

# Could opportunities in outer space bring jobs to the North East?

This week saw the possibility of 2,300 jobs being created in the North East as global defence giant Lockheed Martin identified the region as the frontrunner for a £50m manufacturing and research base.

The potential plans were unveiled at a conference in Newcastle looking at economic opportunities in the space sector, which attracted more than 100 North East companies.

Though no deal has been signed, the US firm has already been scoping out potential sites and said: “there’s a reason we’ve come to the North East first”.

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The North East has previously made efforts to capitalise on some of those opportunities by opening a Space Enterprise Lab linked to the Satellite Applications Catapult at the NETPark science and business park in Sedgfield, County Durham.

Now a North East Space Leadership Group has been newly formed to shape the vision, mission and strategy for the growing space sector in the region.

Made up of a diverse range of professionals from industry, universities, the public sector, politics and the Government, the group aims to support the development of the space cluster in the North East with a focus on nurturing business growth and employment opportunities.

That aims echoes the Government’s ambitions for the UK to capture a significant chunk of the estimated £490bn global space market, and the Leadership Group will meet four times a

year in a bid to keep the North East at the front of that drive.

The group will be chaired by John Bone, currently chair of the North East Satellite Applications Centre of Excellence and chief commercial officer of RHEA Group, an international engineering company with a presence in the UK.

He said: "In the North East, and indeed across the UK, the space sector has been growing with added momentum in recent years. This presents a unique but very substantial commercial and economic opportunity for our region.



Elaine Scott, Centre Manager for NESACoE, Paul Howell, MP for Sedgefield, Richard Gibbs, CEO at Filtronic, Sarah Slaven,

Managing Director at Business Durham, Ralph Dinsley, Executive Director at NORSS, Nafeesa Dadja, Head of Regional Growth at Satellite Applications Catapult, Colin Baldwin, Head of Local Growth Strategy at the UK Space Agency, Alan Welby, Innovation Director at North East EEP, and John Bone, Chair of NESACoE and Chief Commercial Officer of RHEA Group.

(Image: handout from Gardiner Richardson)

“By working across a diverse range of backgrounds and organisations, the North East Space Leadership Group aims to boost collaboration and maximise research and commercial opportunities for companies working in the space sector. It’s our hope that this work will put the North East on the map as one of the key driving forces behind the UK’s up-and-coming space sector and attract existing and start-up businesses and inward investors.”

Working in space is no longer the stuff of science fiction, with satellites circling the Earth playing an essential part in everything from GPS technology that powers smartphone maps to climate change monitoring.

The North East’s expertise in advanced manufacturing makes it an ideal location for space-focussed businesses, and last week’s conference in Newcastle heard that the Lockheed Martin plant – if it comes to fruition – could contribute an estimated £1.7bn to the UK economy over 10 years.

Lockheed Martin’s global space business generated roughly £8.5bn (\$11.8bn) in sales in 2021, and its commercial space arm is almost as big as its military space arm.

The firm has built 945 satellites and played a role in every Nasa mission to Mars, including the Mars lander programme. In the UK, it is involved in a project to set up a space port for launching satellites into orbit from Unst in the Shetland Islands.

The North East Space Leadership Group aims to speak for the current space sector, with representatives from companies such

as Filtronic, e2E Group, Port of Tyne, NORSS and Jacobs. Public sector organisations such as the Satellite Applications Catapult and the North East LEP will also be represented along with the region's five universities, the Department of international Trade and UK Space Agency. North East MPs Paul Howell and Chi Onwurah, from the Conservatives and Labour, are also members.

Colin Baldwin, head of local growth strategy at the UK Space Agency, said: "We are working with our partners to level up the space sector across the country and help companies grow with support networks, funding and advice.

"The North East Centre of Excellence in Satellite Applications has played a key role in strengthening the space ecosystem in the North East. We welcome the establishment of the North East Space Leadership Group which will complement the work of the Centre of Excellence, driving growth and creating jobs across the region."

Sedgefield MP Paul Howell said: "The North East Space Leadership Group has the opportunity to ensure that the voices of businesses, academics, local authorities and political leaders are fully aligned and motivating the many exciting opportunities for Space developments in the North East.

"I have met many players in this important arena and I look forward to participating fully in this initiative."

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