

# EAST MIDLANDS 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, 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 (Gross Domestic Product).

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

The mayoral elections in May will mark the start of the devolution process in the East Midlands, with a mayoral deal for Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, Derby, and Derbyshire after years of negotiation. The CBI is a strong advocate for devolution and worked with partners on securing the East Midlands mayoral deal, as well as supporting at the official consultation stage.

In other regions in the country where devolution is already established, we have seen the value of having a mayor who can act as an economic ambassador for the region and work with businesses on key economic issues. Looking ahead to the future, we would want to see more powers and funding devolved from Whitehall to the East Midlands County Combined Authority (EMCCA), and as such would encourage the mayor to seek Tier 4 devolution powers from Government at the earliest opportunity, as we have called for in our Spring Budget submission<sup>1</sup>.

The East Midlands is a region of diverse strengths, the region showed resilience throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, resulting in the smallest economic contraction between 2019 and 2021 of any English region<sup>2</sup>.

Looking ahead to a new era with devolution, the CBI has identified five key priorities for the next Mayor to provide the economic framework for business to thrive:

1. Drive regional investment
2. Future proof the regional labour market

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<sup>1</sup> [confederation-of-british-industry-cbi-submission-spring-budget-2024.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Regional economic activity by gross domestic product, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

3. Regional climate commitments to help the UK deliver net zero
4. Drive high-growth technology and innovation
5. Deliver resilient public services

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# Drive regional investment

With mayoral devolution coming to the East Midlands, it offers a unique opportunity to develop and deliver a comprehensive economic narrative, allowing the mayor to market the region's strengths and instil a sense of stability for investors.

The Combined Authority should co-create a comprehensive investment framework with business partners and shareholders. This will provide clear strategic direction and give businesses the confidence to co-invest in long-term, strategically important regional assets, including centres of excellence, education institutions, and transport hubs such as East Midlands airport.

- The mayor should ensure that the future East Midlands Investment Zone plays to the region's strengths and makes the region competitive in the high-growth industries of the future
- Like other MCAs, EMCCA should publish a Regional Investment Prospectus to catalyse private sector investment. Business looking to invest in the East Midlands require clarity on the role of the private sector in financing growth projects
- EMCCA must form good business engagement structures, with clear communication that informs businesses of the opportunities on offer and that the region is speaking outwardly with one clear voice

# Future proof the regional labour market to drive inclusive growth

Businesses across the East Midlands, like many others elsewhere in the country, have experienced a challenging time in recent years with recruiting in a tough labour market. To ensure our businesses have access to the best talent, we must ensure that the skills we equip our young people with align with businesses requirements. At the 2023 Q4 East Midlands council, 47% of council members rated the regional labour market as being 'not attractive' for investment, in comparison to 38% of members nationally, showing there is plenty of action needed.

The East Midlands has a higher share of the population with no qualifications than the national average, with particularly high levels in Mansfield and Nottingham<sup>3</sup> This aligns with data recently published by the Centre for Cities, showing that Mansfield and Nottingham rank within the top ten cities with the lowest employment rate in the UK, with Nottingham specifically coming 58<sup>th</sup> out of a total 62 places examined<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> [Midlands-Engine-May-2023.pdf](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Cities Outlook 2024 | Centre for Cities](#)

Therefore, the mayor should seek to use the Adult Education Budget to fund and support activities that will support social and economic mobility through delivering foundation skills<sup>2</sup>, such as English, Maths and Digital, to those with no or low qualifications, enabling them to gain good employment. Moreover, pathways should be developed for those on low wages and/or in insecure work to gain good employment that can lead to higher skilled jobs. In addition, the mayor should:

- Comprehensively integrate universities, further education colleges and training providers into the devolution process moving forward. By embedding this collaboration, skills providers can work alongside the new MCA on future regional skills policies, resolving unnecessary duplication and maximising regional provision of skills. This could be through developing or scaling up a Skills Advisory Panel.
- Integrate the findings from the East Midlands LSIP<sup>5</sup> into a regional skills plan, using the devolved educational powers
- The mayor should use their personal mandate and national platform to create a strong sense of place, leveraging this to encourage the retention of the working-age population and establish the East Midlands as an excellent place to develop and build your career.

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

The journey to net zero provides the East Midlands with an opportunity to achieve prosperity through new jobs and investment in the green economy of the future. There are several exciting developments across the green economy in the region, such as Uniper's vision for a zero-carbon technology and energy hub at Ratcliffe-on-Soar, as part of the East Midlands Freeport<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, the region will be home to the STEP fusion reactor at the West Burton site<sup>7</sup>, representing billions of investment and bringing a wealth of opportunity in scientific research and development to the area.

The mayor should use their powers over skills, housing, and transport **to form a holistic economic plan around the STEP development**. Ensuring people have access to the opportunities on offer as the project progresses and that the right infrastructure is built to support that.

Separately, the mayor should work with the industry-led coalition East Midlands Hydrogen to help **support the acceleration of the hydrogen industry in the East Midlands**. The East Midlands is the UK's largest inland hydrogen cluster with plans for hydrogen production, distribution, and industrial use. This will support new high skilled green jobs as well as supporting decarbonisation.

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<sup>5</sup> [Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire LSIP | FSB, The Federation of Small Businesses](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Ratcliffe-on-Soar Power Station site redevelopment | East Midlands Freeport \(emfreeport.com\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [West Burton selected as home of STEP fusion plant - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

# Drive high-growth technology and innovation

Technology adoption and innovation across the economy underpins much of the future opportunity in achieving sustainable economic growth. There is great potential within the East Midlands in harnessing technology to achieve greater levels of productivity, particularly in sectors where the East Midlands has a traditional strength such as manufacturing. Manufacturing accounts for 16% of economic output in the East Midlands, the second highest proportion of any English region<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, the future East Midlands innovation strategy should focus on harnessing innovation and technology to achieve productivity gains, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing. The mayor should work with Innovate UK to target innovation funding on high-growth potential clusters where investment could help to scale-up.

When it comes to driving growth, innovation is key in enabling growth for local businesses, particularly SMEs. 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 investment and pension funds, along with the British Business Bank, universities, Innovate UK, and industry to explore potential to develop new funding streams.

# Deliver resilient public services and 'fit for purpose' infrastructure

Resilient infrastructure and public services are key to providing the platform on which businesses can operate and grow. At the 2023 Q4 East Midlands Council, 67% of East Midlands councillors ranked infrastructure as being 'unattractive' for attracting investment.

To ensure the success of cities in the East Midlands like Nottingham and Derby, we need to ensure we have the right infrastructure in place for highly skilled workers to reach the city centre and encourage knowledge-intensive businesses to locate there. Centre for Cities data shows that Nottingham specifically has below average accessibility to the city centre for both public transport and private car<sup>9</sup>, reducing the potential for the size of the labour market and economic activity.

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<sup>8</sup> [CDP-2021-0133.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Midlands-Engine-May-2023.pdf \(centreforcities.org\)](#)

One reason behind this is that the East Midlands has long been shortchanged when it comes to transport infrastructure, with expenditure per head on transport the lowest in the country at £394, against a national average of £658<sup>10</sup>. While the region lies at the heart of the country's major road networks, which gives a strategic advantage, this funding gap needs to be rectified to support green forms of public transport and allow businesses to benefit from wider talent pools.

As well as transport, good regional housing stock is essential in unlocking social and economic benefits. As mentioned above, domestic household emissions are one of the largest contributors to regional carbon emissions. Investment in improving housing quality can not only help bring down emissions, but also improves outcomes for residents through reducing fuel poverty. It also encourages highly skilled workers to stay and live in the region, supporting businesses with skills challenges and encouraging inward investment.

Mayoral devolution with different policy levers sitting with the Combined Authority means the region can start looking at infrastructure and the link to economic development in a holistic way. 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 target investment into key strategic assets. To support the regions infrastructure requirements, we recommend that the mayor:

- Champion the Midlands Rail Hub project<sup>11</sup> with Government
- Work with their mayoral counterpart in the West Midlands to seek improvements to East-West connectivity.
- Establish a Combined Authority advisory board, to identify opportunities to support key pan-regional infrastructure projects
- Use national profile to push Government for greater funding for inter-city urban transport schemes, as outlined in *The Second National Infrastructure Assessment*<sup>12</sup>
- Commit to a Regional Spatial Plan to ensure joined-up thinking and that infrastructure supports economic development

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<sup>10</sup> [ME StateoftheRegion 2023.pdf \(midlandsengine.org\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Midlands Connect - Midlands Rail Hub](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Second National Infrastructure Assessment - NIC](#)

# Conclusion

On 2<sup>nd</sup> May, the people of Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, Derby, and Derbyshire will head to the polls to elect the first Mayor of the East Midlands Combined County Authority.

The CBI and its members are committed to collaborating with the mayor to ensure that the East Midlands thrives as a region where people live, work, and conduct business. Despite numerous challenges such as the rising cost of living, inflation, and geopolitical instability, both the region and the nation face, the decisions made by the mayor will significantly impact employees, employers, and the entire region.

The CBI believes that when politicians, public, and private sectors collaborate, the East Midlands can fully unlock its potential. Businesses are poised to contribute by partnering with the new mayor to advance the priorities outlined in this manifesto.



February 2024

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