

William Penn · Thomas Paine · Joe Biden · Thabo Mbeki · Festus Mogae · Guy Scott · Carlos Alvarado Quesada · Simon Segars · Rebeca Grynspan · Burna Boy · Jack Clark · Tim Peake · Michael Cowpland · Steve Phillips · James Jebbia · Eddie Izzard · Romesh Ranganathan · Gwendoline Christie · Piers Morgan · Fatboy Slim · Theresa May

The Sussex diaspora: from belonging to *mobilisation*

A lever for regional growth hidden in plain sight

PREPARED BY

Loksan Harley

DATE

August 2026

Core proposition

Devolution is forcing Sussex to define what kind of place it wants to be. Evidence is already being organised around Growth, Infrastructure, Governance and Belonging.

Our united Sussex possesses an incredible potential lever for growth, prosperity and cultural renewal that remains hidden in plain sight: the *Sussex Diaspora*.

These are the people outside of Sussex who have connections with Sussex. These are people who may have been born in Sussex; have ancestral or family ties with Sussex; are alumni of Sussex universities and schools; have worked, founded, invested or created in Sussex; or have other durable cultural, civic or emotional affinity to Sussex.

THE QUESTION TO POSE & ANSWER

*Who carries Sussex into the world, what do they care about, and **what would make them useful to Sussex now?***

A Sussex Diaspora agenda would connect those two things: it would identify the people outside Sussex who have a reason to care about the county and give them practical ways to help with investment, skills, advocacy, tourism, partnerships and civic pride.

Why now?

The emerging Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority creates a rare moment to unite stakeholders around core strategic issues before the agenda hardens. Government has consulted on the combined authority and announced long-term funding for the new mayoral model. That makes the next 12-18 months important for the story Sussex tells about itself, the partners it convenes, and the kinds of evidence it uses to shape investment priorities.

A diaspora lens would help Sussex look beyond administrative boundaries, as many subnational authorities across the UK and around the world are already doing. The practical question should be not only what assets sit inside Sussex, but which Sussex-connected people, firms, institutions, alumni and families outside Sussex elsewhere in the UK and wider world can help the region grow, be heard and deliver. It would turn the existing “belonging” strand into an evidence-led agenda for growth, governance, regional profile and action.

What this could unlock

- **Investment and business growth:** warm routes to founders, investors, sector specialists, buyers and board-level advocates with a reason to care about Sussex.
- **Talent, skills and mentoring:** practical support for entrepreneurs, students, civic leaders, returners and emerging sectors, including AI, creative industries, life sciences, tourism and clean growth.
- **Regional profile:** credible ambassadors who can raise Sussex's visibility in London, nationally and internationally without the tone of a conventional place-marketing campaign.
- **Heritage and diaspora tourism:** ancestry, alumni and cultural routes that turn Sussex connection into visits, stays, local spending and repeat engagement. Ireland shows the scale of the broader diaspora visitor-economy prize.
- **Civic pride and belonging:** a way to include people who have left Sussex but have not lost their connection to it, and to connect local identity with future-facing opportunity.

A Sussex diaspora hidden in plain sight

1. A transatlantic civic and heritage story

Sussex has strong US-facing hooks. **William Penn**, founder of Pennsylvania, had his principal family home at Warminghurst before leaving for America. **Thomas Paine** lived in Lewes from 1768 to 1774 before becoming one of the great political voices of the American Revolution. **Joe Biden**'s paternal Biden line has been traced to Westbourne. Taken together, they give Sussex a serious civic-history story for heritage tourism, public diplomacy and transatlantic engagement.

2. Universities that have already created a global leadership network

The University of Sussex provides a ready-made international platform. Sussex-linked figures include **Thabo Mbeki**, former President of South Africa; **Festus Mogae**, former President of Botswana; **Guy Scott**, former President of Zambia; **Carlos Alvarado Quesada**, former President of Costa Rica; **Simon Segars**, former CEO of ARM Holdings; **Rebeca Grynspan**, Secretary-General of UNCTAD; and **Burna Boy**, the Grammy-winning Nigerian artist. This is a powerful signal: Sussex already sits inside global networks of government, diplomacy, development, culture and influence.

3. A frontier science, technology and digital economy strand

The Sussex Diaspora agenda can supercharge the development of Sussex into a regional tech and innovation hub. **Jack Clark**, co-founder at AI juggernaut Anthropic, was educated at Varndean College in Brighton; astronaut **Tim Peake** was born in Chichester; Bexhill-born **Michael Cowpland** emigrated to Canada to found Corel and Mitel; **Steve Phillips** of Worthing founded the consumer-insights platform Zappi (which raised \$170m in 2022); and **James Jebbia** was raised in Crawley before founding global streetwear brand Supreme in New York. Together they suggest a practical tech and innovation strand: Sussex could convene high-trust external advisors, alumni and founders around responsible tech innovation, entrepreneurship, and inward investment.

4. Culture, media, sport and public life

Sussex also has high-recognition cultural and public figures who can make the proposition instantly legible. Examples include **Eddie Izzard**, with formative Eastbourne and Bexhill links; **Romesh Ranganathan**, the Crawley-born comedian and broadcaster; **Gwendoline Christie**, the Worthing-born actor; **Piers Morgan**, the broadcaster and editor raised in Newick; **Fatboy Slim**, a defining figure in Brighton's modern cultural identity; and **Theresa May**, the former Prime Minister born in Eastbourne. These Sussex-connected figures are all embedded in national and international networks of significant influence and affluence.

Local models to replicate

A growing body of literature positions diaspora engagement as something countries, regions, counties and cities can all do to tremendous effect. High-impact examples abound at the city and regional levels.

Copenhagen

2-4

FDI WINS / YEAR

Copenhagen's investment promotion agency runs the Copenhagen Goodwill Ambassadors programme: around 50 high-profile Danish business leaders and prominent diaspora Danes who promote Copenhagen and advise government on competitiveness and branding. The programme attributes 2-4 FDI wins per year to the ambassadors, including contribution to Cisco's Internet of Everything R&D centre in Copenhagen. A disciplined diaspora ambassador network can be small, senior, measurable and useful.

Ireland

5

COUNTIES ACTIVE

In Ireland, a global leader in the field whose Irish-American diaspora was pivotal to the country's Celtic Tiger economic growth story, counties including Donegal, Kerry, Mayo, Offaly, and Limerick have developed initiatives to harness the power of the diaspora to support investment and entrepreneurs. For instance, the Kerry Diaspora Business Network links diaspora engagement with local enterprise support, while County Offaly's Atlantic Corridor targeted the scientific diaspora for STEM and regional development.

United Kingdom

200M+DIASPORA
WORLDWIDE

In the UK, which taken together possesses one of the world's largest diasporas (estimated at over 200 million) once both emigrants and their descendants are included, Scotland and Wales already have diaspora strategies and diaspora organisations established. Cornwall became the first English county this year to launch a diaspora strategy (the Cornwall Diaspora Strategy 2025-2028) to engage the Global Cornish community as part of its Good Growth Plan.

What could happen next

- i* **Commission a short scoping study:** Define the Sussex Diaspora, benchmark local and regional comparators, and identify where the agenda most directly supports the regional priorities.
- ii* **Build a verified network map:** Sussex-born and Sussex-raised figures; ancestry and heritage links; university and school alumni; founders, investors and executives; culture, media and sport; civic and public-policy leaders; and affinity diaspora.
- iii* **Test demand through interviews:** speak with 20-30 Sussex-connected figures and institutions to understand what would make them engage, and what they could contribute.
- iv* **Scope out potential pilot projects:** a Sussex Global Ambassadors group; an AI, data and innovation advisory circle; a heritage tourism and US civic-history route; an investor/founder mentoring network; or an alumni-to-region partnership programme.
- v* **Convene a closed briefing:** bring councils, universities, business groups, cultural institutions and selected diaspora voices into one room to decide whether this becomes a fundable Sussex Diaspora workstream.

About Loksan Harley



Homelands *Advisory*

Loksan Harley

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
HOMELANDS ADVISORY**

Loksan Harley is Executive Director of Homelands Advisory and a leading global diaspora engagement expert. He is British and Chinese, born and raised in Hastings before spending a decade abroad studying, working and running businesses. He completed his own “diaspora return” by living in China for three years, before then returning to Sussex. He has developed diaspora policies and studies for governments, United Nations agencies, private sector and non-profit clients in 30+ countries. His recent work includes research and advisory work on diaspora strategies, diaspora investment attraction, and diaspora cultural engagement.

Homelands *Advisory*

YOUR INDEPENDENT MIGRATION & DIASPORA AGENCY