

Eastbourne Economic Strategy 2025-2035

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for Eastbourne Neighbourhood Board
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An aerial photograph of Eastbourne, UK, at sunset. The sea is in the foreground, with the pier extending into the water. The town is visible in the background, with buildings and hills under a colorful sky. A large, white, stylized graphic element, resembling a large letter 'E' or a similar shape, is overlaid on the left side of the image.

A Generational Challenge

The creation of the Neighbourhood Board, in April of this year, is to provide stewardship of the Plan for Neighbourhoods Fund, through which Eastbourne was awarded £20 million over 10 years to invest in long-term regeneration and community empowerment. To help all of us determine how best to invest, we need compelling evidence-based assessments to run alongside the engagement and decision-making processes to come.

This Economic Strategy is designed to activate the values of sustainable and inclusive growth, and at the same time enhance fairer prosperity and well-being across the town and beyond. It is a commitment to both the current and future generations to create a connected town that meets their needs and gives everyone the quality of life they seek.

Economic strategies tend to be full of metrics, from business survival rates to the gross value added (GVA) figures, and this one is, of course, no exception. However, we wanted to recognise that beyond the economic data, policies, and measurables, it is our individual behaviours and relationships with our town and each other that deliver economic security, shape progress and provide the heartbeat of our neighbourhoods. It is understanding our history and how we got here; thinking about where we are heading; and understanding what is already working well.

We are an exceptional town with exceptional citizens, communities, entrepreneurs, networks, and, of course, we are the sunniest place in the UK. We all need to support a transformation to a more distributive and regenerative economy. This means creating more shared wealth that benefits the greatest number of people; and we should all have the opportunity to participate fully to ensure that we have a town that thrives within its environmental and social limits.

We recognise that we need to be better at providing quality, affordable housing and infrastructure to support growth, and that we must align learning and skills to these new economic goals. An ambitious quality of life vision can be a model of urban renewal, attracting entrepreneurs and established businesses alike; and most importantly offering its citizens breathing space. With our collective energies, I am certain that this can lead to a more productive, resilient and fairer Eastbourne economy.

Richard Garland
Chair, Eastbourne Neighbourhood Board

Eastbourne's Economic Ambition

A more productive, resilient, and inclusive economy that supports Eastbourne's citizens, celebrates its outstanding natural and built environment, and grows successful businesses.

A distinctive and outstanding coastal Borough where people are proud to live, inspired to work, and drawn to visit — a place that encourages ambition, champions well-being, and strives to improve the quality of life for all of its residents.

Executive Summary

This is a ten-year Economic Strategy for Eastbourne. It will inform the Eastbourne Neighbourhood Board's and Eastbourne Borough Council's investment decisions over the next decade. It provides an ambition, priority themes, and action areas around which the Borough can coalesce to drive a more distributive and regenerative economy.

It has been informed by a strong evidence base and detailed discussions with local stakeholders; it is aligned with East Sussex County Council's economic prosperity priorities; and it sets out the Borough's strengths and challenges as Sussex establishes a new Sussex and Brighton Mayoral Combined County Authority.

Many factors that will influence the Borough's economy are beyond the control of local stakeholders, but Eastbourne can take advantage of new opportunities and build resilience to withstand future challenges by working collectively, and by making the most of its considerable natural and human capital assets.



Eastbourne Today

Place

Eastbourne is one of England's most well-known coastal resorts. It has a well-kept seafront, direct access to the Seven Sisters South Downs National Park, and an outstanding cultural offer. Its town centre is the commercial hub for a catchment that stretches well beyond its administrative boundaries, and it is an important part of the East Sussex economy. There has been significant investment in the town centre, but much of the commercial accommodation is tired. The seafront is a key asset, but its economic contribution could be enhanced with the right investments.

Eastbourne's environmental context constrains development opportunities and, as a coastal location, climate change poses long-term threats to the Borough. Although its railway is centrally located, journey times to and from other commercial centres can be long, whilst the condition of the A259 and A27 trunk roads along the Sussex coast inhibit economic growth.

Digital connectivity in the Borough is good, but business and consumer expectations are constantly rising as technology evolves.

Eastbourne's distinctive location—nestled between the coast and the South Downs—creates a deep connection between its economic well-being and the natural environment. As such, any economic strategy must be pursued in harmony with nature, ensuring a balanced, mutually beneficial relationship. This approach can offer the town and its residents greater access to green spaces, cleaner air, and a stronger, healthier connection to the natural world.

People

Eastbourne has a population of 104,000, a quarter of whom are aged 65+ years. Between 2025 and 2035, the number of residents is projected to increase by around 3,200. This hides a fall in the number of working age residents and an increase of 6,000+ in the number of post-working age people. The age profile of the Borough's residents influences both the demand for services and the labour supply.

Eastbourne is not especially disadvantaged, but there are significant pockets of deprivation; qualification levels and educational attainment are below national averages; and there are large numbers of carers and people with disabilities or long-term health conditions. At 76%, the employment rate is around the national average, but over 2,400 more people would need to be in work to achieve a national employment rate target of 80%, equivalent to an additional 4% of working-age individuals.



Did you know that 38% of jobs in Eastbourne are part-time – higher than in East Sussex, the South East and England – reflecting not only people balancing other responsibilities, but also the town's strongly seasonal tourism and hospitality economy?

Did you know Historic England lists 173 heritage assets in Eastbourne – from buildings to parks and monuments – giving us a powerful cultural backbone for inclusive tourism, learning and pride in place?



Did you know that around 4,400 working-age people in Eastbourne are economically inactive because of long-term sickness, reducing the pool of local workers and volunteers?

Did you know that over a third of Eastbourne households (36%) face deprivation in education, work, health or housing, with 16% hit on two fronts – trapping many children in overlapping disadvantage?

Economy

Eastbourne's economy is worth over £2.1 billion, but real terms economic growth over the past decade has averaged just 0.8% – half the growth rate in England. The Borough's economy is over-reliant on lower value service sectors, including accommodation & food service, health & social work and retail. These provide significant local employment, but they do not add the same level of economic value to the Borough's economy. Low value sectors generally provide low-paying jobs and, in Eastbourne's case, over a third of these are part-time. At £30.90 per hour, productivity is well below that in England (£40.20).

Median house prices are now around 8.5 times median earnings for the Borough's full-time workers – compared with 3.3 times in 1997. Indeed, wealth associated with privately-owned housing makes a significant contribution to Eastbourne's economy. High housing costs can make local recruitment difficult for local businesses.

There is some evidence of the emergence of higher value activity in the IT & Communications and Professional, Scientific & Technical sectors, albeit from a modest base. Health & social work continues to provide the most jobs and the greatest value to Eastbourne's economy.

Opportunities for significant inward investment are likely to be limited, not least due to development constraints. However, Eastbourne has a thriving freelance and small business economy with high start-up and business survival rates. These are good ingredients to build on and for Eastbourne to develop a strong reputation for enterprise and entrepreneurship. Despite this, Eastbourne lags well behind peers in rates of high growth businesses, which must be a priority for support.

Eastbourne is home to a wide array of world-class cultural, artistic, and sporting events. From the expanding international carnival and the UK's largest free airshow to international tennis and the prestigious Turner Prize, the town attracts global attention. With thriving theatres that host both international performances and homegrown productions, alongside state-of-the-art conference facilities, Eastbourne is uniquely positioned to leverage these legacy events for long-term growth and inward investment, rather than merely focusing on short-term economic benefits.

As with many other places, much of the money spent in the Borough flows straight out again to outside businesses and remote shareholders, without benefitting local residents and businesses. Community wealth building initiatives provide opportunities to keep more of the value of the economy circulating locally, supporting local jobs and businesses, whilst giving residents a greater stake in their communities. Ensuring the increased benefits accrued from a growing economy are distributed inclusively, at a local level, is therefore of great importance, and is recognised as such within this Strategy.

Finally, a healthy, active and engaged population is central to driving prosperity, building resilience, and enhancing quality of life in Eastbourne. Actions that address the Borough's health and well-being challenges are, therefore, a distinct priority within this Economic Strategy. A healthier town is not just a social goal – it is the foundation for a stronger, more productive local economy.



Did you know tourism brings in an estimated £377 million a year to Eastbourne and supports around 8,900 jobs (1 in 5 jobs) – proving that a modern, year-round visitor offer can boost livelihoods across our town?

Did you know there are around 3,800 businesses in Eastbourne – most of them very small companies employing 4 or less people. There are only around 135 larger firms, which is why nurturing local entrepreneurs really matters for long-term resilience.

Did you know that around 1 in 4 jobs in Eastbourne (around 26.6% of all local jobs) are in health and social care, making care one of the town's biggest employers by far – much higher than regional and national shares. And these caring professions also generate almost a fifth of the town's economic output making them a true backbone of Eastbourne's future, not a side story?

Economic Themes and Action Areas

Eastbourne must build on its assets, including strengthening and increasing the value of its visitor economy, but it must also diversify its economy to attract and grow businesses in higher value and more productive sectors.

The economic ambition will be delivered through five themes, supported by seventeen action areas. These provide the framework for the action plan.

Governance and Delivery

The Eastbourne Neighbourhood Board, in collaboration with Eastbourne Borough Council, our Member of Parliament, and East Sussex County Council, will establish a collaborative framework that brings together local business leaders, key organisations, community representatives, and expert external advisors to oversee and deliver the objectives of this economic strategy. This will be underpinned by three core commitments:

1. **Sustainable Economic Growth** – Driving long-term prosperity through responsible development and investment.
2. **Business Responsiveness** – Ensuring this strategy evolves to meet the changing needs of local businesses and market conditions.
3. **Evidence-Based Decision Making** – Commissioning research and analytical studies to inform decisions, measure impact, and guide future interventions.

Through these commitments, the aim is to secure Eastbourne’s economic resilience, enhance competitiveness, and create an environment that supports opportunity, innovation, and a quality of life for residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

This Strategy and Action Plan will be regularly reviewed and updated, as necessary, when relevant documents, such as the Local Plan, the Pride in Place Regeneration Plan and Seafront Strategy, are produced, updated and implemented.



Did you know that Eastbourne now supports around 41,000 jobs – and, unlike the rest of East Sussex where employment has fallen slightly, local employment has grown by nearly 2% since 2015?

Did you know Eastbourne’s “knowledge economy” jobs make up only about 3% of local employment – highlighting the opportunity to grow higher-value, future-facing sectors.

Did you know Eastbourne now has around 694,000 square metres of commercial floorspace, with much of it in retail and public services, making Eastbourne an important commercial centre for East Sussex? Unusually, it has a limited office accommodation offer.

Did you know Eastbourne needs an estimated 735 new homes every year, including around 530 affordable homes, if we want people who work here to be able to live here too?

Themes	Action Areas
1. Develop and diversify Eastbourne’s sectors and clusters for a prosperous economy	1.1: Support innovation in the health & care sector 1.2: Develop Eastbourne into a creative & digital hub 1.3: Raise the profile of advanced engineering in the Borough 1.4: Increase the value of the visitor economy 1.5: Strengthen the economic and social potential of health, leisure and sporting facilities across the Borough
2. Nurture community wealth building, enterprise, and entrepreneurship	2.1: Develop and implement a Community Wealth Building Framework and Action Plan to tackle local poverty and inequality 2.2: Provide world-class business support and opportunities to freelancers, start-ups and SMEs 2.3: Provide good quality, accessible, flexible and affordable business accommodation
3. Develop a vibrant town centre and clusters of retail hubs that serve as great places to live, do business, invest, and visit	3.1: Encourage a mix of uses in the town centre to generate greater footfall and vibrancy 3.2: Improve the accessibility and attractiveness of the town centre to support sustainable growth through design excellence and quality public realm 3.3: Enhance bus, cycle and pedestrian networks to secure an improved environment and reduced congestion 3.4: Develop and strengthen retail hubs outside of the town centre
4. Upskill and empower residents to thrive in the modern Eastbourne economy	4.1: Improve access to work 4.2: Develop skills for the new economy, particularly in Artificial Intelligence and Digital Skills 4.3: Inspire learning and placemaking amongst young people to nurture mutually beneficial social and economic connections with schools and centres of learning
5. Promote and ensure investment in sustainable and resilient infrastructure to deliver long-term economic, social, and environmental benefits	5.1: Promote investment in the strategic transport network 5.2: Develop the commercial floorspace needed to support businesses to grow and be retained locally 5.3: Develop green and blue infrastructure, including green corridors to encourage active living and to better connect communities with centres of learning and commerce, while collaborating with key partners, including Eden and the Environment Agency

Economic Ambition, Themes and Principles

Eastbourne is one of the south of England's most attractive coastal towns. It is a high profile and successful visitor destination with outstanding natural assets, but it is over-reliant on low value service sector jobs that no longer keep pace with high local housing costs. A step change in the performance of its economy is required with a multi-dimensional and collaborative approach, based on strong and clear leadership.

This should make best use of the Borough's human, natural, and cultural capital assets, and strengthen communities throughout the Borough. Creating higher value employment in Eastbourne, including a targeted focus on key sectors (identified in the Action Plan) is a major priority, which will underpin inclusive economic growth.

Qualitative and quantitative evidence has identified Eastbourne's challenges and opportunities. These have been translated into a bold economic ambition that provides the direction of travel for the strategy.

The Strategy is built on four principles that shape every decision and action. These principles are not abstract ideals; they are the way we will deliver tangible results:

- **Inclusive:** Ensuring that all residents, regardless of background or circumstance, can share in the benefits of a balanced economy. By making growth inclusive and accessible, the Strategy addresses the health inequalities and economic exclusion that have held parts of our community back, thereby ensuring disadvantaged residents directly benefit from local economic activity.
- **Sustainable:** Building long-term environmental, economic, and social resilience so prosperity lasts for generations. By making it sustainable, the Strategy will strengthen long-term resilience and ensure that wealth supports local people and protects our natural environment.
- **Connected:** Linking people, places, opportunities, and strategies so that Eastbourne's economy functions as one cohesive eco-system. This will ensure that services, supply chains, and opportunities create an environment where people and businesses can thrive together.
- **Transparent:** To be open and accountable in how decisions are made, resources are allocated, and outcomes are measured. Progress will be reported publicly and accessibly, enabling residents, partners, and businesses to see how priorities are being delivered, how funds are spent, and what impact is being achieved.



Did you know that more than 1 in 4 working-age residents in Eastbourne (27.4%) are classed as work-limited disabled – a higher rate than the South East and England overall?

Did you know Climate Emergency UK scores Eastbourne at 36 out of 100 on its climate action plan – strong on engagement, transport and waste, but weaker on planning and biodiversity – giving our community a clear roadmap for where we need to go next?

Did you know more than 88% of Eastbourne premises can access full-fibre broadband – one of the best coverage rates in the county – giving us a strong base for digital jobs, flexible working and remote learning?

Did you know Eastbourne's economy is worth over £2 billion, but it has grown more slowly than the country as a whole – underlining the need for investment that builds community wealth, not just visitor spend?

Economic Ambition

A more productive, resilient, and inclusive economy that supports Eastbourne's citizens, celebrates its outstanding natural and built environment, and grows successful businesses.

A distinctive and outstanding coastal Borough where people are proud to live, inspired to work, and drawn to visit – a place that encourages ambition, champions well-being, and strives to improve the quality of life for all of its residents.

Principles

Inclusive, Sustainable, Connected, and Transparent

Themes

- Develop and diversify Eastbourne's sectors and clusters for a prosperous economy.
- Nurture community wealth building, enterprise, and entrepreneurship.
- Develop a vibrant town centre and clusters of retail hubs that serve as great places to live, do business, invest, and visit.
- Upskill and empower residents to thrive in the modern Eastbourne economy.
- Promote and ensure investment in sustainable and resilient infrastructure to deliver long-term economic, social, and environmental benefits.

The full Economic Strategy and supporting documents are available to view on the Eastbourne Neighbourhood Board website
www.weareeastbourne.org.uk



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