

# **YORK & NORTH YORKSHIRE MAYORAL MANIFESTO**

## **A Manifesto Delivering Sustainable Growth**



# Foreword

In May, voters across England will elect 10 metro mayors, the most to date. By May 3 approximately 26 million people, or 44 per cent of the English population will be presided over by a mayor. And in May, another three mayors will be elected for the first time, in the North East<sup>1</sup>, York and North Yorkshire, and the East Midlands. This combined group of Metro Mayors (the M12) will then collectively represent more than 50 per cent of England's GDP.

With a strong personal mandate, mayors provide a powerful and influential voice, bringing a strategic regional view to crucial policy decisions on areas such as transport, housing, education, strategic planning, and infrastructure, all of which are crucial to business. Across England, we see mayors continue to play a vital role in ensuring a region is an attractive place for inward investment and to do business, both domestically and internationally.

The CBI has been a long-standing supporter of devolution and of directly elected mayors, we have seen how they can be strong advocates for their region with the convening power to make things happen. They act as ambassadors for their regions both nationally and internationally, and importantly, provide the governance and accountability Whitehall needs in order to devolve powers and funding.

## Regional priorities for devolution

This election marks a significant milestone in the economic future of York & North Yorkshire. Full credit to the politicians who have brought about the formation of the new Combined Authority, we know this was not an easy process so as a business community we must get behind this new institution and ensure it can deliver the outcomes to drive forward this part of the country.

York & North Yorkshire joins 11 devolved English regions to have directly elected mayors, and as we look to the future, we have set out a range of opportunities that we feel will boost the regional economy and give businesses access to the skills & talent, infrastructure, and opportunities to succeed.

The geography of York & North Yorkshire differs from existing Mayoral Combined Authorities in that it is not dominated by an urban city region. Instead, the economic geography is a more an archipelago of economic centres, some of which look outwards to the regions around them, including Teesside, West Yorkshire, and Hull & East Riding. Despite this there are themes which emerge as universal barriers to growth across all parts of the region, which a future mayor will need to grasp if they are to build a stronger and more sustainable economy. Similarly, there is a high degree of shared endeavour, which a future mayor should tap into and bring the public and private sector together on areas that will generate mutual benefit. Ahead of the Mayoral Election, business leaders and the mayor can act on the emerging consensus that unites them, that is to deliver sustainable economic growth which improves our standard of living today and in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> The North East Mayoral Combined Authority will replace the non-mayoral North East Combined Authority and the North of Tyne Combined Authority, whose incumbent mayor is Jamie Driscoll

Most importantly, the mayor must use their mandate to relentlessly promote and pursue an ambitious, long-term regional economic vision that recognises existing strategic assets and emerging economic clusters, inspires inward investment and tourism, and differentiates the York & North Yorkshire narrative in a competitive domestic and global market.

Public and private sector collaboration is a critical component of all these priorities; a strong industry voice – through the Business Board and other advisory groups – is essential. Ensuring there is a strong business voice, that is truly representative of York and North Yorkshire, advising and supporting mayoral decision making, building on the YNY LEP should be a priority for the incoming mayor.

Our priorities are:

- Drive regional investment
- Future proof the regional labour market to drive inclusive growth
- Regional climate commitments to help the UK deliver net zero
- Drive high-growth technology and innovation
- Delivering resilient public services and fit for purpose infrastructure

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# Drive regional investment

As we have seen in other MCAs, the role of the mayor brings with it far more benefits than simply managing and directing devolved powers and funding. It will be important to set out an inward investment strategy, that builds on existing economic strengths, bringing together regional institutions including universities, colleges and major employers to develop emerging clusters in industries such as cyber security and agri-tech.

In his report to government in 2023 Lord Harrington, suggested “**A need for collaboration over competition**”<sup>2</sup>, citing the importance of regions, and Mayoral Combined Authorities working in partnership to land investment into the UK. The incoming mayor should seek to work with the 12 English regional mayors in the spirit of collaboration that will act as a powerful collective voice.

## Trail blazer settlement

As soon as is practical, the region should work towards securing a tier 4 devolution settlement with Whitehall. This will provide a single funding settlement and empower the region’s ambitions, providing greater devolved decision making over investment priorities.

## Digital Infrastructure

Rural broadband – according to the National Farmers Union 52% of their members in North Yorkshire don’t have internet speeds that meet their business needs. This is not only a barrier to increased productivity through tech adoption but also impacts at a practical level on the ability to diversify existing business activities. Whilst we acknowledge that progress has been made over the last decade, there is clearly more to do and the mayor should bring service providers together to identify barriers and where possible seek to develop funding sources.

## Connectivity

89% of CBI members considered regional connectivity to be unattractive in its effectiveness at attracting inward investment in a poll taken in Q4 2023. The mayor should develop a long-term strategic infrastructure plan, working closely with regional stakeholders, government agencies and industry. Funding for some of the key road upgrades has already been allocated from the Network North strategy, whilst this is welcome the mayor should explore opportunities to leverage further investment from the private sector.

# Future proof the regional labour market to drive inclusive growth

The CBI supports the development of Local Skills Improvement Plans, led by West & North Yorkshire Chamber. This aims to identify current and future skills needs of businesses across the region, providing them with a voice from the demand side. In addition the region has an established network of FE colleges, Higher Education and independent training providers which collectively supply skills and qualifications. The mayor should build on these

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<sup>2</sup> p68, [231123\\_Harrington-Review-Report-FINAL-2\\_HH\\_Global\\_.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

partnerships and ensure there is ongoing dialogue that is evidence based and ensures there is close collaboration to direct funding from devolved adult skills budgets effectively and efficiently.

The last CBI Education & Skills Survey said that poor careers advice aligned to sectors (34%) and a lack of awareness among learners about different routes to work e.g., apprenticeships (34%) made up the top drivers of skills gaps for most respondents. The mayor should build on the work of the LSIP and deliver region wide, consistent careers advice and guidance, working with employers and their representative bodies to help people access the job opportunities being created.

Travel to work and to access education also presents challenges, especially for young people and those without access to private transportation. The mayor should work closely with providers of public transport to identify gaps in existing provision, not just within York & North Yorkshire but outwards to other regions that are creating jobs such as Teesside, West Yorkshire and Hull & East Riding. Scope out opportunities to develop a genuinely fully integrated, pan region-wide public transportation system, to provide seamless, single ticket transit across all modes of public transportation.

The region has some fantastic HE & FE provision , however retention of graduate talent is often cited by employers and in part this relates to access to affordable accommodation within commuting distance of employment opportunities. We touch on the need for a regional and joined up planning strategy later in this manifesto.

Many regional firms in sectors such as agriculture and food processing struggle to hire workers, especially seasonal workers. The CBI is calling on government to Reform the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) by turning it into a tripartite body to give social partners a greater voice on labour market policy. This would ensure the advice the government receives on shortages better takes account of the evidence and experience faced by businesses across the economy. We would seek support from a future York & North Yorkshire elected mayor backed up by case studies from within the region.

## **Regional climate commitments to help the UK deliver net zero**

York & North Yorkshire LEP has previously set out ambitions to be the UK's first ever carbon negative economy. Business from across York & North Yorkshire have contributed to this strategy in earlier consultations and support the ambition contained within it. The mayor should set out a plan to deliver this, working collaboratively with the business community and regional stakeholders. Few missions hold a greater moral obligation for both industry and society than the transition to a low-carbon economy.

The Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission, of which the CBI is a member, have set out a series of recommendations in their 2021 action plan<sup>3</sup>. The mayor should drive forward recommendations to support industry and deliver the infrastructure needed to meet net-zero commitments, a summary of which include:

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<sup>3</sup> [Climate Action Plan | Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission \(yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk\)](https://www.yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk/Climate-Action-Plan)

- Invest in digital infrastructure.
- Adopt a regional, systems-based approach to infrastructure.
- Develop a regional training network.
- Promote climate resilience in business and industry.

Rural diversification is an important element in driving inclusive and sustainable economic growth. One of the barriers to this is access to the National Grid, in order to deliver new power access for commercial, residential and industrial use; and enabling renewable energy projects to feed back into the network. Connectivity to the grid can take years in many cases and so the mayor should work with industry and Northern Powergrid, using their convening power to bring parties together and set out a pragmatic long term plan that prioritises schemes based on their viability and impact.

Given the rural nature of York & North Yorkshire, personal cars will remain the dominant form of transportation for many. The transition to electric vehicles has not progressed as fast as anticipated, with EVs making up just 3% of all cars on UK roads<sup>4</sup>. Range anxiety, and poor charging point infrastructure are widely cited as barriers to EV adoption along with the cost of purchase. The mayor should explore options to build a York & North Yorkshire wide EV infrastructure network, working in partnership with Government, Local Authorities, and the private sector.

## Drive high-growth technology and innovation

YNYMCA has already identified that around half of the working population in the region are employed in foundational sectors<sup>5</sup>, including social care, visitor economy, construction and retail. Furthermore research shows that most of the economic growth since 2019 has been delivered by growth in science, research, engineering and technology sectors, which are generally higher skilled and more likely higher paid jobs. The region has potential to build on innovative technologies, not just in cyber security and agri-tech / industrial biotechnology but also in rail technology, building on Network Rail's presence in York.

The York Central development includes plans for a new digital hub sitting alongside government assets. The mayor should push for relevant functions within government such as DFT to have a base of operations here, sitting alongside the University of York and industry creates the well known model for successful innovation eco-systems known as the Triple Helix<sup>6</sup>. The ambition to make York the UK centre of excellence for digital transformation of the rail industry has great potential.

A consistent barrier to high growth start-up and scale-up firms is access to finance; both debt and equity funding can be difficult to obtain. Creating a supportive innovation eco-system will go some way to help and the mayor should use their convening power to bring together

<sup>4</sup> [The UK's electric vehicle strategy needs a rapid recharge says Lords Committee - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Productive and innovative economy - Mayoral Combined Authority \(yorknorthyorks-ca.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> Leydesdorff, Loet; Lawton Smith, Helen. ["The Triple Helix in the context of global change: dynamics and challenges"](#)

investment and pension funds, along with the British Business Bank, universities, Innovate UK and industry to explore potential to develop new funding streams.

The mayor should consider how York & North Yorkshire might develop its own Investment Zone in line with other Northern MCAs.

## Delivery of resilient public services and fit for purpose infrastructure

Confidence in our public services is integral to building a thriving regional economy and a central component in delivering sustainable, socially responsible growth.

By striking the right balance between public and private delivery, and fostering a new era of collaboration, the mayor can ensure that essential enablers of progress and prosperity can best deliver and drive productivity.

For any region or nation of the UK to succeed, they must enable businesses to invest, innovate and bear some risk in the provision of public services. But, to unlock significant capital investment into everything from infrastructure and AI to education and health, the mayor must signal ambition and commit to a long-term framework that instils credibility and enables delivery at pace.

A vital part of this must be to review the regional planning system, removing the often-burdensome barriers to firms that impact business confidence and prevent investment into regional assets. Committing to a Regional Spatial Plan that offers a long-term strategy will give firms the confidence to collaborate with YNYMCA and target investment into those key strategic growth priorities outlined by the mayor.

- **The mayor should empower the combined authority to develop a strategic framework** to identify opportunities and support pan-regional infrastructure delivery – both physical and digital, including for housing of all types and tenures. This will ensure that local plans for employment land uses are equally as important as those for new housing.
- Implement the recommendations made by Network North and bring together a strategic transport plan to form a single unified York & North Yorkshire strategy. Integral to increasing investment and productivity, we must have a fully integrated, region-wide public transport system.
- In addition, the mayor should use their considerable convening power to promote investment into East-West connectivity. This will give people across the region better opportunities to access education, skills, and employment across York & North Yorkshire.
- Develop smart ticketing to ensure a London-style transport system and ease of use for multi-modal travelling for commuters across the region. Explore potential to develop this across mayoral boundaries to take greater account of travel to work patterns and help commuters to be less reliant on cars as their main mode of transport.

## Conclusion

The CBI and its members are committed to working alongside the next mayor to ensure York & North Yorkshire builds on existing economic strengths and develops the industries of the future, not just to boost the region's economy but to help tackle some of the global challenges we must collectively solve. York & North Yorkshire is already a great place in which to live, work and do business but with the creation of the new combined authority and the election of the mayor we look forward to entering a new phase with the powers, funding and accountable leadership that will really make a difference.

In partnership with other business organisations we will be supporting a mayoral hustings event where candidates can put forward their vision for the future of the York & North Yorkshire economy. This will take place on 10 April, at 18.00, more details can be found [here](#).



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To share your views on this topic or ask us a question, contact:

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