



North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee Business Plan 2022 – 2025

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BUSINESS PLAN ON A PAGE

National FCERM Strategy
Ambitions



North West RFCC
Strategic Aims



Achieving resilience in partnership with others

Future risk and investment	<p style="text-align: center;">Accessing investment and funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To help risk management authorities and partners to attract and bring together sufficient investment to achieve sustainable flood resilience. - To support, embrace and adopt innovative approaches to building a more sustainable and climate resilient future through good design, green investment, and integration of environmental, social and economic benefits, underpinned by partnership working built on developing shared objectives.
A nation ready to respond and adapt to flooding and coastal change	<p style="text-align: center;">Building community resilience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To support communities, including businesses and farmers, in becoming more personally and financially resilient to the changing climate, by growing understanding and being clear that everyone must play their part. - To increase capability and capacity within risk management authorities to better engage with and support their communities.
Climate resilient places	<p style="text-align: center;">Managing water at catchment scale with nature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To drive the mainstreaming of nature-based solutions as part of the flood and coastal erosion risk management approach, encouraging holistic and innovative approaches, and achieving wider environmental benefits wherever possible. - To increase the ambition and scale of catchment partnerships, through best practice, and effective, locally appropriate leadership and engagement.
Today's growth and infrastructure resilient in tomorrow's climate	<p style="text-align: center;">Achieving climate resilient planning, development & infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To facilitate a strategic relationship with the planning and development sectors in the North West to embed full consideration of sustainability, resilience, adaptation and environmental regeneration, into processes and decision making. - To facilitate a more proactive, joined up approach between risk management authorities to collectively address the complex legacy of asset ownership and responsibility, moving towards more effective management and reduced flood risk. - To build strategic relationships with infrastructure providers in the North West to bring an ambitious, collaborative approach to achieving sustainable infrastructure which will be resilient in tomorrow's climate, and which seeks to influence national government policy.

Increasing risk management authority capacity and collaboration

A nation ready to respond and adapt to flooding and coastal change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To enable risk management authorities to build strong and effective partnerships to innovate and make best use of their collective resource to move faster towards achieving resilience. - To improve communication and information sharing, from, within, and into, the RFCC, its partnerships and its wider network. - To strengthen the role of the RFCC as supporter and critical friend to risk management authorities, seeking to improve performance, and addressing barriers to this.
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Foreword from the Chair, Adrian Lythgo

There is no doubt that we face a climate emergency and that our weather is already being directly influenced, with numerous examples globally. Even if radical changes are introduced and progress is made towards net zero carbon emissions, we must also plan and adapt to a world with more extreme weather. This means developing our built environment and our behaviour so that we are more resilient to hotter, wetter and drier conditions where flooding, coastal surges, drought and heat waves are all more frequent. More intense rainfall is also changing the pattern of flooding. Surface water flooding, caused when intense rainfall overwhelms drainage systems, is becoming more prominent and is less easy to predict, model and manage, as it usually acts in combination with other flooding mechanisms (e.g. from rivers).



Even before we really began to feel the effects of climate change, communities across the North West have experienced flooding to their homes and businesses, some repeatedly.

The Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) focuses primarily on flooding and coastal change. This covers understanding the risk, securing the investment needed to mitigate this risk, and the multi-agency responses needed to address flooding from different sources. Increasingly we are prioritising the adaptation and increased resilience that will be required from us all, and holistic approaches working with nature, to complement the more traditional approaches.

In this Business Plan, the RFCC sets out what role it will play over the next 3 years to respond to flood risk in the changing context described above.

The North West RFCC and its constituent partnerships

The [North West RFCC](#) brings together the primary organisations who manage the risk of flooding and coastal change in the North West (local authorities, United Utilities and the Environment Agency). Members consist of local councillors representing sub-regional strategic flood risk partnerships and independent members with specific expertise. The sub-regional [partnerships](#), including the North West and North Wales Coastal Group, while different and with their own risks, priorities and networks, are the foundations of the RFCC. But it is only by working in collaboration with other partners, communities and the public that adaptation can be achieved.

A key role of flood and coastal risk management authorities (RMAs¹) is to design and deliver an investment programme of schemes to reduce the risk of flooding and coastal erosion. These programmes increasingly seek to find an optimum combination of engineering and nature-based solutions. RMAs do a number of other things - supporting communities to prepare for flooding, forecasting and warning people when flooding is expected, and supporting communities to recover after they have experienced the horrifying damage caused by flood water. As owners and managers of flood risk and drainage assets, RMAs carry out ongoing asset maintenance to ensure clear and efficient drainage networks, proactively prepare for rainfall events, operate assets during rainfall events (e.g. flood basins, gates, barriers), and carry out remedial work to damaged assets as part of recovery. RMAs also have an important role to ensure that new development takes account of flood risk, will be safe and will not increase risk elsewhere.

¹ Environment Agency, Lead Local Flood Authorities, District councils, Internal Drainage Boards, Highway authorities, Water and sewerage companies.

INTRODUCTION

For this Business Plan we have focussed on what unique roles the RFCC can play in helping to achieve resilience, primarily to:

- **Convene** partners and build new relationships with others outside the RFCC flood family.
- **Fund** and commission projects with dedicated resources using its Local Levy funding.
- **Do Once** - design and create products for consistent use across the North West.
- **Share best practice** and learning from our own initiatives and from elsewhere.

The RFCC also seeks to inform and influence decision makers in other sectors, nationally and in the North West, about what more is needed to support adaptation e.g. policy changes, investment.

This RFCC Business Plan

A key driver behind the refresh of our Business Plan was the publication of the [National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management \(FCERM\) Strategy](#) and associated [Government policy statement](#) in September 2020.

For each of the ambitions set out in the National Strategy we have translated them into our North West perspective and have set out the strategic aims of the RFCC in helping to achieve resilience. The [Plan on a Page](#) at the beginning of this document summarises the strategic aims and each section of the Business Plan then provides a fuller narrative.

The Plan predominantly focusses on how we will achieve resilience by working with others (partners and communities). Alongside that, we are always reflecting on the performance of the RFCC and RMAs and seeking to continuously improve. This is covered in the final section.

The appendix provides more detail on each ambition, including:

- Desired outcomes for 2025
- Examples of successes from the previous RFCC Business Plan
- Actions that the RFCC will take next.

For a glossary of terms used in this document, please refer to the [National FCERM Strategy](#).

This Business Plan document provides an overview and the framework for our actions. It will be implemented through a supplementary action plan. Implementation will be supported with investment from the Committee's Local Levy funding which will in specific and limited circumstances fund resource gaps. There is much to be done and resources are limited, and hence to dedicate enough time and resource to make real progress, we expect to focus more on certain areas of activity in different years.

This Business Plan has been shaped through an extensive engagement process involving officers from flood risk management authorities, RFCC members, and a survey open to community groups. The RFCC is grateful to all for their valuable contributions.

Our Vision *A North West ready for, and resilient to, flooding and coastal change – today, tomorrow and to the year 2100.*

Our Mission *Working together on sustainable management of flooding and coastal change in the North West, we will contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of our communities, have a positive impact on the economy, and enhance the environment.*

Accessing investment and funding

There is more government (capital) funding to better protect communities from flooding and coastal change (£5.4 billion for 2021 to 2027, compared with £2.6 billion for 2015 to 2021) but increasing the capacity of RMAs, both in resources and skills, to deliver a bigger capital programme, is an immediate challenge.

Even with this record level of government investment, the national funding model for capital projects requires financial contributions from other sources (structural and investment funds, other government departments, public and private sector partners and beneficiaries, communities etc). The UK's exit from the EU means a shift from previous European funds to new investment programmes which are still emerging and will continue to evolve over time. We recognise the task for all RMAs in retaining an up-to-date picture on available funds and investments, and their qualification criteria, and will seek to support this. For other initiatives which build flood resilience, future funding opportunities may be embedded in other programmes (e.g. housing), requiring innovative and cross-sector approaches which the RFCC will also seek to enable. The RFCC will continue to use its Local Levy funding to contribute to the cost of capital projects, and to initiatives which meet the ambition of accessing more investment and funding.

The importance of accounting for [natural capital](#) in investment decisions is now widely recognised, factoring in the value of nature's fundamental role in sustaining the economy and human wellbeing. However practical applications of natural capital are still in their infancy. There are also some investment-unlocking environmental benefits which are not yet measurable as natural capital so there is a need to remain open to flexible approaches. Generally, there is growing momentum in green investment and finance, including within the private sector. This is being driven by consumer demand and corporate social responsibility, but also because investors increasingly see it as good business, both financially, and to protect the natural resources and ecosystem services that our societies and economies depend upon. Design also plays an important role in promoting sustainable economics by providing the opportunity to design in wider environmental and social benefits, and design out negative impacts, all affecting economic value. These are all reasons for optimism and the RFCC is excited about what could be achieved if RMAs can come together with other partners, develop shared objectives and combine investment. The RFCC aims to play a threefold enabling role: 1) to monitor, understand and share knowledge on the developing sustainable investment landscape (including, for example, the [IGNITION](#) project in Greater Manchester); 2) to support RMAs to develop the new skills and knowledge needed to effectively engage with the finance/private sector to unlock potential investment, and 3) to actively promote partnership working which genuinely appreciates, overlays and satisfies the interests and goals of all partners.

Better management of water throughout catchments will involve nature based solutions and more environmentally sustainable land management. This has not been incentivised or supported by the current European system of agricultural subsidies. EU Exit, and recognition of the critical role of nature in alleviating the climate and biodiversity crises, have inspired a new UK system of financial support for agriculture, [Environmental Land Management Schemes](#) (ELMS). This will better support action and practices that improve the environment and provide public goods, including flood mitigation. The system will provide payments for landowners, land managers and farmers to

use and manage their land in an environmentally sustainable way (Sustainable Farming Incentive), and go further under the Local Nature Recovery or, on a bigger scale, Landscape Recovery, tiers. The transitional Nature for Climate Fund supports the critical aspects of tree planting and peatland restoration which will support flood mitigation. By incentivising and enabling more environmentally sustainable land use and management, this funding therefore represents an important part of the overall investment picture to achieving a more climate resilient future. As the detail is developed, the RFCC will promote information sharing to help maximise the potential of this source of government funding. The challenge will be in co-ordinating action locally, and working with and supporting those who can access the funding, in order to develop integrated projects that deliver at scale, both for the environment, and flood mitigation and adaptation. There will be a need to overcome other barriers to natural flood management (e.g. concerns about liability), and how farmers and landowners could be incentivised and supported financially where ELMS funding is not available.

While capital investment is vital and welcomed, some of the critical activities carried out by RMAs rely on revenue funding which is much tighter. Flood risk, coastal protection and highways assets need to be maintained, with limited revenue budgets necessitating a risk-based approach. Work associated with engagement and partnership working to explore new approaches are often not eligible for capital funding which can stifle innovation and change. The RFCC is keen to support LAs in making the available funding go further, and to explore potential new sources of funding, and flexibility within funding rules. The RFCC will also look to support the partnership working and innovation required to deliver this Business Plan through its Local Levy funding where other funding sources are not available.

Strategic aims

- **To help RMAs and partners to attract and bring together sufficient investment to achieve sustainable flood resilience.**
- **To support, embrace and adopt innovative approaches to building a more sustainable and climate resilient future through good design, green investment, and integration of environmental, social and economic benefits, underpinned by partnership working built on developing shared objectives.**

Building community resilience

We often count homes and businesses when it comes to flood risk, but it is the people affected who are at the forefront of our minds. Those who have been flooded, or who have come close, will be very alert to the threat and may be more prepared, informed, and ready to respond, but still feel anxious and fearful every time it rains. For those who have not experienced flooding before, appreciating they are at risk can be difficult to accept or prioritise, set against bigger and more immediate challenges in their lives.

If everyone is to play a full part in becoming resilient in the face of the changing climate, people need to become more flood and climate literate (i.e. develop knowledge and understanding). This need for understanding covers the multiple sectors (residents, businesses, public bodies, and managers of property and land) who will need to be part of a co-ordinated effort. Flood literacy includes appreciating where we each need to take greater ownership and responsibility for mitigating our flood risk. Socio-economic, cultural, educational and financial factors all play a part in creating differences in people's ability to respond. The RFCC recognises the importance of developing flood literacy and resilience in the current and next generations and is providing funding to enable this.

Residents and landowners with watercourses flowing through, under, or adjacent to, their property or land holding are likely to be [riparian owners](#) of that stretch. As such, they have certain rights and responsibilities with respect to the watercourse including ensuring flow conveyance, bed and bank maintenance, and culvert condition. Riparian ownership gives rise to a complex picture of asset and watercourse ownership. The holistic approach needed to ensure effective drainage and minimise flood risk means that RMAs look to riparian owners to play their part by fulfilling their responsibilities.

Resilient communities are likely to be less impacted by flooding. Resilience has many elements. Having adequate insurance cover is one component, being better prepared is another (warnings, adaptation) but flooding will never be entirely predictable or preventable. Strong community networks and access to trusted information and support can help communities to recover more quickly after flooding and prevent existing inequalities from growing. However, we recognise that achieving resilience is a process which requires awareness, acceptance, investment, and behavioural change, all of which take time.

The [Flood Re Scheme](#) has helped to provide access to affordable flood insurance for those in at risk areas, but exclusions (e.g. homes built since 2009, commercial property) still leave many without affordable cover. Flood Re continues to evolve to support greater property flood resilience, which the RFCC welcomes but recognises the need to ensure this is taken up. Even where affordable insurance is available, it is not always taken up, being influenced again by socio-economic or cultural factors.

For communities who have experienced flooding, we recognise the frustration they often feel in getting help from authorities. Action is often too slow, and they can feel forgotten. Engagement between authorities and communities is often not easy or straightforward. Communities in areas with high levels of deprivation can be hard for authorities to reach. Communities are rarely a single entity with one voice – they are made up of individuals with their own perspectives and

wishes. Similarly, communities often feel confused about who to talk to and frustrated if they are passed from one authority to another. This can contribute to a lack of trust. Trusting relationships between communities and authorities are only formed from significant and sustained investment of time, energy and commitment, for which RMAs are not specifically funded. And it requires more subtle communication skills. To achieve resilience to the degree needed, engagement and knowledge transfer will need to come through multiple sectors and third-party organisations, who can be better placed to bridge communication gaps and facilitate engagement; however this can add to the complexity of relationships. This reinforces the need to build flood literacy across multiple sectors. The RFCC wants to support RMAs in being better able to engage effectively with their communities through a range of different mechanisms.

Engagement on flooding, both about the risk and after it has happened, has often focussed on the residents affected, but other groups in the community are affected too. RMAs proactively seek to support small businesses, which can be vulnerable, threatening livelihoods, jobs and the economic resilience of communities. Flooding of agricultural land can quickly threaten the profitability and viability of farming businesses, but the agricultural community can sometimes be involved less in engagement. The RFCC recognises the importance of their inclusion and will take steps with RMAs and partners to improve this.

The coast will be a significant frontier where the effects of climate change will be felt particularly acutely. Sea level rise and other physical changes could threaten the viability of coastal communities and require more significant adaptation. This potentially affects both urban areas and high quality agricultural land near the coast. RMAs will need to work with communities to understand the risks and develop options, a process that is likely to take a long time.

Strategic aims

- **To support communities, including businesses and farmers, in becoming more personally and financially resilient to the changing climate, by growing understanding and being clear that everyone must play their part.**
- **To increase capability and capacity within RMAs to better engage with and support their communities.**

Managing water at catchment scale with nature

This ambition is about better protecting and adapting existing places to be more climate resilient through a range of measures, both within those places and across the whole water catchment, working hand in hand with nature wherever possible.

Water is an important resource which is undervalued by our society due to its perceived abundance. Both flooding and prolonged dry weather can happen within short periods of time. Water must be valued and managed more holistically to mitigate against these extremes.

While our primary interest is in flood risk reduction and adaptation, we fully recognise that this requires working in an integrated way with partners to achieve a broader set of outcomes for people and the environment. Looking upstream from places at flood risk, there are big water quantity and quality improvement opportunities from natural flood management. This may involve restoring natural habitats (peatland restoration, woodland planting and management etc.), changing land use and management practices, and interventions to naturally slow the flow of water (e.g. leaky dams). The RFCC recognises the responsibility on RMAs to help achieve the targets in the [25-Year Environment Plan](#), including statutory targets for waterbody condition from the Water Environment Regulations 2017.

Within our communities we see a need for active promotion of the widespread use of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) including rain gardens, street trees, water butts, permeable paving, and rainwater harvesting. These measures not only reduce the water entering drainage systems but also help to clean the water and the air, and improve health and wellbeing.

Looking downstream, ultimately to the coast, places may need to adapt more significantly where flooding and coastal change could threaten their long-term viability. Again, natural habitats such as saltmarsh and sand dunes can play a key role in protection and mitigation. The RFCC will continue to support the [Coastal Group](#) in planning for, and acting on, this through its long-term Shoreline Management Plans. Adaptive management through habitat creation or enhancement, and use of nature-based solutions will not only support sustainable flood risk management, coastal change and climate resilience, but deliver a wide range of benefits, including biodiversity and environmental net gain, enhanced natural capital, improved wellbeing and long-term carbon storage/sequestration.

Managing the flow of water at a catchment scale will require the building of trust and collaboration between RMAs, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the farming/landowning community, both to increase their resilience and to make them part of the integrated solution. RMAs should play a key role in the creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies so that they achieve an integrated mix of environmental and climate (including flood risk) resilience benefits. The Nature for Climate Fund and the [Environmental Land Management Scheme \(ELMS\)](#), as they are rolled out and consolidated over the next few years, will increasingly incentivise and facilitate beneficial and environmentally sustainable land management changes.

The [catchment based approach](#) has brought about many successes and delivered projects and initiatives supporting flood risk reduction. However, in the face of the recognised climate crisis, the partnerships can be supported to increase the scale of delivery, which will require even stronger and effective leadership, and further integration of objectives and initiatives. The RFCC is keen to share learning and experiences on successful approaches and leadership, and to embed flood and climate resilience as key objectives.

WORKING WITH OTHERS: CLIMATE RESILIENT PLACES

In the North West there are areas which have historically been drained for agriculture, using flood risk management funding which will not be maintained in the long term. Work is ongoing to explore options for the future ownership and whole life management of the assets so that the right assets are managed by the right people, but funding for this remains uncertain. Water level management can have impacts on, or benefits for, people, the environment (including carbon sequestration from lowland peat) and the economy. A partnership and balanced approach will be needed to get this right, recognising the needs of the environment and of commercial food production.

When flooding happens, water comes from different sources, potentially reaching a wider population through complex and historical connectivity of flow routes and drainage networks, for which different RMAs are responsible. But those impacted understandably have little interest or patience for this complexity - they just want to see co-ordinated action to address the combined problem. This requires integrated working between RMAs and other stakeholders, to maximise knowledge and capacity to effectively address the complex interaction of combined sources, both now and in future. The RFCC will always reinforce and facilitate better partnership working between RMAs to strengthen this.

The RFCC will continue to guide and support RMAs in co-designing, co-investing and co-delivering their capital investment programmes to reduce the risk of flooding, working with other stakeholders, NGOs and communities, and mainstreaming the use of nature-based solutions as part of the mix of approaches.

Achieving net zero carbon, especially associated with the capital investment programme, is a major challenge for all RMAs. The RFCC welcomes, and will seek to support RMAs in the adoption of, innovative changes in design and materials, teamed with greater use of nature based solutions.

Strategic aims

- **To drive the mainstreaming of nature-based solutions as part of the flood and coastal erosion risk management approach, encouraging holistic and innovative approaches, and achieving wider environmental benefits wherever possible (including biodiversity and environmental net gain, enhanced natural capital and net zero carbon emissions).**
- **To increase the ambition and scale of catchment partnerships, through best practice, and effective, locally appropriate leadership and engagement.**

Achieving climate resilient planning, development and infrastructure

Planning and development

There is significant pressure on local authorities to facilitate development, driven by demand for new homes and by the Build Back Better and Levelling Up agendas. It is vital that this development and its drainage is sustainable and climate resilient, for both its occupants and others nearby.

We know that many communities, including farmers, are concerned about new development being a contributing factor to increased flood risk. The planning and development management processes should ensure that new development effectively manages flood risks, based on current standards with climate change allowances. But at some point climate change impacts could make these standards insufficient and flood risk cannot be designed out entirely. Evidence on the extent to which new development is contributing to flood risk is currently limited or unavailable.

National planning policy goes some way to setting SuDS requirements but there remain weaknesses in its application in England, given the government's decision not to make this a legislative requirement, but instead to facilitate SuDS through the planning process. National planning policy also sets general expectations around climate change, flooding and coastal change but which, again, could be made more robust. There are also barriers within the legislative regime around drainage which inhibit achievement of SuDS (e.g. the ability to acquire the right to discharge to watercourses). Sustainability, resilience and multiple environmental and health benefits need to be at the core of planning decisions, which they currently are not. We hope that national planning policy and the legislative framework continue to evolve to fully support climate resilience.

The Environment Bill, once formally adopted, will introduce a new mandatory requirement for biodiversity net gain (BNG) in the planning system (a minimum of 10%), to ensure that new developments enhance biodiversity. Early consideration and integration of nature-based solutions for flood risk management and coastal change, and incorporation as part of SuDS solutions and new development, have the potential to deliver and exceed the minimum BNG mandatory requirements. The RFCC will look for opportunities to influence BNG delivery and help RMAs to achieve as much as possible through new development.

Some developers are leading the way in SuDS and design, recognising that climate and flood resilient homes and neighbourhoods can easily be beautiful, highly appealing places to live which can attract a premium price. Achieving climate resilient places should not mean compromising on aesthetics and convenience – done and showcased well, public behaviour can be shifted towards more sustainable choices, even if climate resilience is not their personal priority. The RFCC recognises the importance of the new [National Model Design Code](#), produced on the back of the [Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission](#).

For many other developers, the perceived opportunity to maximise profit and a lack of regulation on SuDS still sees them doing the minimum, losing the opportunity for high quality SuDS which truly embrace controlling water at source over standard end-of-pipe attenuation or storage systems. Within Local Planning Authorities, stretched resources, variable understanding of SuDS, pressure from housing targets, and a lack of regulatory powers to address issues which could arise in the future with SuDS and on-site flood storage areas, all limit the ability of local planners to be sufficiently robust with developers and to drive through and enforce planning conditions. The RFCC

would also like to see greater recognition and mitigation of the impact of paving over gardens with impermeable surfaces in terms of increased surface water runoff. The RFCC will work to facilitate closer working between the planning sector and RMAs to ensure that flood risk and resilience are effectively considered and addressed through the available mechanisms.

As indicated by the government's White Paper ['Planning for the Future'](#) (August 2020), reform of the planning system is likely but as yet it is unclear how. The RFCC has provided feedback and will continue to look for opportunities to influence this and help RMAs to achieve as much as possible from whatever evolves and to capitalise on any opportunities.

Making new development climate resilient is one thing but we already have a huge existing property base requiring major scale retrofitting of SuDS and property level flood resilience measures. Finding the space for this in dense urban areas is a big challenge, even with the right partners driving it, but presents a great opportunity for increasing climate resilience in an urban setting.

Infrastructure

There is a legacy of ageing flood risk management and drainage assets, in varying condition, which were not designed for the changing climate. Renewal or replacement of this asset stock will be practically and financially extremely challenging over the coming years. For culverted (piped underground) watercourses, even their location can be unknown, and ownership/responsibility can be disputed or complex (e.g. when a watercourse passes under multiple property boundaries). Ownership often sits with third party riparian landowners, primarily property owners, but can also be the local authority or the Environment Agency. A watercourse needs to be managed holistically to drain effectively. The complexity around ownership presents a major obstacle to ensuring the proper stewardship of assets which are often the cause of flooding. Inevitably, the maintenance required on often long-neglected watercourses can be significant in complexity and financial burden, and often parties are reluctant to discharge their responsibilities, especially where ownership is unclear. Even where assets are clearly under riparian ownership, RMAs are not always adequately resourced to pursue enforcement action where inadequate maintenance is creating a flood risk. As an RFCC we will seek to support local authorities to empower riparian owners to understand their responsibilities and the consequences of inaction, to take ownership of and maintain their assets effectively.

There are also many examples of culverted watercourses being illegally connected to sewers, essentially imposing responsibility on the water company where there is no legal obligation and incorrectly incurring additional costs for their customers. The RFCC is keen to support partners in collectively and strategically addressing these challenges to achieve an overall reduction in flood risk and to derive wider environmental and climate resilience benefits.

There is significant economic impact from flooding of roads as it restricts access, causes flood damage to vehicles, and contributes to flooding of property. At worst, highway flooding kills if occupants become trapped in flooded vehicles. Highway drainage systems are designed to manage the rainwater that lands on the highway only and so highways authorities are unable to adopt SuDS components which do not serve the highway or take surface water discharge from non-highway land. Additionally, current national highway design standards do not include sustainable drainage

components, lagging behind the national standards for developments ([Technical Standards for SuDS](#)) and sewers (the [Design and Construction Guidance](#)). This has resulted in an inconsistent approach to SuDS components which could better manage drainage and water quality of highway water. This all limits the ability of partners to collectively achieve sustainable drainage of the rainwater falling on the area generally. The RFCC is keen to promote closer partnership working between Lead Local Flood Authorities, United Utilities and Welsh Water as the water companies in our region, and Highways Authorities, to innovate and make sustainable drainage a shared ambition, retrofitting blue green infrastructure to increase resilience where possible.

RMAs already work in close partnership, and are working increasingly closely with providers of major infrastructure including transport (road and rail), power (gas and electricity) and telecommunications. There are opportunities to jointly design and fund projects, better align investment programmes for efficiency, streamline permitting and consenting processes, as well as to work better together to ensure that new infrastructure will be resilient in tomorrow's climate. Funding contributions from other government departments (e.g. Transport, Education) where their assets benefit from flood and coastal risk management projects are now more accessible and an important piece of the investment picture. The strength of relationships with other bodies and private sector infrastructure suppliers remains variable and the RFCC can play a role in bringing parties together. As Highways Authorities are themselves flood risk management authorities and often sit within the same local authorities as Lead Local Flood Authorities, the RFCC sees highways as the priority sector for this Business Plan but will actively help to facilitate relationships between RMAs and other infrastructure providers who proactively seek them (e.g. Network Rail).

Strategic aims

- **To facilitate a strategic relationship with the planning and development sectors in the North West to embed full consideration of sustainability, resilience, adaptation and environmental regeneration, into processes and decision making.**
- **To facilitate a more proactive, joined up approach between RMAs to collectively address the complex legacy of asset ownership and responsibility, moving towards more effective management and reduced flood risk.**
- **To build strategic relationships with infrastructure providers in the North West to bring an ambitious, collaborative approach to achieving sustainable infrastructure which will be resilient in tomorrow's climate, and which seeks to influence national government policy.**

There are dedicated and skilled professionals working tirelessly in all RMAs to better protect their communities from flooding and coastal change, and to help them be more resilient.

However resources are limited. The extent and complexity of flood risk management varies across the region but this is often not reflected in the resource that is available to Lead Local Flood Authorities. Budget cuts for local authorities have left their level of resource inadequate to fully cover all the activities needed to achieve a climate resilient future. Day to day pressures often get in the way of strategic development and delivery of programmes and projects. Accepting that this level of funding and resource is unlikely to increase significantly in the short term, we need to explore opportunities to do things differently, to develop innovative multi-sector approaches working together with other partners in smarter ways to share resources and skills, and to share or jointly deliver programmes of work where this is more efficient. The RFCC and RMAs also recognise the need for new skill sets where traditional roles have evolved (e.g. landscape design skills as well as drainage engineering). Bespoke training and targeted capacity building and collaboration may be needed, something which the RFCC is keen to support.

A proposal for a North West Coastal Centre of Excellence is being developed which will pool resources and skills across all coastal RMAs and can develop a broader skill set to take on other aspects of coastal risk management. This has evolved from the Fylde Partnership of coastal authorities which has, for some years, been working together to design and deliver a shared capital programme of schemes. This is a great example of joint working, elements of which could potentially be translated to other situations.

The sub-regional flood risk partnerships are well established, have rightly taken different approaches to suit local circumstances, involve different partners, and continue to evolve. They are critical to effective partnership working more locally and underpin the successful functioning of the RFCC. The partnerships will have an important role in implementing this Business Plan through shaping of the action plan, and by providing leadership and local implementation on agreed initiatives where these align with their local priorities. By working with the partnerships, the RFCC is keen to involve and benefit from the expertise and perspectives of other parties from outside of the core RFCC network, both colleagues in flood and coastal RMAs who are not directly represented on the RFCC, and other partners (e.g. rivers trusts).

The RFCC recognises the importance of data and evidence as the foundations for any plan, action, or investment decision and will continue to promote and enable better sharing of information across RMAs.

The RFCC itself seeks continuous improvement in its operation and effectiveness. Its current priority is on how it shares information and communicates with its membership and wider stakeholder network to enable everyone to play their part more effectively. It will also enable and encourage local partnerships to reflect on their own effectiveness, and agree and implement actions to continually improve.

Strategic aims

- **To enable risk management authorities to build strong and effective partnerships to innovate and make best use of their collective resource to move faster towards achieving resilience.**

- **To improve communication and information sharing, from, within, and into, the RFCC, its partnerships, and its wider network.**
- **To strengthen the role of the RFCC as supporter and critical friend to flood risk management authorities, seeking to improve performance, and addressing barriers to this.**

We intend to start the following actions in 2022/23. Some will extend beyond, or lead to follow-on actions beyond, this first year. We will seek to progress additional actions subject to capacity and opportunity.

All actions will begin with scoping and information gathering to collate what is already in existence so that we build on that rather than duplicating effort. Through this scoping it is possible that the actions will change and evolve slightly – what we have set out here is our initial intention.

ACCESSING INVESTMENT AND FUNDING
Actions the RFCC will take now
<p>Action 1: Potential investment and partner map</p> <p>The aim of this initiative is to create an information resource for North West risk management authorities (RMAs) on potential sources of investment and partners, to help them remain informed and able to access investment for measures to reduce flood risk, build resilience and deliver wider environmental, social and wellbeing benefits.</p> <p>Supplementary to or as part of this, the RFCC will continue to convey, from government and the Environment Agency at a national level, to RMAs and partners, information about the developing funding associated with the Agricultural Transition Plan including the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) and the Nature for Climate Fund.</p>
<p>Action 2: Investment in development of innovative green finance mechanisms</p> <p>The RFCC has approved an annual financial contribution to the Wyre Natural Flood Management (NFM) Investment Readiness project. The fund will allow the creation of NFM measures to reduce flood risk to the community of Churchtown in Lancashire but will provide vital learning and knowledge sharing around innovative public/private sector investment mechanisms for initiatives which reduce flood risk and provide wider benefits.</p> <p>The RFCC is also promoting and supporting the IGNITION project which is setting up an innovative financing mechanism which will fund retrofitting of sustainable drainage blue-green infrastructure to urban areas and schools within Greater Manchester.</p>
<p>Action 3: Assessment and valuation of wider benefits</p> <p>This project seeks to better understand the role of design, and the range and scale of wider benefits (environmental, social, amenity, health, wellbeing, economic, regeneration etc) provided by previous flood and coastal erosion risk management schemes. It aims to develop new tools to assist RMAs with identifying, integrating and valuing the potential wider benefits of future schemes. The aim is for RMAs to have the knowledge and skills to secure the maximum possible investment and funding.</p>
<p>Action 4 – Collaborative approach to asset maintenance and management</p> <p>The intention for this pilot project is to identify a location, preferably with significant surface water flood risk, and bring together asset owners to take a more collaborative approach to the maintenance and management of their assets to provide improved flood resilience in a way that makes best and most efficient use of available budgets.</p>

<p>Additionally, the RFCC will continue to take opportunities to inform and influence government on investment gaps to help shape future funding provision</p>
<p>Desired outcome(s) for 2025</p>
<p>Accessing investment for flood risk reduction measures (including use of nature based solutions) is easier and quicker due to improved knowledge, skills and access to sources. Not all schemes will be fundable but those that are should not be delayed significantly by the time taken to secure funds.</p>
<p>Additional objectives for potential action, subject to capacity and opportunity</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To influence the scope and qualification criteria of funding sources to maximise access for flooding and coastal change projects within a wider set of climate resilience aims. This is likely to be achieved by working with administrators of funds (e.g. Local Enterprise Partnerships) to raise awareness of barriers and opportunities.
<p>Example of previous RFCC success</p>
<p>In recent years the North West RFCC worked closely with Local Enterprise Partnerships to refine the criteria for European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) which directly led to securing £16 million of ERDF funding for North West flood schemes.</p>

BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE
Actions the RFCC will take now
<p>Action 5: The Flood Hub</p> <p>The Flood Hub website, which is funded by the RFCC, and managed by delivery partner Newground, continues to provide a really valuable information resource for communities and partners, not just in the North West but nationally and internationally. The RFCC will continue to provide funding for ongoing site and content management and development.</p> <p>Action 6: Supporting community engagement on adapting to coastal change</p> <p>While there may be no immediate threats to the viability of our North West coastal communities, we are seeing impacts to coastal infrastructure on which they depend. With climate change there will need to be more significant adaptation. The RFCC will continue to enable Newground (and potentially other third parties) to support the North West and North Wales Coastal Group in helping coastal authorities to plan and start the long term conversations that will be needed with communities around adaptation.</p> <p>Action 7: Action campaign – Flood resilience action</p> <p>The RFCC already provides additional capacity to risk management authorities (RMAs), through working with partners like Newground and the National Flood Forum, to communicate and engage with communities (including businesses) to raise awareness of flood risk and to encourage action to build resilience. This includes information provided on The Flood Hub, responding to direct enquiries, proactive communications and social media campaigns, and multi-agency approaches to helping communities recover after flooding. RMAs and partners also work with communities to establish and support flood action groups, develop community and household flood plans, helping them to help themselves.</p> <p>But to achieve resilience, we need everyone to play their part. The RFCC would like to strengthen the programme of activity to raise awareness of flood risk, and enable and inspire action, more widely, targeting new audiences and influencers. Working together we will design and implement an action campaign around flooding and flood resilience, within the broader context of the climate emergency. This will include greater emphasis on engagement with farmers and landowners, and will include specific content on the cumulative impact of (impermeable) paving over gardens (Action 12).</p> <p>Action 8: Flood Poverty Project</p> <p>The RFCC will continue to fund this research project into ‘flood literacy’ and ‘flood poverty’ to identify and understand issues and challenges faced by sections of communities in becoming more resilient. This includes examining the potential role for more capital investment in property level resistance and resilience measures. The project is being led by Rochdale Borough Council, working in conjunction with the National Flood Forum, Flood Re, the Environment Agency and other partners, and will share knowledge with RMAs and partners across the region.</p>

Desired outcomes for 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More people at risk of flooding and coastal change understand their own risks and responsibilities, know how to access clear and trusted information, and are taking action to make themselves, their properties, and communities more resilient. - There is greater partnership working with other sectors and third parties to collectively build flood literacy and resilience within North West communities.
Additional objectives for potential action, subject to capacity and opportunity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To better understand the barriers and challenges that communities experience in dealing with risk management authorities (RMAs), and identify good practice in the use of independent third parties where this will help to bridge communication and understanding gaps e.g. with the farming community. - To facilitate the ongoing development of competence and skills within RMAs in engaging effectively with communities so that all officers feel confident in doing this. - To initiate conversations between RMAs and community flood action groups on what further roles they could play in managing flood risk e.g. low risk maintenance or operation of assets, flood warden roles.
Example of previous RFCC success
<p>Since 2018, the RFCC has provided an exemplar online resource on all things flooding in the North West, The Flood Hub. Content development has been ongoing to create an extensive knowledge hub. 2021 saw the launch of new educational material aimed at teachers of Key Stage 2 children.</p>

MANAGING WATER AT CATCHMENT SCALE WITH NATURE
Actions the RFCC will take now
<p>Action 9: Whole catchment approach</p> <p>The aim of this initiative is to select an appropriate river catchment and then work collaboratively to develop a whole catchment water management approach which reduces flood risk and achieves a range of wider environmental benefits (water quality, soil health, biodiversity etc). It will identify and work in conjunction with other water management initiatives already in place in the catchment. The intention is to develop a bid to the Landscape Recovery element of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS). Partners are expected to include United Utilities, local authorities, Natural England, the Environment Agency, environmental non-governmental organisations, landowners, farmers, and communities.</p> <p>This initiative has a number of objectives including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting the mainstreaming of nature based solutions for flood mitigation - Identifying, sharing and embedding good practice in building and leading effective partnerships at a catchment scale - Overcoming barriers to operating and investing outside of normal administrative/political boundaries. - Raising awareness in, and promoting involvement from, communities on mainstreaming the use of nature based solutions. - Providing an exemplar approach which may influence government policy and investment. - Maximising the opportunity provided by biodiversity and environmental net gain obligations. - Further exploring, with the water industry, the potential role of reservoirs in flood mitigation, balanced with water supply duties and arrangements. <p>In addition, the RFCC will continue to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contribute towards the core funding for partners Mersey Rivers Trust (providing a technical appraisal resource) and Moors for the Future (delivering moorland restoration) who are facilitating and delivering natural flood management across the North West. - Work in partnership with the North West and North Wales Coastal Group and continue to provide funding for a resource to facilitate the work of the group, to lead the refresh of the Shoreline Management Plans, and to support delivery of actions. - Support, and share learning from, the North West projects funded by the government’s Resilience Innovation Programme. These projects involve community-led natural flood management and resilience (Cumbria County Council), Roch Valley neighbourhood flood and climate resilience programme (Rochdale Council), and ecological community-owned coastal buffer strips (Wyre Council). The RFCC will also consider providing funding to enable business case development for those partnership bids not selected for national funding.
Desired outcomes for 2025
<p>Effective partnerships representing all relevant interests are in place for all North West catchments and are implementing an action plan or programme which will help to deliver environmental benefits and achieve climate resilience including flood mitigation.</p>

Additional objectives for potential action, subject to capacity and opportunity
The RFCC will remain informed of other catchment scale initiatives across the North West and take opportunities to support and share learning (e.g. Greater Manchester Tripartite agreement between the Environment Agency, United Utilities and Greater Manchester Combined Authority; strengthened catchment-wide approach to the Upper Mersey).
Example of previous RFCC successes
Pioneered and funded a natural flood management programme which acted as an exemplar for influencing government and national policy and investment.

ACHIEVING CLIMATE RESILIENT PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Actions the RFCC will take now

Planning and development

Action 10: Evidence gathering – Climate resilience within planning and development

By engaging with the planning and development sector (e.g. Local Planning Authorities (both policy and development management elements), regeneration planners, the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Town and Country Planners Association, Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs), developers and their agents), this project will seek to better understand the degree to which climate and flood resilience are, currently, material considerations in determining planning applications and shaping their conditions. It will identify challenges, gaps and barriers to this. The evidence gathered will act as a baseline and will allow the identification of follow-on actions to achieve the following objectives:

- To build stronger links between the flood risk management and planning sectors.
- To grow understanding and knowledge of flood resilience and the vital role of the planning and development system in securing this.
- To influence the extent to which local plans drive climate resilient planning and design.
- To facilitate strategic collaborative conversations to envision how places will need to adapt to become climate resilient.
- To raise flood risk up the political agenda within the broader context of the climate emergency.

Changes to the planning system in England are currently being considered by government and the project will need to interpret and understand the effects of any changes to the planning system.

Action 11: Evidence gathering – Effectiveness of Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) advice on planning applications

Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) and the Environment Agency (EA) are statutory consultees in the planning application process, advising on flood risk and resilience which Local Planning Authorities take into account in their determinations. The degree to which EA advice is followed is already monitored but there is currently no evidence of the extent to which LLFA advice is followed. This project aims to fill that gap. It is linked to the broader evidence gathering action 10 but has a specific focus.

Action 12: Action campaign – Paving over front gardens

This project, to be led by Lancashire County Council and United Utilities, aims to inform and support those planning to pave over parts of their front gardens to make choices that are both compliant with the planning system and climate resilient. The cumulative effect of more impermeable surfaces means rainfall has much less opportunity to soak in, quickly runs off and ponds, and increases the risk of surface water flooding. By finding effective channels including the supply chain, the project will provide simple, easy to apply instructions and tools to allow homeowners or their contractors to meet their property needs in a way that provides sustainable drainage.

Infrastructure

Action 13: Data sharing and mapping of flood risk and drainage assets

The intention for this pilot project is to select a location, preferably with significant surface water flood risk, which illustrates the challenge of culverted (underground) flood risk and drainage assets

<p>that are not clearly mapped, condition-assessed, and where ownership and responsibility are unclear. The aim will be to bring together the relevant asset owner organisations to share data to clarify the location, condition and responsibility for assets in a collaborative and positive way. The approach taken and lessons learned will then be shared with a view to upscaling the approach.</p>
<p>Desired outcomes for 2025</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All new major development is drained sustainably, providing multiple environmental benefits. - More garden driveway conversions have sustainable drainage.
<p>Additional objectives for potential action, subject to capacity and opportunity</p>
<p><i>Climate resilience of new development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To demonstrate and promote exemplar climate resilient development design by establishing a partner relationship with a developer. - To better understand the degree to which new development might be contributing to flood risk, and to share the findings to respond to public concern. - To support partners to maximise the opportunity of, and embed expectations on, biodiversity and environmental net gain from new developments. <p><i>Adaptation of existing property</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To collate and publish further guidance on property level resistance / resilience measures (including advice on products and trusted contractors). <p><i>Highways and sustainable drainage</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To investigate best practice in strategically addressing the challenge of retrofitting sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) in dense urban areas and on highways and how we could apply this within the North West. - To facilitate more joined-up partnership working (between water companies, Lead Local Flood Authorities, Highways Authorities and National Highways) to collectively lead achievement of SuDS which could be adopted. <p><i>Asset ownership and maintenance</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To ensure that risk management authorities adopt new national guidance (to be provided) to improve the data quality and consistency of flood risk asset registers. - To convene organisations and companies to build a broader partnership across the water, infrastructure and flood and coastal risk management sectors which prioritises climate resilience and pursues mutual efficiencies by aligning investment programmes.
<p>Example of previous RFCC successes</p>
<p>Convened partners to create a North West sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) pro-forma for adoption by local planning authorities. This sets minimum, consistent data requirements for developers to provide on sustainable drainage provision as part of planning applications to support decision making, ultimately leading to high quality, multi-benefit SuDS.</p>

INCREASING RISK MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY CAPACITY AND COLLABORATION
What the RFCC will do next
<p>Action 14: Local authority capital project delivery challenges</p> <p>The RFCC has provided additional people resources to support local authorities in delivering flood risk management schemes/projects, including co-ordinating business case development, navigating through the project approval process within the Environment Agency (EA), and building capacity within the local authorities. This has brought significant benefits and has enabled projects to be completed sooner, but there are still barriers and challenges within the dual approval processes required both within the EA and the local authority. This project will seek to better understand these and take steps to reduce them by evolving the support provided and/or streamlining organisational processes.</p> <p>Action 15: Risk management authority capacity building programme</p> <p>The RFCC will sponsor and potentially provide funding for capacity building within risk management authorities, for example through a training and networking programme.</p> <p>Action 16: Additional capacity (to support the RFCC, partnerships and risk management authorities)</p> <p>The RFCC will continue to provide funding for additional resources to facilitate the effective functioning of the RFCC and its sub-regional partnerships, including the North West and North West Coastal Group, and to provide dedicated support for local authorities in their delivery of flood and coastal erosion risk management schemes. , challenge, develop and continually improve partnership approaches through our shared people resources.</p> <p>In addition, we will continuously improve the ways in which the RFCC operates, both during and between its formal meetings, including developing more effective and digital ways of working and information sharing, within the RFCC community and with partners more widely.</p>
Desired outcomes for 2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More local authority capital projects are completed in line with when they are scheduled in the investment programme as a result of barriers having been minimised and optimum support being provided. - RFCC members and partners have the right information at the right time to enable them to play an active and effective role in delivering this Business Plan and fulfilling the statutory purposes of the Committee.
Additional objectives for potential action, subject to capacity and opportunity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To explore best practice on how authorities elsewhere (both within the flood and coastal risk management sector and outside) are working together to make best use of their resources and skill sets, to grow capacity and capability, and ultimately to deliver more than can be achieved individually.

- To convene conversations between authorities to explore joint working opportunities and to support work to design and establish new business delivery models.
- To influence central government to provide wider resilience investment across other departmental spend.
- To promote continuous improvement within its sub-regional flood risk partnerships, using new research and tools on effective partnership governance.
- To promote better sharing of data and evidence across RMAs.

Example of previous RFCC successes

Funded the business case development (in progress) for a North West Coastal Centre of Excellence.