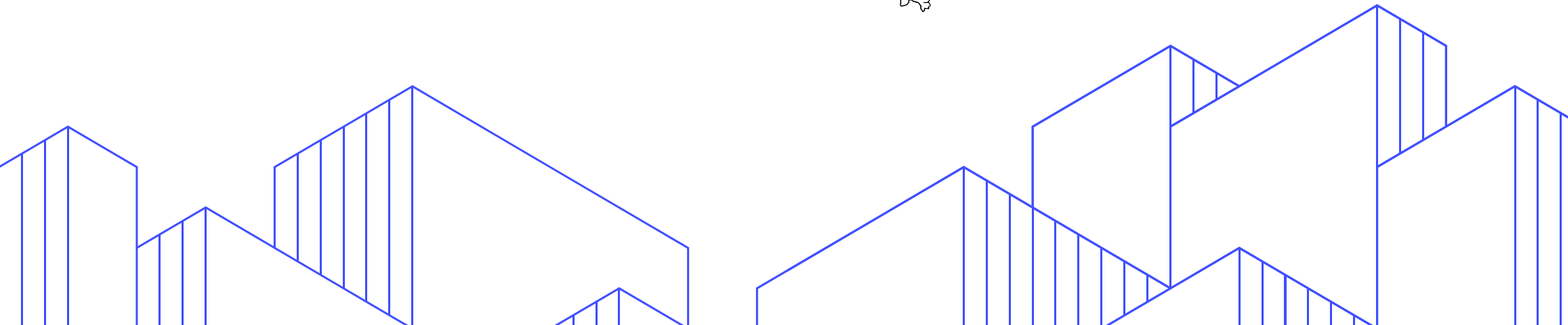
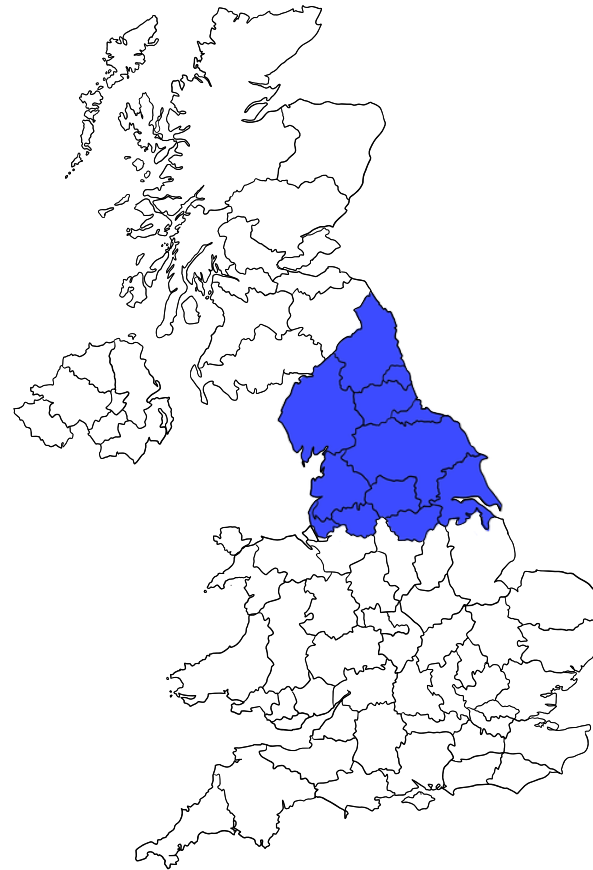


The Great NORTH ONE YEAR ON.

Cobalt's view on the North's investment and talent story twelve months since The Great North launched.



ONE YEAR ON.

From launch to delivery

A year ago, the North's mayors made a simple promise: stop waiting for a story written in Whitehall and write their own. Twelve months on, that promise has moved from launch to delivery.

The region now also has an unusual asset it did not have before: one of The Great North's founding mayors is now Prime Minister.

"One North. One Voice. One Story."



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FROM LAUNCH TO DELIVERY.

The Great North still brings together 11 current and emerging Strategic Authorities, stretching from the Scottish border to the edge of Wales. It remains the only part of the UK fully covered by devolution, with more than 90% of its population under an elected mayor.

What has changed in a year is the tone. The launch rallying cry, “The North’s moment is now,” has matured into a sharper market proposition.

1.

Clean
Energy
Investment

2.

Trade &
Investment
Profile

3.

Culture,
Creative
and
Sporting
Industries

4.

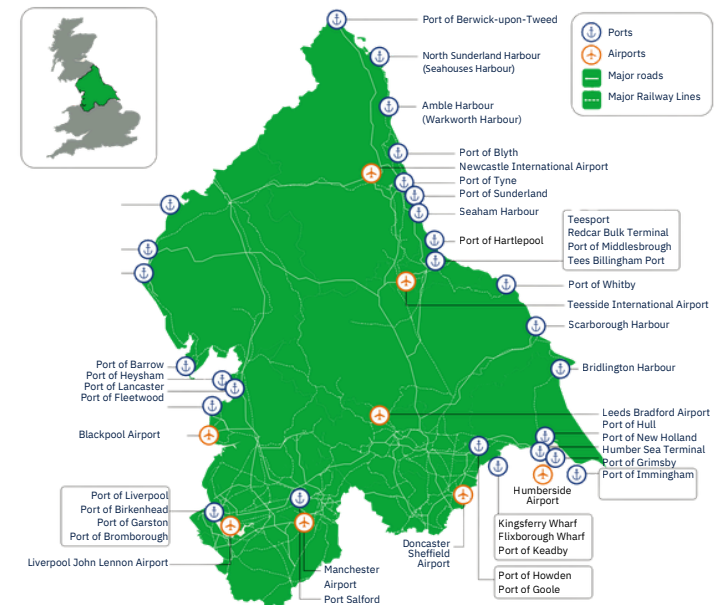
Deepening
Devolution

WHAT CHANGED?

The Great North is no longer just a launch proposition. It is now an operating partnership convening mayors, government departments and investors around a shared pipeline rather than a shared ambition.

For the built environment, this matters because investment has to translate into places, infrastructure, homes and long-term economic output.

The North: Our assets and opportunities



DEVOLUTION KEEPS MATURING.

Hull & East Yorkshire

Completed its first full year in the partnership under Mayor Luke Campbell.

Cumbria + Cheshire & Warrington

Remain in the Devolution Priority Programme, with elections now set for May 2027.

UK Industrial Strategy

Now settled government policy, giving the North's investment case a fixed national backdrop.

No.10 North

Prime Minister Andy Burnham opened No.10 North, a working Manchester base at Heron House, in August 2026.

A NORTHERN VOICE AT THE CENTRE.

In July, the story gained a chapter nobody wrote into the launch brochure. Andy Burnham, until then Mayor of Greater Manchester and a founding member of The Great North, became Prime Minister, with Bev Craig succeeding him in Manchester.

Within days, the partnership's 11 leaders wrote to him directly, asking to be treated not as a regional lobby group but as "a strategic partner in the governance of the United Kingdom."

"Give us the tools and we'll deliver."

It is too early to say how this will play out, but it is a different starting position from the one The Great North launched from a year ago.

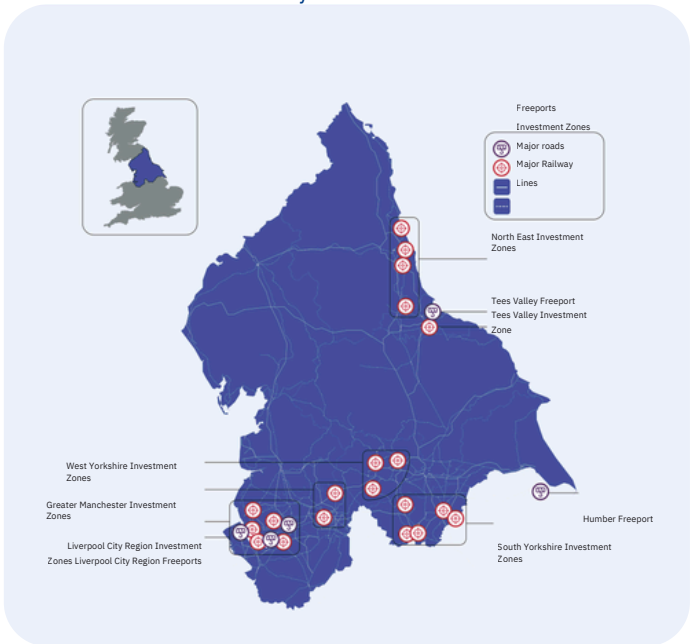
REACHING BEYOND THE NORTH.

The partnership has also gone beyond the original scope and added two further ambitions.

A Northern trade mission to India is being planned under a single banner, building on the UK–India trade agreement to open doors in automotive, life sciences and advanced materials.

The partnership is also exploring, in its earliest stages, a bid to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in the North in the 2040s.

Physical Assets



A GROWING PLATFORM.

The Great North Run, the brand The Great North borrowed its name and momentum from, is still growing too.

This year's Great North Run drew around 63,000 entrants for the 13.1-mile route, with roughly 85,000 people taking part in events across the full weekend.

63,000

Entrants for the 13.1-mile Great North Run route.

85,000

Taking part across the full weekend.

2040s

Earliest-stage Olympic and Paralympic Games ambition.

MAP THE GAP.

Cobalt is working with BE News on the Map the Gap campaign, an industry-wide initiative designed to measure where skills shortages exist across the wider built environment, what is driving them and where employers and employees are experiencing the greatest pressure.



WHY IT MATTERS FOR THE NORTH?

For The Great North, this question is particularly relevant. If the region succeeds in accelerating investment, understanding whether the industry has the right people, with the right skills, in the right places to deliver that pipeline becomes just as important as attracting the capital itself.

The campaign looks beyond construction alone to understand skills challenges across commercial real estate, housing, planning, architecture, engineering and the wider built environment.

Employer Survey.

Where shortages exist, what is driving them, and how hiring pressure is being felt.

Employee Survey.

How professionals are experiencing the market, skills needs and future prospects.

THE DELIVERY CHALLENGE IS A TALENT CHALLENGE.

Investment may create the opportunity, but delivering it requires people.

Across the built environment, skills shortages can no longer be considered solely a recruitment issue. In some areas, they are increasingly becoming a constraint on delivery.

Planning capacity, construction skills, infrastructure expertise and specialist development talent will all be critical if the North is to convert investment ambition into projects on the ground.

“The risk is that demand for specialist skills grows faster than the talent available to deliver it.”

WHAT THIS MEANS.

Planning capacity

Construction skills

Infrastructure expertise

Development talent

Asset management

Specialist technical roles

As development, regeneration, infrastructure and energy pipelines grow, the North will need more than investment and ambition. It will need the right people, with the right skills, in the right places, at the point projects need them.

People and Talent.



WHAT DOESN'T CHANGE?

The fundamentals that investors and employers actually prize remain unchanged. The North's scale, student base, renewable energy strength and growth prize continue to underpin the investment and talent story.

15.6m

People across the North.

4.5m

People under 25 years of age.

618k

Students across 31 universities.

220k

Graduates a year, incl. 120k in STEM.

50%

Of England's renewable energy capacity.

£118bn

Potential annual growth prize by 2050.

£26bn

If the North matched the OECD average.

£16.7bn

Added value from stronger exports.

THE JOB REMAINS DELIVERY.

The launch told the world the North's moment had arrived. A year on, with one of the North's most prominent voices in Andy Burnham now leading the country, the job remains focused on delivery.

Increasingly, that means ensuring the North has not only the investment and ambition to grow, but the skills and talent required to deliver it.

"Investment is progressing. Capacity is now the test."

NEXT CHAPTER.

“The question for year two is whether the North can build the capacity to deliver.”

The Great North spent its first year building the investment story. The next phase depends on turning that story into viable projects, infrastructure, homes and jobs, and ensuring the built environment has the talent required to do it.

SOURCES.

- The Great North launch brochure (2025)
- thegreatnorth.org.uk
- UK government announcements, 20 July – 6 August 2026
- instituteforgovernment.org.uk
- Public reporting on the Makerfield by-election and the 2026 Greater Manchester mayoral by-election
- Map the Gap campaign outline, supplied by BE News / Cobalt

CONTACT US.



info@cobaltrecruitment.com



London: +44 (0) 20 7478 2500



Manchester: +44 (0) 161 711 0602



www.linkedin.com/company/cobalt-recruitment



www.cobaltrecruitment.co.uk

Cobalt

