GMCA GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY

Economic growth in Greater Manchester

January 2026

together we are GREATER MANCHESTER

Bolton Bury Manchester Oldham Rochdale Salford Stockport Tameside Trafford Wigan

Contents

Strategic context

The recently refreshed Greater Manchester Strategy acts as a collective vision to providing a thriving city region where everyone can live a good life. The Strategy reflects on the progress made in the city region during the last decade and identifies the priorities for the next ten years:

We've forged a partnership that's stronger than the sum of its parts, spanning the public, private, voluntary, community, faith, social enterprise and academic sectors. In the decade since devolution, we've become the UK's fastest growing economy, with productivity growth outpacing the national average and more foreign direct investment than any region outside London… We're ready to do even more in the next decade to support those who live, work, visit or invest in our city region to ensure that everyone and every place can feel the benefit of economic growth.

This report aims to examine the data on Greater Manchester's (GM) recent positive growth performance and the factors contributing to it, examine the city region's future growth prospects and the strategies and policies in place to continue the city region's economic trajectory through the next decade.

Sincere thanks are due to the Productivity Institute for their valuable input and constructive comments during the development of this work. All interpretations — and any remaining errors or omissions — are the responsibility of the GMCA.

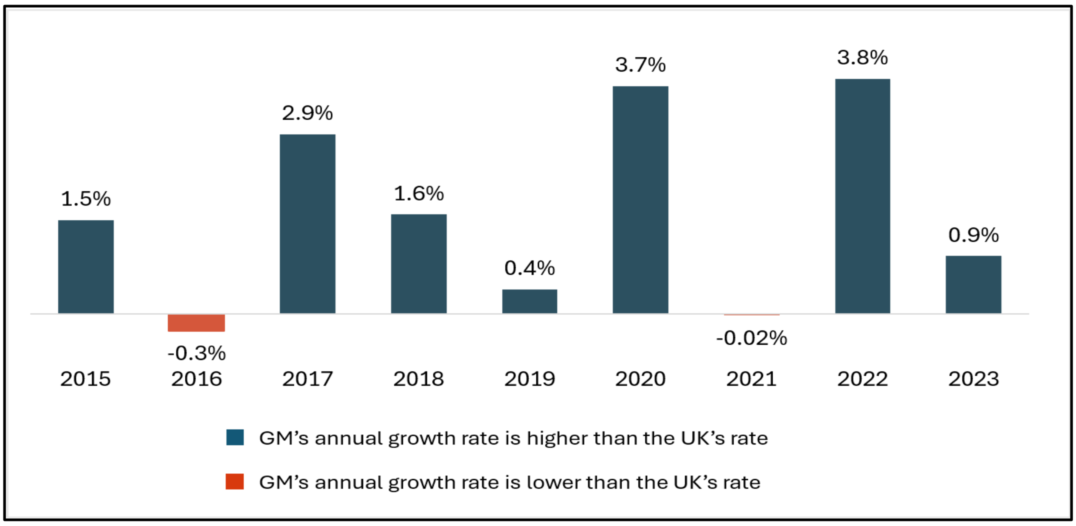
Greater Manchester's recent growth

Analysis of data on Gross Value Added (GVA) suggests three distinct phases of recent growth in Greater Manchester's (GM) economy:

- As the economy grew strongly in the years preceding the global financial crisis, GM thrived too. From 2004 to 2007, GM grew by 3.4% per annum, exceeding the UK growth rate (2.6%).
- In the period following the global financial crisis (2008 to 2014), GM and UK growth slowed to an annual average of 0.8%.
- From 2015 to the 2023, GM saw a strong recovery, with an average growth rate of 3.1%.

GM was the UK's fastest growing sub-regional (i.e. ITL2) economy in this latter period, growing at double the rate of the UK (GM: 3.1% per year; UK: 1.5%). GM's economy grew more quickly than the UK economy in 7 of the 9 years to 2023. Provisional data for 2023 shows that for the first time GM's economy is valued at over £100bn.

Annual GVA growth 2015 to 2023, GM and UK

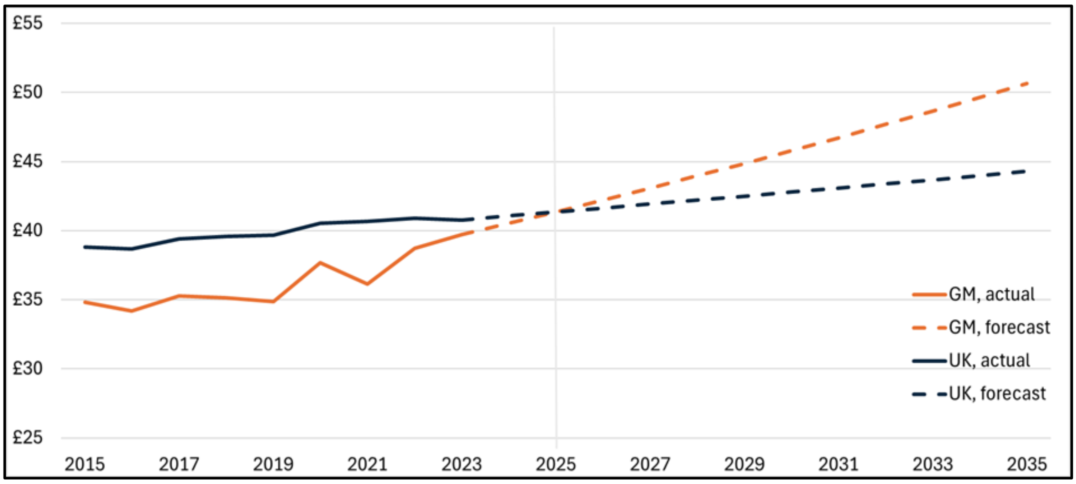


Source: ONS Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry: all ITL regions, 2025

Productivity improvements

The latest productivity data shows that the period of economic growth in GM from 2015 to 2023 was underpinned by strong productivity performance. Since 2015, GM's average annual productivity growth (+2.0%) has been the highest of all the ITL2 areas in the UK. At this rate GM would become more productive than the UK average in 2025 (although this data will not be available until 2027).

GM and UK Productivity, GVA per hour, inflation adjusted



Source: ONS subregional productivity: labour productivity indices by UK ITL2 and ITL3 subregions 2025

Whilst the data is positive, it is also useful to cautious. In its publication *How productive are the UK's big cities?,* Centre for Cities identifies the city-region as a national leader on productivity growth, but also highlights some of the methodological challenges in the data and the need for further analysis on subregional productivity.

The 2019 GM Independent Prosperity Review explored the effect of sectoral growth on productivity. The report describes how an increasing share of employment in lower productivity sectors contributed to the city-region's sluggish growth in productivity over the decade to 2015. Since then, the trend has reversed with the share of higher productivity sector jobs now increasing as GM's productivity growth has improved.

Over the 2015 to 2023 period, the number of jobs in the city-region's above average productivity sectors increased at a faster rate than those in below average sectors. Above average sector jobs grew by 27% from 435,000 to 554,000, while low productivity jobs grew by 14% from a higher base of 789,000 to 900,000 jobs.

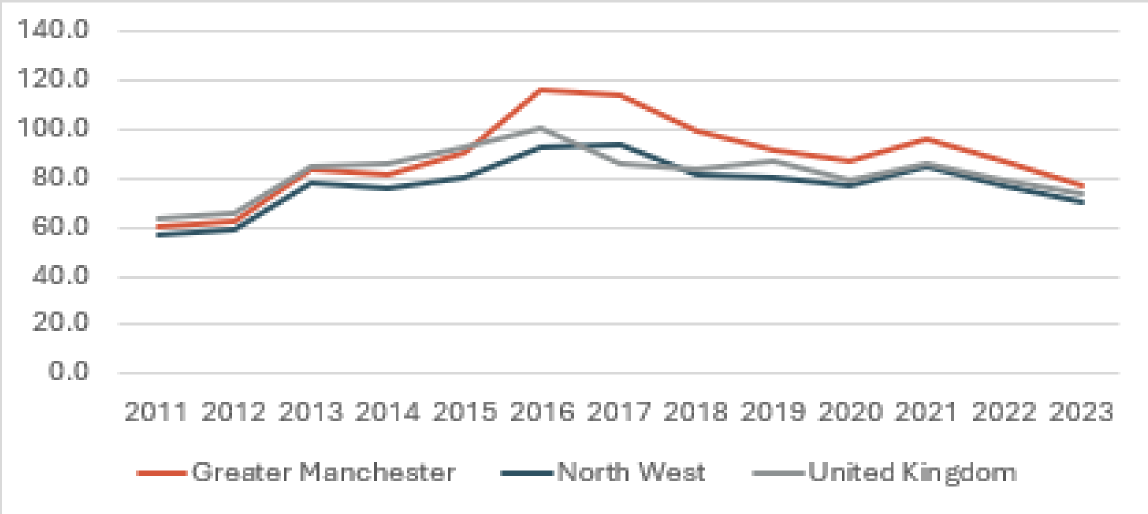
The Productivity Institute's *North West Productivity and Growth Strategies* examines how these productivity changes have manifested across the region. It particularly notes the strong performance of Manchester (the subregion containing the city centre) as the area "Steaming Ahead" in the North West (i.e. with productivity levels and growth rates above the national averages).

Sectoral change

GM's economic output growth between 2015 and 2023 was largely driven by the services sector which represented 87% of the city-region's additional output across the period. GM achieved the highest average annual growth rate in services of all UK sub-regions (3.3%), outperforming the UK rate (1.7%).

Allied with this sectoral change have been slight shifts in the make-up of GM's businesses. GM has continued to have a greater number of start-ups than either the North West or England, a trend that has been in evidence since 2015. This has resulted in faster growth in the number of firms in GM than nationally (22% vs 12% nationally).

Business births per 10,000 working age population



This has resulted in particular growth in the volume of the smallest firms. The number of firms in GM with 0 to 4 employees grew by 27% between 2015 and 2023. As a result, GM's share of national businesses has risen from 4.1% in 2015 to 4.4% in 2023.

Drivers of growth

Greater Manchester’s recent economic transformation stems from a combination of long-term institutional collaboration, strategic adaptation of historic strengths, and sustained investment in transport, innovation, and skills. Growth has been concentrated in the central urban cluster but is spreading through designated Growth Locations, supported by improved connectivity and a strong international profile. Sustained national and local investment in an expanding public transport network, in particular of the country’s largest light rail system, has markedly improved connectivity between residential areas and the clusters of employment growth. There has been relatively rapid change in the qualification levels of GM’s residents over the last 20 years, with the number of residents with a Level 4+ qualification increasing by c.15 percentage points, and the number of graduates from GM’s higher education institutions continuing to increase more rapidly than the nation overall. Expanded innovation assets and science-led programmes are reinforcing this momentum and enhancing the city-region’s attractiveness to businesses and investors.

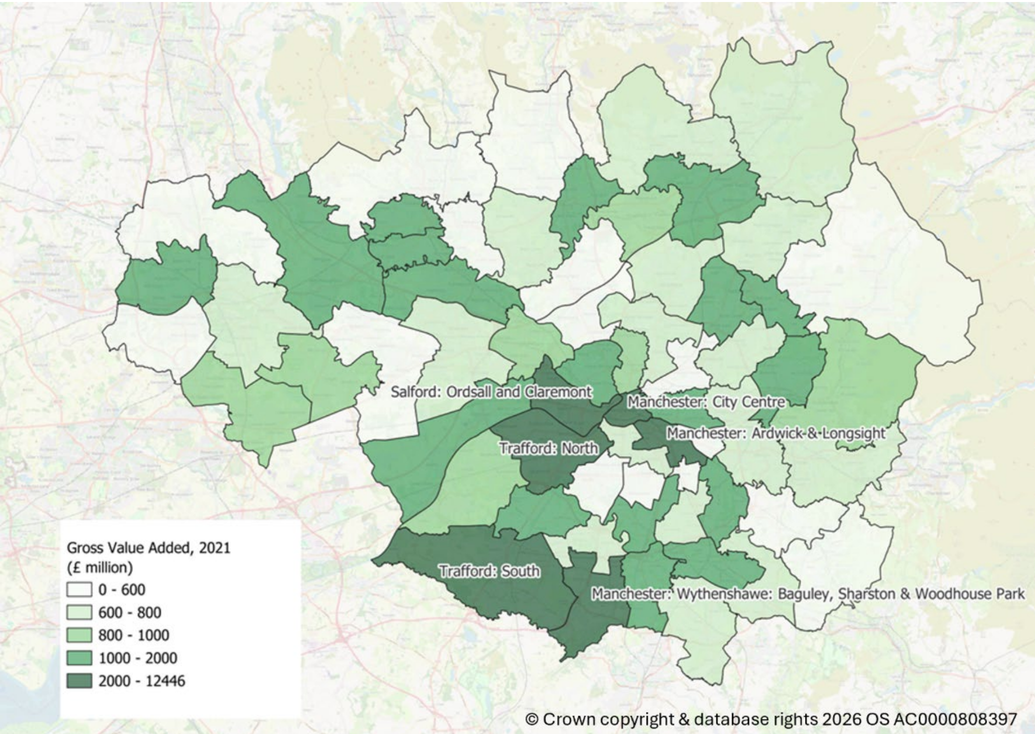
Scale of opportunity

Data suggests there remain significant additional opportunity for growth in GM. Whilst GM's share of the UK economy has risen to 4.1%, up from 3.6% in 2015, this is still a lower share than expected based on GM's share of the UK working age population (4.4%).

In their report [A Tale of Two Cities: A plausible strategy for productivity growth in Greater Manchester and beyond](), the Resolution Foundation highlight the distance GM has still to travel to be as productive as London's economy, which is 36% more productive – a much larger gap than between France's second city, Lyon, and Paris, which is 20 per cent.

GM's economic geography shows that output is not evenly distributed across the city region. Whilst there are clusters of high value activity in manufacturing and service sectors around the city-region, high paid jobs and high value activity are still weighted towards GM's southern areas. Latest data shows that more than two thirds (68%) of GM's GVA is concentrated in four of its southerly Local Authorities (Manchester, Salford, Trafford and Stockport).

GVA 2021, by GM neighbourhood



Source: ONS Regional gross value added (balanced) by industry: all ITL regions

Ongoing challenges

Addressing the challenges outlined in GM's Local Growth Plan will be central to the city region's future economic success.

Innovation

There is further to go on levels of innovation, investment and productivity growth across GM's industries. Across all industries, Business Expenditure on Research and Development in GM was £985 million in 2023 equivalent to 1.0% of GVA, compared to 2.0% for the UK. Allied to this, there is still a significant gap in innovation funding spend in GM compared to the South East. For example, in 2023–24, UKRI invested £183 per person in the Greater South East (including London), compared to £106 per person outside it, including GM.

Transport infrastructure

Transport Infrastructure faces significant challenges and nearly four in ten of GM's highly skilled workers cannot reach the city centre within 45 minutes. Links to neighbouring cities are slow and unreliable; the M6 is congested and the West Coast Mainline will reach capacity by the mid-2030s. Whilst the transformation of Northern east-west connectivity remains unrealised to date, the recent announcement of the Government's firm commitment to delivering Northern Powerhouse Rail shows progress towards improved regional connectivity.

Manchester's productivity gap due to public transport access is estimated at £8.9 billion per year – the largest gap of any UK city (Birmingham's is £3.6 billion), and congestion is estimated to cost GM businesses £1.6bn per year.

Housing

The housing market currently presents a number of challenges in ensuring that housing across Greater Manchester is both available and affordable enough to create the conditions for optimal growth. Affordability pressures affect both home ownership and private rental sector across the city region.

Between June 2020 and April 2025, the private rent index rose to 141.9, meaning private rents increased by 44.8% over this period. Over the same timeframe, the earnings index reached only 130.9. As shown in the GM Housing Market Monitor Dashboard, this indicates that while both rents and earnings have risen, rents have grown considerably faster, widening the affordability gap. A similar pattern is seen within the ownership market: the April 2025 house price index stood at 140.2, also outpacing earnings growth since June 2020.

Private rental costs vary significantly across the city region. In October 2025, the average cost of a private rental room ranged from around £700 in Wigan to over £1,300 in Trafford.

Delivery of affordable housing has improved but remains a key factor in addressing affordability pressures. Affordable housing completions increased from 2,626 in 2023–24 to 3,044 in 2024–25, contributing to progress toward the Places for Everyone target of 50,000 affordable homes by 2037 (excluding Stockport).

Overall housing delivery has also strengthened. In 2024–25, Greater Manchester saw 10,363 net additional dwellings, a 1% increase on the previous year. Net additional dwellings have risen steadily each year since 2022–23. The years prior to this were affected by the pandemic, which created initial shocks to the construction industry and may have influenced delivery rates.

Secure, affordable housing is fundamental to improving living standards and enabling the inclusive economic growth Greater Manchester depends on.

Skills

GM's skills profile has shifted in a positive direction in recent years. Yet several closely watched indicators reflect a sense that GM continues to lag national norms on skills. For example, the proportion of the population with a level 4+ qualification (typically, a bachelor's degree) was 42.9% in GM in 2024 compared with 46.8% in England. Meanwhile, the proportion of GM residents without any qualifications was 9.1% in 2024, compared with 6.6% in England. This implies that upskilling the population to sustain the city region's trajectory of economic growth and to help address persistent poverty and deprivation remains a major policy challenge. Skills development involves different stakeholders and interest groups (individuals, employers, the state) and a diverse host of institutions – encompassing schools, colleges, universities and workplaces. GM is home to a set of very well-regarded higher education institutions, but technical education, spurred by the devolution of key funding streams (eg. adult skills), is increasingly the focus of local policy ambition. Approximately two thirds of young people do not opt to go to university. But less is understood about their subsequent pathways.

Research has found that technical skills formation as currently conceived and delivered within the city region reflects and reinforces inequalities within the local labour market (for example, 'higher' apprenticeships at level 4 and above are taken disproportionately by better off residents, while gender and ethnic differences remain stark in different occupational areas and learning routes). GM's current Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) articulates GM employers' skills needs - both occupationally specific and the cross-cutting and essential skills needed across the economy. The current plan focusses on addressing digital skills gaps at all levels from basic functional skills to specialist cyber roles; improving leadership and management to residents are prepared for managerial roles, impacting efficiency and morale; better defined and accelerated net zero and low carbon training, soft skills such as attitude, time management, and presentation and essential work skills, including literacy, numeracy, and practical application of core subjects. Yet it also remains a challenge to an "employer-led skills system" that employers are – with exceptions - tending to invest less in staff development over time (as suggested by the Employer Skills Survey 2024), while GM residents are – also with exceptions - also generally tending to undertake less training than they did a few decades ago (as suggested by the Annual Population Survey and other research). Encouraging employers to invest in and upskill staff - and to make better use of existing talents and skills within the workforce - is an important, if somewhat neglected, theme within unlocking further workforce productivity growth.

Health

In GM, around 250,000 residents have a long-term health condition and are out of work and not looking for work, with 38% of working age people having a long-term health condition. Since labour market participation is a key driver of economic output, this level of non-participation will be acting as a brake on GM's economic performance. This is most keenly felt through the experience of the city region's residents. Despite GM's relatively strong economic growth since 2015, GM residents still have an average household income available for spending or saving that is £3,700 lower than the UK average, limiting their spending power and life choices. The ability to fully participate in work is one of the factors driving this.

How GM's economic plan over the next decade projects will drive future growth

GM's economic vision brings together the spatial opportunities of the city region's Growth Locations with an integrated and prioritised pipeline of investment and plans for frontier sector development. When working together these provide opportunities for the development of new industrial clusters in sectors where GM already has competitive advantage or in new industries that sit at the intersection of those strengths.

Growth locations and Integrated Pipeline

GM has used its devolved powers to create a single Integrated Pipeline for growth. Until now, GM has had separate pipelines for delivering transport, housing, innovation, and low-carbon energy infrastructure. The new approach enables development to be sequenced in a way that delivers maximum value per pound invested.

The Integrated Pipeline is designed to accelerate growth by unlocking land and attracting £10 billion in investment over the next decade, paving the way for the private sector to deliver new homes, jobs, and industrial and commercial spaces.

The Pipeline provides a structured and dynamic framework for identifying, sequencing, and prioritising key growth and place-making opportunities across GM over the next decade. It will act as the foundation for investment decision making and is designed to support a rolling programme of investment, that ensures resources are directed to the right places at the right time.

Funding will be recycled wherever possible to maximise the benefits GM can deliver with its limited resources and will seek to maximise the investment into GM made by other government partners and the private sector.

The Pipeline will target investment at six Growth Locations – nationally significant sites with land allocated for development. Each Growth Location has a distinct focus, building on the city region's sector strengths:

Western Gateway covers Old Trafford and Port Salford and is where the HyNet low carbon hydrogen project links to GM, with plans to capitalise on its connectivity and link new employment sites to the world – supporting GM's low carbon visitor economy.

North East Growth Corridor includes Atom Valley, where a Mayoral Development Zone is driving the development of an advanced materials and manufacturing hub, connected to Materials and Robotics research assets in the Central Growth Cluster.

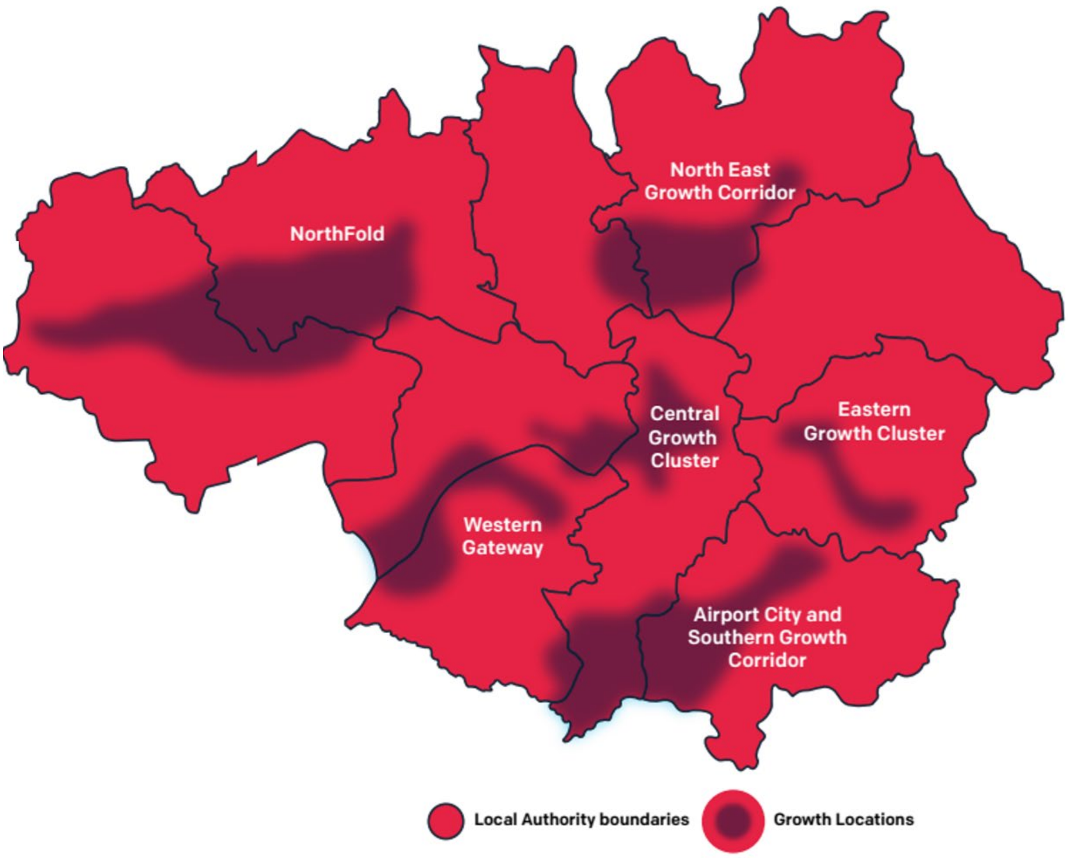
Plans for the **Airport City and Southern Growth Corridor** capitalise on the international connectivity of Manchester Airport, where MIX Manchester is creating opportunities to grow Life Sciences and Tech sectors.

Central Growth Cluster will build on the continuing high performance of the city centre growth engine – powered by the science and tech cluster on the Oxford Road Corridor, creative industries and GM's large business, financial and professional services community. This area will provide 58,000 new homes on brownfield land and new spaces for businesses, including growing innovation districts at Sister and Crescent Salford, and major regeneration projects like Victoria North and Holt Town.

Eastern Growth Cluster, linking development opportunities of Ashton Moss, St Petersfield and Ashton town centre, building on the creation of Ashton's Mayoral Development Zone

NorthFold – 12,000 new homes with access to green space and a new Health Innovation Campus linked to the Royal Bolton Hospital.

GM's Growth Locations



The development potential of our six Growth Locations is significant, as shown below, and will unlock thousands of new homes and space for new businesses.

Summary of Growth Location Development Potential

Development Potential in GM's Growth Locations (*based on all future years' land supply)*		
Growth Location	**No of Homes**	**Employment Floorspace (sqm)**
Airport & Southern Growth Corridor	13,571	362,919
Central Growth Cluster	100,465	2,387,422
Eastern Growth Cluster	4,366	239,495
North-East Growth Corridor	20,989	1,775,144
Western Gateway	20,533	1,197,697
Northfold	17,128	851,618
	177,052	**6,814,295**

There will be a new single investment approach to target funding at Growth Locations, using the greater flexibility over finances agreed in the city region's Integrated Settlement devolution deal. This approach will provide the public funding to unlock significant private sector investment, giving confidence to the businesses that will help drive economic success.

This approach is supported by The Productivity Institute's paper *Land use and planning reforms: strategic context, challenges and policy recommendations* which makes the case for strategic planning at a Combined Authority level aligned with local rotating finance vehicles / institutions for improved productivity.

A focus on sector strengths

In June 2025, the Government published its National Industrial Strategy in which it outlined its priorities for economic growth. It identifies the need to take specific and co-ordinated action:

> *This is about positive choices: backing eight sectors (the IS-8) with the highest potential, and the frontier industries at their leading edge – and targeting the places and clusters across the UK that support those sectors, to increase national productivity, strengthen our economic security and resilience, and support our environmental goals and the net zero transition.*

This corresponds with the approach to sector development that Greater Manchester adopted in 2019 through its Local Industrial Strategy which identified frontier sectors that align closely with the IS-8 sectors. Since then, the city region has undertaken significant work to deepen the understanding of these industrial frontiers and how they can be supported to drive competitive advantage and innovation-led growth.

Most recently, GMCA has been coordinating this activity through the development of a set of five Sector Development Plans. Developed in close collaboration with businesses, universities and a range of partner organisations, the Plans outline priority actions to increase innovation, support job creation and attract investment.

The Plans are designed to act as living documents and will be updated at least once a year in line with key developments and opportunities in these sectors. Sector development plans have been completed for 5 of the IS-8 sectors:

- Advanced Materials and Manufacturing
- Digital, Cyber and AI
- Health innovation and Life Sciences
- Creative Industries
- Low Carbon

Advanced Materials and Manufacturing

GM's Advanced Materials and Manufacturing sector employs approximately 15,000 people with more than 500 businesses, supported by a wider manufacturing sector of 110,000 employees. Key advanced manufacturing subsectors include forming, precision machining & cutting, and coating processes.

Key advanced materials subsectors include technical textiles, polymers, and coating materials. The sector is well served by a wealth of R&D assets primarily linked to the city-region's universities. These include the University of Manchester's materials department, the National Graphene Institute, Graphene Engineering Innovation Centre, Henry Royce Institute, Dalton Nuclear Institute and the Salford Innovation and Research Centre (which includes the North of England Robotics Centre).

GAMMA, GM's Graphene, Advanced Materials and Manufacturing Alliance provides strategic leadership for the sector and supports commercialisation efforts. Projects and programmes in development include: The Advanced Materials and Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMMIC), the Sustainable Materials and Manufacturing Centre (SMMC) in Atom Valley and the Sister innovation district on the Oxford Road Corridor.

The plan identifies specific actions for the development of the sector related to the availability of relevant industrial space the sector needs to grow, developing new approaches to the verification of new materials, how the Made Smarter programme of technology adoption in the sector can be further embedded and how GM's Further Education colleges can work more closely with the sector to shape curriculums and placements.

Digital, Cyber and AI

Greater Manchester boasts a £5bn tech ecosystem, with a strong business base and strengths in key subsectors including AI, cyber security, fintech, immersive tech, and e-commerce, all supported by robust digital infrastructure and connectivity.

Key assets include the University of Manchester's Institute for Data Science and AI, University of Manchester's Centre for Digital Trust and Society, the Turing Innovation Catalyst, Manchester Metropolitan University's Centre for Digital Innovation, Centre for Sustainable Innovation, Digital Innovation and Security Hub (DISH), MediaCity Immersive Technologies Innovation Hub, GCHQ, North West Cyber Resilience Centre, and Sister.

The plan prioritises action to encourage AI adoption across GM's business base and public services, better engage the city region's cyber security firms with national security agencies, develop the commercial space needed for startups in the sector, and develop the infrastructure that enables the sustainable growth of data intensive industries.

Health innovation and Life Sciences

GM's key Health innovation and Life Sciences sub-sector strengths include Omics, Pharma, Medtech, BioPharma, as well as Health Innovation fields such as Medical Sensors and Software as a Service. Industrial BioTech is an emerging cluster strength. R&D assets, include a high intensity knowledge cluster on Oxford Road corridor, with universities and innovation assets co-located with the University of Manchester NHS Foundation Trust, soon to be bolstered by the expanded UK BioBank Headquarters. Christie, Europe's largest single site cancer campus, is a 10-minute journey from the Oxford Road Corridor, co-located with the Manchester Cancer Research Centre.

The city has strengths in Health data, Clinical trials, translational innovation, and commercialisation; as well as complimentary strengths in Applied and ethical AI and Data, Advanced materials including biotechnology, robotics and precision engineering.

Businesses are spread across the city region, with distinct clusters in Manchester city centre (including Citylabs) and smaller concentrations in both Trafford and Stockport. Key companies based in Greater Manchester include Qiagen, IQVIA, Kratos Analytical, Hologic, Yourgene Health, E-Lucid, TruePill, F2G, Bouygues, Lumira Dx, Lonza, Proteintech Group, and ChiesiThe sector is supported by industry bodies including Health Innovation Manchester and Manchester Applied Health and Care Research Group (MAHSC).

The sector development plan includes actions to develop services and interventions that enhance business access to GM's Real-World Evidence and Clinical Trials offer, establish a pipeline of innovation assets for the sector with business cases and routes to funding and to develop a sector-wide CPD framework.

Creative Industries

Greater Manchester has the largest concentration of creative businesses outside London, with a mature and thriving ecosystem with potential to deliver significant growth to the UK economy. Notable developments include MediaCityUK, Manchester Metropolitan University's School of Digital Arts (SODA), and Factory International demonstrating the city region's commitment to harnessing the economic potential of creativity.

Greater Manchester has particular sub-sector strengths in Programming and Broadcasting and Sound Recording & Music Publishing and culture and performance although sector-specific micro clusters exist across the conurbation. Companies are primarily clustered within Salford's MediaCity, which is home to the BBC, ITV Granada Studios, and Dock10. GM also has comparative strengths in Advertising & Market Research, with companies clustered within Manchester and Stockport.

Actions within the Sector Development Plan focus on expanding apprenticeships and training, supporting grassroots venues, SMEs, and freelancers, securing investment and developing priority initiatives in high-growth sectors like music and screen.

Low Carbon

Greater Manchester's Low Carbon and Net Zero sector comprises more than 3,000 firms employing nearly 60,000 people and generating nearly £9bn in revenue (2019/20). The sector spans renewable energy, building technology, green consultancy, and waste and circular economy solutions.

Its success is underpinned by world-leading research and innovation assets across Greater Manchester's universities, a thriving business support ecosystem led by The Growth Company, and a long history of industry collaboration.

The plan prioritises establishing sectoral leadership linked to the city regions 5 Year Environment Plan, the establishment of Low Carbon Innovation Zones (key sites that attract innovators and enterprises), and working with the University of Salford to establish GM as a National Retrofit Centre

Other sectors

In addition to this approach to specialisation there a is a recognition that GM continues to benefit from having one of the most diverse ranges of sector strengths in the country. This was identified in the 2019 GM Independent Prosperity Review and reinforced through more recent analysis.

There is therefore a need to also develop support for other sectors and sector agnostic programmes. There are actions to support these industries underway in the city-region through programmes established under our Local Industrial Strategy such as our Foundational Economy Innovation Fund and the GM Visitor Economy Strategy and they will continue to be supported under the overarching delivery framework of the Greater Manchester Strategy. The Greater Manchester Institute of Technology, led by the University of Salford works in close partnership with GM colleges and employers to co-design and deliver higher technical provision across a range of sectors aligned to labour market need.

An innovation leader

GM has a strong innovation ecosystem, underpinned by leading research and development institutions and a range of growth-driving frontier sectors, including health innovation, advanced materials, biotechnology and digital. Over the next decade, through Innovation GM, the city region's universities, businesses and public sector will continue working together to increase both business and public sector research and development investment, and to develop more connected clusters of innovation.

Trade missions are expected to boost internationalisation, supporting local companies to engage successfully in new markets. GM will also continue to support the groundbreaking partnership led by the Universities of Manchester and Cambridge, which aims to strengthen links between the two innovation ecosystems, accelerate growth in start-ups and scale-ups, drive private sector investment into research and development, and attract new foreign direct investment to the UK.

International partnerships will also be used to improve levels of innovation amongst GM's firms, such as the Innovation Bridge with the Ruhr region in Germany, supported by the British Consulate General in Düsseldorf and GM.

An integrated transport network

The Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2050 and supporting delivery plan outline how the city region plans to further develop a transport system that 'helps people live better lives, supports local communities and powers the economy.'

The delivery plan provides a summary of proposals and planned investments in Greater Manchester's transport network between 2027-2037 and gives an idea of future proposals beyond 2037. It includes projects that will be delivered by a range of partners, including TfGM, local authorities, National Highways, Network Rail/Great British Railways and developers.

To ensure a coordinated approach to transport investment, the transport interventions, schemes and initiatives in the delivery plan are being coordinated alongside the Integrated Pipeline for Greater Manchester.

The plan outlines street improvement, Metrolink and busway, rail, road, and transport interchange projects across three distinct phases:

- Deliver: Transport schemes where a clear need has been identified, the case for change has been made, and significant funding is already allocated. They may still need further funding and final business case approval, before they can go ahead. The aim is for these schemes to be delivered (or in delivery) before 2032

- Develop and deliver: Transport priorities which could be delivered by 2037 subject to development funding, prioritisation, business case approval, and delivery funding for construction / implementation.
- Explore and develop: outlines longer-term transport priorities. These will need further investigation and development to identify future options and determine feasibility. All proposals would be subject to funding and business case approval. Whilst these will be delivered prior to 2037 where possible most are longer term projects to be implemented before 2050.

Expanding and upskilling the workforce

Realisation of the opportunities from GM's sector strengths, success of GM's businesses, and delivery of the infrastructure, housing and commercial property in GM's growth locations, will depend on being able to draw on a skilled and increasingly specialised workforce. The highly specific nature of growing sector, and the employers within them, means a much more agile, integrated and responsive skills system will be needed than exists at present. The roles created through GM's growth also have the potential to offer the good jobs which will provide the opportunities for GM's residents.

GM is responding to this opportunity. A new strategic initiative Developing the Tertiary Education Ecosystem of Greater Manchester, between GM's higher and further education systems, is exploring how providers can collaborate more effectively to build a stronger, more connected skills ecosystem across the region. This needs to be reinforced by further devolution of post-16 skills in order to move away from the fragmented approach of the past and deliver to the sectoral needs of GM's developing economy.

The city region has developed the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate – the MBacc - to develop the technical skills needed to underpin economic growth. The MBacc will provide a clear and prestigious route through technical education aligned with the opportunities in the local economy. This is focussed in seven Gateway sectors each of which sets out the subjects and qualifications most valued by Greater Manchester's top employers: Construction and the Green Economy; Creative, Culture and Sport; Digital and Technology; Education and Early Years; Financial, Business and Professional Services; Health and Social Care; and Manufacturing and Engineering.

By 2030 the MBacc will provide increased experiences of the workplace linked to employers in each Gateway for all young people following an MBacc pathway. This will be accompanied by work to transform technical education pre- and post-16 to ensure a sufficient scale of places and provision including availability of T Levels and apprenticeships in high demand occupational areas. The MBacc will be on offer in every Greater Manchester school, college and specialist provision embedded into the curriculum and preparing young people for choices at 14,16 and 18.

The Get GM Working Plan outlines how the city region plans to narrow the gap between the Greater Manchester employment rate and the national rate and moving closer to achieving an 80% employment The Plan sets out a collaborative approach to recognising this ambition and is built on four pillars:

1. Prevention: Invest in community-powered, place-based support— integrating health, skills, and employment services across the statutory and VCFSE sector through the “Live Well” model to provide everyday support in every neighbourhood. Prioritise early intervention, digital inclusion, and confidence-building to break cycles of disadvantage.
2. Growth: Drive inclusive economic growth by aligning skills and employment support with GM’s growth sectors and locations, supporting SMEs, and expanding good work through the GM Good Employment Charter and Keep Britain Working vanguard. This will provide good employment opportunities for our residents, providing a clear line of sight to high-quality jobs and ensuring GM is a great place to do business.
3. Health: To tackle increasing number of people who are unable to work due to their health or disability fully integrate health, skills and employment support, scaling up existing innovative models to help residents overcome health barriers and move closer towards, move into, and remain within work.
4. System Conditions: Maximise GM’s unique governance, data, research and devolution powers to streamline funding, align outcomes, and foster continuous improvement to create the conditions for opportunity and growth

Conclusion

The coordinated delivery of the Greater Manchester Strategy and its supporting plans can convert recent economic momentum into long-term, broad-based growth. This involves sequencing investment through the Integrated Pipeline so that transport, housing, innovation and skills interventions are aligned spatially and temporally with areas of greatest need and opportunity. It also requires a clear focus on strengthening the city region's growth sectors, while maintaining support for the wider economy and ensuring that firms can access the infrastructure, workforce, and research assets necessary to raise productivity. The development of a spatial plan to underpin the local industrial strategy, addressing land allocation and greenbelt release, has meant that GM now has defined geographical locations to host five global clusters based around its sector strengths.

Weaknesses in connectivity, housing affordability, skills attainment, business investment in R&D, and health-related economic inactivity continue to constrain the city region's economic performance. Uneven spatial distribution of growth risks reinforcing disparities between places, while capacity pressures—within transport networks, education and training systems, and parts of the labour market—may limit the realisation of emerging opportunities. Addressing these issues will require greater devolution and sustained partnership across national and local government, employers, education providers, and civic institutions.

With a coherent strategic framework in place and clear areas of comparative strength, Greater Manchester has a solid foundation for further progress. Delivery will depend on rigorous prioritisation, effective governance, and continued alignment of public and private investment. If these conditions are met, the city region will be well positioned to narrow long-standing economic gaps and support a more resilient, productive, and inclusive economy over the decade ahead.