities, seasonal pressures and exploitation risks. Relevant existing OPCC policies provide a base for road and water safety, rural crime and security at gateways, with further consideration through transition.

Further development

Priority-setting should consider health, insecurity and community capacity alongside economic role and development potential. The opportunities for early action depend on trusted local partnerships, the practical capacity of community organisations and clear responsibilities between services. Shared evidence and evaluation should help identify whether coordinated action improves safety, confidence, access to support and the ability to respond to shocks. Overlapping barriers associated with disability, ethnicity, faith, caring responsibilities, sexual orientation or gender identity also need to inform policy and engagement. Diverse communities contribute knowledge, enterprise and civic capacity as well as facing different risks and opportunities.

3. Turning shared ambition into action

Our role and relationships

Sussex and Brighton's prosperity depends on decisions made across businesses, communities, councils, public services and institutions. The evidence shows how closely these decisions are connected. Housing delivery depends on infrastructure and environmental capacity; business growth requires premises, skills and reliable services; participation in work and learning is shaped by health, affordability and access.

Brighton and Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex provide the Authority's democratic foundation, to be strengthened by the election of a Mayor in 2028. District and borough councils, town and parish councils, the National Park Authority and other partners bring essential responsibilities and networks.

The Authority will lead where it holds a clear duty, coordinate where decisions need alignment and support action led by others where they have the strongest knowledge and capacity.

The Authority will exercise this place leadership through democratic representation, strategic planning, convening, commissioning, investment and shared learning. These roles will develop as responsibilities transfer and partners identify where working at Sussex and Brighton scale can change an outcome.

The national Rewiring the State programme is expected to extend the scope of devolution, including skills and employment, fiscal autonomy, public service reform and the coordination of infrastructure. We will prepare to use these opportunities to advance Sussex and Brighton's priorities, updating our approach as the responsibilities and resources available become clear. Devolution could help partners align prevention, neighbourhood working and commissioning around shared outcomes.

A shared voice and connected plans

The Local Growth Plan will establish a ten-year economic framework, identifying sector strengths, cooperation opportunities and constraints requiring joint action with government. It will make choices about economic opportunities, places and investment, connecting local capabilities with the national Industrial Strategy. The Mayor will strengthen Sussex and Brighton's voice with government, national institutions and investors.

Partnerships that connect decisions

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 gives the Mayor a statutory power to convene partners within the Authority's areas of competence, with a duty on specified partners to respond to meeting notifications. This complements the Board's convening role, helping partners resolve shared challenges, align resources and agree action.

The Chair of the Surrey and Sussex Integrated Care Board is Associate Member for Health Outcomes, with a reciprocal SBSA appointment planned. These links complement the Sussex Health and Care Assembly and existing council and health-service cooperation.

The Chair of the South Downs National Park is Associate Member for Protected Landscapes. The Representatives Panel will bring together all twelve district and borough councils, alongside representatives of the East Sussex and West Sussex Associations of Local Councils for advisory business. It will provide an early sounding board on the Prosperity Strategy, Local Growth Plan, Spatial Development Strategy and wider policy framework. Its

advice will accompany relevant Board reports, with the Board's response reported back to the Panel.

The Panel will nominate one district and borough representative for East Sussex and one for West Sussex to the Board, and representatives to the two non-voting district and borough seats on Overview and Scrutiny, for appointment by the Board. Parish and town council representatives contribute to advisory business and do not vote on nominations. The Panel complements formal scrutiny and wider public consultation.

The new Business Advisory Board will bring firms of different sizes, sectors and places into strategy and delivery. Its Chair will serve as Associate Member for Business, with members advising Transport and Investment Committees. Formal investment decisions remain subject to appraisal and authorised governance.

SBSA also contributes to Regional Energy Strategic Planning, connecting Sussex and Brighton's priorities to wider South East infrastructure planning. Across these relationships, the practical task is to identify shared opportunities, resolve barriers and agree who will act.

Our responsibilities and approach

The nine areas of competence provide a comprehensive account of the Authority's starting position and the policy instruments available to advance the pathways. The Authority's general power of competence provides further scope to act, subject to legal limits, alongside its specific functions and funding.

The twelve priorities set the focus for our core work. The Authority's responsibilities, established frameworks and delivery relationships provide the means to advance them. Councils and wider partners retain essential statutory duties and operational roles.

Transport and infrastructure

The Strategic Authority can bring transport networks and investment decisions together so that more people can reliably access work, learning, services and other places that matter to them. It can align decisions across boundaries and modes with homes, jobs and growth.

The Strategic Authority is the Local Transport Authority, with functions held concurrently with constituent councils during the transition to mayoral arrangements. Councils retain day-to-day highways maintenance and local delivery responsibilities within the applicable governance arrangements. Delivery depends on operators, Transport for the South East, national bodies, neighbouring authorities, employers, service providers and the people who use the network. The Authority's role is to set the shared direction, coordinate funding and investment, and bring those partners together around journeys that cross organisational boundaries.

Existing plans and partnerships

The constituent councils' Local Transport Plans, Bus Service Improvement Plans and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans provide the immediate policy and delivery base. Transport for the South East's 2026 Strategic Investment Plan provides a wider framework for major connections. The emerging transport investment programme builds on local plans and prioritises proposals. The first Sussex and Brighton Local Transport Plan will need to set a shared direction and implementation approach, aligned with the emerging Spatial Development Strategy and growth plans. Local Plans and infrastructure delivery plans will help connect transport priorities with development and the services places need.

Policy considerations

Access, as well as network capacity. Improving a major corridor will deliver less value if people cannot afford the journey, reach the station, travel at the times they need or complete the final part of the trip.

Different places need different solutions. The strongest case for a road, rail, bus, active travel or demand-responsive intervention will depend on the geography and the opportunity it is intended to unlock. Relevant connections include the Arun Valley and West Coastway railways, the A24, A29 and A272, and routes from northern East Sussex towards neighbouring economies. The A21 and coastal rail links also connect the eastern coast with London, Kent and neighbouring places.

Growth and transport need a common sequence. Housing and employment proposals depend on transport capacity, while new development can help sustain better services. Water, energy and environmental constraints also affect when investment can be delivered.

Developing responsibilities

The planned bus-service study will inform consideration of bus policy later in 2027–28, including the options for partnerships and franchising. Subsequent transport plans will develop the delivery sequence. Cooperation with Network Rail, train operators and neighbouring authorities can develop the case for improvements to the Brighton Main Line and other rail connections, alongside timetables and ticketing.

Active travel funding will support walking, wheeling and cycling, alongside an emerging role in regulating micromobility options such as e-scooters. These measures will contribute to safer, more accessible local journeys.

Skills and employment

Skills and employment policy should help more people enter, remain in and progress through good work, while giving employers access to the people and capabilities they need. The Strategic Authority can connect education and training with the realities of local labour markets, health, housing and transport. Its new commissioning role also gives it a way to shape adult provision around shared priorities for Sussex and Brighton.

The Authority will work with colleges, universities, schools, independent providers, employers and their representatives, trade unions, councils, the NHS, DWP and voluntary organisations. The employer-led Local Skills Improvement Plan and the partnership behind Get Sussex Working provide starting points. The Authority's role is to commission and align provision, convene partners around transitions into work, and use evidence of employer demand and learner outcomes to improve decisions. Councils' responsibilities for participation and SEND, and the knowledge of independent providers, will inform joint working.

Existing plans and partnerships

The second Sussex and Brighton Local Skills Improvement Plan, Get Sussex Working Plan, current adult learning provision, Connect to Work, Skills Bootcamps and WorkWell are significant parts of the existing base. National employment and post-16 skills policy frames the new responsibilities. The planned transfer of the Adult Skills Fund brings provider commissioning, funding assurance and continuity of learning into the Authority's immediate programme.

Policy considerations

A regional skills offer has to respond to different labour markets, while making it easier for learners and employers to navigate provision across boundaries.

The test is progression into sustained and better work, alongside the supply of qualifications. Job quality, employer practice and barriers outside training need attention. The care workforce, unpaid carers and people returning after illness need learning and employment pathways that recognise their circumstances.

Major housing, transport, energy and airport investment will create workforce demands. The timing and location of training should be considered with those investment decisions. Clean-energy deployment needs to be matched with local supply-chain capacity and skills for installation, operation and maintenance, including improvements to the public estate.

Developing responsibilities

From August 2027, SBSA will take responsibility for Adult Skills Funding, commissioning councils, colleges and independent training providers to support learning for people aged 19 and over. Preparing for this transfer requires commissioning arrangements that connect residents' needs, employers' demand and the capacity of providers.

The Local Skills Improvement Plan and Get Sussex Working Plan provide important foundations, with the latter bringing together our constituent councils, DWP and the ICB. These relationships will help SBSA connect skills, employment and health support, improving routes into work and progression for people whose circumstances span several services.

Housing and strategic planning

The Strategic Authority can connect suitable, affordable homes with jobs, services and environmental capacity. Its distinctive contribution is to make decisions at a scale larger than individual Local Plans, align investment with that spatial picture, address land and infrastructure constraints and help partners overcome barriers to delivery. Shared place intelligence can identify strategic opportunities, infrastructure requirements and viability barriers, connect them to spatial choices and help partners develop deliverable investment propositions.

The Authority will work closely with constituent councils, district and borough planning and housing authorities, the South Downs National Park Authority, Homes England, registered providers, developers, landowners, utilities, environmental bodies and communities. Local authorities retain their statutory Local Plan and housing functions. The Authority can set a shared strategic framework, convene partners around complex opportunities and align transport, infrastructure and investment decisions. Delivery depends on strong local partnerships.

Existing plans and partnerships

Adopted and emerging Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans, local housing and homelessness strategies, infrastructure delivery plans and council investment programmes provide the existing base. The Spatial Development Strategy will form the Sussex-wide spatial framework, respecting its process and relationship to Local Plans. The Local Growth Plan and Investment Strategy will help unlock public and private investment. The developing Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England provides an opportunity to align housing and infrastructure priorities, including shared priorities and investment propositions with

councils and utility providers. Employment-land, water, energy, flood-risk and nature-recovery evidence will inform this work.

Policy considerations

More homes will only widen opportunity where location, tenure, quality and access to jobs and services work together. Different housing markets require different interventions. Social rent, community-led housing and accessible and adaptable homes can form part of a locally appropriate mix, with affordability considered against local incomes.

Water, energy, transport and environmental capacity affect where and when growth is possible. The Spatial Development Strategy and Local Growth Plan need a common prioritisation framework and sequence.

Strategic coordination must create practical value for the Local Planning Authorities and communities without anticipating site allocations or replacing local responsibilities. Strategic powers will be used within the applicable rules and governance arrangements, with councils and communities involved through the relevant processes.

Developing responsibilities

The Spatial Development Strategy will take a horizon of at least 25 years, setting out housing and employment needs, their broad distribution and supporting infrastructure. It will address regeneration, quality, environmental protection and climate resilience, reconciling needs with capacity and local character. Adoption is aimed for the end of 2029.

Local planning authorities, including the South Downs National Park Authority, will continue preparing Local Plans and allocating sites, and councils retain most planning decisions. Mayoral Development Corporations, Mayoral Development Orders and call-in powers provide additional tools for coordinated intervention in priority development.

A single Local Transport Plan, a Key Route Network and work building on Local Nature Recovery Strategies will help align growth, access, water, energy and environmental capacity.

Preparatory work on a Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England connects shared priorities and place evidence with a housing and regeneration pipeline. Learning from initial investments will inform longer-term propositions, alongside proportionate appraisal and assurance. Detailed delivery commitments will be developed through the delivery plan.

Economic development and regeneration

Economic development should help more firms start, invest and become productive, while enabling places to retain a greater share of the value they create. The Authority can join business support, innovation, sites, skills and investment across Sussex and Brighton, and use its convening and funding roles to address opportunities that are too large or complex for one organisation.

The Authority will work with businesses of different sizes, councils, universities and colleges, investors, lenders, business representative bodies, the Growth Hubs, national agencies, anchor institutions and community enterprises. Its role is to set a selective regional growth proposition, help firms navigate support, assemble an investment pipeline and coordinate action where sites or local economies need several partners to act together.

Existing plans and partnerships

The constituent and local economic strategies, recently published Sussex and Brighton visitor economy strategy, investment prospectuses, sector partnerships and the Sussex and Brighton Local Visitor Economy Partnership, destination partnerships and existing business

support form a substantial starting point. The developing Local Growth Plan will set a longer-term framework and priorities agreed with government. Growth Hub transition and continuity of support are immediate operational matters. The Authority's emerging investment approach proposes collaborative pipeline development and criteria covering strategic fit, value for money, deliverability, partnership contribution and learning.

Policy considerations

Support for firms with potential to scale and broader productivity support for the business base serve different purposes and may require different delivery models.

Sites, premises, energy, water, transport, housing and workforce capacity can determine whether an investment proposition is realisable.

Sussex and Brighton's several economic centres and external connections call for a clear shared proposition without treating every place or sector alike.

Developing responsibilities

In 2027, the three Growth Hubs will come under a single banner within a wider business-facing support service. Working with councils and networks, it will build sustained relationships with firms, understand expansion plans and coordinate responses on skills, premises and infrastructure.

Environment and climate change

Sussex and Brighton's natural environment is part of the foundation of prosperity. Nature recovery, climate adaptation and secure water and energy supplies protect people and productive activity while shaping where growth can happen. The Strategic Authority can connect existing environmental strategies to spatial, transport and investment decisions and help partners assemble delivery at a larger scale.

The Authority will need to work with councils, Protected Landscapes, environmental bodies, water and energy companies, land managers, farmers, ports, marine interests, universities, environmental partnerships, investors and communities. Many statutory delivery responsibilities remain with those partners. The Authority's contribution is to align plans, bring investment propositions together and use its own transport, planning and funding decisions to support resilience and recovery.

Existing plans and partnerships

The two Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategies, local climate plans, management plans for protected landscapes, catchment and coastal risk plans, water resource plans and statutory environmental protections form an extensive base. Partnerships including the Sussex Local Nature Partnership, Sussex marine and coastal forum and Weald to Waves already connect organisations around delivery. These should provide the starting point for a future Sussex-wide role rather than be displaced by a new programme. The Authority's future responsibility for a Sussex-wide Local Nature Recovery Strategy needs to be planned with the current responsible authorities.

Policy considerations

Nature recovery, climate adaptation and development need shared spatial evidence, but each has different statutory owners, investment models and timescales.

Water and energy constraints require early engagement with infrastructure providers. Coordinated utility investment should connect future demand, grid connections, heat, water availability and resilience with spatial and economic choices. Protecting river,

groundwater and coastal water quality is part of this strategic approach. Infrastructure choices should weigh economic, social, climate and environmental effects together.

Health, wellbeing and public service reform

Health and wellbeing shape people's ability to participate in work, learning and community life. The Authority can use its decisions on transport, housing, skills, employment and investment to improve the conditions for health, and bring partners together to test more preventative ways of working where services and responsibilities intersect.

The Surrey and Sussex Integrated Care Board, NHS providers, councils and Directors of Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards, schools, employers, DWP, Healthwatch, voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations and residents each hold essential knowledge or delivery capacity. The Authority is neither the main health commissioner nor a provider. Its particular contribution is to consider health in its own decisions, align wider determinants and use convening and evaluation to support practical reform with those who deliver services. Directors of Public Health bring expertise on population needs and inequalities; properly governed shared evidence can connect that insight with transport, housing, skills and investment choices.

Existing plans and partnerships

Improving Lives Together, successor integrated care arrangements, council Health and Wellbeing Strategies, Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and existing neighbourhood and public service reform programmes provide the starting point. Get Sussex Working and WorkWell connect health with employment. The Authority's duty to consider health improvement and health inequalities across its functions gives this competence a role in every major strategy and investment decision.

Policy considerations

Health inequalities often appear at a much smaller geography than regional averages reveal; the place and population selected for action matter. The three areas' JSNAs show how housing, income, access, social connection and physical and mental health interact. These relationships should inform policy across the pathways.

Reform and any co-commissioning require agreement on responsibilities, resources, risk, data and assurance between the relevant statutory bodies. Shared outcomes for health, wellbeing, participation and inequalities could help partners align place-based reform. Engagement and co-production where appropriate should inform the shape of support, including barriers faced by care leavers, carers and people with SEND.

The delivery plan will develop the scope of practical support with partners, taking account of neighbourhood care, existing local programmes, capacity and what the Authority can add.

Public safety

Safety and resilience shape whether people can participate and whether places and businesses can function with confidence. The Authority must establish sound governance for its fire and rescue responsibilities and the future mayoral policing role, while using its wider functions to address risks that cut across services, transport networks, public spaces and communities.

Effective prevention and resilience depend on established local and regional partnerships. The Authority can connect their intelligence and priorities with decisions on housing, health, transport, investment and neighbourhoods, while supporting scrutiny, assurance and visible

follow-through. The Chief Constable, fire leaders and other statutory partners will retain direction and control of their operational services.

Existing plans and partnerships

The Sussex Police and Crime Plan, fire and rescue Community Risk Management Plans, Community Safety Partnership priorities and Sussex Resilience Forum arrangements provide the existing base. Transition will proceed in line with the Board's adopted principles and governance.

Policy considerations

Governance transfer and operational independence must remain distinct. New strategic oversight should clarify accountability without prescribing operational policing or incident response.

The Authority will add most value where its wider powers connect prevention, place management and resilience with investment and strategic planning.

Transport safety, violence against women and girls, road danger and climate-related risks require several competences to act together.

Developing responsibilities

East and West Sussex fire and rescue responsibilities transfer in April 2027, followed by Police and Crime Commissioner functions in May 2028. A Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime will support the Mayor. Strategic planning and commissioning include support for victims and witnesses, with operational responsibilities remaining clear.

Following that transfer, the Mayor will provide leadership across the local criminal justice partnership, connecting police, prosecutors, courts, probation and other partners to improve effectiveness, support victims and reduce reoffending, respecting judicial and operational independence.

Culture

Culture, creativity and heritage help people shape and belong to their places, contribute to wellbeing and support the visitor and creative economies. The Authority can connect a distributed sector, make its contribution more visible in strategic decisions and create room for practitioners and communities to develop a shared agenda.

The Authority has a convening and strategic role rather than a large direct delivery function. Councils, Arts Council England, cultural and heritage bodies, creative businesses, universities and colleges, visitor economy organisations, funders, independent practitioners and communities will shape what can be done.

Existing plans and partnerships

Local cultural strategies, the East and West Sussex cultural prospectuses, the Greater Brighton creative industries vision, Arts Council England priorities and the Arts Council-funded review led by Culture Sussex provide a foundation. Existing venues, networks and projects provide the basis for collaborative policy development.

Policy considerations

The Authority can strengthen connections across Sussex and Brighton's cultural sector, building on existing networks and provision. This includes arts, libraries, heritage and community creative activity alongside commercial creative industries.

Evidence of cultural value is less consistently assembled at regional level; better synthesis of existing work can support investment and collaboration. Sustaining affordable cultural space and routes into creative work should inform that discussion.

The Strategic Authority will work with partners to support and sustain Sussex and Brighton's cultural sector, building on local leadership, existing networks and the contribution of organisations, venues and independent practitioners.

Rural and coastal affairs

Rural and coastal affairs should ensure that the Authority's mainstream strategies and investments work for communities with distinct access, economic, demographic and environmental conditions. These places also contribute essential assets and productive activity to Sussex and Brighton. The competence can help partners test whether Sussex-wide decisions respond to those differences and create opportunities for locally led action.

The Authority's role cuts across its transport, housing, skills, growth, environment and health responsibilities. Parish and town councils, constituent and local councils, the National Park Authority, land managers, marine and port interests, businesses, community foundations, voluntary organisations and residents hold local knowledge and delivery capacity. Engagement should use those networks while making room for groups they do not currently reach.

Existing plans and partnerships

Local Plans, housing and economic strategies, coastal risk and shoreline plans, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, South Downs and harbour plans, visitor economy work and initiatives such as Sussex Bay and Weald to Waves provide the starting point.

Policy considerations

Testing how decisions affect rural and coastal communities should influence choices about access, investment or delivery.

Different coastal and inland economies, settlement patterns and environmental risks call for place-sensitive action rather than a single rural and coastal programme.

Any support for locally led initiatives must define the problem and the value sought, while keeping access, verification, administration and learning proportionate.

Mobilising investment

Investment is one of our key ways to drive prosperity. Alongside planning, skills, commissioning and partnership, we will use our funding and influence to bring homes, infrastructure and business opportunities forward. Our ambition is to attract substantially more commercial investment into Sussex and Brighton, connecting capital with opportunities that deliver good work, thriving places and lasting public benefit.

We will play an active role in developing public-private partnerships and connecting businesses, landowners, developers and institutional investors to strategic opportunities. This means shaping credible propositions, testing commercial viability and bringing partners together around delivery, funding and risk. Sometimes public funding will unlock a stalled project or provide enabling infrastructure. Elsewhere, coordinated decisions on planning, skills or utilities will help investment proceed without an Authority funding contribution.

Three connected pipelines will organise opportunities: housing and regeneration with Homes England, as we prepare a Strategic Place Partnership to address capacity,

infrastructure and viability; transport, drawing initially from the Local Transport Delivery Plan; and a wider Prosperity Pipeline for business growth, innovation, employment and skills, energy, nature and culture. Working with our partners, we will develop projects with clear objectives, accountable sponsors and practical routes to delivery. Sustained relationships with businesses and investors will help us understand expansion plans, identify barriers early and match opportunities with potential capital. Learning from initial housing and regeneration investments will help refine the longer-term pipeline and investment approach.

The anticipated £38 million annual Flexible Investment Fund is one of several funding sources and is limited relative to the scale of regional ambitions. The Authority's investment position will develop further through planned fiscal devolution, access to public finance institutions and Rewiring the State. The delivery plan will reflect budget discussions, the medium-term financial plan and partner capacity, alongside opportunities to attract further capital.

We are developing proposals for a Good Growth Fund, bringing public resources together with private and institutional capital, including exploring partnerships with pension funds. Any pension fund involvement will respect each fund's investment decisions, fiduciary duties and governance. Its design will follow the opportunities: projects must deliver public benefit and meet investors' requirements for returns and risk. A full Investment Strategy will follow adoption of the Prosperity Strategy, with individual decisions appraised and assured through the Local Assurance Framework.

Public intervention will be assessed against the prosperity outcomes it can achieve and the constraints it can address. Commercial finance may support viable development and infrastructure; other essential outcomes will require public funding. The investment approach will recognise these differences and make the distribution of benefits, costs and risks explicit. Pipeline entry will identify opportunities for development and prioritisation. Investment decisions will follow the Local Assurance Framework, with appropriate appraisal and independent assurance. Propositions will be presented externally when sufficiently developed to support credible investor discussions. Transparent decisions will recognise need and opportunity, including hidden disadvantage and rural isolation where relevant. Detailed investment arrangements belong to the relevant programmes.

Pipeline development will bring policy and delivery expertise together with finance, commercial capability and sustained business and investor relationships. Partners will originate and deliver many opportunities. The Authority can help test viability, clarify the public contribution and connect propositions with suitable capital, without treating pipeline entry as an investment approval.

Partners will contribute through their own responsibilities, budgets and decision-making arrangements. Pipeline development does not commit their resources or confer investment approval.

Working through participation and partnership

Sussex and Brighton's future will be shaped through the decisions and contributions of many organisations and communities. Councils, businesses, education and research institutions, public services, cultural and environmental organisations, and local networks hold ideas, resources and expertise that can help turn shared ambition into action.

A platform approach can make those contributions easier to connect. The Authority can bring partners together around shared questions, open policy development to wider

expertise and help promising ideas find the relationships and resources needed to progress. Partners can shape propositions and take responsibility for activity within a common direction, drawing on the knowledge and capacity already present across Sussex and Brighton.

This builds on thematic working groups and whole-place policy sprints, which have brought economic opportunity into conversation with housing, health, skills, nature and the experience of different communities. Continuing that approach requires clear questions, accessible routes to contribute and an account of how participation influences decisions.

The cultural sector's established networks, councils, Arts Council England, universities, independent practitioners and communities provide a foundation for collaboration, alongside the partnerships supporting other pathways.

Working in this way also requires judgement about scale. Local institutions hold relationships and detailed knowledge that Sussex-wide arrangements need to respect. Regional coordination adds value where it combines assets, resolves fragmentation or connects issues that cannot be addressed by one organisation. Clear responsibilities and feedback will help partners understand what has been agreed, who will act and how learning will be shared.

The Authority's role can develop as partners test these approaches. The aim is to build practical collaboration around the priorities and strengthen the capacity of the wider system to act, with openness about the resources, decisions and agreements needed to take proposals further.

Outcomes, evidence and learning

We are already taking a test-and-learn approach to initial investment in affordable homes, using early delivery to build experience and strengthen our investment capability.

The post-consultation strategy will include an Outcomes Framework, identifying the changes that best express prosperity and tracking differences between places and population groups. It will guide the Authority's strategies and investment choices, while recognising that outcomes across Sussex and Brighton are influenced by many organisations and wider circumstances.

The framework will connect the pathways and priorities with the changes people, businesses and places should experience. It will distinguish shared Sussex-wide outcomes from the contribution of specific programmes and investments, and help identify whether progress reaches different places and population groups.

Programme evaluation will examine what interventions contribute, who benefits and where approaches need adjustment. Quantitative measures will be combined with the experience of residents, businesses and practitioners.

The Office for National Statistics and What Works Growth are supporting the development of our evaluation capability. Cooperation with Sussex and Brighton's three universities, through their Civic Universities Agreement, will connect research and education to our shared priorities. We will explore publishing areas of research interest to help researchers address questions relevant to future decisions.

Progress reporting and shared findings will support regular review of the evidence, priorities and delivery. This will allow the Authority and its partners to adapt as responsibilities develop, circumstances change and experience reveals more effective approaches.

Further work on outcomes, indicators, baselines and reporting will be brought forward with the final adopted Strategy. The delivery plan will set out the practical approach to delivery.

Help shape the prospectus

We welcome feedback on the evidence, the emerging place profiles and the policy approaches set out here. We also welcome ideas for delivery and investment, and offers of partnership, expertise or other contributions. Tell us what opportunity you see, where it could make a difference and who could help take it forward. Suggestions will inform future consideration as plans and partnerships develop; submitting an idea does not secure funding or approval.

The consultation will run from the week commencing 16 November 2026 to midday on 18 January 2027. Take part at www.sussexandbrighton-cca.gov.uk. Responses will be considered alongside further evidence, national policy and local circumstances when preparing the final strategy and prospectus. For an alternative format or to discuss your feedback, contact enquiries@sussexandbrighton-cca.gov.uk. Consultation materials and the website will set out accessible and offline routes and targeted engagement.