
Title: River Blyth - Upper Harbour and River Channel Improvements Feasibility Study
Report of: Phil Witcherley, Director of Economic Growth and Innovation
Portfolio: Home to Growing and Vibrant Economy

Report Summary

The North East Combined Authority holds driving forward the region as the 'Home of the Green Energy Revolution' as one of its core missions. The 16GW seabed leasing area of opportunity identified by the Crown Estate off the North East coast has the potential to attract major investment in the region and drive economic growth. The North East CA has targeted 25,000 new green jobs by 2035 and expects at least 10,000 of these new roles to originate within the growing offshore wind sector. Therefore, investing in opportunities to directly support the growth of the green energy sector and associated job creation is a core tenet of the North East CA Local Growth Plan. The Battleship Wharf at the Port of Blyth has been identified as a key site in the North East, already serving the offshore wind sector it is a site well suited for development.

This project will help fund a feasibility study to determine the viability of larger development at one of our nationally significant deepwater port sites through site investigation works. The works will include involve penetration cone testing of the Battleship Wharf quay, testing the river channel dredge, feasibility work for land reclamation and wider analysis work. Should the study be successful; the Port of Blyth believe there is potential for up to 50 new jobs and up to 200 in the wider supply chain.

The Port of Blyth and wider Energy Central cluster in southeast Northumberland is home to over 50 offshore engineering businesses, including the JDR Cable Systems manufacturing facility and the RWE-operated Sofia offshore wind construction base. Although the Port of Blyth has successfully attracted major investment, it requires local, regional and national support to future proof its operations in offshore wind and unlock further economic growth.

The North East Combined Authority seeks £91,667 from the North East CA Investment Fund to award as grant funding to the Port of Blyth. This funding will sit alongside £275,000 match funding from the Crown Estate, £91,666 from both Northumberland County Council and the Port of Blyth respectively to meet the total project cost of £550,000.

Recommendations

The Chief Executive is recommended to approve £91,667 from the North East CA Investment Fund to be awarded to the Port of Blyth for the River Blyth - Upper Harbour and River Channel Improvements Feasibility Study, and the completion of the necessary grant funding agreement.

Background

The Port of Blyth is a leading UK port serving the offshore wind sector and is core to the growth ambitions of the North East. However, several challenges are currently constraining the port's ability to expand and future proofing its ability to capture future investment opportunities in offshore wind, and service the growth of existing businesses located at the port, including:

- Without expanding Battleship Wharf and capacity of the port, meeting the opportunities associated with the increasing scale of offshore wind, subsea components and vessels as developers and manufacturers move to deliver projects within deeper waters in the UK will be challenging.
- Next generation vessels will increase in scale, potentially restricting the port's ability to serve the JDR Cables factory adjacent to the port and constraining activity in oil and gas decommissioning
- Rising cost and decreasing supply of large heavy lift cranes for offshore wind
- Increasing market competition from UK and European ports due to the growth of the UK offshore wind market
- Current infrastructure scale at the port, and specifically Battleship Wharf Terminal, has resulted in the port missing out on several opportunities.
- Current dredging exclusion zone upstream of Battleship Wharf restricts development

1. The Investment Proposal

The Port of Blyth proposes to overcome the above challenges and capitalise upon growth of the offshore wind market, unlocking job creation and growth for the established Energy Central offshore wind cluster around Blyth in the following ways:

- Extension of Facilities North of Battleship Berth 4 (BW4)
- Deepening of the Port of Blyth marine channel and existing BW4
- Installation of a heavy-lift crane to support large scale mobilisation of future offshore wind turbine components.

This investment will enable the Port of Blyth to commission providers to deliver geotechnical investigation, engineering feasibility study, market engagement and testing activity. This will serve as supporting technical information that supports the development by the Port of Blyth of a business case allowing them to seek investment to deliver the physical expansion of Battleship Wharf and the enabling works, currently estimated to be over £25m.

Battleship Wharf is part of the North East Investment Zone, and the existing quayside site is included in the Investment Zone Business Rates Retention site. Any uplift in business rates revenue due to subsequent development (up until 2048/49) will be retained in the region to support future economic development in line with Investment Zone policy.

Short-term beneficiaries and impact: the Port of Blyth will be the primary beneficiary of the funding, enabling the port to better understand high level technical viability, costs and supply chain capacity to deliver infrastructure works.

Long-term beneficiaries and impact:

- Attract further supply chain activity and inward investment to the Port of Blyth and Energy Central Cluster, creating 50 direct jobs within the Port of Blyth and 200 jobs in the supply chain.
- Support growth and expansion of the £130m JDR facility utilising the Northumberland Energy Park (NEP) 1 dock at the Port of Blyth, through access to larger scale and future proofed infrastructure.
- Protect existing jobs within the Energy Central cluster centred upon Blyth and South East Northumberland
- Creates further opportunities for the development of more regional jobs, apprenticeships and training, aligning with the objectives of the North East Combined Authority.

2. Project timetable and costs

Activity	Start Date	End Date	Costs excluding VAT (£)
Project Management (Port of Blyth)	Oct-25	Oct-26	30,000
Marine Licence for Site investigation works	Oct-25	Jan-26	15,000
Site Investigation	Jan-26	Mar-26	302,435
Laboratory Testing of Core Samples	Mar-26	Apr-26	20,000
River Channel Dredge Assessment	Feb-26	Mar-26	20,000
Land Reclamation Feasibility Study	Mar-26	Jun-26	50,000
Land Reclamation Preliminary Design Study	Jun-26	Aug-26	30,000
Market Research	Oct-25	Mar-26	50,000
Contingency	Oct-25	Aug-26	32,565
Total (£)			550,000

3. Timetable for agreeing project funding and launch

Milestone	Target Date
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Match funding award from Northumberland County Council	March 2026
Match funding award from North East CA	March 2026
Match funding award from Port of Blyth	March 2026
Award from The Crown Estate: Supply Chain Accelerator	Complete
Project Launch	April 2026
Project Completion (Enabling Studies)	August 2026

4. Timetable for implementation

Description	From	To
Marine licences for site investigation works.	Feb 2026	May 2026
Site investigation works comprising CPT (Core Penetration Test) testing and core sampling	Jul 2026	Sep 2026
Laboratory analysis of core samples	Sep 2026	Oct 2026
Review of CPT data, mapping of data on to river channel, assessment of dredging requirements, specification of dredging campaign.	Sep 2026	Oct 2026
Study to determine practicability of land reclamation works, identify constraints and proposed solutions to determine a works proposal to be taken to preliminary design.	Jun 2026	Nov 2026
Preliminary design of proposed works identified by Feasibility study to be taken to detailed design and used for approvals and licences.	Oct 2026	Dec 2026
Business intelligence on markets and work streams that will improve the marketability and business case for the development.	Mar 2026	Aug 2026

5. Steering Committee

As per the request of the Senior Leadership Group at the North East Combined Authority and funding condition imposed, the CA will have a presence on the official project steering committee, alongside Northumberland County Council. Managed by the Port of Blyth, the first of these meetings was held on 10th February 2026 to mark the launch of the project.

6. Appraisal

6.1 Overall RAG Assessment

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

6.2 Appraisal Summary Statement

Proposal Description:

The project aims to explore the viability via feasibility studies of creating a dedicated port facility at Battleship Wharf to support offshore renewable energy operations, including cable storage, marshalling, and long-term

O&M requirements. This will involve reclaiming 3 hectares of land and deepening the river channel for unrestricted vessel access. North East CA funding will enable feasibility studies, site investigations, and preliminary design to de-risk the larger development, positioning the Port to secure further investment through the Crown Estate’s Supply Chain Accelerator fund. Port of Blyth’s Battleship Wharf development will deliver ready-to-use infrastructure for offshore renewable energy, driving the UK’s 50GW offshore wind ambition while embedding net zero and biodiversity best practice.

Proposal start date **10 January 2026**
Financial completion date **31 January 2027**

The Strategic, Economic & Commercial Case

The project demonstrates the potential to position Port of Blyth as a critical international gateway and economic catalyst for the North East, addressing capacity constraints that have led to missed opportunities and supporting the UK’s 50GW offshore wind target. The project has strong alignment with North East Combined Authority objectives on industrial strategy, green growth, and environmental stewardship, while delivering infrastructure for cable handling, floating platform fabrication, marshalling, and decommissioning. The project is expected to unlock £15m inward investment, create up to 250 direct jobs, and safeguard existing employment, with feasibility studies funded to de-risk the larger development and enable further investment.

The Financial & Management Case

The application provides costs for the site investigation, licensing, feasibility study, and market analysis at £550,000. The Port of Blyth will commit £91,667.00 but requires additional funding to proceed; without it, the works would be delayed or scaled back over several years. Any spend beyond what is outlined in this programme will be at the discretion of the port itself. The Port of Blyth will deliver the project through an experienced engineering management team, including a Project Steering Group, Project Director, and Project Manager, ensuring strategic oversight, resource allocation, and compliance with funding requirements.

7. Key risks

Risk	Rating
Failure to obtain funding	Green – Ongoing work with various funding sources to ensure success of applications.
Marine Licencing not granted	Green – Continued work by the Port of Blyth to work with the Marine Management Organisation and Natural England at an early stage to ensure scope of works is agreed and licensing process is eased.
Unavailability of marine contractors for site investigation	Green – Port of Blyth identified and approached several contractors at an early stage to establish availability and outline costs.

8. Recommended Conditions of Funding:

The award of funding will be subject to the following proposed funding conditions.

No.	Condition
1.	Funding to be provided once all match funding is secured.
2.	Funding will only be provided once the Port of Blyth secure necessary marine licensing from the Marine Management Organisation and Natural England to progress with agreed works.

In terms of the subsidy control position, the Port of Blyth has confirmed that the funding from the North East CA and Northumberland County Council together will be below the £315,000 Minimal Financial Assistance threshold, providing a compliant route under the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

9. Financial and other resources implications

Funding source	FY 2025/26 (Q4) – 2026/2027	Total
North East Combined Authority Trailblazer Fund	£91,667	£91,667
Private sector match (Port of Blyth)	£91,666	£91,666
Northumberland County Council	£91,666	£91,666
Private sector match (The Crown Estate)	£275,000	£275,000
Total (£)	£550,000	£550,000

10. Status of match funding

Private sector match funding from The Crown Estate has already been publicly confirmed (11/12/2025), whilst the match funding from Northumberland County Council is also contingent on the award of funding from the North East Combined Authority. The Port of Blyth match funding has also been confirmed.

11. Funding availability

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. The £1,068,306 includes this commitment of £91,667.

12. Legal implications

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

13. 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.

14. Appendices

None

15. Contact officers:

Name: Lewis Evans
Title: Programme Manager
Email address: lewis.evans@northeast-ca.gov.uk

Name: Ross Lowrie
Title: Head of Clean Energy and Environment
Email address: ross.lowrie@northeast-ca.gov.uk