Central Lancashire Local Plan 2023-2041

National Cyber Force HQ

Topic Paper

October 2025

Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this topic paper

1.1 This topic paper presents that information which is known to the Central Lancashire Authorities (CLAs) to detail the context, local policies and strategies and collated information and evidence which relate to the National Cyber Force (NCF). In doing so, it will demonstrate how the CLAs have considered the NCF in the preparation of the emerging Central Lancashire Local Plan (CLLP) 2023-2041.

What is the National Cyber Force?

1.2 In October 2021, the UK Government announced the new NCF was to be permanently located in Samlesbury, 'cementing the North-West region's position as the cyber centre of the UK'[1].

1.3 The NCF draws together personnel from intelligence, cyber and security agency Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) (formerly known as MI6) and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL), under one unified command for the first time. Working together with law enforcement and international partners, the NCF will help 'defend the nation and counter the full range of national security threats'.

1.4 The Defence and Intelligence Partnership's *National Cyber Force: 'Responsible Cyber Power in Practice* (2023) provides details of how the NCF is operating now. The Government have set out their commitments to prepare facilities at Samlesbury for the NCF Headquarters (HQ) to accommodate growth and meet the ambitions set out in the National Cyber Strategy (2022).

1.5 The aim of the NCF is to:

- Counter threats from terrorists, criminals and states using the internet to operate across borders to harm the UK and other democratic societies.
- Counter threats which disrupt the confidentiality, integrity and availability of data, services and cyberspace.
- Contribute to UK defence operations and help deliver the UK's foreign policy agenda[2]

1.6 Indications are that the arrival of the NCF is due to bring an investment of £5bn to the Lancashire economy[3] and that the NCF will create or provide up to 2,000 jobs

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[1] Permanent location of National Cyber Force campus announced - GOV.UK
[2] The North West Cyber Corridor
[3] How Samlesbury, Lancashire became the home of the National Cyber Force | Computer Weekly

by the 2030s[4], boosting skills and training levels, increasing wages and supporting the growth of the local economy. It is anticipated it will provide opportunities for collaboration with business and universities to develop skills and support economic growth in this sector, with the potential to reap benefits for the local area. The location of the NCF will also help to move key public sector roles outside of London, spreading job opportunities across the country and supporting levelling-up[5].

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[4] Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament
[5] LancasterCyberCorridorv2.pdf

2.0 SPATIAL CONTEXT

Samlesbury and the North West Cyber Corridor

2.1 The GCHQ careers website confirms their six sites of operation are located at Cheltenham, Bude, Scarborough, Manchester, London and, now, Samlesbury. Located to the north of the South Ribble borough, between Preston and Blackburn, Samlesbury is described as being 'at the heart of the UK's developing North-West cyber corridor, with cutting edge technology firms and cyber universities[6]".

2.2 The North West 'Cyber Corridor' has been identified as an area stretching across the region, covering Manchester, Lancashire, Liverpool, Cumbria, Cheshire and Warrington. It reflects a network of over 300 cyber-security related businesses which make it one of the UK's leading regions in cyber, and over 150 associated public, defence and research assets. The corridor area also has strong relationships to other sectors, including aerospace and defence, nuclear and energy, finance, professional services and advanced manufacturing. It also has a number of leading universities and training facilities that can help build the skills pipeline in cyber[7].

2.3 GCHQ already have an office in Manchester, and they cite the city as Europe's fasted growing major tech cluster with more than 15% of Manchester's population employed by the digital, creative and technology sector. Samlesbury is located within commutable distance of Manchester and so is intended to 'tap into' that existing skill sector. The GCHQ website promotes the Ribble Valley, the Forest of Bowland, Lake District and Yorkshire Dales, rural villages, market towns and Manchester as all being within easy commuting distance whilst an accompanying map shows the cities of Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester as within commutable distance of Samlesbury.

2.4 The presence of a cluster of prominent universities, working with the NCF and offering an increased range of computer, cyber and digital courses, is therefore also key to the decision to locate the NCF in Samlesbury. According to some media reports, one of the NCF's aims is to hire employees with a diverse range of backgrounds and aside 'traditional' education routes, additional direct entry and apprenticeship programmes have been announced (see Section 7.0 of this report) or are planned[8].

2.5 The Central Lancashire Authorities have been in contact with personnel from National Cyber Force directly and they have provided the following response:

The NCF does not provide comment on exact figures regarding staff numbers for national security reasons. We have previously provided approximations of workforce size through publicly available sources, which remain the most appropriate reference for such information.

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[6] About us | GCHQ Careers
[7] LancasterCyberCorridorv2.pdf
[8] How Samlesbury, Lancashire became the home of the National Cyber Force | Computer Weekly

The NCF anticipates that many of the future jobs, both direct and indirect, will be filled from local recruitment of people already resident in the area and that the growth in housing demand linked to the NCF will follow normal patterns of housing demand for employers of a similar scale.

2.6   The range of locations shared on their recruitment website show NCF expect personnel to travel from the commutable catchment area around Samlesbury, where there are good transport links to the area. There is also a range of housing choice, in both urban and rural areas, which typically benefit from lower house prices when compared to the South.

2.7   Therefore, it can be reasonably inferred that the NCF is initially intended to draw upon the existing skills and employment base of the surrounding areas (e.g. Manchester) but with a focus on developing cyber-skills through expanding education and training provision. Commuting links between Manchester and across the cyber corridor are important, and Samlesbury is in an accessible location. Its location within a rural area also enables greater security, away from prying eyes, and it is strategically located close to already established businesses that specialise in national defence, including the advanced engineering and manufacturing company BAE Systems.
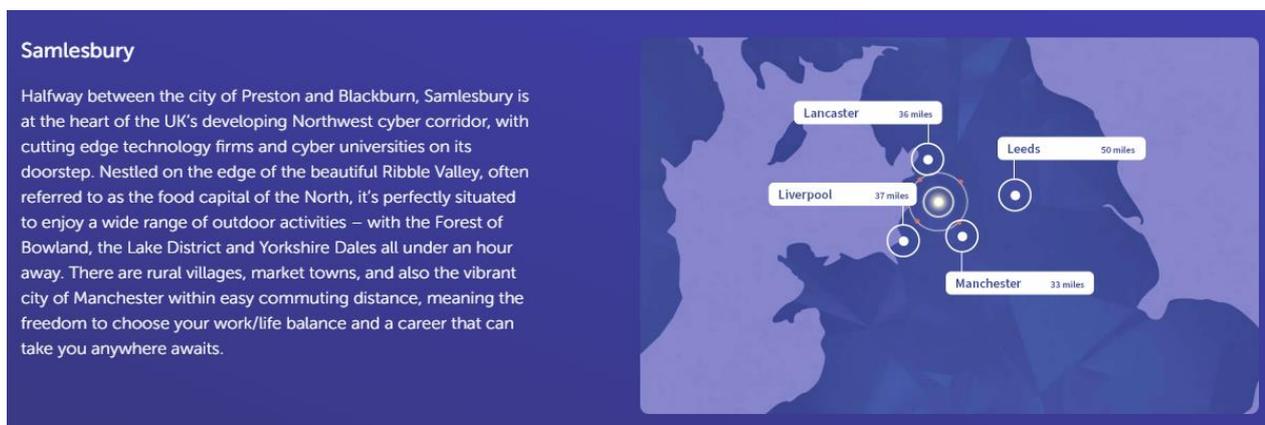
Source: About us | GCHQ Careers

BAE Systems

2.8   Samlesbury is already home to BAE Systems (BAE) – a British multinational aerospace, defence and information security company with sites in Samlesbury, Preston and Warton (Lancashire) as well as Barrow-in-Furness (Cumbria). The BAE Samlesbury site is a centre for aircraft engineering, both designing and building military aircraft, whilst the central Preston office serves as its modern corporate hub. As with GCHQ, the BAE Careers webpages promote its location to Preston, the Ribble Valley, Manchester and the Lake District.

2.9   In 2023, research carried out by Oxford Economics, showed that BAE directly employs almost 12,000 people at its Warton and Samlesbury sites[9] with a further 19,000 jobs sustained through indirect employment (contractors, trade unions and suppliers) across the region. Since then, the company has hired thousands more at its sites and plans to hire thousands more in 2025[10] as it prepares for a global rise in defence spending. Note that BAE employs much higher numbers of staff compared to that indicated through the NCF proposals.

2.10 Key to BAE's success has been its investment in developing education and skills. In 2023 it was reported to have spent £180m on education and skills, including the development and use of bespoke facilities such as its Academies for Skills and Knowledge (ASK) within the Samlesbury Enterprise Zone[11].

2.11 As with emerging details around the NCF, BAE recognise that strong partnerships across industry, academia and SMEs are a vital part of their work[3]. This includes links within Lancashire and the surrounding areas - BAE Systems have a local supply chain of businesses supporting them.

2.12 It is expected that the NCF will, similarly, support a series of local supply chains, involving businesses at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Other NW Investments

2.13 There are also a number of ongoing strategic investments in cyber security within the NW region, in addition to Samlesbury. These include:

- Manchester's Digital Innovation and Security hub (DiSH)
- NW Cyber Resilience Centre, joint venture between GM Police and Manchester Digital
- GM and Lancashire Cyber Foundry projects[12]

2.14 As of 2022, there were also at least 20 high quality co-working and incubation spaces with a digital and cyber-security focus, including premises in Lancaster, Cheshire, Liverpool and Manchester[13]. This further illustrates the growing strength of the NW digital and cyber sectors and the opportunities provided by them.

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[9] BAE Systems: Company announces full-year results for 2024 | Lancashire Telegraph
[10] Record £1 Billion skills investment as BAE Systems set to recruit thousands more Apprentices and Graduates in 2025
[11] BAE Systems sustains more than 40,000 North West jobs
[12] LancasterCyberCorridorv2.pdf
[13] LancasterCyberCorridorv2.pdf

3.0 APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT IN SAMLESBURY

Local Development Order & Masterplan

3.1   The Samlesbury Enterprise Zone (EZ) was designated to help create business and jobs and attract international investment, stimulating economic growth. The Enterprise Zone (EZ), relating to land adjacent to BAE Samlesbury, was first granted by Central Government in 2011. To aid the delivery process, a Local Development Order (LDO) and Masterplan were adopted in 2014 with a lifetime of 10 years. The provisions of the LDO allowed for its replacement or renewal if development was not completed by the time of its expiry.

3.2   Following the expiry of the 2014 LDO, in October 2024, and following a consultation exercise, the Councils agreed to adopt a revised LDO, Masterplan and Transport Assessment (that reflected development undertaken since 2014). The level of development within the revised Masterplan has not increased and remains the same as in 2014. The adopted documents run for a further 10 years at which point they will be re-assessed.

3.3   As the EZ falls across two local authority boundaries – South Ribble and Ribble Valley – it is signed by both authorities in conjunction with Lancashire County Council as the development lead.

3.4   The LDO and Masterplan conditionally extend permitted development (PD) rights to development within the EZ boundary and set down the principles of design and development for the site. PD rights grant planning permission subject to a number of conditions, without the need to work through the usual, lengthier planning process. For the Samlesbury EZ, permitted uses centre around advanced engineering and manufacturing (AEM), related services and necessary infrastructure. Links to the documents can be found at https://southribble.gov.uk/planning-13/lancashire-enterprise-zone.

3.5   Since 2014, significant site infrastructure and utilities have been put in place, including new access points from the A59 and A677 linked by a spine road through the site, safe access from the spine road into plot areas, site wide drainage infrastructure and utilities, site-wide ecological mitigation and design and landscaping.

3.6   This has enabled a number of key developments to be delivered – including BAE's Academy for Skills and Knowledge (ASK), AEM Defence Logistics, Asset Management Facilities (AMF), and the University of Sheffield's Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC) North-West. Figure 1 shows that delivered prior to 2024. No schemes (other than planning applications to create access roads to the south-east and south-west plots) have been received since 2024.

3.7 The EZ is supporting genuine growth, creating new businesses, and is on track to deliver around 2528 high value new jobs on site, with the potential for 5000-6000 high value jobs in the wider Lancashire sub-region as indirect growth[14].
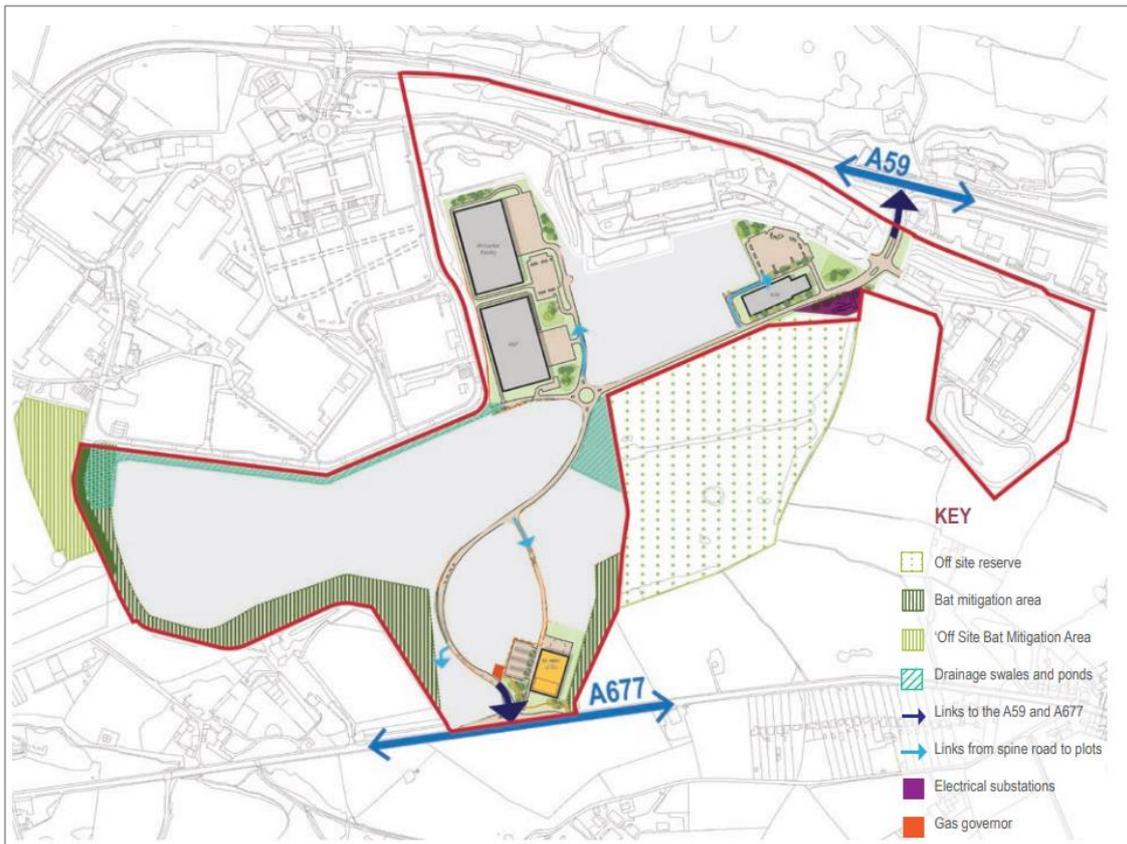

Figure 1: Delivered utilities, infrastructure, ecology & buildings (Source: SEZ Masterplan 2024)

3.8 Strategically, the site plays a key role in anchoring and developing an AEM, Sci-tech and cyber enterprise corridor linking key universities and extensive AEM capabilities. Samlesbury EZ forms a cluster of 4 EZs in the county, forming the Lancashire Advanced Manufacturing and Energy Cluster (LAMEC).

3.9 The 2024 Masterplan guides the delivery of the remaining plots, shown in Figure 2 below. The main uses proposed within the LDO remain the same as in the 2014 LDO, but with an enhanced provision for research and development (R&D), sci-tech and cyber purposes. An increase proportion of those uses is allowed within the same overall total scale of development and has been considered through an update to the Transport Assessment for the proposed development site. In addition to the main uses, provision has now also been made for a small, central area of amenity uses intended to support users on site (owing to the site's security measures) and contribute to place-making. This will be tightly controlled by the LDO provisions.

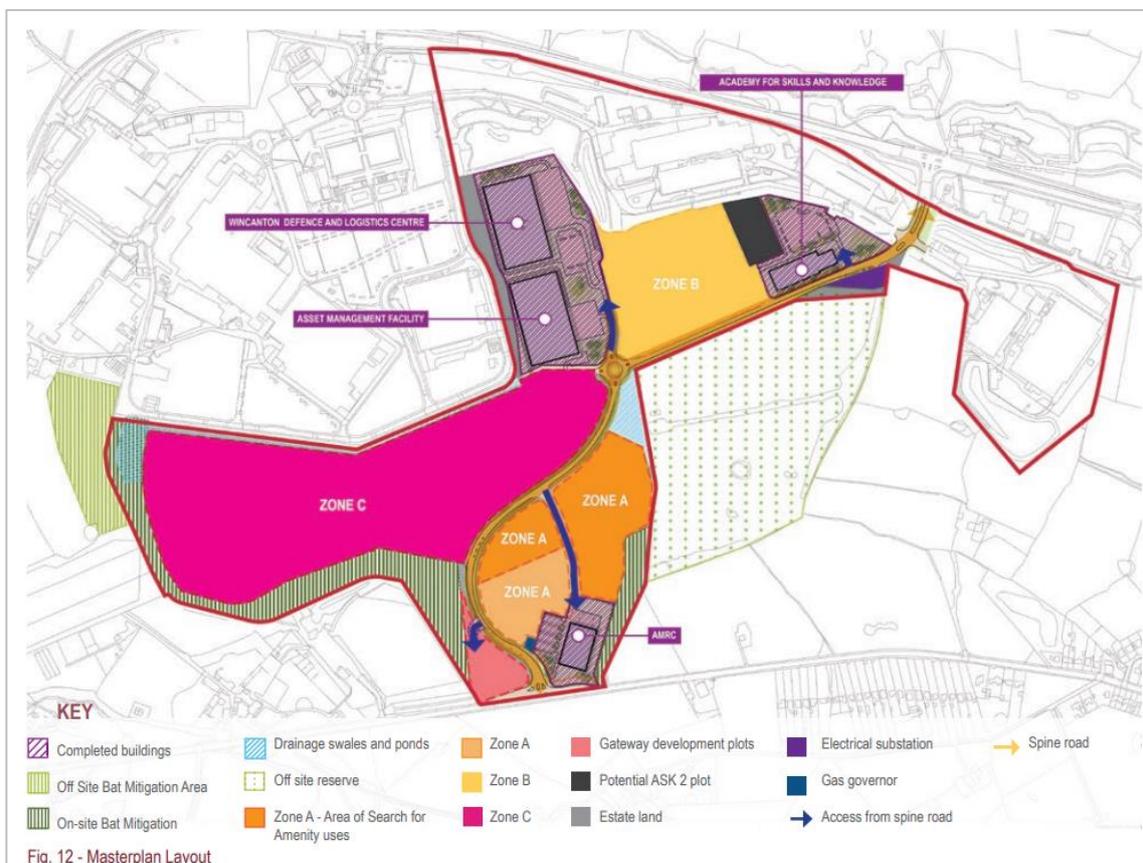[14] final-masterplan-june-2024 – page 4

Figure 2: Masterplan Layout (Source: SEZ Masterplan 2024)

Ensuring growth and investment

3.10   The EZ project has reported to the Enterprise Zone Governance Committee in accordance with governance protocols (note that SRBC did not sit on this committee). This has now been wound up and new governance arrangements are in place. The county council as lead developer and landlord of the site remains responsible for the development and delivery of the site alongside all related commercial matters. As part of an initial vetting process, the county council assesses each proposed development to ensure that the displacement of existing Lancashire based companies does not occur and that any development is genuine growth in and support to the Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing, science and technology and cyber sectors. Any existing Lancashire based companies considering the Enterprise Zone would have to demonstrate that their growth is currently constrained and that locating on the Enterprise Zone would achieve significant growth for their business. Activity will focus on inward investment.

3.11   Key to Lancashire being able to maximise the contribution of its Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing, Sci-tech and Cyber workforce to the Lancashire and national economy will be the availability of a flexible, agile and highly-skilled workforce. It is highly likely that during average working life the existing and new

workforce will need to retrain and re-skill more than once to exploit emergent technologies and markets. In support of this, BAE Systems has established the Academy for Skills and Knowledge on the site in line with the 2014 LDO and associated Masterplan. Further facilities to support training and skills may be appropriate during the lifetime of this LDO.

Forthcoming development within Samlesbury EZ

3.12   In January 2025, LCC's Cabinet agreed to establish an Innovation Hub (IH) at Samlesbury EZ to capitalise on opportunities of the NCF and provide a significant location for innovation, research and development. The £13.2 million Innovation Hub will be located in Zone A of the EZ and will provide c.27,000 sq ft of open plan, office, events and amenity spaces It is hoped the hub will encourage clusters of businesses within the EZ, and stimulate innovation from partners, including the NCF, universities and private/public sector bodies[15].   Initial design proposals for the scheme are anticipated in late 2025, with prior notification to then follow.

Establishment of the NCF

3.13   Due to the sensitive nature of its work, details about NCF's planned deployment in Lancashire, including detailed staffing numbers, phasing of its arrival and housing needs are not shared externally. Therefore, no details are publicly available of the location of the NCF, other than it will be based in Samlesbury.

3.14   Statements previously released from official sources state '*The National Cyber Force (NCF) headquarters in Samlesbury is currently undergoing construction work. It will open in 2025, and the NCF is planning for several hundred staff to be based there within the first 12 months. By the 2030s this will have increased to up to two thousand people, including those from other partners, working there'*[16].

3.15   A media article from 2023 suggested that '*Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) understands that around 2,000 jobs are expected to be generated by the NCF's presence in the county by the mid-2030s – not just within the headquarters itself, but also across the supply chain that it is expected will now spring up to service the development*[17]'

3.16   A statement made by the Ministry of Defence in 2025 states that '*there is a roughly equal share of personnel from Defence and the UK intelligence community*'[18].

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[15] Lancashire County Council – Cabinet Paper 16/1/2025
[16] Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament
[17] 'Once in a generation' arrival will put Lancashire at forefront of 'one of the most exciting missions in the 21st Century' | Lancs Live
[18] Q. National Cyber Force: Staff

3.17   The NCF has said to the CLAs they do not *"provide comment on exact figures regarding staff numbers for national security reasons. We have previously provided approximations of workforce size through publicly available sources, which remain the most appropriate reference for such information".*

3.18   The NCF has also stated that they "*anticipate that many of the future jobs, both direct and indirect, will be filled from local recruitment of people already resident in the area and that the growth in housing demand linked to the NCF will follow normal patterns of housing demand for employers of a similar scale".*

3.19   Following the Lancashire Cyber Festival (2025), media reports from coverage of the event indicate that the NCF is expected to be fully operational by 2030[19].

3.20   The GCHQ careers website began to advertise jobs for 'Operators' and 'Developers' at their Samlesbury location in January 2025, with those jobs expected to be provided on site from 2026. This lead-in time (lag) is likely owing to the 6-9 month vetting process for the highest levels of security clearance (Developed Vetting); details of which accompany the job adverts[20]. Local media articles reported "training for the roles – which will be delivered on-site in Samlesbury and at another unspecified location in Lancashire – begins in January 2026. It will involve lectures and seminars, but also "real-world simulations" to provide practical experience in preparation for the work[21].

3.21   In April 2025, a job advert for 'Infrastructure Engineer' cited flexible working; with employment split across dual office sites (Manchester and Samlesbury) and with a small proportion of time working outside of the office. It stressed 'working from home isn't guaranteed but may be possible on occasion'. This again illustrates the importance of the commuting links between Samlesbury, Manchester and surrounding areas.

3.22   Jobs began to be advertised for Samlesbury-based posts in January 2025 - listed in Table 1 below. The Council is continuing to monitor job advertisements.

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[19] National Cyber Force in Samlesbury update given at latest Lancashire Cyber Festival | Blog Preston 7/7/25
[20] Infrastructure Engineer | GCHQ Careers
[21] National Cyber Force trainee jobs at Samlesbury as Lancashire County Council approve new 'innovation hub' | Blog Preston

Table 1: Job Advertisements for Samlesbury

Date advertised	Job	Location	Salary
April 2025	Infrastructure Engineer	Manchester & Samlesbury*	£36,408
May 2025	Infrastructure Engineering Specialist	Cheltenham, London, Manchester, Samlesbury	£44,404
July 2025	Senior Business Enabler	Samlesbury	£44,044
July 2025	Business Enabler	Samlesbury	£36,408
August 2025	Intelligence Data Analyst	Cheltenham, Manchester, Samlesbury	£36,408

*These jobs are currently shared across multiple locations.

4.0 RELEVANT LOCAL PLANNING POLICY AND EVIDENCE

Central Lancashire Core Strategy (2012) and South Ribble Local Plan (2015)

4.1   The Core Strategy (2012) identifies the BAE Systems site as a strategic regional site. The South Ribble Local Plan (2015) Policy C5 then guides development in relation to the BAE Systems site, Samlesbury, and identifies it as a strategic site on the policies map. It includes both the BAE Core Area and Enterprise Zone.

4.2   To enable the Samlesbury EZ to be delivered, the Green Belt boundary was amended through the 2015 Local Plan. This released land south of the runways (shown in Local Plan Appendix 2). The boundary was not extended west because that land is being used for solar PV to supply energy to the BAE site, and there are additional issues regarding the heritage protection of Samlesbury Hall and land ownerships. The land to the east of the EZ is secured as a BHS / for ecological mitigation.

4.3   To mitigate the loss of Green Belt and the impacts on the landscape and wider environment, compensatory enhancements were made to land surrounding the BAE Systems site. The Biological Heritage Site (BHS) within the EZ was also retained and enhanced. These areas of biological mitigation are now complete and cannot be used for development.

Emerging Central Lancashire Local Plan (CLLP)

Regulation 18 (2018, 2022)

4.4   The Councils undertook consultation on the Issues and Options in 2019. In December 2022, the Councils consulted on the Preferred Options – Part One which considered key strategic policies and some site allocation proposals. These sites had been initially suggested to the Council. Details of additional allocation sites remained subject to further identification and assessment work.

4.5   One option explored through the Part One consultation was a new settlement / large-scale development option. The Preferred Options Part One Consultation considered options for future long term growth sites and where they should be located, linked to emerging policy PD5 (Longer-Term Large-Scale Development Options)[22] at that time, and asked whether the Cuerdale Garden Village would be a suitable approach to accommodating growth beyond the plan period at that time. Policy Direction 2 muted a spatial approach which included considering identifying a strategic area of growth linked to the Enterprise Zone and NCF. The paper expected the NCF to deliver around 5000 jobs during the plan period.

4.6   A proposal for a mixed-use site at Cuerdale – referred to as the Cuerden Garden Village (CGV) was submitted to the Council as two planning applications – by Story

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[22] central-lancs-part-1-prefererd-options-final-dec-22.pdf

(mixed-use) and Logik (employment-led mixed-use) in January 2023. Those applications currently remain undetermined. The boundary for the Cuerdale site, submitted as a proposal through the Local Plan, encompassed a larger area than the planning application sites and was included as an option for large-scale mixed-use development. Both site boundaries were wholly within the Green Belt.

4.7 At that same time, two planning applications were pending on the Pickering's Farm site. The Pickering's Farm site is allocated within the adopted Local Plan (2015) for 1350 new homes, and Homes England (with Taylor Wimpey) had submitted two planning applications for a total of 1100 homes for the land that lies in their ownership. Both applications were pending a decision from the Secretary of State (SoS). In the event that the Pickering's Farm site was dismissed through the appeal, the Cuerdale site offered an alternative solution to help meet the housing needs of Central Lancashire and so was included within the options for the emerging plan.

4.8 However, following the decision by the SoS to grant approval for the Pickering's Farm development, which would help meet a significant proportion of the housing need, the decision was taken to exclude the Cuerdale site from further consideration on the basis that the Council's emerging evidence determined that they had sufficient land to meet housing (and employment) need without necessitating Green Belt review and release. Consequently, the emergent options policy PD5 has not been taken forward through the Publication plan.

4.9 The Part One consultation paper made clear that uncertainty remained (at that time) around the Pickerings Farm site, stating that the site "*could deliver up to 1350 homes but if it is proven this site cannot come forward then further consideration of safeguarded land coming forward alongside the Samlesbury / Cuerdale growth option will need to take place in subsequent versions of the plan*". As the Pickering's Farm site received planning permission, Cuerdale was excluded from further consideration.

Evidence Base: Open Land Designations Study - Green Belt Assessment Report (2022)

4.10 As part of ongoing evidence to inform the emerging CLLP, the CLAs commissioned a Green Belt Study to provide an assessment of the strategic role and function of Central Lancashire's' Green Belt. The assessment of strategic contribution identified broad variations in the role of land in relation to each of the NPPF Green Belt purposes, defining parcels of land with ratings and supporting text.

4.11 The land surrounding the Samlesbury EZ was assessed as parcel 14 (P14). The study found it had limited / no contribution to Purpose 1 (a. checking sprawl of large built-up areas), purpose 2 (b. preventing neighbouring towns from merging) and purpose 4 (d. preserving setting and special character of historic towns). However, it made a significant contribution to Purpose 3 (assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment) and an equal contribution to Purpose 5 (supporting brownfield and urban regeneration). Overall, the site was determined

to have one significant rating and therefore made a significant contribution to the Green Belt purposes. The study acknowledged that further detailed Green Belt and landscape assessment work would be required to inform any sites / areas within the Green Belt which may be proposed for release, including the consideration of the harm that release for development would create.

4.12   The study can be drawn upon by the CLAs when assessing planning applications.

Evidence Base: Employment Land Study Update (2022) and OAN update (2024)

4.13   The Central Lancashire Employment Land Study (2022) was commissioned to provide a proportionate update of the 2017 Employment Land Study by BE Group. This reviewed policy and guidance, considered socio-economic data updates, updated market analysis, undertook a high-level review of employment land supply and provided updated employment land forecasting to identify the scale, location and type of demand for employment land and property in Central Lancashire over the plan period. A 2024 update followed.

4.14   The studies informed the objectively assessed need (OAN) for employment land within the emerging Local Plan and identified the employment land supply to meet that need. In making their conclusions, BE Group concluded that, whilst acknowledging some strategic projects, like the NCF, are proposed within Central Lancashire "*there are no clear forecasts of the jobs growth resulting from these schemes which could inform a policy on forecast*" *(2024 Report, paragraph 3.8).*

4.15   Using publicly available information, Plexal has forecast that the NCF will bring 2,000 direct jobs to Lancashire (including wider partners) but provided no further data to detail the type, scale, timescale and location of indirect jobs / growth that are expected to be created from increased market demand for cyber-related business space, or to extrapolate the data to a more local Central Lancashire or South Ribble level.

4.16   Through the statements already released, particularly by Ministers, it is reasonable to assume that this will be through a phased approach into the 2030s, and that until at least the early 2030s, the number of jobs will be somewhat below the 2,000 figure.

4.17   Plexal's figures are i) unofficial estimates and ii) based on approximations using information in the public domain. As Plexal's indirect jobs figure is calculated from Plexal's direct jobs assumption figure, both figures cannot be considered wholly accurate

4.18   BE Group have confirmed that when the ELR was undertaken, there were no jobs estimates available with which to complete a 'Policy On' analysis of the impact of the Cyber Campus. Whilst a Policy On analysis of the need generated from the extra jobs could be produced, it would need to make a lot of

assumptions and would likely only lead to a very modest uplift in employment land needs[23].

4.19   The CLA's Statement of Common Ground with LCC (September 2025) confirm that LCC will continue to monitor the take-up of employment opportunities at the Enterprise Zone in Samlesbury and future demand from specialised businesses looking to co-locate. LCC agree that a timely review of the CLLP post adoption supported by a comprehensive review of long-term strategic employment need across the three boroughs, including specialist sectors will be important (paragraphs 5.30-5.31).

Evidence Base: Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (2025)

4.20   The CLLP evidence work also confirms the preferred strategic and local employment sites within the CLLP. The [Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment](#) (SHELAA) sets out the methodology for the assessment of sites. It confirms that the NPPF requires there to be exceptional circumstances to alter Green Belt boundaries and therefore sites within the SHELAA that are located within the Green Belt (with the exception of previously developed sites) were to be 'parked' until a review of land outside of the Green Belt had been undertaken and it had been established if there was sufficient land available outside the Green Belt to meet the identified housing and employment needs.

4.21   The study work confirmed that the employment needs identified within the Employment Land Study and OAN update could be met through a supply of land located outside of the Green Belt. Therefore, the Councils have not considered additional sites that are located within the Green Belt.

4.22   As outlined above, the CLAs have undertaken a Green Belt Assessment to understand how Green Belt land within Central Lancashire meets the five purposes set out within national planning policy. This information can be drawn upon when assessing planning applications.
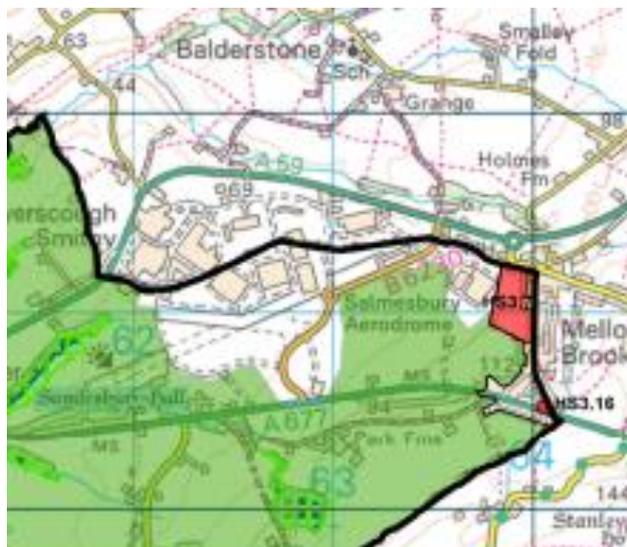
Regulation 19 (2025)

4.23   The CLLP sets out its spatial strategy (Policy SS1) for new housing, employment and commercial growth, and associated infrastructure, to be focused on the most sustainable locations in Central Lancashire. Policy SS2 confirms that Preston Urban Area (Tier 1) will be the primary focus for development growth and investment, with the largest amount of new development to be directed here. This will be delivered through a combination of redevelopment and regeneration activity and major new development to meet strategic general housing, employment and commercial development needs.

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[23] Email from BE Group 30.4.25

4.24   With specific focus on Samlesbury, Policy EC1 retains the Samlesbury EZ as a regionally significant site for employment with the use of LDOs to help deliver the site. The emergent policy confirms that development likely to compromise the delivery or operation of the EZ will not be supported.

4.25   The closest allocation to the Samlesbury EZ is made under Policy HS3, and site HS3.7, which is proposed to accommodate 120 dwellings. The site is currently owned by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council (BwD) and will be delivered in conjunction with Prospect Homes. BwD have confirmed that they are committed to the delivery of the site and a full planning application was submitted in June 2025 for 121 homes (07/2025/00406/FUL). The site is not in the Green Belt.

4.26   As explained above, the Regulation 19 plan excludes Cuerdale from its site allocations. The SHELAA and the assessment of deliverable land within Central Lancashire, including South Ribble, showed that there was sufficient supply of land to meet the identified housing and employment need without necessitating Green Belt release.

Duty to Co-operate - Lancashire County Council

4.27   LPAs and County Councils (in two tier areas) are under a duty to co-operate with each other, and other prescribed bodies, on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries. A Statement of Common Ground (SOCG) has been prepared to address strategic planning matters between the Central Lancashire authorities and LCC.

4.28   Through the preferred option consultation and later Duty to Co-operate meetings, LCC requested that the CLAs maintain existing strategic allocations and consider the allocation of new strategic employment sites (and the lead-in times to prepare them for development). However, the CLAs are of the view that this is not required given the available supply of employment land and the principles of the spatial strategy to support growth in the existing main urban areas to support urban regeneration and make the best use of existing land. The SOCG with LCC[24] confirms that the County Council will continue to monitor the take-up of employment opportunities at the Samlesbury EZ and future demand from specialised businesses looking to co-locate with existing businesses in the area.

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[24] dc11-statement-of-common-ground-with-lancashire-county-council_sept-2025.pdf

LCC also confirm they are committed to working with the CLAs to ensure the timely preparation of evidence for the next Local Plan.

Other Relevant Local Plans / Strategies

Preston

4.29   In Preston City Centre, the area surrounding Preston Station has been identified as having significant potential for new employment opportunities in the future. The Station is established as a strategic gateway to the rest of Lancashire, through its position on the West Coast Main Line and the need for all trains within Central Lancashire to stop or terminate at Preston. Recognising these unique circumstances, the project aims to create a Commercial Quarter on the land around the Station to both develop high-grade commercial activity within the city and provide essential Grade A office and commercial space. The aim is to bring offices and new commercial and educational opportunities, as well as new housing.

4.30   The Preston Station Quarter Project will also work towards achieving one of the city's key strategic priorities around improving Preston's commercial district offer set out in Preston's 15 year City Investment Plan. This includes objectives to retain and attract key public sector occupiers (including key office-based government department functions in the city), business HQs, and government departments and realise growth opportunities that are intrinsically linked to city centre success, and to draw the University of Lancashire campus towards and to face the city centre. It emphasises the accessibility of the location within the main town of Lancashire, linking business and education, with opportunities to capitalise on the NCF.

4.31   Preston Station Quarter is identified within the final LGP as one of the schemes within the major project pipeline, to support growth in Lancashire.

4.32   Preston Innovates was set up to work towards achieving the second priority of the Preston regeneration plan to 'maximise Preston's opportunities for cyber and innovation triggered by the relocation of National Cyber Facility in the region'. To achieve this, Preston Partnership is an independent partnership of business and organisations passionate about Preston and its continued growth and development. The Partnership are collaborating with agencies, organisations and businesses across the city to create an ecosystem to maximise opportunities within the cyber, data and digital sectors. An Innovation Ambassador has been appointed to engage with the digital, tech and innovation community across the city to identify opportunities for collaboration and further development.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

4.33   The BwD Local Plan (2021-2037) was adopted in January 2024. It's ambitions for growth are focused around 6 key ideas: including the Blackburn Growth Axis.

The axis seeks to link strategic and local development sites, the M65 and key growth corridors, Samlesbury EZ (stating it to be "a future economic driver of the borough") and Blackburn Town Centre. The growth corridor is illustrated through the plan's key diagram. Key junction improvements are proposed along the M65, to be enabled (in-part) through the delivery of a strategic employment site at Junction 5 of the M65 (site E179), and a strategic residential development site for c.1500 homes in the north-east of the borough (site H195).

4.34   BwD consulted on the NE Blackburn Masterplan in May 2025, with the consultation confirming the number of houses expected for the site has been reduced to c.1250 homes. This is owing to constraints and delivery requirements on the site, including that relating to topography.
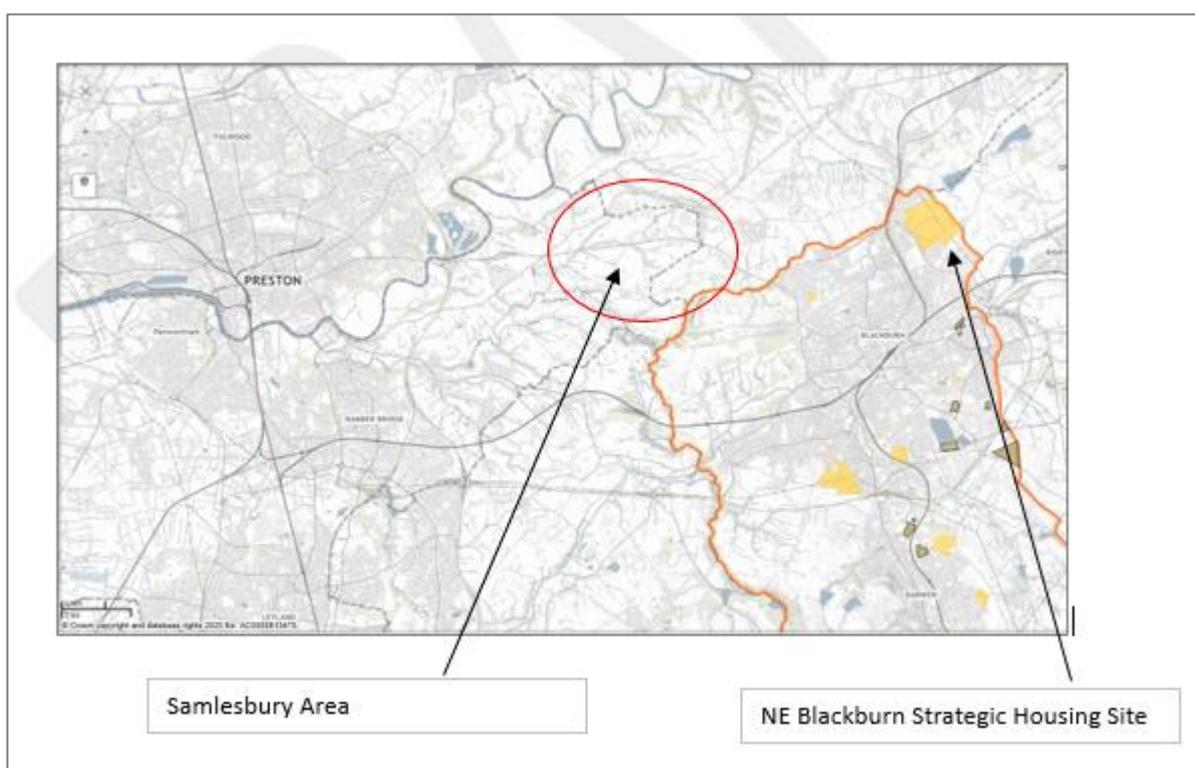

Figure 3: Proximity of BwD Growth Sites to Samlesbury (Source: Blackburn with Darwen Adopted Policies Map (interactive))

4.35   To support the redevelopment of the Blackburn Town Centre (Eastern Investment Area), BwD are working with the University of Lancashire (formerly UCLan) and Training 2000 to deliver a £60 million Cyber Skills and Education Campus. BwD received £20m of Levelling-Up Funding towards the scheme, which must be spent by 2027.

4.36   In 2024, a hybrid planning permission (10/24/0595) was granted on the former markets site - Full application for Building one (F1 Education and ancillary uses E(b) (café) and E(g) (offices)); Outline application for Building Two (F1/E(g) Education/Offices and ancillary uses E(a) (retail) and E(b) (café)). The scheme

also delivers 2 acres of public realm in a new park. The accompanying planning statement confirms the development will help support the delivery of 1,200 new jobs, 400 homes and £1 billion of new economic activity, and is intended to link Blackburn with innovation and companies including SEZ, NCF and the AMRC. The BwD borough contains a number of companies within BAE systems supply chain, including in Darwen. They hope to attract companies that can support BAE Systems but which cannot locate within the Samlesbury EZ.

4.37   BwD are looking to build-on the opportunities arising from the SEZ and NCF, although there is little detailed information publicly available on the 'Growth Axis'. BwD confirmed through their Local Plan examination note (EL7.A3) that a Growth Axis document could be available by February 2023, but a Growth Axis strategy currently remains unpublished. BwD also stated through the examination note that the Growth Axis "*is made in the context of growth sites and infrastructure improvements that are identified within the [BwD] plan*": i.e. it is intended to guide the location of development, and lever investment, within that borough, and is not part of an agreed strategy with other authorities such as South Ribble.

4.38   Housing and employment land is allocated in BwD, including that at the North East Blackburn strategic site, to accommodate and support identified growth within their borough. The recent adoption of the plan (January 2024) means that forecasts around employment and housing needs for the BwD borough, and how they fit with their wider strategy, have already been addressed - including strategic growth needs identified by BwD.

Ribble Valley Borough Council

4.39   Ribble Valley (RV) Borough Council have begun to prepare a new Local Plan and consulted on the Regulation 18 (Strategic Matters) in May 2022.   The consultation document indicated that a minimum of 10.5 ha of additional land for employment needs to be identified within RV which should be suitable for office, industrial and warehousing uses. The options document suggests the primary areas for locating new development, reflecting market demands, should be Clitheroe, Longridge, Whalley and the A59 corridors.

4.40   RV have confirmed that, owing to resource issues and changes to national policy, work continues on the Regulation 18 stage. All employment sites within their current adopted plan are delivered, or with extant planning consent, and there is a demand for employment land across the borough, with associated implications for additional housing land. The A59 corridor is being considered as a logical area for consideration, as it is sustainably located with links to the M6 motorway. The area also has the potential to support Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and link to the BAE/ NCF / Samlesbury Enterprise Zone. This will be subject to commissioning of evidence work to inform the strategies of the Local Plan.

4.41   No sites are identified at this stage although initial work suggests there are opportunities to identify land along the A59 corridor, which would create links to the Samlesbury EZ (also on the A59 corridor) and provide opportunities to support cyber-growth should such a need be identified through the evidence work. As with the CLAs, no detailed information has yet been shared with RV in relation to NCF based needs.

5.0 RELATED ECONOMIC STRATEGIES AND STUDIES

The NW Cyber Corridor: Innovation Impact Study (2023)

5.1   Lancaster University's[25] '*The North West Cyber Corridor: Innovation Impact Study Evidence Base 2023*' research report provides a call to support growth in the North West to build on existing strategic advantages and maximise opportunities in cyber security and digital. It notes the NW has a strong cyber security sector - one of the largest sectors outside London and the South East – with a wide range of specialisms in defence, aerospace, advanced manufacturing, professional services and public sector. The cyber corridor spans the whole of the NW, across its 5 sub-regions (Lancashire, Cumbria, Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region) and key cities/towns/areas including Lancaster, Preston, Samlesbury, Liverpool, Manchester and Warrington. The Cyber Corridor is also home to the NW Cyber Security Cluster – one of UKC3's recognised regional clusters of business, education, research and innovation.

5.2   The report cites that the NW has approximately 300 unique cyber security companies complementing 150 public, defence and research assets identified across the North West (including businesses in Greater Manchester, research in Lancashire, NCF/innovation in Samlesbury aside training and skills development). Over a third of cyber security employers are either large (250+ staff) or medium (50+ staff) indicating there are significant opportunities to build the skills pipelines through entry-level pathways, training and apprenticeships - including through the NCF. Currently, over half (53%) of cyber security offices are based in Greater Manchester, whilst 8% are located within Lancashire.

5.3   The report estimates there are currently 12,000 FTEs (across all sectors) working in cyber security in the NW (generating £550m in annual salaries, and £760m in GVA each year). Growth estimates are that the region should be aiming to grow the cybersecurity ecosystem with c.30,000 FTEs by 2035, potentially unlocking £2.7bn of GVA per annum for the NW. However, research highlights that whilst the cyber and digital employment sector is growing, the employment base is not growing quickly enough to keep up with demand. The
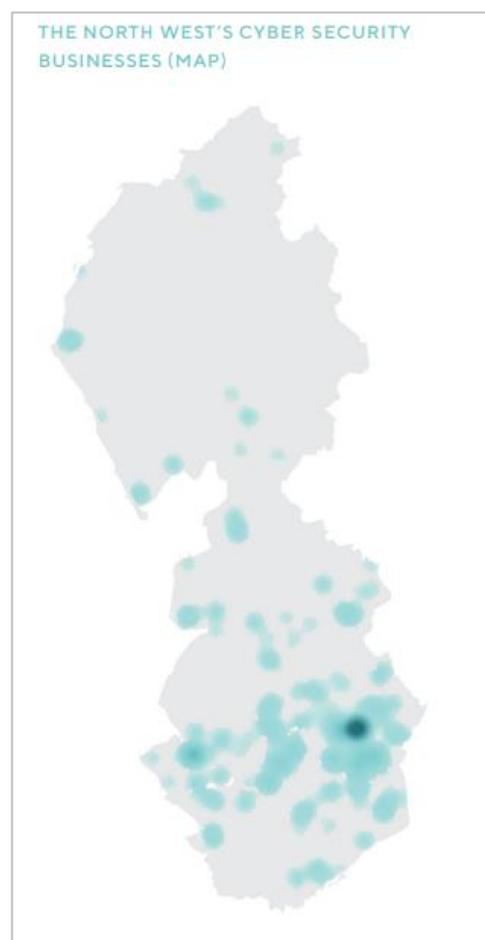

Figure 4: Location of NW Cyber-Security Businesses (Source: Innovation Impact Study)

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[25] Lancaster University (in collaboration with Plexal) commissioned Perspective Economics

proximity of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) with specialised courses is therefore important to supporting the economic growth of the cyber-security sector.

5.4   The NW contains 10 HEIs offering cyber security and computer science courses, placing it as a top region for skills provision. The report recommends that training provision should increase by at least 1,000 people per annum to meet the growth scenarios. It also identifies a gender gap in cyber-education and the workforce and suggests this is a further challenge to address.

5.5   The report highlights two key implications for economic development in the NW region – i) the role of investment and regeneration to stimulate local economies, and ii) the need for levelling up and maximising opportunities across local authorities. It identifies opportunities to grow the North West's cyber security ecosystem, to nurture and attract talent, to develop leading capability and to maximise infrastructural investment. Collaboration with associated sectors, whether businesses or HEIs, will place an important role in achieving growth.

5.6   The study recommendations include developing an agreed governance structure and strategy for the NW Cyber Corridor, building a coalition of cyber security ecosystem partners, and developing a growth strategy (including investment, skills and priority areas for intervention and support).

Developing the North West Cyber Ecosystem (October 2024)

5.7   This report, undertaken by Perspective Economics on behalf of Lancaster University, follows on from the NW Cyber Corridor Innovation Impact Study. In May 2024, Lancaster University hosted a collaborative event to understand how to unlock the cyber potential of the North West. The paper summaries they key feedback from the event, outlining the progress made by partners across the NW cyber ecosystem and how key partners can work collaboratively in the future on a range of projects aimed to enhance the ecosystem.

5.8   Core messages included the importance of collaboration, cohesive partnership, the critical role of universities, place-based fundings, and the need for inclusivity and vision in developing skills for growth.

Lancashire Growth Plan (Final, September 2025)

5.9   The creation of the new Lancashire Combined County Authority (LCCA) was announced in February 2025, comprised of Lancashire County Council (LCC), Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council (BwD) and Blackpool Council. The LCCA is intended to provide a single body for the county to deliver on local priorities, provide decision-making and accelerate growth.

5.10   In February 2025, the LCCA consulted on a draft Lancashire Growth Plan (LGP) 2025-2035, intended to steer economic growth in the region. In September 2025,

following public consultation on the draft plan, the [final Lancashire Growth Plan](#) was published, setting out five economic priorities (Section Two) focused around national security and resilience, clean growth and nuclear, sustainable digital and AI, advanced engineering and manufacturing, culture and tourism. Spatially, the final LGP focuses on economic connectivity through key clusters and corridors – including the Central Belt along the M55-M65 corridor, and the North-South Cyber Corridor (along the M6).

5.11   Section Four of the Plan establishes Spatial Priorities, with spatial focus on the Central Belt and North-South Cyber Corridor. The Growth Plan aims to develop the Central Belt into a cohesive economic zone by leveraging existing strengths, future opportunities, workforce concentrations, and strategic transport routes. This will create a super corridor of innovation assets, further and higher education institutions, economic clusters, and development ready sites for private investment. It recognises (page 65) several major economic clusters including Samlesbury and the Blackburn Growth Axis, as well as substantial urban growth and regeneration opportunities in Preston (including Station Quarter) and Blackburn (Cyber and Skills campus).

5.12   Section Five of the Lancashire Growth Plan now identifies 6 strategic enablers that underpin Lancashire's ambition for a resilient, inclusive and innovation-led economy:

- Infrastructure and Place Transformation
- Knowledge and Innovation Assets
- Business Growth and Enterprise
- Skills for Growth and Inclusion
- Health, Wellbeing and Inclusive Communities
- Data and Evidence

5.13   Section Six sets out how the LCCA intend to partner with the Government. This includes, for digital and cyber innovation, advancing investment in the NCF, place-based initiatives such as the Blackburn Cyber and Skills Campus and Innovation Quarter, advancing Preston Station Quarter proposals.

5.14   The Plan commits to partnering with the Government to unlock potential, seeking targeted policy and investment support to deliver 12 transformational projects. The projects are set out within the Plans' Appendices and are central to deliver the ambitions of the Growth Plan.

5.15   Appendix A sets out transformational projects and includes the Samlesbury Enterprise Zone and Innovation Hub. It confirms the site will act as an anchor development for other emerging economic opportunities, including the Preston Station Quarter, Blackburn's Cyber Skills and Education Campus and Innovation Quarter, and the wider M65 East Lancashire corridor. It highlights that the location of the NCF in the Samlesbury area provides opportunities to harness new corporates, SMEs and talent into the region. Funding to build the first phase of an Innovation Hub has been secured through Devolution. The plan acknowledges the

contribution of the NCF to supporting around 2,000 personnel and an estimated 3,120 direct and indirect jobs (page 29) (using Plexal evidence).

5.16   With specific reference to Preston Station Quarter, the LGP says "Preston is undergoing a dramatic transformation, capitalising on the NCF HQ facility on Preston's doorstep, to create huge opportunities for commercial development and city living" (page 114). 43 hectares are identified to create a thriving commercial district next to Preston Railway Station, one of the most accessible locations in the North. It will be anchored by nearly £1 billion of investment.

Economic Impact of the NCF (Plexal) (September 2024)

5.17   Plexal were commissioned by LCC to undertake research on the potential economic impact of the NCF and make predictions about the employment, economic and housing and travel considerations that may need to be made. Plexal's report, 'The Economic Impact of the NCF', has subsequently informed the Lancashire Growth Plan, and is listed within its 'References' (at XIII).

5.18   Whilst the Plexal report does not appear to have been published, the CLAs have seen the report and note that the Lancashire Growth Plan publicly references the Plexal report. The CLLP Regulation 19 representation from Story (A60_12c) also draws heavily from the content of the Plexal report, including reference to its case studies. Details of the Plexal report are therefore summarised here on the basis that whilst the Plexal report has not been published, its contents do appear to be publicly available – having been referenced through the Lancashire Growth Plan and the Regulation 19 representation.

5.19   The Plexal report acknowledges, due to the security sensitivity of the NCF, details of its deployment, staffing, phasing and housing needs are not publicly available and so the report draws from 3 case studies and other available information to make its assumptions. *(Two of these case studies are referenced in the Regulation 19 response (A60_12c)).*

5.20   The Impact Report recognises Lancashire's role as a hub within the NW Cyber Corridor, including the NCF, and the importance of collaboration with key players within the NW. It expects an "influx of civil servants and senior decision makers to the NW', and states that Lancashire should seek to retain the value of benefits and opportunity in the region by appropriately planning for its supporting infrastructure.

5.21   In seeking to ascertain future requirements, Plexal state that it is challenging to pinpoint the exact number of people currently employed in the cyber sector in Lancashire, but suggests around 900 individuals work in core roles, with an additional 1300 in related positions (total 2200). Cyber security in Lancashire is estimated to contribute around £79 million GVA, and part of the larger £1.47 billion GVA (representing 4.2% of Lancashire's total GVA). *(This information is detailed in the Regulation 19 response (A60_12c, page 13 & 17)).*

5.22 The Plexal report estimates that the NCF will deliver around 2,000 direct new jobs, including wider partners, with a further 3,120 indirect jobs. *(These Plexal job figures are referenced in the LGP (page 29). The Regulation 19 representation (A60_12c, page 27) inconsistently quotes 2000 direct jobs and 1120 indirect jobs, whilst citing its source as Plexal.)*

5.23 Plexal speculate that "wider partners" refers primarily to the supply chain for NCF, and so not all those jobs will be created solely at the NCF. Their indirect job estimates include an aggregation effect where a large anchor employer results in other employers co-locating to access skills and opportunities. Thus, Plexal have applied an average multiplier of x1.56 to the direct jobs figure to calculate 3,120 indirect jobs. The multiplier is based on an average of ONS multipliers for indirect jobs to the public sector. Standard multipliers (average across all sectors) indicate a much lower multiplier average of 0.4.

5.24 The NCF has said they "*do not provide comment on exact figures regarding staff numbers for national security reasons. We have previously provided approximations of workforce size through publicly available sources, which remain the most appropriate reference for such information.*", however answers to parliamentary questions show an estimated workforce of 2,000 in the 2030s, and likely building towards that number from 'several hundred' in 2025, and also that there will be a roughly equal share between military personnel and from the UK Intelligence community[26].

5.25 These approximations are lower than the 3,000 jobs figure stated in the KCL report 'The National Cyber Force that Britain Needs?' (2021) and indicates assumptions from these sources may be over-estimates of job numbers, or extrapolations past the timescale of the 2030s that official sources cite. Furthermore, as Plexal's indirect jobs figure is calculated from Plexal's direct jobs assumption figure, both figures cannot be verified as accurate estimations and are not official figures.

5.26 In relation to skills and education, Plexal state that Lancashire has the potential to develop a strong technology talent pipeline. They note that across the three Lancashire Universities (University of Lancashirec, Edge Hill, Lancaster) in 2020-2021, there were 217 graduates enrolled in cyber-specific courses and 2,834 in broader computing-based subjects, representing 5% of overall university population in Lancashire, yet proportionally lower than that for Greater Manchester and Merseyside. Universities continue to develop academic learning; Lancaster University is delivering £10m of funded cyber projects, whilst £1.57 million of social impact has been delivered by the NW CyberFirst programme.

5.27 As Plexal note in their report, there is an absence of thorough impact data and specific information on the recent movements of secure government

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[26] Q. National Cyber Force: Staff

organisations (including Defence Digital, National Cyber Security Centre and GCHQ), and so it is difficult to comment on their exact impact. However, in their study, they examined case studies of three large government departments which relocated into rural areas – the Met Office, Darlington Economic Campus, and the Office for National Statistics. *(The Regulation 19 representation (A60_12c) provides the information from the Met Office and Darlington case studies).*

Key learnings and insights drawn were:

- At the **Met Office**, under 40% of staff at the time of opening lived in Exeter; the remainder commuted to work, largely by private transport. Located within a rural area, employees prioritised living in areas they like and commuting in, not being located next to their office of HQ. It would be expected that government deploying to Lancashire would also be likely to distribute in a similar manner, within a commutable (typically driveable) distance of work / home.
- The office relocation changed the redevelopment of the city, encouraging redevelopment of derelict sites and the creation of a science park.
- Demand for additional school places was insufficient to require the building of new schools and children were distributed across the county.

- The creation of a new **DEC** saw the relocation of some staff, and the creation of 1,400 direct jobs, of which 80% were locally hired, and 840 indirect jobs were required for the boost. The campus boosted the local economy, but not severely.
- Private sectors have begun to relocate to access opportunities, including large primes such as Deloitte.
- Again, travel data shows that employees commuted to their workplace, mainly by private car transport and from commutable distances (up to an hour).

- The relocation of 1,000 **ONS** jobs from London to Newport resulted in many staff choosing not to follow their jobs, requiring ONS to recruit locally where there were insufficient skills available for many of the positions. The ONS experience highlights the importance of ensuring there is talent and expertise within the area, emphasising the need for education and skills development.
- Again, employees typically lived within a wider region and commuted to work by private car.
- Staff struggled with the 'drab' location of the site, with the lack of facilities, like shops and restaurants, believed to hinder the attractiveness of employment on the site and the impact ONS could have on local services.
- The sensitivity of the work meant government departments did not engage fully with local suppliers, and so failed to boost regional growth as much as was hoped.

5.28 Plexal expects NCF personnel to commute distances of 25-65 minutes, including from Manchester and Liverpool (areas with established digital and cyber sectors and experienced employees). Figure 4 illustrates a 1-hour travel window on public transport and driving from Samlesbury and shows many of the proposed direct and indirect staffing brough into the region or hired in Samlesbury *may* live in nearby areas within a suitable commuter belt. Personnel may also, of course, travel in from wider areas.
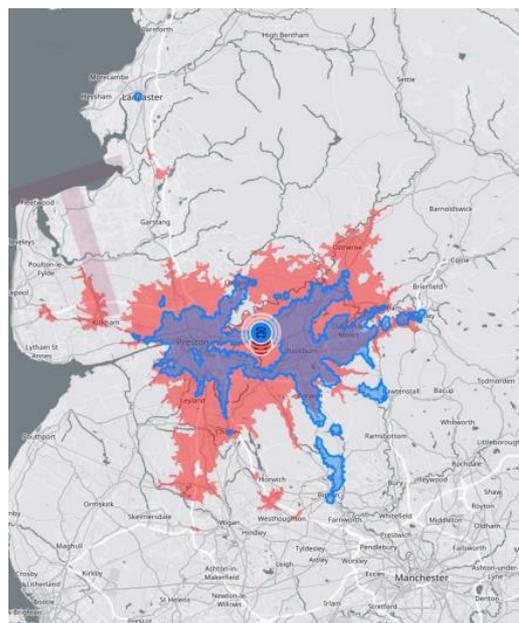
5.29 There is a clear assumption that proposed direct and indirect personnel will live within Lancashire, or the wider commuter belt. Liverpool and Manchester are within commutable distance by rail, however access between the rail stations and Samlesbury may be more problematic to access.

Figure 5: NCF Commuting catchment (Plexal 2024) – Driving shown in red, public transport in blue

5.30 Using the case studies as suitable examples, Plexal assume that under 50% of government employees will need homes in the immediate area and so conclude that most directly-employed staff will require homes and transportation links across wider Lancashire, and that the majority of indirect roles will be based across the NW (not just Lancashire). *(This is repeated in the Regulation 19 response A60_12c.)*

5.31 This compares broadly with the 'marketing' information on the GCHQ website, for NCF careers, which promotes similar commuting areas, albeit extends the area further afield to include Leeds and Yorkshire (see Section 2.0).

5.32 Plexal's report confirms that there is a healthy and thriving property market with varied options for housing, and that this would be expected to accommodate any demand arising from the relocation of the NCF. It does not identify that any new housing is required to support the NCF, and NCF personnel are expected to be drawn from the commutable catchment area. The statement from NCF personnel to the CLAs (see Appendix 1 of this paper) confirms they expect housing demand to follow normal patterns and no specific needs have therefore been identified for housing.

6.0   OMISSION SITES (IN SAMLESBURY)

6.1   Through the CLLP, the CLAs have proposed a series of site allocations and land designations to meet identified employment and housing needs.

6.2   However, with specific reference to Samlesbury, information is provided in this section to outline major alternative sites being proposed for development, by developers and land owners, through Regulation 19 and/or planning applications. The CLAs have identified these within the CLLP process as omission sites, and information on them is provided for contextual information only.

Cuerdale

6.3   Through the CLLP process, land at Cuerdale has been suggested by Logik and Story Homes for major mixed-use development. The land proposed is wholly within Green Belt and so the site suggestions been discounted by the CLAs through the CLLP process as they consider the Central Lancashire employment and housing needs can be met without necessitating Green Belt release.

6.4   Two outline planning applications were submitted in 2022 for the land at Cuerdale Lane, Samlesbury: 07/2022/00451/OUT by Story Homes and 07/2023/00035/OUT by Logik. Together, they propose to develop land east of the M6 to the Samlesbury EZ for housing, employment, office, hotel, retail and leisure. In October 2025, new, updated information was submitted to the Council by the applicants, "in light of updated National Planning Policy"[27], which has made material changes to the planning policy context which the planning applications are to be considered. The applicant states this relates primarily to considering the sites as Grey Belt land, and the revisions to housing need calculations. As a result, the Council 'restarted the clock' on the application's determination time.

6.5   Both applications are pending determination and so no comment is made on the applications through this topic paper. They are provided for contextual information only, owing to the Regulation 19 representations.

6.6   Logik and Story have each submitted an objection to the CLLP through the Regulation 19 consultation and include the NCF within their arguments. These can be found as representations A36 and A60, respectively. Their objections are addressed by the CLAs through Examination document CD10.

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[27] 07_2022_00451_OUT-PLANNING_STATEMENT_REVISED_AUGUST_2025-380858.pdf

Blackburn with Darwen (BwD) Borough Council

6.7   Stantec submitted comments on behalf of BwD Borough Council (representation D.3) in respect of site promotion for land at Mellor Brook, Samlesbury. BwD own the relevant land, which lies predominately to the east of Samlesbury EZ and west of the Mellor Brook settlement.

6.8   Their representation challenges the evidence base and argues that the employment evidence does not take into consideration the 3,120 direct and indirect jobs identified within the [then] draft LGP in respect of the NCF. Based on a perceived shortfall in employment land, they believe the site should be released from Green Belt to deliver employment land to support the cyber-corridor growth potential.

6.9   The CLAs have provided a response to their representation through CD10.The CLAs maintain that sufficient employment land needs have been appropriately calculated, and an appropriate supply of land is identified to meet the employment OAN. Consequently, Green Belt review / release is not required.

7.0 JOBS GROWTH FROM THE NCF

7.1   In March 2025, the government published their [Cyber security sectoral analysis 2025,](#) showing that the sector contributes £13.2b in revenue and £7.8b in GVA to the UK economy, with the sector employing an estimated 67,300 people with 6,600 new jobs created in the last year alone. The UK cyber-security is a strong growth market, with half of firms located outside London and the South East and growth in every region. For the first time, the highest proportion of external investment was in the North West, home to a growing number of cyber businesses and (soon to be) home of the National Cyber Force in Lancashire.

7.2   However, there is little data available at local level. Due to their nature, cyber-businesses are often 'under the radar'. SRBC and Chorley Borough Council have appointed a co-ordinator for both districts who are seeking to work with local technology businesses to build a network and grow the sector.

7.3   On the 1 May 2025, a question was asked at [Parliamentary Questions](#) as to how many personnel the NCF has. It was confirmed that the NCF does not comment on detailed figures regarding staff numbers for national security reasons, although there is a roughly equal share of personnel from Defence and the UK intelligence community.

7.4   The Ministry of Defence's [Strategic Defence Review (2025)](#) was published 2 June 2025, which sets out "*how to harness the best expertise from inside and outside Government to produce the first root-and-branch review of UK Defence in 25 years*". Whilst it highlights the importance of cyber, and the National Cyber Force, it contains no details on Samlesbury.

7.5   A figure of 2,000 direct jobs is provided through the Plexal NCF Impact Study (2024) and is repeated through the LGP. However, as this paper has reported, the jobs data which is available is inconsistent. Direct jobs figures cited for the NCF vary between 2,000 (Plexal) and 3,000 (KCL) whilst indirect job numbers are quoted at 3,120 (Plexal) and 1,500 ([LCC Cabinet January 2025](#)). Table 2 shows how reported figures vary across studies and reports. No detailed evidence is provided in terms of the scale, nature or geographic distribution or timescale of those indirect jobs. Wider assumptions risk being presumptive and without evidence.

7.6   According to the Government in a 2023 response to a Parliamentary Question, the NCF "will open in 2025, and the NCF is planning for several hundred staff to be based there within the first 12 months. By the 2030s this will have increased to up to two thousand people, including those from other partners, working there. We continue to prioritise the NCF workforce growth."

7.7   As referenced earlier, through the responses by Ministers, it is reasonable to assume that this will be through a phased approach into the 2030s, and that until at least the early 2030s, the number of jobs will be somewhat below the 2,000 figure.

7.8 Table 2 shows a comparison of how different sources quote direct/ indirect jobs inconsistently. The NCF anticipates that many of the future jobs, both direct and indirect, will be filled from local recruitment of people already resident in the area.

Table 2: Comparison of the number of direct / indirect jobs quoted by different sources

Jobs	Direct (D)	Indirect (ID)
KCL (2021) (not official figures)	3,000	-
LU Cyber Corridor NW (2023)	3,000	-
Plexal NCF Impact (2024) (not official figures)	2,000	3,120
LCC Cabinet Paper (2025)	3,000	1,500
Draft LGP (2025)	2,000	3,120
Final LGP (2025)	2,000 (personnel)	3,120 (D+ID)

8.0 EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

8.1 This paper has explained that education and skills development is key to enabling the successful delivery of the NCF and expanding the wider NW cyber eco-system. Lancaster University's study suggests that training provision in cyber relate courses should be increased by at least 1,000 people per annum in the region to meet the growth scenarios. The NW Cyber Corridor contains a number of universities and colleges leading the way, through the provision of new teaching courses, and continuing research development.

8.2 The University of Lancashire is one of six founding members of a collaborative initiative called the Lancashire Cyber Partnership (LCP), which will shape, support and promote the county's cyber strengths and cyber eco—system. The 6 partners include LCC, Lancashire Economic Partnership (LEP) (now dissolved), Lancaster University, BAE Systems and the NCF. Launched in 2022, at the first Lancashire Cyber festival, the event brought together business owners, local authority leaders, academics and representatives from national government. In addition, pupils from Lancashire schools and colleges took place in cyber-based activities designed to encourage interest in education and skills development, and promote careers in cyber-security.

8.3 The University of Lancashire is home to the Security and Forensic Research in Computing Group (SAFeR), one of the UK's leading cyber-focused research groups, and the CyberCrime Research unit. It also hosts the Cyber Solutions Centre, citing it as pivotal to supporting the NCF delivery with the region. University of Lancashire also offers degree, degree apprenticeship, and postgraduate cyber security courses. The university's Engineering Innovation Centre and its Civic Drone Centre are both supporting the development of leading-edge cyber applications.

8.4 This report has already explained BwD's ambitions to develop a cyber-skills campus in Blackburn town centre, working with the University of Lancashire and Training 2000 – their apprenticeship training subsidiary.

8.5 Lancaster University is one of an elite group of universities – and the only one in NW England – to be tripled accredited for excellence in cyber education and research. In 2022, it announced a £19m investment in data and cyber security research teaching and innovation to support the NCF[28].

8.6 In 2024, the University of Liverpool announced a new £4.9m CyberFocus project combining the strength and expertise of seven universities across the North West[29], including Manchester, Lancashire and Lancaster. It draws on the North West partnership and leverages the NW Cyber Corridor.

8.7 A list of course examples can be found in Appendix 2 of this report but is not an exhaustive list. For example, additional courses are provided by Edge Hill and Salford

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[28] Lancaster University £19m cyber force investment to boost jobs and economy | Lancashire Telegraph
[29] Liverpool partners in £4.9M project to turbocharge NW cyber ambitions - News - University of Liverpool

University. Level 3 courses (for 16-18 year olds) are being provided through colleges, including Accrington and Rossendale, Burnley and Blackburn. There are also cyber degree apprenticeships being provided at Sellafield, with 300 apprenticeships in 2023 within cyber security[30].

8.8   In February 2025, the Minister for the Armed Forces announced a new bespoke Direct entry route for 'cyber warriors', seeing basic training reduced from 10 weeks to around one month, after which recruits will undergo 3 months of specialist training. This will be conducted at the Defence Cyber Academy in Shrivenham. By the end of 2025, new recruits will be embedded into operational roles, either in Corsham or as part of the NCF. The cyber roles will be part of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force with the Army joining subsequent recruitment campaigns for 2026 and beyond[31].

[30] LancasterCyberCorridorv2.pdf
[31] Military to fast-track recruitment of 'cyber warriors' as online threat grows | ITV News

9.0 HOW THE NCF HAS BEEN CONSIDERED IN THE CLLP

9.1   The CLAs welcome the relocation of the NCF into Samlesbury and are supportive of economic and skills growth associated with the cyber-and digital sectors. To assist this, SRBC and Chorley Borough Council have appointed a co-ordinator for both districts who is seeking to work with local technology businesses to build a network and grow the sector and help boost all opportunities for growth. This work will remain ongoing.

9.2   Throughout the CLLP's preparation, relatively few details have been available in terms of the scale of growth associated with the NCF, and what supporting infrastructure (employment, transport etc) needs to be provided, to enable fully informed, evidence-based decisions to be made. The NCF has said it "*does not provide comment on exact figures regarding staff numbers for national security reasons. We have previously provided approximations of workforce size through publicly available sources, which remain the most appropriate reference for such information.*

9.3   It is expected that many of the future jobs, both direct and indirect, will be filled from local recruitment of people resident in the area; the NCF Commander has stated NCF will "*gain massively from being able to recruit from Lancashire*[32]"

9.4   As Table 2 of this report has illustrated, job growth data quoted from non-NCF sources is inconsistent and unreliable – for example, direct jobs figures (for Lancashire) cited for the NCF vary between 2,000 (Plexal) and 3,000 (KCL) whilst indirect job numbers vary between 1,500 ([LCC Cabinet January 2025](#)) and 3,120 (Plexal). The final Lancashire Growth Plan quotes 2,000 personnel and 3,120 direct and indirect jobs.

9.5   No detailed evidence is provided in terms of the scale, nature or geographic distribution of those indirect job numbers, and they are not apportioned or extrapolated to lower geographic scales such as South Ribble or Central Lancashire, or wider into the North West (for example, building on the links with the established cyber sector in Manchester). The 2,000 direct jobs quoted by Plexal states those numbers include 'wider partners' and does not detail who they are, or what proportion of the figures they comprise. Nor do Plexal detail the timeframe for those jobs.

9.6   We have no reason to believe that the NCF's housing demand will differ materially from other employers in the area, supported by the NCF's statement "*the NCF will follow normal patterns of housing demand for employers of a similar scale".* NCF is a partnership of MOD, GCHQ, SIS and DST, and the government has stated that it "is made up of a roughly equal share of personnel from Defence and the UK intelligence community", suggesting mostly civilian personnel living normally within the regional community.

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[32] [How Lancashire is enticing and training the cyber defenders of the future](#)

9.7   When the CLAs commissioned the Employment Land Review (ELR) there were no confirmed job estimates available with which to complete a 'Policy On' analysis of the impact of the Cyber Campus. BE Group have since confirmed that even if the Plexal figures were now to be applied under a 'Policy On' analysis, a number of assumptions would need to be made, such as how many jobs would be generated within Central Lancashire alone, and, in any case, this would be expected to lead to only a very modest uplift in employment land needs. The statement from the NCF confirms Plexal's figures are unofficial and unreliable to base any calculations upon.

9.8   Further, the ELR's methodology uses historic-take up rates and does not account for specific employers' growth. For example, for comparative purposes, BAE Systems employ much greater numbers of personnel than that proposed through the NCF and have demonstrated ongoing growth in the advanced manufacturing and aerospace sectors. They, nor other growth employers, do not receive specific calculations within the ELR but are considered as part of the holistic demand forecasting based on historic take-up rates, Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) groups and Cambridge econometrics.

9.9   However, this does not mean that the CLLP does not include sufficient space for growth; indeed, the proposed allocations provide for significantly above the OAN for the area and CLLP identifies a range of sites that would be suitable to accommodate cyber-related business. The CLLP, and SOCG with LCC, both confirm the CLA's commitment to continue to work with LCC to understand opportunities and timescales.

9.10   Using the information available at the time of the review, the ELR has calculated the employment land OAN and identified sufficient land to meet that need. This need can be met without necessitating the release of Green Belt land. CLLP Policy EC1 confirms the CLAs employment land need, and how this will be met, also confirming the Council will look to support economic growth and that the Samlesbury EZ will continue to be a regionally significant site for employment. The policy also confirms the Councils are working with LCC to understand the future growth needs arising through the NCF (this is also iterated within the LCC SOCG).

9.11   The CLA's acknowledge the importance of Samlesbury EZ and its identification as a significant economic asset within the final Lancashire Growth Plan.

9.12   Evidence does indicate a focus upon the importance of developing education, skills & training; transport and cyber corridors (including links to Manchester); and ongoing engagement with local business and HEIs etc.

9.13   Plexal's evidence expects that most direct and indirect personnel, associated with the NCF, will live within Lancashire, or the wider commuter belt. Their report confirms that Liverpool and Manchester are within commutable distance by rail. NCF careers marketing information emphasises the proximity of Samlesbury to Manchester, highlighting the fact that a large, vibrant city is more likely to appeal to employees, whilst there are surrounding rural villages within commuting distance to provide for wider preferences. Plexal's case study evidence (Met

Office case study) illustrates that employees prioritised living in areas they like and commuting in/out, rather than being located next to their office or HQ.

9.14   However, access between the rail stations and Samlesbury using public transport is limited, consequently persuading people more towards private car use. The CLLP promotes sustainable development, and the transition to net zero, and therefore the CLAs would support the location of new businesses in existing urban areas (and then the improvement of public transport services to outlying areas).

9.15   There are existing sites and key projects in Central Lancashire that provide opportunities to support employment growth whilst providing links to cyber- and digital- businesses, education and skills development and sustainable transport networks. This includes the Preston Station Quarter proposals (identified within the CLLP and the Lancashire Growth Plan).

9.16   As the CLLP states, the CLAs are committed to working with all partners to support economic growth but direct contact with NCF personnel to date has not identified any specific needs, above or beyond that which the CLAs have already considered through their evidence base. The CLAs consider their current evidence to be robust, and there are existing sites and opportunities within Preston and South Ribble that can be used to support any emerging development opportunities. As this paper demonstrates, the CLAs are confident that they have attempted to understand the likely impact of the NCF on the housing and employment need and that the evidence that is available at the current point in time does not require a change in the strategy within the CLLP, as it is an appropriate strategy (in accordance with NPPF paragraph 36).

9.17   The CLAs will continue to monitor the delivery of housing and employment across the plan period and are committed to reviewing the CLLP as necessary.

APPENDIX 1: STATEMENT FROM NCF PERSONNEL (October 2025)

The National Cyber Force (NCF) does not provide comment on exact figures regarding staff numbers for national security reasons. We have previously provided approximations of workforce size through publicly available sources, which remain the most appropriate reference for such information.

However, our publication, [Responsible Cyber Power in Practice](#) states that once the currently planned growth is complete, we will be made up of a roughly equal share of personnel from the MOD and the intelligence agencies. The NCF is investing in both military and civilian recruitment, including our recruitment pipelines, by creating dedicated cyber career pathways to build a world class workforce to ensure the NCF can operate at scale.

The NCF anticipates that many of the future jobs, both direct and indirect, will be filled from local recruitment of people already resident in the area and that the growth in housing demand linked to the NCF will follow normal patterns of housing demand for employers of a similar scale.

APPENDIX 2: UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE CYBER-RELATED COURSES

University of Lancashire, includes (BSc, MSc, BEng)
- Cyber Security
- Computing
- Mechatronics & Intelligent Machines
- Aerospace Engineering
- Artificial Intelligence & Data Science
- Computer Networks & Security

University of Liverpool (BSc, MSc)
- Cyber Security
- Advanced / Computer Science
- Advanced data science and Artificial Intelligence

University of Manchester (BSc, MSc)
- Cyber Security
- Advanced / Computer Science

University of Lancaster (BSc, MSc)
- Cyber Security

Preston College
- Cyber security – level 1
-
Blackburn College
- Gateway level 1 cyber security
- Cyber security technician apprenticeship level 3
-
Cardinal Newman College
- Cyber Academy (A-level)) - Launch of Newman's Cyber Academy