

# **Economic Opportunities Review for Greater Brighton**

## **Executive Summary**

Greater Brighton Economic Board

17 March 2026



# 1. Introduction

Greater Brighton is a dynamic functional economic area comprising the seven local authority areas of Brighton and Hove, Arun, Worthing, Adur, Mid Sussex, Crawley and Lewes. The Greater Brighton Economic Board ('GBEB') brings these authorities together with public and private sector partners to create the conditions for sustainable economic prosperity, including progress towards net zero, conserving natural capital, supporting the creative industries and promoting food security.

This report considers the opportunities and priorities for Greater Brighton in light of the English Devolution White Paper<sup>1</sup> ('the Devolution White Paper') which marks a significant shift in local economic planning and public service delivery.

## Devolution context

In February 2025 Sussex was accepted onto the Government's Devolution Priority Programme, with the aim of establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority ('MCCA') within 12-months, to be known as the Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority ('SBCCA'). This new body will hold strategic powers across transport, housing, skills, economic growth, public safety, health and climate action.

In December 2025, it was confirmed that SBCCA will receive £38 million per year Investment Fund for 30 years, split equally between capital and revenue, and will be 'un-ringfenced' giving local choice on which priorities are invested in. This will be in addition to devolved funding streams. The inaugural Mayoral election will take place in May 2028<sup>2</sup>, 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)<sup>3</sup>.

This marks a pivotal moment for the region, creating an opportunity to build on GBEB's achievements and position Sussex, through the lens of Greater Brighton, at the forefront of a rapidly evolving national landscape shaped by the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy and the Government's wider growth ambitions.

With major projects, regeneration schemes and proposed masterplan already in the pipeline, this study identifies the short, medium and long-term opportunities for the region, and informs the discussion on how SBCCA's new capabilities and funding powers can be used to prioritise investment, drive growth and secure long-term economic prosperity.

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1 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2024), *English Devolution White Paper*. [\[Link\]](#).

2 *Devolution Priority Programme, Written Ministerial Statement, 4 December 2025*. [\[Link\]](#).

3 *Sussex councils continue to create new Combined County Authority to unlock huge investment*. [\[Link\]](#).

## 2. Unlocking the Devolution Dividend

Devolution will consolidate funding streams and devolve decision to the local level, enabling SBCCA to design strategies that link infrastructure, housing and skills with economic growth and environmental priorities, better positioning the region to attract inward investment, foster innovation and strengthen international gateways, ensuring growth is both inclusive and sustainable. The study identifies five thematic areas where SBCCA and the Mayor can enhance impact for the region, including:

- a **Transport and infrastructure;**
- b **Skills and employment;**
- c **Housing and strategic planning;**
- d **Economic development and regeneration;**
- e **Environment and climate change;**

### A New Era of Local Leadership

Devolution marks a major shift of powers from Whitehall to local leaders, giving SBCCA and the Mayor the ability to align future investment with the region's unique assets. Through the consolidation of funding streams and devolved decision-making, SBCCA will be enabled to develop integrated strategies that link infrastructure, housing and skills with economic growth and environmental protection, strengthening inward investment, innovation and the region's international gateways. However, this will also require SBCCA to reflect the region's varied identities, ensuring it does not disproportionately benefit specific areas at the expense of smaller and/or rural settlements.

Over time, the powers available to SBCCA and the Mayor will expand, with effective delivery and strong governance providing the platform for further fiscal levers, expanded responsibilities and longer-term funding settlements.

## 3. Economic Opportunities for Greater Brighton

This study explores the opportunities and initiatives SBCCA and the Mayor can prioritise as the devolution begins, recognising that while opportunities are presented as sitting within different themes, many cut across multiple policy areas and create scope for more integrated growth, and stronger investment cases. This approach reflects the region's interconnected challenges and the need for joined-up action.

### a. Transport and infrastructure planning

Transport is one of the region's most significant barriers, with congestion, unreliable services and limited alternatives to private car use constraining connectivity and productivity. Devolution allows SBCCA to bring together national agencies, operators and local partners to align investment, champion schemes, and develop a coherent and long-term vision supported by new funding levers (e.g., MCIL). By embedding these opportunities within the Local Transport Plan, SBCCA can develop an integrated, and future ready network that connects people to opportunities and which positions Sussex as a leader in sustainable mobility.

- **Unlocking bottlenecks and constraints on the road network** – Congestion along the strategic road network constrains Sussex's economic potential. Devolution gives SBCCA the ability to unlock investment, coordinate partners and align upgrades with housing and wider regeneration, delivering an integrated package of road improvements alongside rail, and other transport modes.
- **Transforming Sussex rail to unlock labour markets** – Through devolution SBCCA can champion faster, more reliable east–west and internal rail services within Sussex and beyond, helping to ease road congestion while also opening labour markets and supporting wider regeneration ambitions.
- **Building Sussex mass transit** – New franchising powers give SBCCA the ability to transform unreliable and fragmented bus services into an integrated mass transit system that reduces car dependency, and anchor regeneration through the delivery of Strategic Mobility Hubs.
- **An active travel revolution: embedding walking, cycling and micromobility** – Devolution also positions SBCCA to accelerate investment in walking, cycling and micro-mobility by regulating local schemes, expanding pilots and embedding active travel, helping to shift travel behaviour, ease pressure on private car use, and create healthier communities.

### b. Skills and employment

The region's economy is changing quickly; however, the current skills system remains fragmented, leaving employers with persistent skills gaps, and residents without the training or support needed to progress (particularly in a labour market that is increasingly shaped by digital, green and knowledge-based demands). Devolution provides the opportunity to build a Sussex-wide skills and employment ecosystem that aligns schools, further and higher education providers, employers and local authorities around shared priorities. This would see employer insight embedded within provision, the strengthening of pathways into work and successful implementation of the Get Sussex working Plan<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Department for Work & Pensions (2025), *Get Sussex Working Plan*. [[Link](#)].

- **Building a future-ready skills ecosystem** – Through devolution SBCCA has the ability to help build a coherent, life-long and employer-aligned skills ecosystem that strengthens progression pathways, supports innovation and develops a future-ready workforce.
- **Driving employer engagement in the skills ecosystem** – The Mayor’s convening powers mean the region can also embed consistent, real-time engagement into skills, and align training with labour-market needs. This could include the creation of a regular channel for businesses to influence priorities, giving employers a stronger role in governance and programme design further down the line.
- **Promoting inclusive pathways by implementing the Get Sussex Working Plan** – Devolution gives SBCCA the ability to embed the Get Sussex Working Plan into an inclusive skills and employment system by convening partners from across the region. This can be achieved by aligning provision with the region’s economic priorities, and the development of practical pathways that support residents facing the greatest barriers to work.

### c. Housing and strategic planning

The region faces long-standing challenges delivering enough homes and employment land, with the coast and other natural constraints limiting space for growth. This inadvertently contributes to higher business costs, increased housing pressures and affordability challenges. Devolution offers a chance to address these constraints strategically; through a new SDS SBCCA can, in coordination with regional and national partners coordinate land release, align housing, employment and infrastructure delivery, while also tackling issues like grid capacity and water neutrality. With new powers (such as CPOs, MDCs, MDOs and the ability to raise MCIL), SBCCA and the Mayor can help unlock stalled sites and accelerate regeneration.

- **Employment land: unlocking sites for growth and innovation** – The region’s fragmented and ageing employment land supply is constraining growth. Devolution allows SBCCA to prioritise and unlock strategic sites, while also coordinating land-use and infrastructure planning. The availability of new powers to bring stalled sites forward will help create a modern employment land portfolio that supports innovation, investment and inclusive economic growth.
- **Drive housing growth and affordability** – Devolution gives the region the ability to address housing pressures by embedding affordability and sustainability into a region-wide strategy that aligns homes with transport and infrastructure, unlocks constraints and uses new powers as well as funding streams to expand affordable provision.

### d. Economic development and regeneration

The region’s economy combines long-established industries with emerging specialisms, however fragmented delivery has limited the ability to maximise these strengths. Devolution provides SBCCA with the tools needed to align investment with innovation, housing, skills and infrastructure. With four international gateways, a diverse and globally recognised visitor economy, and strengths in growth drivers (e.g., quantum computing), the region has significant opportunities to drive and accelerate clean growth. By convening partners, embedding strengths and assets and leveraging devolved powers, SBCCA can elevate Sussex’s economic profile and unlock high-quality employment.

- **Ports as powerhouses: Newhaven and Shoreham as drivers of clean growth** – The region’s two ports are powering the region’s clean-growth transition, and devolution gives SBCCA the ability to elevate them into nationally significant green industrial hubs by backing their

electrification, renewable energy deployment, sustainable logistics and maritime innovation, while also attracting long-term investment into the region.

- **Reimagining the Sussex visitor economy to unlock its full potential** – Devolution enables the region to reposition the visitor economy as a higher-value, year-round driver of inclusive growth by elevating its cultural, creative and natural assets, and aligning investment with the region’s Local Visitor Economy Partnership’s (‘LVEP’) shared vision to champion a coordinated narrative that strengthens long-term resilience.
- **Supporting innovation: from creative industries to quantum computing** – There is opportunity to connect the region’s strengths (including creative, automotive, engineering and computing) into a coherent plan that brings together education providers with businesses and other stakeholders, to leverage funding opportunities<sup>5</sup> and position its industrial cluster as a national competitive hub that drives long-term economic transformation.
- **Revitalising town centres as pilots for inclusive renewal** – Devolution also gives the region the ability to revitalise town centres by integrating regeneration with housing, transport and skills, to bring vacant sites back into use, strengthen the cultural/evening economy and use place-based delivery vehicles (e.g., MDCs) to attract investment and create replicable models of inclusive urban renewal across Sussex.

## e. Environment and climate change

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. Devolution equips SBCCA with the tools to embed clean energy and natural capital at the core of its growth strategy. By embedding environmental protection SBCCA can ensure that the delivery of new housing, employment and infrastructure respect ecological limits while also maximising opportunities for sustainable and long-term growth.

- **The Sussex Energy Mission** – Devolution provides additional levers to align renewable energy investment with grid capacity improvements and green development, building a coordinated strategy that supports net zero ambitions and which positions Sussex as a leading hub for clean growth.
- **Harnessing natural capital for long-term prosperity** – The region also has opportunity to embed natural capital at the core of its growth plan, ensuring that development respects ecological limits while also maximising economic opportunity, positioning Sussex as a national exemplar where environmental stewardship and long-term prosperity reinforce one another.

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<sup>5</sup> Such as the Local Innovation Partnerships Fund (‘LIPF’): [\[Link\]](#).

## 4. Priority Actions and Next Steps

Drawing on the above, the study identifies a series of priorities and next steps that can shape short to medium term delivery, while laying the foundations for long-term transformation, and translating opportunities into actionable proposals that generate measurable benefits.

As SBCCA takes shape, it will be important to build on the existing Greater Brighton agenda, in particular GBEB's flagship commitment to transitioning the region towards net zero, alongside its focus to conserve natural capital, unleash the potential of the creative sector and strengthening food security. This already provides a strong and coherent platform that should be carried forward.

Taken together, these actions emphasise the need for integrated, cross-cutting delivery aligning transport, skills, housing, energy and natural capital, and highlighting the importance of bringing partners together, supported by a Sussex-wide LGP and SDS, and the potential for creating new delivery vehicles to turn strategic ambition into tangible and inclusive outcomes.

- a **Embed the Sussex Energy Mission as a cornerstone to delivery** – This flagship programme offers a powerful opportunity to align clean energy deployment with wider benefits. Analysis suggests that the scale of opportunity is substantial, equating to £45-£50 billion in capital investment.
- b **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.
- c **Raising productivity levels and supporting sectoral growth** – A step-change in productivity will require a focused, evidence-led approach that identifies strengths and aligns investment, skills and land provision around them. With world-leading institutions and a growing ecosystem of innovative firms, the region is well-placed to attract R&D investment and diversify its wider sector base.
- d **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.
- e **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.
- f **Develop a vision for Newhaven and Shoreham Ports to lead economic diversification** – The two ports are more than simple international gateways to 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 investment into regional priorities, positioning the ports as Sussex-wide economic and community anchors.
- g **Leverage major projects to drive local economic value** – The region is seeing unprecedented capital investment, yet there is scope to increase the level of benefits captured locally by treating major projects as strategic economic enablers rather than standalone schemes, helping to strengthen supply chains, boost business resilience and secure long-term benefits for communities across Sussex.



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