

Seizing the Opportunity

The election of Hampshire and the Solent's first Mayor in May 2026 is a pivotal moment for our region. Business South is ready to work in partnership with the incoming Mayor, constituent authorities, and regional leaders to turn strategic ambition into practical action.

Our Asks – Key Calls to Action

We are asking politicians and decision-makers to commit to the following:

1. Work collaboratively with constituent authorities – align plans and priorities for joined-up action.
2. Engage with Business South and our 150+ Champions – gain insights and connect with key businesses and stakeholders.
3. Back the 4Cs framework – adopt this approach to tackle challenges and unlock opportunities for sustainable growth.
4. Support delivery boards and partnerships – including housing, infrastructure, energy, skills, sustainability, health, and culture.
5. Champion the region nationally and internationally – secure funding and investment, and raise the profile of Hampshire and the Solent.



This work has been prepared over the course of the year by Business South, with input from all of its Action Groups, representing over 150 champion organisations across all sectors of the economy.

Together, we can ensure Hampshire and the Solent realises its full potential – delivering good growth for generations to come.

Get in Touch

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Priorities for Good Growth across Hampshire and The Solent



Who we are

Business South brings together business, government, and communities to deliver sustainable, inclusive growth for Hampshire and the Solent – creating a globally competitive coastal region.

We are an independent business leadership organisation representing over 150 organisations or Champions. Collectively, they represent approximately 100,000 employees and £4 billion in economic activity, giving Business South significant convening power and influence.

Through initiatives like the Champion programme, attendance at MIPIM, UKREiIF and EXPO REAL, and convening the Central South All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), we influence national and regional policy, showcase opportunities internationally, and help shape the future of our region.

Why Now

In May 2026, the region will elect its first Mayor for the Hampshire and Solent Mayoral Combined Authority. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring together previously fragmented approaches to growth, ensuring joined-up action and lasting impact.

In February 2025, the Central South APPG agreed to assemble a coordinated set of regional challenges and priorities. The goal: to create a coherent, unified plan that the incoming Mayor can consider as part of informing their own policy approach to drive and deliver meaningful change, in partnership with the new Unitary Authorities across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

The time has come to turn strategic insight into concrete action, ensuring the Central South's future is as bright as its promise.

Great Potential, Pressing Challenges

Hampshire and the Solent has extraordinary potential – world-class ports, vibrant cities, renowned universities, and stunning natural assets. But the region’s ability to grow and compete is held back by long-standing, interconnected challenges. Unless tackled through co-ordinated leadership, these issues will continue to limit prosperity and quality of life.



Social

- Pockets of deprivation alongside areas of prosperity create stark inequalities.
- Public services under pressure from a growing, ageing population.
- Workforce retention undermined by housing costs and poor connectivity – to employers, transport and e-connectivity across our urban and rural communities.



Environmental

- Flooding and coastal erosion driven by climate change threatens communities and infrastructure.
- Natural assets like the New Forest and South Downs need safeguarding alongside growth to support health and reduce dependencies.
- Complex environmental regulations can delay vital projects.



Economic

- A fragmented regional identity weakens the area’s voice and ability to attract investment.
- Loss of skilled talent, especially young people with economic inactivity issues, impacts innovation and competitiveness.
- Businesses face skills shortages in construction, defence, digital, and advanced manufacturing, especially in green skills.



Infrastructure

- Congested and slow transport networks with poor integration hold back growth and productivity.
- Housing shortages and affordability pressures pose a continuing and significant challenge for the region, both socially and economically.
- Energy grid constraints stall new housing and commercial development, and water infrastructure constraints threaten our productivity.

Why Action is Needed Now

The Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) and our first elected Mayor in May 2026 provide a unique opportunity to:

- Integrate infrastructure and development planning across the region.
- Align decisions across councils and sectors.
- Secure new investment and funding.
- Deliver sustainable, inclusive growth that benefits people and the environment.

A Framework for Good Growth

Business South has distilled its recommendations into four pillars that provide a roadmap for sustainable, inclusive growth. These pillars are designed to tackle the region’s most pressing challenges through practical, co-ordinated action.



Commission

Independent evidence and insight to inform decision-making.

- **Strategic transport review** – feasibility for expanding water-based travel, integrated ticketing, and supporting key hubs such as ports and airports.
- **Energy Heat Map** – identify current and future grid capacity to align development and renewable energy opportunities.
- **Regional asset review** – comprehensive audit of land and infrastructure to guide strategic retention, redevelopment, and investment decisions.
- **Use of fiscal incentives** – assess grants and funding mechanisms to unlock growth and address bottlenecks.



Champion

Promote regional pride, key sectors, and transformational projects.

- **Build a strong regional identity** – instil pride and unity across Hampshire and the Solent to boost confidence, championing our area for its world class environment, and attract talent to underpin a world-beating economy.
- **Office for Investment** – establish a dedicated body to champion inward investment and promote priority sectors.
- **Secure funding for major projects** – such as the new hospital at M3 J7, and a physical innovation campus.
- **Expand successful programmes** – replicate initiatives like the Maritime & Transport Careers Programme into other sectors such as tourism.



Create

Develop the structures and strategies needed for long-term growth.

- **Strategic Development Strategy** – align land use, housing, transport, and environmental planning into a unified regional blueprint with reference to the Modern Industrial Strategy unlocking in particular industrial zones and the freeport.
- **Housing & Construction Academy** – deliver skills and training across the built environment to meet housing and infrastructure needs.
- **Strategic Skills Plan** – align the LSIP 2026 refresh and education and workforce planning with future economic priorities and establish the region as a centre of excellence for defence, green skills and jobs, attracting and retaining the workforce of the future to our region.
- **Embed sustainability and health resilience** – ensure new development protects natural capital and supports vibrant, sustainable communities in our rural and urban areas.



Convene

Bring the right people together to deliver change.

- **Quarterly Delivery Taskforce** – a cross-sector expert panel providing ongoing guidance, troubleshooting, and engagement to drive delivery.
- **Housing & Infrastructure Boards** – introduce Champions to chair boards for Housing Delivery, Challenging Sites, Energy, and Transport Boards, to coordinate planning and accelerate delivery.
- **Skills & Workforce Board** – align education and training with regional economic priorities and workforce needs, building on Southampton, Portsmouth and Havant’s locally targetted employment support programme for under 24s and over 50s.
- **Additional focus areas** – establish further boards exponent for sustainability, health & wellbeing, culture, and tourism to maximise benefit from our world class cultural destination.