

West Sussex Economic Strategy 2025 – 2035

High-Level Action Plan: 2025 – 2026

1. Overview

Set out below is the 25/26 high-level action plan for taking forward the West Sussex Economic Strategy ambitions and strategic priorities. The strategy is broad and long-term, and so actions will be prioritised and phased. There will be an annual review of progress when we will consider if the high-level actions remain the right ones. We will pause, adapt, or introduce new actions to ensure the work to achieve the strategy remains 'live' and up to date.

We will ensure broad engagement around the economic strategy and high-level action plan through communication activities, and will bring people together within existing structures and establish appropriate new ones (e.g. task groups) where this will add value. The action plan will be overseen by the West Sussex Economic Growth Board (WSEGB), established in 2024 as part of Government arrangements following the demise of Local Enterprise Partnerships. The WSEGB brings together leaders in business, local government, education, and health.

We have built the 25/26 action plan around: action areas with confirmed Government funding (green); action areas from current provision and commitments (blue); and new action areas for focus that need consideration and planning (purple).

In the first year we will also need to consider and respond to Government announcements including; [Sussex Devolution Proposal](#); [Get Britain Working](#); Department for Business and Trade SME Strategy and the [Business Growth Service](#); [Skills England](#) plans, including for apprenticeships; reforms to the [Planning and Infrastructure bill](#), including on affordable housing; and plans for the [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#).

2. High-Level Action Plan

The action plan sets out initial action areas and shows how they align to the Economic Strategy ambitions and strategic priorities. Each action area includes proposed key organisations to be involved, the funding source (where known), and targets to indicate progress. For ease of reference the ambitions are:

1. Boost productivity growth, investment, and innovation
2. Ensure a dynamic and skilled workforce
3. Boost green innovation, enhance natural capital, and support the transition to net zero
4. Deliver new development and infrastructure and maximise the benefits of our international transport hubs
5. Sustain our distinctive and vibrant places and grow the visitor economy

We will assess and measure progress of the strategy through tracking the implementation of the high-level action plan (as well as monitoring the overall indicators). We will monitor in 'narrative' terms progress against the high-level actions annually. We will also report on performance indicators relevant to key activities in the action plan.

Ambition(s)	Action Areas	Suggested Owner /Delivery Partner(s)	Funding source	Target(s)	Strategic priorities alignment
1	1. Start-up and business support across the county including delivery of Growth Hub service	West Sussex Local Authorities	Department for Business & Trade/Various	Better coordinated approach to business support provision Delivery of Growth Hub service with 500 businesses supported in 25/26 (to be confirmed after Grant Agreement finalised) Respond to new national Business Growth Service	Strengthen collaboration between the public and private sectors Improve efficiency and value in sectors with modest or low productivity
1	2. Boost the adoption of digital and other advanced technologies for businesses	West Sussex County Council (WSCC) as part of South East Consortium	Department for Business & Trade	Delivery of Made Smarter for manufacturing businesses, with 7 supported in West Sussex by March 2026	Grow high value sectors and distinctive clusters and strengthen innovation networks aligned with the National Industrial Strategy
3 & 4	2. Boost the adoption of digital and other advanced technologies for businesses	West Sussex County Council, Brinsbury and Plumpton Colleges, West Sussex Growers Association, East Sussex County Council and local District and Borough Councils	Department of Science, Innovation and Technology	Growing Sussex 5G Innovation Region	Position West Sussex as a market leader in innovation and investment Enable future-ready digital infrastructure and connectivity

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1	3. Agree priority sectors, cluster, and innovation development, and establish working arrangements for taking the work forward	West Sussex County Council (WSCC) facilitated small working group (membership tbc)	Pooled Business Rates funding bid – TBC	West Sussex Economic Growth Board (WSEGB) sign off Develop agreed sector propositions by March 2026 Secure funding for workstream	Grow high value sectors and distinctive clusters and strengthen innovation networks aligned with the National Industrial Strategy Promote the county as an attractive investment and international trade location
1	3. Agree priority sectors, cluster, and innovation development, and establish working arrangements for taking the work forward	West Sussex County Council (WSCC) as part of South East Consortium	Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport	Delivery of Create Growth in 25/26 to target at least 10 West Sussex businesses	Grow high value sectors and distinctive clusters and strengthen innovation networks aligned with the National Industrial Strategy Promote the county as an attractive investment and international trade location
1 & 4	4. Agree positioning on international trade and inward investment	West Sussex Local Authorities, Gatwick Airport Economic Zone (AEZ) Taskforce	TBC	Gatwick Airport Economic Zone proposition agreed Attend UKREiIF 2025 as Gatwick Airport Economic Zone delegation in May 2025	Promote the county as an attractive investment and international trade location Maximise the benefits from our international transport hubs
2	5. Consider and propose interventions on working age population challenges	West Sussex Economic Growth Board (WSEGB)	TBC	Review existing activity across the county Agree initial action areas by March 2026	Boost the proportion of working age residents Increase employment in high value sectors and specialisms

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2	6. Ensure local skills provision is responsive to emerging and changing needs	Future Sussex and Local Skills Improvement Plan Board / FE Sussex	Department for Education	Deliver priorities as agreed by Future Sussex Delivery of LSIF projects	Strengthen business engagement in careers and talent development
2	7. Respond to Skills England review of post-16 provision	Skills England /Local training providers/ Employers/WSEGB	Various	Review and respond to findings from engagement on the Growth and Skills Levy in early 2025	Strengthen business engagement in careers and talent development
2	8. Support the provision of training to meet the needs of occupations and industries	Sussex and Surrey Institute of Technology (IoT)	Department for Education	Deliver higher-level technical qualifications in engineering, construction, digital, and business and management in 2025/2026	Increase employment in high value sectors and specialisms
2	8. Support the provision of training to meet the needs of occupations and industries	West Sussex County Council/Business/Delivery partners	Department for Education	Deliver 28 courses through Skills Bootcamps in 25/26	Strengthen business engagement in careers and talent development
2 & 3	9. Ensure delivery of green skills provision	Education Providers	Further and Higher Education Providers	Promote take up of green skills courses to local businesses	Increase employment in high value sectors and specialisms Support the transition to net zero and resilience to climate change

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2	10. Link schools and colleges with businesses to provide careers education reflecting the local economy	West Sussex Careers Hub	West Sussex Local Authorities and Careers and Enterprise Company	Achieve 5.7 out of 8 Gatsby Benchmarks by September 2025 – which provide a blueprint for schools and colleges to achieve ‘good careers education’.	Strengthen business engagement in careers and talent development Increase employment in high value sectors and specialisms
2	11. Support priority groups into employment	Sussex Local Authorities, Department for Work and Pensions, NHS Sussex/Delivery Partners	Department for Work and Pensions	Connect to Work programme launch by October 2025	Facilitate an inclusive workforce Boost the proportion of working age residents
2	11. Support priority groups into employment	West Sussex Local Authorities, Department for Work and Pensions/NHS Sussex	Department for Work and Pensions	Develop local Get Britain Working plans by Autumn 2025	Facilitate an inclusive workforce Boost the proportion of working age residents
3	12. Support businesses to reduce energy waste and decarbonise	West Sussex County Council and District and Borough Councils	Various	Solar Together offer for businesses launched by autumn 2025 Agree wider energy infrastructure support by March 2026	Position West Sussex as a market leader in innovation and investment Support the transition to net zero and resilience to climate change
3	12. Support businesses to reduce energy waste and decarbonise	All partners	Various	WSCC action with top 50 spend suppliers in 2025/2026 District and Borough support programmes	Support the transition to net zero and resilience to climate change

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1 & 3	13. Create carbon offsetting offers for businesses	West Sussex County Council, District and Boroughs, South Downs National Park Authority	TBC	Business offsetting propositions agreed by March 2026	Strengthen collaboration between the public and private sectors Support the transition to net zero and resilience to climate change
1 & 3	14. Support environmental projects as nature based solutions for diversification for land based sectors	South Downs National Park Authority, Land owners and land based businesses, District and Boroughs	TBC	Develop models of best practice by March 2026	Position West Sussex as a market leader in innovation and investment Enhance the county's biodiversity and natural capital
3 & 4	15. Engage the National Energy System Operator (NESO) on issues raised by businesses regarding national grid capacity	West Sussex County Council, National Energy System Operator (NESO)/West Sussex Districts and Boroughs	TBC	Convene conversations with businesses on capacity issues by March 2026	Support the transition to net zero and resilience to climate change Promote opportunities for new development with supporting infrastructure to enable growth
4 & 5	16. Delivery of existing Growth Deals to enable place based growth	West Sussex County Council and District and Boroughs	Various	Seven Growth Deals on track for delivery in 25/26	Promote opportunities for new development with supporting infrastructure to enable growth Improve how people and goods move around the county Ensure our urban centres, employment hubs and rural areas are vibrant and attractive

Ambition(s)	Action Areas	Suggested Owner /Delivery Partner(s)	Funding source	Target(s)	Strategic priorities alignment
4 & 5	17. Agree refreshed Growth Deals informed by place based and Economic Strategy priorities	West Sussex County Council and District and Boroughs	Pooled Business Rates Allocation Various	Seven refreshed five-year Growth Deals agreed by March 2026	Promote opportunities for new development with supporting infrastructure to enable growth Improve how people and goods move around the county Ensure our urban centres, employment hubs and rural areas are vibrant and attractive
4	18. Lobby for and deliver strategic transport infrastructure improvements identified in West Sussex Transport Plan to support economy priorities, including through Transport for the South East (TfSE)	West Sussex Economic Growth Board (WSEGB), Delivery Partners, TfSE	Various	Deliver priorities identified in the West Sussex Transport Plan in 2025/2026 Ensure alignment with new TfSE Transport Strategy, with representation by the WSEGB on the TfSE Business Advisory Group in 2025/2026	Improve how people and goods move around the county Maximise the benefits from our international transport hubs
4 & 5	19. Enable digital infrastructure in hard-to-reach areas	Building Digital UK (BDUK)/CityFibre	Department of Science, Innovation and Technology	Project Gigabit delivery on track to reach 72% premises able to access gigabit-capable connectivity.	Enable future-ready digital infrastructure and connectivity Enable the creation of connected places

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5	20. Progress plans on the future of high streets and town centres	District and Borough Councils/ Business Improvement Districts, West Sussex County Council, Various	Various	Locally determined	Ensure our urban centres, employment hubs and rural areas are vibrant and attractive Boost the proportion of working age residents
3 & 5	21. Collaborate to maximise opportunities from the visitor economy	Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) , Experience Sussex , District and Borough Councils, Local Destinations and business, Sussex Wine Group	Sussex Local Authorities Various public and private sector	Sussex Strategy for Growth delivery plan on track in 2025/2026 Local destination plans	Enhance the county's biodiversity and natural capital Harness the unique opportunities from the visitor economy Boost the proportion of working age residents