

***Energy and  
Economic Growth***

**Clean Power as an Anchor  
for Regional Regeneration  
in the South East**

**Sprint Two Report**



# Contents

Foreword	2
Executive Summary	4
Energy, Infrastructure, and Growth in the South East – Insights From the Sprint	5
Draft Implementation Plan	9
Conclusion	11
About Us	12



*Sprint two was facilitated by Member of Parliament for East Worthing and Shoreham, Tom Rutland MP.  
(Photo: Silverstone Communications)*

## Foreword

**E**nergy sits at the heart of almost every challenge and opportunity facing the South East. From economic growth and regeneration to public health, housing delivery, industrial competitiveness, and climate responsibility, our ability to generate, move and use clean, affordable power will shape the future of our region for decades to come.

The South East is home to critically important national infrastructure - ports, transport corridors, coastal communities, and energy assets – but it is also on the frontline of many of the pressures discussed during this Sprint. Air quality along major freight routes, constrained grid capacity, rising electricity costs, and planning systems that struggle to balance local consent with national need are not abstract policy debates. They are lived experiences for residents, businesses, and councils across Sussex and the wider South East.

This Sprint on Energy and Economic Growth brought together an unusually broad and valuable mix of voices: local government leaders, industry operators, port authorities, energy suppliers, academics, infrastructure specialists, and community representatives. What emerged was not a single silver bullet, but a clear and consistent diagnosis of the problem we face – and a set of practical, grounded ideas for how we begin to address it.

The starting point for the discussion was an implicit but important assumption: the South East must be able to generate more of its own power, closer to where it is used. Long grid connection times, rising transmission costs, and national infrastructure bottlenecks mean that waiting for distant solutions will leave our region exposed. If we want resilient growth, cleaner air, and lower energy bills, local and regional solutions must form a far greater part of the mix.

Participants I met at the Sprint and conference were frank about the scale of the challenge. Ports that could act as hubs for clean energy are constrained by grid access and electricity prices that make electrification commercially unattractive. Airports face ambitious targets for sustainable aviation fuel without a credible supply roadmap. Heavy goods vehicles continue to dominate freight movement in a region with limited rail alternatives, yet the infrastructure for large-scale electrification does not exist. Meanwhile, communities are being asked to absorb the visual and environmental impact of new energy infrastructure without always seeing clear local benefits.

What struck me most was the degree of consensus around the systemic nature of these issues. Again and again, contributors returned to the same themes: fragmented decision-making, siloed expertise, misaligned incentives, and an adversarial planning system that rewards objection rather than collaboration. The South East does not lack knowledge or ambition – it lacks coherence.

At the same time, this was a positive conversation. The Sprint surfaced a wealth of opportunity – local renewable generation, microgrids, community energy schemes, green roofs, tidal projects, port-based electrification, and innovative regulatory mechanisms all offer tangible ways forward. Crucially, many of these solutions are smaller, more agile, and more reversible than the large-scale infrastructure projects that often dominate national debate.

There was also strong recognition that evidence and trust matter. Whether discussing solar farms, onshore wind, or biodiversity impacts, participants highlighted the need for better shared data and more transparent modelling. The proposal to develop a digital twin of the South East – capable of testing scenarios, trade-offs, and cumulative impacts – is emblematic of the more mature, evidence-led approach that is now required.

This Sprint reinforced my view that delivering the energy transition is not just about technology or targets. It is about leadership. Local political leadership that is prepared to make the case for infrastructure, to engage communities honestly and to articulate the benefits as well as the costs. National leadership that enables regions to act, rather than tying them up in delay and uncertainty.

The South East has enormous assets: ports, universities, skilled workforces, innovative companies, and engaged communities. Harnessing those assets requires us to move beyond one-size-fits-all solutions and towards a genuinely place-based energy strategy. This report captures the substance of that conversation and sets out a credible path from discussion to delivery.

The challenge now is not understanding what needs to be done. It is having the confidence and co-ordination to do it.

**Geri Silverstone**  
Chief Executive  
Silverstone Communications



# Executive Summary

**T**his report captures the outputs of Sprint Two: Energy and Economic Growth from the Get Britain Growing South East Conference, which explored how clean power can anchor regional regeneration across the South East of England. The Sprint brought together stakeholders from local government, industry, academia, ports, energy providers, and community organisations to examine the barriers to delivering affordable, reliable, and low-emission energy at a regional level.

Participants identified a shared set of challenges. These include long delays and high costs associated with grid connectivity, rising electricity prices that undermine electrification, fragmented strategic planning across the South East, and an adversarial planning system that inhibits delivery. Sector-specific pressures were also highlighted, including the electrification of ports and freight, sustainable aviation fuel supply for Gatwick, uncertainty around the future of the Dungeness nuclear site, and growing tension between renewable deployment and land use, biodiversity, and food security.

Despite these challenges, the Sprint identified a series of opportunities. Local and decentralised energy solutions – including microgeneration, community energy projects, microgrids, green roofs, and tidal schemes – were consistently identified as practical, scalable, and locally beneficial. Participants argued for a shift away from reliance on distant national infrastructure towards solutions that generate power closer to demand and deliver visible benefits to communities.

A central theme was the lack of a unified strategic vision for energy across the South East. Knowledge, data, and expertise exist, but they are dispersed across organisations and geographies. This fragmentation undermines trust, slows planning approvals and weakens the region's ability to act collectively. The proposal to develop a digital twin of the South East emerged as a potential mechanism to address this, enabling evidence-led scenario testing and better-informed decision-making.

The Sprint also highlighted the importance of leadership and communication. Political leadership at local and national level is essential to make the case for necessary infrastructure, to engage communities meaningfully and to move away from a planning culture dominated by objection rather than co-design.

This report sets out the key themes of the Sprint, provides a detailed account of the discussion and proposes a draft implementation plan focused on mapping regional energy needs, piloting local solutions, strengthening strategic co-ordination, and reforming planning and regulatory frameworks. Together, these steps offer a credible pathway to making clean power a driver of economic growth and regional regeneration in the South East.



*Attendees of sprint two represented a range of different industries, from renewable energy, to housing, and infrastructure.  
(Photo: Silverstone Communications)*