



SUSTAINABLE, CONNECTED, AND EQUITABLE SUSSEX

Our Civic University Agreement

Civic University Agreements are civic strategies, rooted in a robust and shared analysis of local needs and opportunities, and co-created with local partners

Civic University Network, 2025



This agreement sets out our joint commitment to work with each other – and with local people, organisations, and communities throughout this region – to shape a more sustainable, connected, and equitable future for Sussex.

Sustainable, Connected, and Equitable Sussex is rooted in a fundamental recognition that as anchor institutions and networks in this region, we have a responsibility to work together to make this a better place for everyone to live, work, and learn. By combining our resources and assets, and by working in close partnership to achieve our shared goals, we will drive an ambitious vision for positive change to promote environmental sustainability and community cohesion for the whole of Sussex.

The three multidisciplinary universities of this region – the Universities of Sussex, Brighton, and Chichester – all share a deep commitment to their civic responsibilities. The strategic alliance of higher education and further education in Sussex – with the many tens of thousands of young people who power it – has a central role to play in the development of our communities. By combining the energy, ambition, and values of those young people with the strengths of Sussex's public services and business, we know that we can

attract investment to boost our region's economic prosperity, cultivate the innovations and skills that are needed in a world of rapid technological change, and strengthen the cohesion of our culturally rich and diverse communities.

This Civic University Agreement (CUA) sets out the ambition to achieve more for our communities together. Our civic mission and high-level commitments are set out below as a matrix of interlocking ***dimensions*** of our lives, analysed through several ***lenses*** in order to identify challenges and find innovative solutions. These are intended not to capture all the activity that each partner currently delivers individually or jointly, but rather to illustrate areas where we know that acting together will add value to our shared mission.

We have also set out below how individuals and organisations in the local area can express their interest in contributing to this work. You are all warmly invited to join us on this journey to create a more *Sustainable, Connected, and Equitable Sussex*.

PARTNERS







**OUR
ENVIRONMENT**



**OUR LEARNING
AND HEALTH**



**OUR CULTURE
AND HERITAGE**



TACKLING SOCIAL INEQUALITIES



PIONEERING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY



DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH

DIMENSIONS OF OUR LIVES

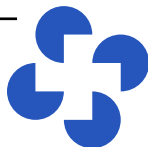
OUR ENVIRONMENT



We recognise the beauty and biodiversity of the natural environment in Sussex, as well as the environmental threats and climate emergency faced both globally and locally.

We commit to working together to reduce our carbon footprint, promote environmentally sustainable practices, and address both the causes and consequences of climate change.

OUR LEARNING AND HEALTH



We know that creating a more sustainable, connected, and equitable future for Sussex depends on growing knowledge, skills, and wellbeing across our communities.

We commit to working together on high-quality education, positive physical and mental health support, and evidence-based strategies for behaviour change.

OUR CULTURE AND HERITAGE



We value the rich and diverse culture and heritage of our region, and the strengths of Sussex's creative and cultural sector in drawing together people and influences from across the globe.

We commit to working together to protect our renowned culture and heritage, and to support cultural and creative practitioners in promoting sustainable and equitable development for our communities.



LENSES FOR ANALYSIS AND DESIGN

TACKLING SOCIAL INEQUALITIES



Sussex is characterised by significant social inequalities that limit opportunities and access to all that life should offer. Our civic mission will promote sustainability and community cohesion through inclusive and socially just practices, fully recognising the additions brought by those who join our communities in Sussex.

PIONEERING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY



Sussex is a leading region for digital innovation, as well as for advances in technology and how we live and work with these, but there is so much more that we can do here. Our civic mission will nurture sustainable partnerships in cutting-edge digital technology and expand their visibility and impact.

DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH



Sussex has a diverse and thriving economy, but there is great untapped potential for growth, and a need to address economic inequalities in order to build prosperity for all in our communities. Our civic mission will identify and capitalise upon economic opportunities to create a more sustainable, connected, and equitable Sussex.







CUA JOINT INITIATIVES 2025-2028

We have agreed to work together on joint initiatives at the intersection of the three dimensions of our CUA: our natural environment, learning and health, and culture and heritage. We will collaborate with stakeholders across the region to develop the following projects.

NATURE RECOVERY AND BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

Coherently integrating diverse projects

We will work together to maximise the contribution of research and education at the heart of nature recovery and biodiversity conservation in Sussex. Building upon existing partnerships with major agencies and collaborative initiatives, such as the South Downs National Park Authority, High Weald National Landscape, Living Coast UNESCO Biosphere, and Sussex Bay, we will showcase, protect, and respond to the wonder and vitality of Sussex's natural environment. Adding to existing projects examining the environmental impacts of pollutants and damaging practices on land and in the sea, our partnership activity will raise the profile of nature recovery projects throughout the region, protecting biodiversity across the South Downs and strengthening the region's marine and coastal resilience. Our work will draw in the renowned quality and diversity of Sussex's arts, culture, and heritage, and encompass links with education and health, as well as wider community safety and belonging.

SUSTAINABILITY DATA OBSERVATORY AND MONITORING HUB

Openly sharing data with strong public and community engagement

We will establish an environmental Sustainability Data Observatory to support regional decision-making, innovation, and community empowerment. Building upon existing projects across the Sussex Downs, our waterways, and our coastline, we will provide in-depth monitoring of biodiversity and environmental quality for land, river, and sea. Our work will create different combinations of cutting-edge monitoring technology, citizen science, environmental

DNA, and professional surveying to work with and empower local communities to assess the current state of nature in our region in a variety of ways and track nature recovery over time. The environmental sustainability data will be fed back to land managers and policy makers to improve decision making, informing and optimising the development of sustainable and effective innovations throughout Sussex. Numerous dimensions of our community life – from children and young people's civic participation through to professional artists' creative expressions – will be centrally involved in developing, testing, and responding to our environmental monitoring activity, creating a living lab that supports inclusive progress toward a just transition to an environmentally sustainable future.

JUST TRANSITION TO NET ZERO THROUGH RENEWABLE ENERGY

Drawing upon innovations in technology and policy

We will support a region-wide transition to net zero energy by 2040, building upon the momentum of the Sussex Energy Mission and the Sussex Energy Forum hosted in July 2025. Adding to the existing collaborations of universities, local authorities, and energy stakeholders, we will actively contribute to strategic planning through the development of Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs) under the National Energy System Operator (NESO). These plans aim to integrate electricity, gas, hydrogen, and heat systems into a coherent regional framework, informed by local needs and infrastructure constraints. The Sussex Energy Mission provides a platform for showcasing decarbonisation projects – such as large-scale solar, retrofits, and community energy initiatives – and aligning them with national investment priorities. Our work together will strengthen stakeholder engagement, amplify regional voices in national energy planning, and ensure that the transition to net zero delivers economic and social benefits for communities across Sussex.

GOVERNANCE AND DELIVERY

To ensure the effective implementation of our shared civic mission, the governance and delivery of Sustainable, Connected, and Equitable Sussex will be structured around a collaborative, transparent, and accountable model. This model draws on best practice from the UK-wide Civic University Network and reflects the relational, place-based approach to which we are all committed. The delivery of this agreement will be overseen by a three-tiered governance structure to provide effective strategic oversight, coordination, and project delivery.





1. CIVIC MOBILISATION FORUM

This is the strategic leadership body comprising the senior leaders from each of the signatory partners. This group will meet annually to:

- Provide strategic oversight and direction for the CUA
- Champion the civic mission across their organisations and networks
- Agree on shared priorities, milestones, and measures of success
- Review progress and ensure alignment with regional strategies and community needs.

2. CUA STEERING GROUP

A cross-organisational team with civic leads from each of the universities and other partners, responsible for coordinating the implementation of agreed initiatives. Three times each year, this group will:

- Translate strategic priorities into deliverable workstreams
- Monitor progress and report to the Civic Mobilisation Forum
- Facilitate communication and collaboration across thematic areas
- Identify and secure resources to support delivery.

3. THEMATIC PROJECT DELIVERY GROUPS

These groups will be formed around the core joint initiatives of the CUA, responding and in turn feeding back to the CUA Steering Group. Each of these groups, expected to meet at least quarterly depending on project needs will:

- Co-design and co-deliver specific projects aligned with the CUA themes
- Include representatives from academia, local authorities, community organisations and networks, and other public, private, and/or voluntary sector stakeholders
- Embed participatory and inclusive approaches to ensure community voice and lived experience shape delivery.




To maximise impact and avoid duplication, the governance model will actively align with existing regional structures and strategic initiatives. For example, we will be integrated with:

- LSIP (Local Skills Improvement Plan), ensuring that civic initiatives support local workforce development and skills pipelines
- LVEP (Local Visitor Economy Partnership), collaborating on sustainable tourism
- The Growth Boards of the three council partners:
 - ▶ Brighton and Hove Economic Growth Board
 - ▶ Team East Sussex
 - ▶ West Sussex Economic Growth Board
- Other Sussex economic stakeholders, leveraging economic development strategies and aligning with the Sussex Energy Mission
- Get Sussex Working, an ongoing strategic plan in response to the Get Britain Working white paper.

Importantly, this Civic University Agreement is intended to inform, support, and enhance the community benefits of the future **Mayoral Combined County Authority**. All partners in this CUA are committed to ensuring our civic activities are embedded within devolved governance priorities. These linkages will be formalised through shared representation, data exchange, and joint planning processes, enabling the CUA to act as a connective tissue across regional ambitions.

TYPES OF PARTNER ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE, CONNECTED, AND EQUITABLE SUSSEX

A very wide range of collaborative civic activity is already undertaken by the CUA partner organisations. The table below shows the many different types of partnership activity mapping onto the Dimensions and Lenses of this CUA.

	OUR ENVIRONMENT 	OUR LEARNING AND HEALTH 	OUR CULTURE AND HERITAGE 
TACKLING SOCIAL INEQUALITIES 	<p>Regional nature recovery and biodiversity projects connecting different communities</p> <p>Inclusive access to natural spaces</p> <p>Community-led climate justice work</p>	<p>Diverse and accessible skills pathways – schools, FE, HE, CPD, lifelong learning</p> <p>Awareness-raising and behaviour change for pro-environmental practices</p> <p>Targeted services for disadvantaged groups and community-level initiatives that promote educational access, wellbeing, and employability</p>	<p>Creative place-making activities for diverse communities</p> <p>Storytelling rooted in Sussex history and a wide range of community groups today</p> <p>Accessibility and inclusive promotion of arts and culture venues/events</p>
PIONEERING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY 	<p>Platforms and practices for sharing data</p> <p>Environmental monitoring observatory (citizen science apps)</p> <p>Digital tools enhancing community safety</p>	<p>Immersive and smart technology to support environmental education and wellbeing</p> <p>Enhancements in measuring impacts and reporting on sustainability actions</p>	<p>Expanded access to culture and heritage across Sussex through digital interfaces, for residents, visitors, and remote audiences</p> <p>Digital tools for urban planning to optimise space for creatives</p>
DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH 	<p>Just transition to net zero via innovation in renewable energy</p> <p>Circular economy in food and waste systems</p> <p>Eco-tourism and visitor economy relating to natural environment</p>	<p>Predictive data analytics to identify risks and reduce drop-out from education or work</p> <p>Educational opportunities and ecological health to attract domestic and international students</p>	<p>Showcasing creative industries across Sussex, anchored by environmental commitments</p> <p>Night-time economy and domestic/ international visitor economy relating to culture and heritage</p>



NEW DAWN

GET INVOLVED!

We believe that a truly sustainable, connected, and equitable Sussex can only be achieved through the active participation of the people who live, work, and learn in Sussex. That's why we warmly invite individuals, groups, and organisations across the region to join us in shaping and delivering this Civic University Agreement.

Whether you are a community group with a bold idea, a local authority seeking collaboration, a business with a shared vision, or a resident who wants to make a difference – there is a place for you in this work.

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

Through contacting the central coordinating hub for this CUA at publicaffairs@sussex.ac.uk, you can express your interest and get involved in a variety of ways:

Integrate into an existing collaborative initiative

Suggest ways in which you or your organisation can add value to any of the existing activities and initiatives within this CUA.

Volunteer your time or expertise

Staff, students, and community members are encouraged to contribute to ongoing initiatives through volunteering, mentoring, or sharing specialist knowledge.

Propose a civic project

Share your ideas for collaborative projects that align with our shared mission. We welcome proposals that are community-led, innovative, and rooted in place.

Join mailing list for newsletter/ events update

All partners will showcase activities and events relating to this CUA, but you can email us at publicaffairs@sussex.ac.uk if you would like to be added to our mailing list. Newsletters and updates will always offer opportunities for you to share relevant information about any other activities/ events that are aligned to this CUA.

