Opportunity East
A Partner in Delivering Growth in Every Postcode

The East of England: The UK's Growth Engine Ready to Deliver

Investing in the East of England is not a regional proposition. It is a national commitment that would turbocharge the UK economy.

For decades, the East has quietly powered the national economy. It is one of the UK's most productive regions, generating more than £214 billion of economic output annually, while attracting almost £10 billion of private sector R&D investment every year. It leads the country in business research intensity, feeds the nation, and sits at the heart of Britain's energy future.

The East is where world-leading life sciences meet advanced manufacturing; where globally significant ports connect Britain to international markets; where innovation clusters drive discovery and commercialisation; where one-third of England's highest-quality agricultural land is situated; and home to key defence industries and airbases crucial to our country’s security.

We’re also strategically important for energy, and the home of major energy assets, including offshore wind, nuclear, gas and emerging hydrogen technologies and carbon capture and storage. These are helping secure the UK's future resilience, and are crucial to the construction of the UK’s future energy system

Yet, despite its contribution to UK prosperity, the East has not received investment commensurate with its economic importance. The region receives among the lowest levels of public investment per head in England, creating growing pressures on housing, transport, water, energy, digital infrastructure and skills. These constraints are no longer simply regional issues; they are now national barriers to growth.

The message from our flagship reports, Opportunity East, and Opportunity East: One year on, is clear: if the Government wants to reindustrialise the country and ensure growth in every postcode, then investment in the East will pay dividends.

The opportunity is substantial. With fairer investment and stronger partnership between national and local government, the East could become a £235 billion economy by the end of this Parliament, generating additional tax revenues, jobs, homes and energy capacity that benefit every part of the United Kingdom.

The East is already delivering. With the right support, it can deliver even more.

Key Messages

1. If Britain wants growth, it must back the East

The East of England is one of the country's most significant economic assets. Unlocking its full potential is one of the fastest and most cost-effective ways to increase national productivity.

The success our region has experienced comes with costs – and as the fastest growing region in the UK, housing has become unaffordable.

2. Housing is crucial to maintaining growth

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3. Feeding and powering the nation

We generate enough clean power to cater for 32% of the UK's homes and employ 12% of the UK's agricultural workforce. The path to national resilience goes through our region.

The East of England receives less than the per-capita UK average in terms of public spending by around £10bn. With even a small uplift, the gains could be huge.

4. Underserved by Government funding

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5. Infrastructure is the critical constraint

The challenge is not economic potential. It is instead capacity and connectivity. Transport, water, energy and skills infrastructure must keep pace with growth.

The East of England is an international gateway, with over half the UKs containers passing through our region. We're also the home of key sectors in the Industrial Strategy

6. Key to reindustrialisation

A region of economic productivity and primed for growth:

GVA will be at
£235 BILLION
by 2029

Over
£1,900
Research and Development spend per capita – highest of any region in the UK

Economy grew by
57% **since 1992**
12 points ahead of the UK average (excluding London)

270,000
businesses

A strong labour market:

3.3
MILLION
jobs

Employment rate of
78.6%

Fastest growing region in terms of population between 2011 and 2021

Jobs in the East of England **more productive than the UK average**

A clean energy powerhouse:

Generated enough low-carbon electricity in 2023 to power
32%
of UK homes

Potential to increase this to **90%** by 2035 with investment

Currently host
5GW
of installed wind capacity, with a further **10GW planned** installed or in development

Offshore wind presents a
£25 billion
investment opportunity for the UK

Delivering the homes we need:

Ambition to deliver
227,000
new homes

In 2023/24,
28,640
homes were built

In 2023/24,
94,406
households were on local council waiting lists

In 2023/24,
local councils and housing associations built a total of
7,002 homes, 861 of which were for social rent

A connected region:

163
MILLION
passenger train journeys made in 2024/5, the **third highest region in the country**

Half the UK's container freight handled by Felixstowe, Harwich and Thames Freeport

Uniquely placed to connect to
700
global ports

4 airports providing a critical mobility link to the rest of the world for air freight

Tackling the climate crisis:

Advancing innovative approaches to reduce overall pressure on the water environment and investing in new reservoirs

Total **greenhouse gas emissions have fallen by**
39%
since 2005

Our region received just
£6
per capita from the main climate change funds – **the lowest of any region at just 2.92% of the funding available**

Extensive partnership working by public, private and third sectors to address climate change

What is holding the East back?

Water

The East is a water-scarce region, and its strong economic and population growth has stretched underlying natural resources Both water supply and wastewater capacity are two critical pinch points that need addressing if businesses and housebuilders are to continue their vital work growing the economy.

Connectivity

As a predominantly rural region, we face persistent connectivity challenges. Limited transport links and poor digital infrastructure continue to constrain many businesses and communities. Despite this, we have delivered growth and positive outcomes across the region. Targeted investment in transport and digital connectivity will help us achieve even better results.

Resilience

The region is faced with considerable challenges to its underlying infrastructure. Coastal erosion is causing entire towns to disappear into the sea, while flooding causes considerable damage. It is expected that extreme weather events are likely to become more frequent. Therefore, there is a need to ensure that our region is protected against such threats.

Affordable Housing

Due to our economic and demographic success story, more people want to live in the East of England. In the last census, we were the fastest growing region in terms of population. This has had an impact on housing affordability, with the East becoming one of the most unaffordable parts of the country to live in.

Skills Provision

The East of England faces a significant skills challenge that threatens its ability to deliver economic growth, energy projects and ambitious housing targets. The region records the lowest participation rate in further education and skills training of any English region and the second-lowest achievement rate. Skills deprivation is particularly acute in many rural and coastal communities, while qualification levels remain below the national average in several areas. This is despite the huge number of infrastructure and growth projects in our region – undermining our ability to provide the next generation of workers to support these schemes.

What Government Can Do

Prioritise enabling infrastructure

The region largely welcomes and supports the development of key infrastructure projects, including the Fens and Lincolnshire reservoirs and Sizewell C. However, to unlock our full economic and housing growth potential, other projects such as the Ely and Haughley rail junctions, along with improvements to the A12, A14, A11, and A47, are necessary along with investment in wastewater capacity.

Give local authorities the resource to build their business cases

The Government has suggested that local authorities may experience some level of fiscal devolution in the coming UK Budget this autumn. We welcome this move and would appreciate the additional fiscal freedom to better plan our own local and regional infrastructure pipelines based on the needs of providers in the East. Funding to enable regional collaboration between projects to avoid overwhelming labour supply could be critical for the delivery of the vast number of schemes planned for our region.

Fund the East in line with other regions

The East of England has experienced perennial underinvestment from the public purse, despite our exceptional growth. If expenditure in the East of England matched the national per-head average, the region would see an extra £10 billion investment annually. This would go a long way in unlocking road, rail, digital and resilience infrastructure upgrades.

Undertake an independent resilience assessment

Given the challenges facing the East of England Landscape over the coming decades, we request that the government undertake an independent Resilience assessment for the entire of the East of England. This will create an understanding of where areas of risk are within the region and outline a plan to mitigate these risks – be this risk flooding, coastal erosion, soil erosion or water scarcity. This is an approach that could then be scalable for other high-risk areas nationally.

Funding for skills

The Government should empower local areas to shape skills provision, increase funding for training and apprenticeships, and ensure the workforce needed for major growth projects is developed locally. Connectivity is also linked to the skills agenda, and we ask the new administration to build on their bus fare freeze with a commitment to better rural connectivity.

Local
Government
East