

A Manifesto for the True North – October 2025

Panel Members

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Themes/questions

1. Is there still a levelling up agenda and what can we do to resurrect it?
2. What are the priority areas for the future?
3. Is further devolution the answer?
4. Does the North need a Marshal plan?
5. What cultural issues are a priority?

A Summary of Discussion Points

Levelling Up

Is there still a levelling up agenda?

- Was there ever one? There was a lot of talk at the time pre and post Boris Johnson. Three PMs later and a change in government and we are still left behind in the region – if not further behind.
- The NE employment rate is still the lowest in the country at 68%
- A worker in the NE earns c.£200 less per week than the same in London
- The NE has the lowest GCSE attainment in England – only half of pupils secure a strong pass in English and Maths



The promised levelling up funds have helped exhibit this gulf further:

- £317m has been given across 2 rounds
- Round 2 gave £109m – approx. £40 per person. Wales £66, North West £48

Transport investment is the same:

- London received an annual investment of £1,183 PP. -North East - £430
- Decades of neglect to our transport infrastructure – fewer trains, planes and a road network not fit for purpose
- Poor social mobility
- Moving south should not be the only option particularly for young people
- Disparities of life expectancy
- Positivity and ambition lacking
- A buoyant north helps the south – for example, housing

If levelling up is to succeed there has to be a political will and we are not seeing that from the current Government. Real levelling up is a forty year project not 4 years for the life of a Government so all parties need to commit to reducing disparity and put policies and priorities in place to achieve it.

Priority points

Our current government regularly mentions growth and the importance of it. We aren't seeing this anywhere in economic terms. Our only growth has occurred in the public sector:

- 1) 20 new quangos created since July last year
- 2) 600 in total, costing us £400bn PA

The North is particularly reliant on this, with more than half our workforce employed by the public sector.

So there are three main areas:

- 1) We need to remove our reliance on the public sector:
 - a. More than half of our workforce are employed thus

b. This artificially distorts the competition in the local jobs market, creating higher than average rewards – wages, pensions, benefits, holidays

c. It also distorts the local communities – rents are driven high and for the long term. Working from home on average more, damages local hospitality businesses. Where staff are ‘dropped in’ (e.g. Darlington), it creates a second home culture and prices out local residents.

d. All of which in the long term lowers tax revenues (no Corporation Tax) and increases higher tax demands – meaning HMRC again looks at private individuals and businesses.

2) Instead, we need to reward private businesses to either come to the North or setup (and stay) here:

a. Reward investment via genuine tax breaks by removing two of the major ‘drags’ that come from running any business:

i. Remove the high costs of employment through ‘dead’ taxes like NI

ii. Remove the workers rights bill and give more autonomy to business owners to take a chance of employing the best possible employees without the risk and red tape

iii. Offset Corporation Tax against private investment in growth, innovation or anything that encourages owners to spend their money on growing their businesses

iv. These are not grants, that encourage consultants and quango-Esque thinking – these are savings at the bottom line, which can derisk startups immediately and empower them to grow – more than 50% of all UK private firms see taxation as their number one challenge, so we should remove this barrier at once

b. Look to encourage the best international businesses to come to the North and back them:

i. Tax breaks

ii. Removal/speeding up of red tape for planning

iii. Public endorsement

iv. Look at the benefits Nissan brought/brings to the NE – a major employer, a major eco-system of supporting businesses and an international partner to be proud of. This was 40 years ago!

3) Improve our skilled citizens in the North:

a. Make radical changes to our education system and arrest the ever-widening gap with our GCSE and A-Level results

b. 54% of students who come to our area for university leave after graduating

i. This is significant ‘brain drain’ and likely represents the lack of real or perceived opportunities to build a career post university

ii. If we do not have a vibrant private sector, offering career opportunities, then we will never arrest this

So in conclusion, removing our reliance on the public sector. Relax rules and costs of employing great talent by incentivising growth and investment in great businesses and people.

This will allow us to focus our efforts on growth in the private sector can create wonders for the North:

- More, better paid jobs with a clear path to career growth
- More innovation and investment
- A better skilled, motivated and long term workforce
- Less drain on the public purse

Further devolution

Is further devolution the answer?

Yes, but only if it is allowed to go far enough.

The Lord Houchen has demonstrated the power of independence in his area, but we can go a lot further.

Many of us are fearful of mentioning Brexit in-case we are pilloried for being too far right or xenophobic. But we should look at the potential Brexit can give us and differentiate ourselves from the rest of the UK.

We should instead use the North as a freeport-esque area of enterprise that doubles down on the freedom that Brexit was meant to give us and lets us become an independent 'sandbox' to have the autonomy to de-couple from daily oversight from Whitehall and allow us to make our own decisions on:

- Taxation
- Regulation
- Planning
- Immigration and overseas workers
- Skills

By having the autonomy to do so, the North can confidently push into the world and give us the toolkit needed to differentiate ourselves and look for genuine growth.

The North should be given autonomy as a region to have our own budget, our own taxation and our own immigration rules to attract the very best and brightest organisations in the world.



Marshal Plan

Majority – yes! Yes! Yes! Under another name.

To address left behind communities

Taxation benefits

Increased investment

Branding

Transport infrastructure – eg. HS3

Apprenticeships and skills

Employment burdens – rules, regs and tax costs – remove them

Correct differential energy costs

Stop selling assets to pay for imports

We are missing the voice of Northern MPs

Cultural Issues

Many things can be proposed but nothing we propose will succeed unless we get the CULTURE of our RULING ELITE right. Unless their WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD is sound. Most of our region's difficulties have cultural roots. And if nothing can be done about cultural causes then nothing can be done about anything else.'

4 examples:-

First, Trains

When you leave Newcastle Central Station going south you sometimes glimpse on your left the DB relief locomotive. Usually a Class 67. But I think to myself - What's it doing there? Why has our ruling class allowed foreign states to run our railways? A few hundred yards away is Stephenson's Boiler Shop where The Rocket was built. Point is - foreign operation of our railways is a cultural problem and if you don't see it as a cultural problem then you have a cultural problem. This is something we should care about. It's a good thing that the new Northumberland Line has the right operator.



Second, Trade

The biggest hit to our region has been the loss of our manufacturing base. Coal, ships, steel, heavy engineering. We've never properly recovered from the loss of the industrial wage - which was the foundation of the family. Part of the problem is squarely cultural. Indifference. The indifference of our elites to what is made where and by whom. They think it doesn't matter. We get cheap goods from abroad. We run huge trade deficits... so what. This is COMPLETELY WRONG It does matter. And the mathematics of international trade prove it. We're begging ourselves and regions like ours pay the price. Not advocating a Bennite siege economy, an AUTARKY - but we do need to value manufacturing. And to do that we need to value the master industry - ENERGY

Thirdly, Energy

Britain pioneered nuclear power. Now, we have a renewables-led energy crisis. And we're importing gas to keep the lights on. How did this happen? Well, you can find our by reading SDP's new ENERGY ABUNDANCE green paper. The abandonment of planning, Flawed privatisations, the throttling of oil and gas but also CULTURAL DECAY. The WORLD VIEW of our elites is a key part of the problem. For example, Blair and Brown thought that Britain was too poor to maintain its nuclear power stations. So they sold them to the French. But to turn back the region, we are reliant on national policy. CF Fertilisers closed their Ammonia plant in Billingham in 2023 because of high energy and carbon costs - national policy failure. And the same thing applies to fishing. We can want a new deep sea fishing fleet in North Shields - but we can't if our government has given away our fishing grounds to foreign states. We need an industrial renaissance in the North East and Cumbria but this will depend on national trade policy, energy policy, industrial policy. And that depends on the CULTURE of our elite.

Finally, Ownership

We're indifferent to what is made where and by whom but also indifferent to who owns what. Again, a its cultural problem. The list of British companies which have fallen into foreign hands is legendary - Cadburys, Rowntree Mackintosh, Jaguar Land Rover, Rolls Royce, Dulux, Boots, Asda, Pilkington, Thames Water, Northumbrian Water... Turn on your tap in Northumberland and you are enriching a Chinese Company - profits syphoned abroad. Point is... No serious industrial economy behaves like this. This is actually how you become a Vassal state.

This is a cultural problem - instant gratification, weakness and the inability to say no. The decisions which led to this were national not local... downstream of national elites were thinking.

The roots of our problems are cultural but remedies are available. Investment, building, future orientation. And strength. A little firmness of mind. The power of saying no - the first of the useful virtues. The route to success in our region - The True North is not just proposals or particular schemes in it but requires a CULTURAL SHIFT in our RULING ELITE

Away from indifference, towards strength.

