



THE ESSEX ECONOMY 2026

Growth, Investment and Opportunity

An Invest Essex economic briefing

September 2026

Executive Summary

Essex is a large and diverse economy with significant strengths across advanced manufacturing, engineering, logistics, construction, energy, technology, life sciences, financial and professional services, aviation and the creative industries.

Recent evidence points to an economy that is continuing to grow and attract investment, while operating in a more challenging national and international environment.

The latest **Essex LTD. 2026** analysis from Grant Thornton shows that Essex's 100 largest privately owned businesses recorded combined turnover of **£14.65 billion**, up 4.4%, while EBITDA increased by 13.7% to £972 million. Those businesses employ more than 71,000 people. The report also identifies strong performance in real estate and construction and significant growth in private healthcare.

At sector level, Essex has particularly substantial employment and business bases in advanced manufacturing and engineering. Recent Essex Chambers evidence identifies more than 40,000 people employed across more than 4,000 businesses in manufacturing, engineering and related aviation activities.

Other sectors are developing rapidly. Essex's creative economy is expanding, with film and television production employment up 71% since 2018 and the number of creative businesses increasing by up to 30%. Technology and AI are becoming increasingly important to business productivity, supported by the University of Essex, Freeport East and other innovation partners.

Essex also benefits from a distinctive connectivity proposition. The county sits between London and Cambridge and is served by two international airports, major road and rail connections, and significant port infrastructure. London Stansted supports more than 12,000 jobs across approximately 200 businesses, while London Southend Airport is continuing to expand its network and employment base.

The investment pipeline is equally significant. Essex is seeing development across logistics, energy, infrastructure, housing, manufacturing, aviation and commercial property, alongside emerging opportunities in technology, life sciences, clean energy and the space economy.

However, the evidence also points to challenges.

Business confidence remains subdued. Skills shortages continue to affect employers, particularly in engineering, construction and digital roles. Productivity remains below the national average, despite continued improvement. Access to growth capital remains an issue across the wider East of England, particularly for innovative businesses seeking to scale.

The opportunity for Essex is therefore not simply to attract more investment, but to convert its existing assets into greater productivity, higher-value employment, stronger businesses and sustainable long-term growth.

This report identifies **six themes** that characterise the Essex economy in 2026:

1. **A substantial and resilient business base**
 2. **Strong sector diversity, with particular strengths in manufacturing, engineering, construction and logistics**
 3. **Growing opportunities in technology, AI, life sciences and creative industries**
 4. **Exceptional connectivity and major infrastructure investment**
 5. **A significant energy and clean-growth opportunity**
 6. **Skills, productivity and access to finance as the critical enablers of future growth**
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1. The Essex Economy at a Glance

Essex is the fourth largest economy in the UK, combining a substantial private-sector business base with nationally significant infrastructure, major employers, international connectivity and a diverse range of industries.

The latest evidence from Grant Thornton's Essex LTD. 2026 report provides a useful snapshot of the strength of the county's largest privately owned businesses.

Essex's leading private businesses

Indicator	Latest evidence
Combined turnover of Essex Top 100 privately owned businesses	£14.65bn
Year-on-year turnover growth	4.4%
Combined EBITDA	£972m

EBITDA growth	13.7%
Employees	71,792
Turnover generated by highlighted international subsidiaries	£7.5bn+

The figures demonstrate the scale of the private-sector economy and its ability to generate growth despite continuing cost and economic pressures.

The composition of Essex's economy is also important. Growth is not concentrated in a single industry. Instead, the county combines established sectors such as manufacturing, engineering, construction and logistics with emerging opportunities in technology, life sciences, clean energy and creative industries.

That diversity provides resilience while also creating opportunities for businesses to connect across sectors.

2. A Manufacturing and Engineering Economy

Manufacturing remains one of Essex's most important economic foundations.

Recent evidence from Essex Chambers identifies more than **4,000 manufacturing, engineering and related businesses employing more than 40,000 people**.

The sector includes advanced manufacturing, aerospace and aeronautical engineering, automotive, defence, electronics, precision engineering and specialist manufacturing.

Essex is home to internationally recognised companies and supply chains, including businesses operating in aerospace, defence, automotive and advanced engineering.

The sector is also increasingly technology intensive.

Businesses are investing in:

- automation;
- artificial intelligence;
- digital manufacturing;
- robotics;
- advanced materials;
- decarbonisation;
- engineering technology; and
- more resilient supply chains.

The local labour market illustrates both the opportunity and the challenge.

Essex Chambers' latest sector evidence identified **more than 2,000 vacancies** in a single month for occupations including engineering technicians, assemblers, routine operatives and mechanical engineers during the year to summer 2026.

This is an important indicator.

The constraint on manufacturing growth is not necessarily a lack of demand or industrial capability. Increasingly, the availability of suitably skilled people is a determining factor.

The opportunity

Essex has an opportunity to build on its existing industrial base rather than treating advanced manufacturing as an emerging sector.

The priority is to help existing companies move further up the value chain, adopt new technology, develop export capability and connect more effectively with research, skills and investment.

3. Construction, Property and Infrastructure

Construction and property remain major components of the Essex economy.

The construction sector is estimated to be worth **£7.5 billion in GVA**, supporting some **65,000 jobs across Greater Essex**.

The scale of future development is significant.

Essex is seeing investment and planning activity across:

- housing;
- commercial development;
- industrial and logistics space;
- transport infrastructure;
- energy infrastructure;
- regeneration;
- retrofit; and
- major nationally significant infrastructure projects.

The Greater Essex property market evidence highlights projects including the expansion of the Port of Tilbury, development around the A127 corridor and infrastructure associated with the Tendring-Colchester Borders Garden Community.

The opening of Beaulieu Park Station, the first new mainline station in over 100 years is another example of infrastructure investment changing the economic geography of the county by improving connectivity and supporting development.

The opportunity

The challenge is to ensure that infrastructure investment translates into productive economic activity.

That means creating the commercial space businesses need, ensuring new developments are properly connected, providing the skills required to build and operate infrastructure, and ensuring communities benefit from the employment and investment generated.

4. Logistics, Ports and International Connectivity

Essex's geography provides a major competitive asset.

The county has direct access to London, Cambridge and the wider South East, while its ports and airports connect businesses to national and international markets.

The logistics economy is supported by:

- the Port of Tilbury;
- Harwich International Port;
- Thames Freeport;
- Freeport East;
- London Stansted Airport;
- London Southend Airport;
- major road networks including the M25, M11 and A12; and
- an extensive rail network.

Recent development at Tilbury includes plans for a new rail-connected freight terminal, while major logistics schemes are also progressing elsewhere in the county.

The logistics opportunity is increasingly linked to technology, with warehouse automation, data, AI, robotics and improved supply-chain management changing the way logistics businesses operate.

The Bank of England's September 2026 business intelligence identified warehouse operators among those looking to automate in response to higher labour costs.

The opportunity

Essex can increasingly position itself not simply as a logistics location, but as a **high-value logistics and distribution economy**, combining physical connectivity with technology, automation and advanced supply-chain capability.

5. Aviation: Two Airports, Two Economic Assets

Few county economies have the aviation assets available to Essex.

London Stansted

London Stansted is the East of England's largest single-site employer, supporting **more than 12,000 jobs across approximately 200 businesses**.

Its economic role extends beyond aviation.

The airport supports:

- logistics;
- engineering;
- hospitality;
- retail;
- tourism;
- international business connectivity; and
- skills development.

In its budget of February 2026, Essex County Council allocated **£5 million** towards the expansion of Stansted Airport College.

The proposed expansion would increase student capacity from 568 to approximately 1,350 students a year, strengthening the pipeline of aviation, engineering and STEM skills.

London Southend

London Southend Airport is also experiencing significant growth.

In September 2026, easyJet announced a fourth aircraft based at the airport and a new route to Rhodes.

The airport expects passenger numbers to exceed **one million in 2027** and expects to employ more than 400 people directly.

The airport has also reported strong passenger growth during 2026.

The opportunity

The two airports give Essex an unusual combination of passenger connectivity, freight potential, employment, tourism and international business access.

The wider economic opportunity is to connect airport growth more effectively with local supply chains, skills, tourism, inward investment and international trade.

6. Technology, AI and the Digital Economy

Technology is increasingly becoming a cross-cutting driver of growth rather than a standalone sector.

AI, cyber security, data and automation are already changing manufacturing, logistics, professional services, financial services, education, healthcare and creative industries.

Essex has significant academic assets in this area, particularly through the University of Essex and Essex Business School.

In September 2026, the University of Essex announced a new AI skills programme backed by **£300,000 of Innovate UK funding**, designed to help businesses develop practical AI capability.

A separate partnership between the University, Freeport East and Mid Suffolk District Council is providing SMEs with access to expertise in AI, cyber security, data automation and innovation.

These initiatives illustrate an important feature of the Essex economy: the opportunity is not simply to create technology companies, but to help existing Essex businesses become more productive through technology.

The opportunity

AI adoption could become one of the most important productivity opportunities available to Essex businesses.

The challenge is moving from awareness to implementation.

That requires:

- management capability;
- digital skills;
- access to expertise;
- investment capital;
- trusted innovation partnerships; and
- practical support for SMEs.

7. Life Sciences and Health Innovation

Life sciences represents another area of potential growth.

Essex benefits from its universities, healthcare organisations, research capability and proximity to the wider Cambridge and London ecosystems.

The University of Essex has been developing its investment and innovation activity, particularly around deep tech, medtech, climate and agri-tech.

The wider investment environment is also becoming more supportive.

The British Business Bank has recently committed significant new capital to UK life sciences funds, while its new **£140 million East of England Investment Fund** is designed to improve access to finance for businesses across the region.

This is particularly relevant because the East of England has a strong university and innovation base but has historically attracted a smaller share of UK equity investment relative to its contribution to the spinout ecosystem.

The opportunity

Essex does not need to replicate Cambridge.

Its opportunity is to build stronger connections between its own research strengths, businesses, investors and neighbouring innovation ecosystems.

8. Creative Industries: A Fast-Growing Opportunity

The creative economy is increasingly visible within Essex's growth story.

A new Essex report published in September 2026 found that:

- film and TV production employment has increased by **71% since 2018**; and
- the number of creative businesses has increased by up to **30%**.

The county's creative economy includes screen industries, music, performing arts, visual arts, games and related creative businesses.

The growth of businesses such as Witham-based games developer Dlala Studios illustrates how locally founded creative businesses can develop intellectual property and reach international markets.

The sector also has wider economic significance.

Creative businesses can contribute to:

- town-centre regeneration;
- visitor economy growth;
- skills;
- entrepreneurship;
- inward investment;
- placemaking; and
- the attractiveness of Essex as a place to live and work.

The opportunity

The next stage of creative growth will depend partly on infrastructure.

The recent sector report identifies the need for flexible studio space, affordable creative workspace, rehearsal facilities, business incubation and creative skills.

9. Energy and Clean Growth

Essex is becoming increasingly important within the UK's energy landscape.

The county combines:

- significant electricity infrastructure;
- ports;
- industrial land;
- offshore wind opportunities;
- solar;
- battery storage;
- hydrogen potential;
- sustainable aviation opportunities; and
- major energy infrastructure projects.

Recent investment activity includes new battery storage capacity around Rayleigh.

Essex is also affected by a number of major nationally significant infrastructure projects, including solar and battery developments, electricity network reinforcement and proposed interconnection infrastructure.

The wider energy opportunity is particularly significant for industrial and technology investment.

Reliable, affordable and increasingly low-carbon energy is becoming an important factor in decisions about where businesses locate and expand.

This is particularly relevant to energy-intensive industries and emerging data-centre investment.

The opportunity

Essex has the potential to develop a wider energy economy, rather than simply hosting energy infrastructure.

That includes opportunities in:

- engineering;
- construction;
- operations and maintenance;

- energy technology;
 - storage;
 - hydrogen;
 - offshore wind supply chains;
 - low-carbon fuels; and
 - associated professional services.
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10. Tourism, Hospitality and the Visitor Economy

The visitor economy is another significant contributor to Essex's economic activity.

Visit Essex reports that the county attracts approximately **54 million visitors a year**, contributing around **£3.4 billion to the local economy**.

The opportunity extends well beyond traditional tourism.

Essex's proximity to London, two airports, coastline, countryside, heritage, food and drink businesses, events and cultural attractions creates opportunities for:

- leisure tourism;
- business tourism;
- conferences and events;
- hospitality;
- food and drink;
- destination development; and
- international visitors.

The sector is varied with traditional historical and coastal offers. This is particularly important because visitor expenditure circulates through local businesses, supporting employment across hospitality, retail, transport, culture and leisure.

11. The Business Environment: Growth Alongside Pressure

The Essex economy should not be viewed through an exclusively positive lens.

The most recent business evidence points to a mixed environment.

The ICAEW Business Confidence Monitor for the East of England recorded business confidence at **-11.6 in Q2 2026**, down from -8.8 in Q1, although still above the UK average of -14.6.

Businesses reported continuing growth in domestic sales and exports, but also cited:

- geopolitical uncertainty;
- labour costs;
- transport issues;
- rising input costs;
- cautious capital investment; and
- pressure on margins.

The Bank of England's September 2026 intelligence similarly found that conditions remained uneven.

There were signs of improving output and confidence in some business services and manufactured exports, but significant pockets of weakness remained.

This matters for Essex. Growth should not be assumed simply because investment projects are being announced.

The ability of businesses to invest, recruit, export and adopt technology will determine how much of the potential economic growth translates into actual productivity and jobs. Invest Essex will continue to monitor how this evolves.

12. Skills: The Critical Enabler

Across almost every sector, skills emerge as one of the defining issues.

The evidence from manufacturing and engineering points to significant vacancies.

Construction is expanding its training capacity.

Aviation is investing in specialist education.

Technology businesses require new AI and cyber skills.

The Essex Growth Agency has launched a **£900,000 Skills and Innovation Capital Fund**, supporting post-16 providers to invest in equipment, digital tools and immersive learning.

The question is not simply whether Essex has enough people. It is whether Essex has enough people with the right skills in the right places at the right time.

13. Access to Finance and Scaling Businesses

Essex has a substantial business base, but the next stage of growth will require more businesses to move from start-up to scale-up.

The East of England's investment position highlights the challenge.

The British Business Bank's new **£140 million East of England Investment Fund** will provide loans from £25,000 to £2 million and equity investments of up to £5 million.

The Bank notes that the East of England is home to 15% of UK University spinout businesses but received 9% of UK equity investment by value in the previous year.

For Essex, this suggests an opportunity to strengthen the investment ecosystem around:

- start-ups;
- scale-ups;
- university spinouts;
- innovative SMEs;
- inward investment;
- international investors; and
- businesses seeking growth capital.

This is an area where business networks, universities, investors and economic-development organisations can play an important connecting role.

14. Productivity: The Opportunity Behind the Growth Story

Economic growth is ultimately about more than the number of businesses or jobs.

Productivity matters.

The latest Greater Essex skills evidence, using ONS productivity data updated in January 2026, shows GVA per hour worked in Greater Essex rising from approximately £38.2 in 2022 to £39.2 in 2023.

However, England remained higher at approximately £42.1 per hour. The gap is therefore narrowing only gradually so this creates a significant opportunity.

If Essex can improve productivity through:

- technology adoption;
- management capability;
- infrastructure;
- skills;
- automation;
- innovation;
- investment; and
- stronger business-to-university collaboration,

then existing businesses can generate more economic value without relying solely on increases in employment.

For a large economy such as Essex, relatively small improvements in productivity can translate into substantial additional economic output.

15. What the Evidence Says About Essex

Taken together, the recent evidence suggests that Essex has five defining economic characteristics.

1. It has scale.

Essex has a substantial private-sector economy with internationally significant businesses, major employers and large sector clusters.

2. It has diversity.

Manufacturing, engineering, construction, logistics, professional services, aviation, energy, tourism, technology and creative industries all contribute to the economy.

3. It has connectivity.

Two airports, ports, major road and rail infrastructure and proximity to London and Cambridge provide an unusually strong platform for trade and investment.

4. It has an investment pipeline.

Infrastructure, energy, logistics, property, aviation and innovation projects are creating opportunities across the county.

5. It has unrealised potential.

Skills shortages, productivity gaps, access to finance, infrastructure constraints and uneven business confidence mean that the potential is not automatic.

16. The Essex Growth Opportunity

The evidence suggests that Essex's future economic opportunity lies in connecting its existing strengths rather than treating sectors in isolation.

For example:

Advanced manufacturing + AI + engineering skills can create more productive and higher-value industrial businesses.

Ports + logistics + automation + clean energy can create a more advanced international supply-chain economy.

Universities + life sciences + investment capital can help innovative businesses move from research to commercial scale.

Airports + tourism + international connectivity can strengthen both the visitor economy and inward investment proposition.

Energy infrastructure + industrial land + technology can create new clean-growth opportunities.

Creative industries + town centres + tourism can contribute to both economic and place-based regeneration.

This interconnected model is important. The competitive advantage of Essex is not one individual sector. It is the combination of **place, people, infrastructure, businesses, connectivity and investment opportunity**.

17. The External Environment: Risks and Opportunities

Essex does not operate in isolation. The performance of the local economy is influenced by developments across the UK and international economy, from changes in global trade and geopolitics to energy costs, interest rates, technology and investment flows.

For Essex, these external factors are particularly important. The county has a substantial manufacturing and engineering base, major ports and airports, internationally trading businesses, energy infrastructure and a growing technology and innovation economy.

The external environment therefore presents both risks and opportunities.

Geopolitical uncertainty and supply chains

Changes in global trading relationships, energy costs, geopolitical tensions and disruption to international supply chains can affect the cost and availability of goods, components and raw materials.

This is particularly relevant to manufacturing, engineering, construction, logistics and food and drink businesses across Essex.

Businesses are increasingly considering resilience alongside cost when making sourcing and investment decisions. This can create opportunities for businesses that can provide more secure, local or diversified supply chains, as well as for companies investing in automation and technology.

For Essex, the strength and diversity of its industrial and logistics base provides an important foundation from which businesses can adapt.

International trade

Essex's ports, airports and internationally active businesses mean that changes in global trade have a direct bearing on the local economy.

The UK's evolving trade relationships and international agreements provide opportunities for Essex businesses to access new markets, while changes to tariffs, customs requirements and regulation can increase cost and complexity.

Supporting businesses to develop their export capability and connect with international markets will therefore remain important to future growth.

Essex's connectivity, including its ports, two airports and proximity to London provides a strong platform from which to build those relationships.

Energy and the transition to a lower-carbon economy

Energy costs and energy security remain important considerations for businesses, particularly in manufacturing, logistics and other energy-intensive sectors.

At the same time, the transition towards a lower-carbon economy is creating new markets and investment opportunities.

Essex has significant assets in this area, including ports, industrial land, electricity infrastructure and proximity to offshore energy resources. These provide opportunities across renewable energy, energy storage, engineering, clean technologies and associated supply chains.

The energy transition is therefore both an economic challenge and a potential source of investment and business growth.

Technology and artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies are likely to have an increasing effect on productivity, employment and business models.

For Essex, the opportunity is not limited to developing new technology businesses. There is potentially a much larger productivity opportunity in helping existing businesses adopt technology effectively.

Manufacturing, logistics, professional services, financial services, retail, healthcare, education and creative businesses can all benefit from greater use of AI and digital technology.

The economic impact will depend partly on whether businesses can access the skills, finance and practical expertise required to move from experimentation to implementation.

Investment, interest rates and business confidence

The cost and availability of finance continues to influence business investment.

Higher financing costs can delay investment decisions, particularly for smaller businesses, while uncertainty can encourage businesses to defer expansion.

However, investment opportunities continue to emerge across Essex in infrastructure, property, energy, technology, aviation and business expansion.

The challenge is to ensure that viable Essex opportunities can access the capital, skills and infrastructure required to proceed, whether that be from home or abroad.

Building economic resilience

Many of these external risks cannot be addressed at a local level.

Economic resilience can, however, be strengthened.

A diverse business base, strong infrastructure, skilled people, international connectivity, access to finance and the ability to adopt new technology all help businesses respond to changing conditions.

For Essex, the objective should therefore be not simply to respond to global economic change, but to identify where that change creates new markets, investment opportunities and competitive advantages.

18. Priorities for the Next Phase of Growth

The evidence in this report highlights six areas that will be important to Essex's economic performance over the coming years.

Invest Essex exists to help turn that evidence into action.

Its role is to connect businesses, investors, institutions and opportunities; identify where there is potential for growth; bring the right people together; support business organisations and help Essex present a stronger proposition nationally and internationally.

The priorities below reflect both the opportunities identified through the evidence and the areas where Invest Essex will focus its activity.

1. Turn infrastructure investment into economic growth

Essex has a significant pipeline of investment in transport, energy, housing and commercial infrastructure.

The economic opportunity is to ensure that this investment generates wider benefits for businesses and communities rather than being viewed simply as a series of individual projects.

New transport links can open development opportunities and improve access to employment. Energy infrastructure can support industrial and technology investment. Commercial and industrial development can provide businesses with the space they need to expand.

The Invest Essex focus

Invest Essex will work to connect major infrastructure investment with the businesses, investors and supply chains that can benefit from it.

This includes identifying opportunities for local businesses to participate in major projects, highlighting development and investment opportunities, and bringing together businesses and decision-makers where there is a clear opportunity to unlock growth.

The focus will be on the **economic opportunity created by infrastructure**, not simply the infrastructure itself.

2. Strengthen the skills pipeline

Skills shortages are evident across a number of Essex's growth sectors, including engineering, manufacturing, construction, aviation and technology.

The challenge is not simply to increase the number of people entering employment. Businesses need access to the skills required to grow, adopt new technology and respond to future investment.

This requires closer alignment between employers and the education and training system.

The Invest Essex focus

Invest Essex will strengthen connections between businesses, education providers and other organisations working to develop the Essex workforce.

This includes creating opportunities for businesses to engage directly with young people, highlighting emerging skills requirements and bringing employers together with education and training providers around specific sector needs.

Invest Essex will also use its business network to identify where employers are experiencing common skills challenges and where greater collaboration could provide practical solutions.

The aim is to ensure that **Essex's talent pipeline is increasingly connected to Essex's growth opportunities.**

3. Raise business productivity

Essex has a substantial existing business base, meaning that improving the productivity and competitiveness of those businesses could make a significant contribution to overall economic growth.

AI, automation, digital systems and improved management practices provide opportunities across manufacturing, logistics, professional services, financial services, retail, healthcare and other sectors.

The challenge is ensuring that businesses — particularly SMEs — can move from understanding new technologies to implementing them effectively.

The Invest Essex focus

Invest Essex will bring businesses together around practical opportunities to improve productivity, with a particular focus on AI, technology adoption and innovation.

Its events, sector discussions and business networks will provide opportunities for businesses to hear from specialists, share practical experience and develop relationships with organisations that can support implementation.

The focus will be on **practical business application rather than technology for its own sake.**

4. Improve access to growth capital

Access to finance can determine whether a business is able to invest, innovate and scale.

This is particularly important for innovative SMEs, technology businesses, university spinouts and companies moving from early-stage growth into larger-scale expansion.

The new East of England Investment Fund provides an additional source of capital, but finance only creates economic impact when businesses and investors are effectively connected.

The Invest Essex focus

Invest Essex will develop its role as a **connector between businesses, investors and investment opportunities**.

This will include identifying businesses with credible growth and investment propositions, helping businesses become more investment-ready, connecting appropriate opportunities with relevant investors and bringing investors into Essex to understand the sectors and opportunities available.

Where appropriate, Invest Essex will also work with universities, professional advisers, financial institutions and other partners to strengthen the wider investment ecosystem.

The objective is simple: **make it easier for the right capital to find the right Essex opportunity**.

5. Build on Essex's sector strengths

Essex does not need to create an economic identity from scratch.

It already has substantial capabilities across advanced manufacturing, engineering, construction, logistics, technology, life sciences, energy, aviation, professional services, tourism and the creative industries.

The opportunity is to build greater depth around these existing sectors, while supporting emerging sectors with the potential to contribute to future growth.

The Invest Essex focus

Invest Essex will develop a programme of **sector-focused activity** designed around where there is a genuine business and investment opportunity.

This will include targeted networking, private roundtables, investor engagement, sector events and business introductions across areas including technology and AI, energy, manufacturing, logistics, tourism and hospitality, and other sectors where there is clear demand.

Rather than trying to represent every sector equally, Invest Essex will focus its resources where **there is a credible opportunity to connect businesses, investment and growth**.

6. Strengthen Essex's international economic profile

Essex has significant international assets: two airports, major ports, internationally trading businesses, universities, Freeports and proximity to London and the wider South East.

It also has businesses with international ambitions and sectors that can compete in global markets.

The opportunity is to convert these assets into more international business relationships, inward investment and trade.

The Invest Essex focus

Invest Essex will strengthen Essex's outward-facing economic proposition by connecting the county with investors, businesses and international organisations.

This will include supporting international business introductions, promoting Essex investment opportunities, developing relationships with international networks and identifying opportunities for Essex businesses to access overseas markets.

Invest Essex will also use its events, research and communications to ensure that **Essex is increasingly visible as a place to invest, do business and grow.**

From Evidence to Action

These priorities provide the framework for Invest Essex's economic activity.

They are not intended to replace the responsibilities of government, local authorities, universities, business organisations or other economic-development partners.

Instead, Invest Essex's role is complementary: **to connect, convene, promote and create opportunities for action where there is a clear economic benefit.**

That means:

Connecting businesses with investors, partners, customers and opportunities.

Convening business leaders, decision-makers and sector specialists around specific economic opportunities.

Promoting Essex's businesses, sectors, investment opportunities and international proposition.

Supporting businesses that are looking to grow, invest, export or attract capital.

Identifying emerging opportunities and bringing the right people together before those opportunities are lost.

The intention is for this report to provide the evidence base for that activity and as the Essex economy changes, Invest Essex will continue to monitor the evidence, identify emerging

opportunities and use its network to help turn them into practical business and investment opportunities.

Invest Essex will work proactively to identify emerging opportunities and bring the right businesses, investors and partners together. We are equally open to working in partnership with businesses, sector groups and other organisations where there is a clear opportunity to support growth, including responding to requests for sector roundtables, business events and other focused activity. **If there is an issue, opportunity or sector you believe would benefit from bringing the right people together, we would encourage you to get in touch with Invest Essex.**

Conclusion

The evidence published during 2026 presents an Essex economy with significant strengths, alongside clear areas where further progress is needed.

Essex has a substantial and diverse private-sector economy. Its manufacturing and engineering base remains significant; its ports and airports provide international connectivity; major infrastructure and energy investment is creating new opportunities; creative industries are expanding; and universities are strengthening their links with business, innovation and investment.

At the same time, Essex is operating within a wider economic environment characterised by geopolitical uncertainty, changing international trade patterns, technological disruption, skills shortages, investment pressures and the transition towards a lower-carbon economy.

These factors create risks, but they also create opportunities.

The response cannot simply be to protect the economy from change. A resilient economy is one that can adapt to change and take advantage of it.

For Essex, that means using its existing strengths more effectively, improving productivity, developing the skills businesses need, connecting investment to economic opportunity and strengthening relationships with national and international markets.

Invest Essex will play its part by connecting the people, businesses, capital and opportunities that can help make that growth happen.

The county already has many of the assets required for growth. The next phase is about creating the conditions in which businesses can start, grow, invest, innovate, employ and succeed.

That is the economic opportunity for Essex and the opportunity Invest Essex exists to help unlock.

Source and Methodology

This report has been prepared by Invest Essex using publicly available economic, business and sector evidence, with a primary focus on material published between **1 July and 2 October 2026**. It has also considered Invest Essex data material.

The evidence base includes publications and data from:

- Grant Thornton – *Essex LTD. 2026*
- Essex Chambers of Commerce – Local Skills Improvement Plan sector evidence
- Essex County Council – economic, skills and sector publications
- Essex Growth Agency – business and investment publications
- University of Essex – business, innovation, AI and investment publications
- Greater Essex Business Board – property and investment evidence
- London Stansted Airport – economic, investment and employment information
- London Southend Airport – passenger, investment and employment information
- British Business Bank – East of England Investment Fund
- Bank of England – September 2026 Agents' Summary of Business Conditions
- ICAEW – East of England Business Confidence Monitor
- Ofgem – energy and electricity connections evidence
- Visit Essex – visitor economy evidence
- Relevant national government and sector sources.

Where a recent publication reports on earlier underlying data, the date of the underlying data is identified where relevant. This avoids presenting historical data as though it were a current measurement.

Company announcements, institutional publications and press releases are treated as evidence of reported activity, investment, plans or commitments. They are not necessarily independent assessments of the eventual economic impact of those activities.

The geographical definition of Essex also varies between sources. Where figures relate to Greater Essex, rather than the administrative county of Essex, this is identified in the report.

The report is intended as a living reference document and will be updated as new economic evidence becomes available.