

Subject:	Economic Opportunities Study
Date of Meeting:	25 March 2026
Report of:	Chair, Greater Brighton Economic Board
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Ward(s) affected:	All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 In February 2025, Sussex and Brighton was one of six regions confirmed as being on the Devolution Priority Programme, meaning that this region has been moving rapidly towards establishing a Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority (SBCCA).
- 1.2 Sustainable economic prosperity is the main focus of the Greater Brighton Economic Board (the Board), and the Board has been able to add great value and demonstrate competence in the areas of economic development & regeneration and environment & climate change. Given that the Sussex and Brighton region is on the Devolution Priority Programme, it was agreed that the work of the Board through 2025/26 be framed within the context of devolution so that the Board remained an important, proactive and relevant governance structure through the transition period, and that key strands of work continue into the future.
- 1.3 The region is therefore entering a pivotal moment, offering the chance to build on the Board's achievements to date, and to use this as a launchpad for the establishment of SBCCA. To that end, the Board commissioned an independent Economic Opportunities Review for Greater Brighton, to consider current priorities for Greater Brighton in the context of devolution, and the enhanced powers and funding that will become available. There is an opportunity to reposition Sussex (i.e., through the lens of Greater Brighton) at the forefront of a rapidly evolving national context; one that is shaped by the National Industrial Strategy and the Government's wider growth ambitions.
- 1.4 An Integration Plan is currently under development to set out how the Board's priority programmes, partnerships and commissioned work could be transferred into the SBCCA. The Economic Opportunities Review identifies a number of opportunities that will help inform the proposal for integration. As an evidence-led assessment of regional opportunity in the context of devolution, it will be presented within the Integration Proposal alongside other Board initiatives, with clear alignment to SBCCA's Areas of Competence and to the strategic and statutory documents SBCCA will be required to prepare.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Board agrees with the seven key opportunity areas outlined in 3.11.
- 2.2 That the Board agrees that the Economic Opportunities Review be included within the Integration Proposal.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 In December 2025, it was confirmed that SBCCA will receive £38 million per year Investment Funds allocation for 30 years. The Fund will be split equally between capital and revenue, and will be ‘un-ringfenced’, giving local choice on which priorities are invested in. This funding will be in addition to devolved funding streams. The inaugural Mayoral election will take place in May 2028, and in the meantime, work would progress on establishing the new structures, with Sussex and Brighton receiving 40% of its allocated annual Investment Funds over the next two years (i.e., £15.2 million per annum).
- 3.2 SBCCA will have a defined list of ‘Areas of Competence’, set out in law including; transport & local infrastructure, skills & employment support, housing & strategic planning, economic development & regeneration and environment & climate change.
- 3.3 The Economic Opportunities Study explores a series of opportunities and initiatives that SBCCA, and eventually the Mayor, can prioritise as the region charts its course through the early stages of devolution. These span a range of themes, but cut across multiple policy areas, which creates scope for a more integrated growth, stronger investment cases and wider benefits for both businesses and communities alike. This approach reflects the reality of the region’s challenges and acknowledges that opportunities are best addressed through joined-up action, which devolution will provide a stronger platform for. The Review is intended to directly inform the Integration Proposal by:
 - a) providing a single, agreed evidence base that SBCCA can adopt without duplication;
 - b) setting out the initial set of cross-cutting priorities recommended for early SBCCA focus; and
 - c) providing the policy “line of sight” from devolved powers to practical actions that can be embedded within SBCCA’s emerging strategies and statutory plans.

Transport and Infrastructure

- 3.4 Transport is one of the region’s most significant barriers to growth, constraining connectivity and productivity. Key challenges include bottlenecks and constraints on the road network, unreliable public transport services and limited alternatives to private car use. Devolution gives SBCCA the ability to convene national agencies, operators and local partners to align investment, champion shovel-ready schemes, and develop a coherent and long-term transport vision for the region. By embedding these opportunities within the Local Transport Plan, SBCCA can

develop an integrated, and future ready network that better connects people to opportunities, unlocks labour markets and which positions Sussex as a leader in sustainable mobility.

Skills and Employment

- 3.5 The current skills system remains fragmented, leaving employers with persistent skills gaps, and residents without the training or support needed to progress. This is especially true in a labour market that is increasingly shaped by digital, green and knowledge-based demands. Devolution provides the opportunity to build a Sussex-wide future ready skills and employment ecosystem by aligning schools, further and higher education providers, employers and local authorities around shared priorities.

Housing & Strategic Planning

- 3.6 The region faces long standing challenges in delivering enough affordable housing and employment land, with coastal and other natural constraints limiting space for growth, which contributes to higher business costs, raising housing pressures and affordability challenges. Devolution offers a chance to address these constraints strategically; through a new Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) that informs a comprehensive Local Growth Plan, SBCCA and the Mayor can coordinate land release to unlock sites for growth and innovation and drive the delivery of affordable housing. The SBCCA will have the leverage to proactively work with strategic partners to tackle some of the other issues like grid capacity and water neutrality.

Economic Development and Regeneration

- 3.7 The region's economy combines long established industries with emerging specialisms. However, fragmented delivery has limited the ability to maximise these strengths. Devolution gives SBCCA the tools to align innovation, investment, housing, skills and infrastructure into a joined-up regional strategy.
- 3.8 The region has four international gateways, and the ports of Newhaven and Shoreham have the potential to be drivers of clean growth. The region has a diverse and globally-recognised visitor economy, but there is a need to reimagine the sector to unlock its full potential. There are strengths in emerging sectors (e.g. createch, quantum computing), but these need support to capitalise on the opportunity. By convening partners, embedding strengths and assets within the Local Growth Plan and leveraging devolved powers, SBCCA can elevate Sussex's economic profile, unlock high-quality employment and revitalise and renew the regions town centres.

Environment and climate change

- 3.9 The region faces the combined pressures of tackling climate change, strengthening energy security and accommodating economic and housing growth. This makes coordination essential to avoiding fragmented delivery and ensuring that the environment is seen as a driver of prosperity, rather than a constraint. The Sussex Energy Mission is starting to address these challenges and is a major opportunity for the region. Devolution equips SBCCA with the tools to embed clean

energy and natural capital at the core of its growth strategy. By embedding environmental protection within the Local Growth Plan and supporting SDS, SBCCA can ensure that new housing, employment and infrastructure respect ecological limits while also maximising opportunities for sustainable and long-term growth.

Priority actions and next steps

- 3.10 Drawing on the above, a series of priorities and potential next steps are identified. The proposed actions are designed to shape delivery across the short to medium term, while also laying firm foundations for long-term transformation. In doing so, the study translates the preceding opportunities into a clear set of proposals which can generate measurable benefits.
- 3.11 Taken together, the following actions highlight the importance of an integrated and cross cutting delivery, ensuring that transport, skills, housing, energy and natural capital are aligned so that individual opportunities reinforce one another. The ability to convene partners, supported by the scale of a Sussex-wide Local Growth Plan, with key housing and planning strategies (such as the SDS) underneath, and the potential for creating new delivery vehicles will be central to turning strategic ambition into tangible and inclusive outcomes that endure well into the long-term.

(1) Embed the Sussex Energy Mission as a cornerstone to delivery

This flagship programme offers a powerful opportunity to align clean energy deployment with economic growth, skills and spatial planning. Analysis suggests that achieving energy neutrality by 2040 could require capital investment in the order of £45-£50 billion. National evidence shows that every £1 billion in low carbon turnover supports around 4,600 jobs across the economy¹.

By embedding the Mission within the Spatial Development Strategy and coordinating grid, infrastructure and supply chain activity, SBCCA can ensure that a far greater share of this investment is captured locally — driving green jobs, strengthening SMEs, building skills pathways and improving energy resilience.

(2) Ensure the adequate provision of employment space to meet business needs

The region requires a coordinated and Sussex-wide review of employment land to ensure that future supply keeps pace with the needs of modern businesses and high value sectors.

(3) Raising productivity levels and supporting sectoral growth

A step-change in productivity levels will require a focused, and evidence-led approach that defines and prioritises sectoral strengths, while at the same time aligning investment, skills and land provision around these. This dovetails with the ambition outlined by the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy; to "*seize the most significant opportunities and create the most favourable conditions in key UK*

¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/finalestimates/2023>

sectors". With world-leading institutions and a growing ecosystem of innovative firms, the region is well-placed to attract investment in R&D, while at the same time diversifying the region's economic base by expanding existing sectors to unlock productivity gains.

(4) Develop an investment prospectus for Sussex

An investment prospectus translates the region's strengths and development pipeline into a compelling and investor-ready offer, packaging shovel-ready projects along with potential employment sites, skills pathways and regional initiatives into a suite of clearly costed and de-risked propositions. The approach adopted by the West Midlands Combined Authority evidences how successful delivery has made the West Midlands as the UK's most investible region outside London, with over 130 projects supporting an estimated 5,800 jobs during 2024 and 2025²_[OBJ].

(5) Deliver a long-term affordable and sustainable housing strategy

A long-term, strategic approach to housing delivery is essential to meeting the region's unmet needs, and support genuinely inclusive economic growth. Through the SDS, SBCCA and the Mayor can plan at scale, while also prioritising well connected sites and removing barriers. The HACT Social Value Bank suggests that each household accessing affordable housing experiences in the region of £4,700 of annual social value benefit³. More broadly, the delivery of sufficient new homes will support labour market growth, underpinning the region's wider economic growth ambitions.

(6) Develop a vision for Newhaven and Shoreham Ports to lead economic diversification

The two ports are more than simple gateways for freight and passengers travelling to/from the region; they are strategic assets with potential to anchor a more diverse and resilient regional economy. Devolution gives SBCCA the platform to set a bold and unified vision that links port investment into regional priorities, positioning the ports as Sussex-wide economic and community anchors.

(7) Leverage major projects to drive local economic value

The region is experiencing a period of unprecedented capital investment, including Gatwick expansion, Rampion 2, coastal defence upgrades and major housing and infrastructure delivery. However, current evidence suggests that only a small proportion of total project value is captured by Sussex-based businesses (with early estimates for Rampion 2 indicating around 1% of total spend locally). Devolution creates an opportunity to treat major projects as strategic economic catalysts — rather than isolated infrastructure schemes. By coordinating procurement, strengthening local supply chain readiness, aligning skills provision with forthcoming demand and embedding local value

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/regional-investment-summit-delivers-almost-800m-boost-to-west-midlands-creating-hundreds-of-jobs>

³ <https://hact.org.uk/tools-and-services/uk-social-value-bank/>

expectations into major schemes, SBCCA can maximise the economic return from this investment pipeline.

4 ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.2 Through background research and engaging with stakeholders, the Consultants were presented with a large number of potential opportunities for consideration. These Consultants analysed and evaluated all of these options and based on their methodology have concluded that the seven identified in 3.11 should be prioritised at this stage.

5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 As part of the initial research the Consultants engaged with Greater Brighton Economic Board Members and wider stakeholders to understand the key challenges and opportunities facing local authority areas, sectors, and individual organisations.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Economic Opportunities Review provides an evidence-led framework for how devolved powers can translate into practical interventions for growth, inclusion and decarbonisation. Board endorsement of the seven priorities enables them to be incorporated into the Integration Proposal as a recommended package for SBCCA adoption, helping maintain momentum through the transition period and reducing duplication as SBCCA develops its Prosperity Strategy, Local Growth Plan, Spatial Development Strategy and Local Transport Plan.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The SBCCA will be responsible for considering the financial implications of any proposal it takes forward from the Economic Opportunities Study.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Deputy CFO (BHCC) Haley Woollard
Date: 17/03/2026*

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report. Should the SBCCA wish to take forward any of the proposals set out in the Economic Study, this will be for the SBCCA to consider under its own governance and decision-making processes.

*Lawyer Consulted: Head of Legal (Commercial) BHCC Siobhan Fry
Date: 13/-3/2026*

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 There are no equalities implications arising directly from this report.

Sustainability Implications

7.4 There are no sustainability implications arising directly from this report.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

Economic Opportunities Study: Executive Summary

Economic Opportunities Study: Final Report

