

Greater Brighton Economic Board

09 July 2025 – 11am

Gallery Room 1, Bramber House, University of Sussex,

Minutes

Attendees:

Sankey (Chair), Cox, Gardner, Eggleston

Jess Gibbons, Gemma Hayford, Debbie Keeling, Dean Orgill, Andrew Swayne, Andy Willems, Judy Holmes, Matt Slade, Hillary Knight, Rachel Harding, Andrew Hill, Natasha Bridge, Francis Mitchell,

1 – Ratification of Chair

- 1.1 Jess Gibbons ratified Bella Sankey as the Chair of the Greater Brighton Economic Board for the municipal year.

2 - Procedural business

- 2.1 Apologies were received from Martin Lewry and Ana Christie.
- 2.2 There were no substitutes.
- 2.3 Dean Orgill declared that they were the Vice-Chair of the Sussex Chamber of Commerce Board.

3 – Minutes of the Previous Meeting.

- 3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 2 April 2025, were agreed as correct record.

4 – Chair's Comms

- 4.1 The Chair delivered the following communications:

Chairs Comms

Good morning everyone, and welcome to this meeting. I would like to especially give a warm welcome to Damian Tow from Brighton Energy Cooperative who is

joining today as an expert to support the Sussex Energy Update discussions, and to Mark Baynham, and Garry Mortimer-Cook from Horsham District Council, and Hilary Knight and Paula Seager from Natural Partnerships. They are here today to present the Sussex Six item on the agenda. They have also brought along some very tasty, and very local refreshments, for us to enjoy, so many thanks for those and for giving us your time to be here today.

Thank you to the University of Sussex for hosting us and for the inspiring quantum lab tour — an experience I've had the pleasure of enjoying before during central government visits, and one that never fails to blow the mind! It's a particularly exciting time following their record-breaking discovery of the world's most sensitive electric field detector, which could transform brain imaging and treatment for conditions like depression, OCD, and epilepsy.

Chair Ratification

I am very pleased to be able to continue as Chair of this Board through 2025/26. With this region being selected as one of only six to be in the Government's devolution priority programme, we are on the verge of a historic moment for Sussex. Work is progressing at pace to deliver a mayoral strategic authority by May 2026. The powers devolved will enable investment to be directed where it matters most—reflecting local priorities and delivering better outcomes for our citizens, businesses and the wider economy. The Board will leverage its influence and standing to ensure that Greater Brighton and Sussex as a whole seize every opportunity.

Keeping up the momentum is crucial through the transition period and our Board seeks to continue to grow in stature and impact. At the start of this year we welcomed NHS Sussex to our membership, and later today we will discuss the Sussex Chamber of Commerce also joining us. The Board is, and will continue to be, a collaborative forum where the public and private sectors can work together in a solutions-focused space. We remain firmly on the front foot throughout this transition, helping to shape policy and direct resources.

Our commitment to the Sussex Energy mission—to achieve energy neutrality by 2040—remains our key priority. It has a dedicated partner group with representation across Sussex and across sectors, a roadmap to 2040, and a focused 2025 action plan. Later today we will launch the Sussex Energy Forum, bringing together practitioners from across the region to accelerate low-carbon energy projects and ensure that, as powers devolve, we speak with one coordinated voice on environment and climate change.

The Board stands ready to maximise the benefits of devolution, to deepen collaboration across sectors, and to champion Sussex on the national and global stage. I would like to thank my fellow Board members, our partners and every stakeholder whose dedication and ingenuity power our progress.

Industrial Strategy

The recently published Modern Industrial Strategy outlines a comprehensive 10-year plan to drive sustainable, inclusive, and resilient economic growth. It focuses on transforming the UK into the best place in the world to invest, innovate, and scale businesses, with a strong emphasis on public-private partnership, regional development, and strategic sectoral support.

The Strategy outlines eight priority sectors (IS-8), many of which are already key strengths for Greater Brighton and wider Sussex region – Creative Industries, Advanced Manufacturing, Life Sciences and Digital technologies to name just a few. There is an opportunity to align local plans with these sectoral strategies, and successfully applying for Local Innovation Partnerships funding will see these sectors grow.

The Modern Industrial Strategy is centred on devolved regions with an emphasis on infrastructure investment and unlocking sites. The Greater Brighton and the wider Sussex region have enormous potential as part of a future MCCA, but to realise this potential we must tackle the issues that businesses have told us constrain growth, including poor transport connections and skills shortages. Accessing finance for businesses wishing to grow or innovate has been a historical challenge, so we welcome the fact that the government is committed to making it easier for businesses to do business, attract investment and enabling growth in city regions and clusters where the IS-8 are based. There is an opportunity to collaborate with the British Business Bank, National Wealth Fund and UK Export Finance to encourage investment here.

Economic Opportunities Study

At our last meeting the Board agreed to commission a study to review the potential economic opportunities associated with powers that will be devolved to a Sussex & Brighton MCCA. A small project group formed from officers across the partnership has been established to oversee the procurement exercise and wider project. The Procurement exercise is almost complete, and the successful bidder will be appointed very shortly.

Newhaven-Dieppe Ferry Service

The Newhaven–Dieppe ferry service is currently under pressure, with rising carbon taxes, tightening French public budgets, and an EU complaint challenging the €26 million per year subsidy that keeps the route viable. These challenges threaten the long-term future of this strategically important connection.

In response, the Board has issued a formal letter of support to SMPAT—the French organisation that owns and subsidises the route—recognising the ferry’s vital role in our regional economy, sustainability goals, and international connectivity, and affirming our commitment to working together to secure its future.

Papers for today

Sussex Chamber of Commerce

It was great to have Ana Christie, CEO of the Sussex Chamber of Commerce at our last meeting as an observer, and since then the Chamber has requested to formally join GBEB. A paper has been produced that sets out the rationale for Sussex Chamber joining the Board.

Sussex Energy Update

A key recommendation from Sussex Energy Partner Group recent discussions is to appoint dedicated finance and technical expertise to unlock funding and drive forward initiatives such as Solar Across Sussex, an idea to expand and aggregate large scale solar installations across Sussex to leverage economies of scale. This comes at a time when national policy is strongly aligned: the UK Government's recent Spending Review has increased investment in energy security and clean power by 2.6% with £8.3bn to be invested in 'homegrown clean power' over the spending review period, signalling clear support for the kind of long-term renewable infrastructure we're developing.

GBEB Annual Report & OPE Report

These arrangements Board's Heads of Terms require the Board to submit an annual report to each of its representative bodies. The One Public Estate Memorandum of Understanding between the LGA, Cabinet Office and the Greater Brighton OPE Partnership requires the Programme to produce an annual report to the Board. Both of these reports are presented here today.

Sussex Six

The final item on the agenda today is not a paper but a presentation about a local food sector campaign called Sussex Six, aimed at increasing consumer demand for local products by encouraging local shops, pubs, restaurants and cafes to sell at least six locally-sourced products – thank you bringing a sample along today! This collaborative campaign started in Horsham but is gaining traction across Sussex Local Authorities, including Mid Sussex who have recently launched it. Today's discussion can help grow awareness of the great work and consider how best to position it within the emerging Sussex and Brighton MCCA.

5 – Sussex Chamber of Commerce

5.1 Andy Hill introduced the report for this item, providing an overview of the and history of the Sussex Chamber of Commerce.

5.2 Andrew Swayne supported the Chamber's introduction to the Greater Brighton Economic Board.

5.3 The recommendations as outlined in the report were agreed unanimously.

6 – Sussex Energy Update

6.1 Natasha Bridge introduced the report for this item, providing an overview of the Sussex Energy Forum.

6.2 Andrew Swayne supported the objectives of Sussex Energy and questioned how many opportunities would be made available for solar power expansion.

6.3 Jeremy Gardner supported the propositions outlined in the report and requested more information regarding Sussex Community Energy Champions.

6.4 Natasha Bridge provided further details of Sussex Energy's priorities and funding streams.

6.5 Sophie Cox welcomed the report and emphasised the importance of cross-party and cross-sector collaboration.

6.6 Natasha Bridge invited suggestions for potential future stakeholders in Sussex Energy.

6.7 Robert Eggleston suggested that Local Authorities identify public-owned urban estates for solar retrofitting.

6.8 Damien Tow suggested that rooftops and car parks could also be retrofitted for solar energy production.

6.9 The recommendations as outlined in the report were agreed unanimously.

7 – GBEB Annual Report + OPE Annual Report

7.1 Andy Hill introduced the report.

7.2 There were no comments or questions.

7.3 The recommendations as outlined in the report were agreed unanimously.

8 – Sussex Six Presentation

- 8.1 Gary Mortimer-Cook, Hillary Knight and Paula Seager introduced the report and delivered the presentation for this item, as well as providing an overview of the Sussex Agricultural Food Sector, Sussex Food and Drink Directory and an overview of the Sussex Six business-plan.
- 8.2 Cllr Mark Baynham provided an overview of the reasons to invest in and support Sussex Six, citing the reduction of food miles and the need to support the local economy.
- 8.3 Cllr Jeremy Gardner stated their support for the initiative and was informed that existing large-scale suppliers and distributors pose a challenge to smaller and local producers.
- 8.4 Hillary Knight stated that Sussex Six aims to work collaboratively with large-scale suppliers and distributors.
- 8.5 Andrew Swayne questioned what Sussex Six was doing to help the local economy with employment and food-standards.
- 8.6 Gary Mortimer-Cook stated that the ultimate goal of Sussex Sixes was larger scale production and distribution of local products.
- 8.7 Hillary Knight outlined obstacles and challenges that could present difficulties to the mission of Sussex Six.
- 8.8 Damien Tow suggested a collaboration between Sussex Energy and Sussex Six.
- 8.9 The Chair commended Sussex Six.

The meeting concluded at 12:30pm.