

IF SUSSEX WANTS TO GROW, IT NEEDS TO GET HUNGRY AGAIN



KYRIAKOS BAXEVANIS is a Brighton-based entrepreneur, community builder and wellbeing advocate with a backstory powered by hard work, resilience and a lot of late nights.

After arriving in the UK with little more than a suitcase and a sofa to sleep on, Kyriakos built multiple award-winning businesses from the ground-up under the banner of The Brighton Hive - including Little Jasmine Therapies & Spa, Nostos Hove, Nostos Catering UK and Be well, Live Well. Between them, these businesses employ over 40 people, serve thousands across Sussex and have picked up accolades from the Sussex Business Awards to BRAVO.

A Goldman Sachs 10KSB alumni and MBA graduate, Kyriakos also sits on the University of Brighton's Business & Law advisory board and co-founded The Big Fat Greek Club - a social networking group with ouzo, purpose and a playlist. He's passionate about systems thinking, supporting fellow SMEs and helping Sussex become the best place in the UK to start and grow a business that actually values people. He believes in kindness, sustainability and getting stuff done - ideally all at once.

I DIDN'T COME TO BRIGHTON TO BUILD AN EMPIRE.

I came because I'd failed. Hard. At 27, I was broken - emotionally, financially and professionally. So, I called a mate and asked if I could crash on his sofa. He said 'Brighton', I Googled it, saw Fatboy Slim on the beach and thought - that'll do.

Fast forward 20 years and I run several business, employ 40+ people, sit on university boards and try to give something back to a city that gave me space to breathe again. But this isn't a Brighton fairy tale. It's a warning.

Because, if we don't serious as a region, about enabling people like me to grow, then devolution will be just another buzzword. And Sussex will stay in second gear while other regions overtake us. Growth doesn't just happen. **You have to fight for it.**

Let me be blunt. One of the biggest barriers in the UK isn't rent or rates (though those are a nightmare).

It's mindset. Too many people - and leaders - are comfortable. Playing it safe.

Waiting for someone else to sort it out.

I came here hungry. Hungry people build.

We fail, learn and try again. We ask stupid questions. We collaborate and we hustle.

If devolution is going to mean anything, it's got to inject that kind of drive into the ecosystem - not just through money, but through *permission*. Let entrepreneurs experiment. Make space cheap, cut red tape, link up the colleges and unis with real-world SMEs. Get the infrastructure *and* the attitude right.

Brighton's great but it's not the centre of the universe.

We've been banging on about Brighton being a "Super City" for years. But guess what? Eastbourne has the only five-star hotel on the south coast. Worthing is one of the most productive towns in the UK. Hastings is bursting with creative energy. Chichester grows the world's best salad produce.

If we stop competing and start collaborating, Sussex could be unstoppable. Imagine a hospitality network that shares sustainability hacks. A digital skills ladder that runs from Bognor to Crawley. An investor pitch deck that tells the *whole* story, not just the shiny bits.

We need to think in systems, not silos. If devolution gives us the tools, let's use them properly.

If I were mayor (no, I'm not running), here's what I'd do in my first 100 days:

- free or subsidised workspaces for startups and sole traders
- a regional mentor pool: not just consultants but people who've *actually* built something
- business rates reform that help people start, not just survive
- create a regional identity that isn't seagulls and slogans - but action, value and ambition



If we stop competing and start collaborating, Sussex could be unstoppable.



There's a window right now. The economy is tight but there's energy in the system. Use it, back the doers. Don't overthink it.



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