
Title: North East Ports
Report of: Phil Witcherley, Director of Economic Growth and Innovation / Rob Hamilton, Assistant Director of Economic Strategy
Portfolio: Home to the Green Energy Revolution

Report Summary

Delivering the North East Ports Partnership is a critical Mayoral priority and objective, providing an important vehicle for the North East CA to make the North East the home of the green energy revolution. Our North East Ports comprising the sea Ports of Tyne, Blyth, and Sunderland, and Newcastle International Airport:

- A. Play a critical role in unlocking investment and economic growth in sectors such as offshore wind, advanced manufacturing, defence and digital / AI.
- B. Are investing to upgrade and present attractive industrial sites and assets, which are central to the green growth investment proposition that the North East CA is currently developing in partnership with Lloyds Banking Group and the Office for Investment.
- C. Act as important anchor institutions and possess attractive quayside infrastructure to deliver upon ambitions set out in an upcoming 10 year vision and strategy for offshore wind in the North East due in Spring 2026.

The North East Ports Partnership, a collaboration formed by a non-legally binding MOU between the ports and the North East CA, will attract new investment into the region, creating the next generation of green and sustainable jobs. By 2035, the vision is that the North East Ports Partnership will have collaboratively worked together to secure new regional inward investment in supporting the region's offshore, engineering and green manufacturing industries – delivering the ambitions set out in the North East Local Growth Plan. This includes maximising the unique economic opportunities provided at our Enterprise Zone and Investment Zone sites, including from current and future port/riverside infrastructure and the land next to the runway at Newcastle International Airport.

North East Ports seeks £100,000 from the NEMCA Devolution Deal trailblazer funding, allocated for the development of the Green SuperPort, to appoint specialist consultant support to: fully devise and deliver the NE Ports Partnership Business Plan, the NE Ports Three-Year Delivery Strategy; and NE Ports Branding and Marketing.

Recommendations

The Chief Executive is recommended to approve £100,000 from the NEMCA Devolution Deal trailblazer funding, allocated for the development of the Green SuperPort. The North East CA will lead a procurement exercise on behalf of the North East Ports Partnership and Steering Group, and appoint specialist consultant support to fully devise and deliver:

- The NE Ports Partnership Business Plan
- The NE Ports Three-Year Delivery Strategy
- NE Ports Branding and Marketing.

1. Background:

In 2024, the North East Combined Authority (North East CA) established the principle of a 'Green Super Port' Partnership in the new North East Devolution Deal 2024. This highlights the opportunity for the North East CA and Government to work with the region's sea ports, airport and a range of relevant stakeholders to develop a ground-breaking proposition for North East Ports. The Deal is clear on the potential of the proposition to create and sustain jobs, skills and supercharge the North East's progress towards a world-leading industrial cluster based on net zero transition. This proposal has been developed further and is now being brought forward under the name "North East Ports".

The North East Mayor's Manifesto builds on this opportunity by setting out the ambition to work with Councils, Businesses and all Ports to create thousands of well-paid green jobs, green housing, environmental projects, and to boost the North East's reputation as world leaders in renewable energy. It goes on to set out and give support to improved governance and accountability to co-ordinate investment along our rivers and ports. It underlines that focus is needed to incentivise investment here, to unlock much-needed development and to take the practical measures needed to grow vital industries in the region and that the Ports also play a vital role in supporting the region's electric car industry and supply chain and other aspects of all huge sectoral growth potential including the circular economy.

The North East Ports Partnership will be critical for developing and accelerating ambitions on our Local Growth Plan, in particular across offshore wind and energy transition, advanced manufacturing, inward investment and trade.

2. The Investment Proposal

This paper now proposes focussed specialist expertise to fully develop the details of the North East Ports Partnership. To implement the commitments set out in the MOU, a collaboration and business plan will be developed by the North East Ports Partnership Steering Group in conjunction with specialist support, comprising of the designated partnership leads for each partner organisation. They will focus on areas where it makes sense for the Ports to work together, respecting the commercial independence of the organisations.

Subject to agreement at the first North East Ports Partnership Steering Group meeting, the North East CA Chief Executive will act as Chair during the first year. The membership of the Steering Group is to be formally agreed, but is expected to include Chief Executives and Directors of the Port of Tyne, Port of Blyth, Port of Sunderland and Newcastle International Airport, and senior officers from the North East CA, including additional observers from the North East CA when necessary.

The responsibilities of the North East Ports Steering Group are outlined below and included in the North East Ports Partnership MOU.

The North East Ports Steering Group will be responsible for:

- Maximising the unique economic opportunities provided at our Enterprise Zone and Investment Zone sites, including from port/riverside infrastructure and the land next to the runway at Newcastle International Airport.
- Proactively seeking and being receptive to potential multi-site inward investment opportunities that will benefit the North East region and all partner organisations without negatively impacting any individual partner organisation.
- Collaboration to address specific infrastructure constraints (utilities, capital and maintenance dredging) that would accelerate multi site project opportunities.
- Collaborative working to examine operations synergies in respect of the provision of marine services (Pilotage, port work boats etc)
- The potential for the collaborative procurement of capital and maintenance dredging resources utilising regional bodies such as the North East Procurement Organisation
- Supporting and participating in jointly agreed North East Ports Partnership communications activities.
- Providing appropriate expertise from within their own organizations for more specialist or technical workstreams, as agreed by the North East Ports Partnership Steering Group where capacity allows within each respective organisation.
- Sharing progress and opportunities for collaboration on progress to net zero across Newcastle International Airport and the Ports of Blyth, Tyne and Sunderland – including sustainable fuels, decarbonisation of operations, energy generation. This will include engagement with Government Departments and Agencies and by identifying collective funding opportunities.
- The Steering Group shall make its decisions by unanimous agreement of all members of the Steering Group

This report proposes that a procurement exercise is undertaken to select and appoint specialist advisers to support the following activities:

North East Ports Business Plan:

- Develop a Business Plan for ensuring the operation and delivery of activities through the North East Ports Partnership

North East Ports Strategy:

- Develop a 3 year North East Ports Strategy to provide future strategic direction of activity to be delivered by the North East Ports Partnership, aligning to the responsibilities of the agreed North East Ports Steering Group. This will focus upon the responsibilities outlined above, focusing upon maximising economic benefits, inward investment opportunities, addressing infrastructure constraints, identifying operational and procurement synergies, sharing of collaborative opportunities and other areas to be jointly identified as part of the strategy development process.

North East Ports Branding:

- Develop a brand and communications approach for the North East Ports Partnership aligned to the ambitions and objectives of each organisation within the North East Ports Partnership.
To inform the initial focus and activity of the North East Ports Steering Group, a draft 2026 Programme Plan has been developed and shared with the North East Ports members.

3. Outputs and Outcomes:

Outputs	24/25	Q 25/26	26/27	Total
North East Ports Business Plan		1		1
North East Ports Strategy		1		1
North East Ports Branding		1		1

Description of Outcomes	Timeframe for achievement	Totals
Design and delivery on shared NE Ports objectives, addressing Business Plan; allied 3 year strategy and Branding / Marketing	31/03/2026	1

4. Timetable for Implementation:

Milestone	Forecast Date
North East Ports Business Plan	30/09/2026
North East Ports 3 year Strategy	30/09/2026
North East Ports branding and marketing	30/09/2026

5. Evaluation:

Evaluation of North East Ports Partnership activity is to be agreed with partner organisations.
The impact on the North East Combined Authority's Objectives is as follows:

- The proposal directly delivers on the objectives of the North East CA Devolution Deal and the Mayors Manifesto, wherein the development of the 'Green Super Port' model is outlined.
- The Partnership will have a positive effect across many other of North East CA's objectives including the Local Growth Plan's offshore wind sector growth priorities, growing North East offshore wind sector as a whole; Tyne Taskforce and Energi Coast, North East CA Cross Cutting Themes such as Infrastructure; Enterprise and Investment Zones.

5.1 Appraisal

Overall RAG Rating:

Overall RAG assessment		
Risk Rating	The Strategic, Economic & Commercial Case	GREEN
	The Financial & Management Case	GREEN
	Overall Rating	GREEN

5.2 Appraisal Summary Statement:

Proposal Description:

The North East Ports Partnership and project will be made up of the North East CA, Ports of Blyth, Tyne and Sunderland and with the addition of Newcastle International Airport. The members of the partnership have signed an MOU and formed the North East Ports Steering Group, which will be made up of designated partnerships leads from each organisation.

This funding will specifically focus on supporting the full establishment and regular running of the Steering Group via publicly procured consultancy support, to establish a 3-year strategy of activity, Business Plan and associated Brand and Marketing as well as the NET Zero objectives to have all ports involved achieve the NET Zero objectives by 2050.

The Strategic, Economic & Commercial Case:

The £100,000 funding was allocated by MHCLG for the development of the 'Green Super Port' (NE Ports) under the original North East Devolution Deal (6th March 2024). The 'Green Super Port' which is also part of the North East CA Mayoral Manifesto sets out the ambition to work with Councils, Businesses and all Ports to create thousands of well-paid green jobs, green housing, environmental projects, and to boost the North East's reputation as world leaders in renewable energy.

The aim of the NE Ports project is to bring together all key deep water ports and the international ports in one collaborative steering group approach, ensuring that duplication of delivery and services, fractured funding, and independent efforts on attracting inward investment can be avoided and pooled approaches to labour, security, fuels, and procurement can enable maximum value for minimum resource. Commissioning expert input will unlock the fully developed NE Ports Partnership and delivery of associated activity.

The Financial & Management Case:

The North East Ports Steering Group will be responsible for overseeing delivery of associated activity from the North East Ports partnership.

This is an internal application for the North East CA to mobilise funding around the North East Ports Partnership and undertake procurement for support. The North East CA will be managing the funding, including appointing and managing the procured consultant. Funding source has been agreed with North East CA finance officers.

5.4 Key risks: A summary of key risks relating to the investment proposal is included below.

Risk	Rating
No resource implemented to progress development of North East Ports Partnership and delivery of activity	Amber - Imperative that the momentum is continued via the additional resource and independence of externally appointed experts
Gaining collective agreement between members of the North East Ports Partnership on activity following signing of MOU	Amber – underlines importance of independent oversight and advice, that this commission will provide

- 6. Financial and other resources implications:** The financial profile for the project/programme is included below.

Funding source	2025/26	2026/27	Total
NEMCA Trailblazer	0	£100,000	
North East CA Investment Fund (£)	0	0	0
Private Sector Leverage (£)	0	0	0
Total (£)	0	£100,000	£100,000

If this request is approved, the total commitment from the £2m Trailblazer funding will be £1,068,306, so there will be £931,694 remaining in the fund.

6.1 Status of match funding: N/A

6.2 Funding availability: Funding was secured as part of the NEMCA devolution deal 2024, directly granted from MHCLG for the development and delivery of a 'Green Super Port'.

7. Legal implications:

The comments of the Monitoring Officer have been included in this report.

8. Equalities implications:

The North East CA follows the [Public Sector Equality duty](#) and this report has due regard to the need to achieve the objectives set out under s149 of the Equality Act 2010.

9. Consultation and engagement:

All of the Ports involved have been directly involved in the shaping the project development of the NE Ports proposition – and the MOU has been signed all parties.

As the work outlined in this report is further developed, wider engagement will take place as led by the commissioned consultant team.

10. Appendices

None

11. Background papers:

The North East deeper devolution deal White Paper – 06th March 2024:

[North East deeper devolution deal - GOV.UK](#)

12. Contact officers:

Name: Lewis Evans
Title: Programme Manager (Net Zero and Energy)
Email address: lewis.evans@northeast-ca.gov.uk

Name: Ian Freshwater
Title: Programme Manager, Major Projects
Email address: ian.freshwater@northeast-ca.gov.uk