



## A Summary of Consultation Responses

### Purpose of this document

This report provides a summary of the consultation 'Connected by Water Action Plan'. The aim of this document is to explain why and how we ran the consultation as well as summarising the responses received and what action we will be taking as a result.

### Introduction

Since the devastating flooding in November 2019 across South Yorkshire, several organisations have been working together to respond to the flood risk and climate emergency in South Yorkshire on a catchment scale.

The Connected by Water Action Plan is a vital part of this work. It will describe a strong, regional ambition to reduce flood risk and build climate resilience so that people can live, work, and thrive in South Yorkshire in the face of a changing climate.

The plan will outline the actions that partners and communities are developing and delivering now and in the coming years. It will strengthen our capacity to plan and act together to ensure we are building a climate resilient future for the long term.

The plan will provide a compelling programme for investors and create opportunities to build a stronger case for wider investment in South Yorkshire, to support economic growth in a post-covid economy. This is a chance to do things differently and become a national example of innovation and excellence.

The online consultation was an opportunity for us to build on feedback and comments we have already received as part of our engagement with stakeholders throughout 2021. We sought views from partners, landowners, the public and other bodies on the plan itself and the actions detailed within it. We were also asking for information about any existing groups we need to link in with to enable us to deliver our actions.

This is a living plan and will be reviewed and updated each year; the comments received in this consultation will support the review process for the next update.

### How we ran the consultation

The consultation ran for 6 weeks from 28 January 2022 to 11 March 2022. We consulted using the Environment Agency's online consultation tool Citizen Space and provided an email for people to return comments if they wished. The consultation was advertised with direct emails to interested parties; on social media platforms; through partners existing communication channels and in other meetings and conversations. We also asked that people pass the invitation on to other parties as they saw fit. We know from the responses that some people did find out about the consultation in



this way. We also recognise that some people only found out about the consultation close to the closing date due to emails and radio interviews in the final week of the consultation. In future we will look at additional ways to engage and consult and not just the online system.

We received 121 responses in total. 94 of these responses were from residents living in South Yorkshire, 8 were from charity or voluntary organisations, 7 from businesses and 13 responses were recorded as 'other'. This category included councillors, landowners, Local Authority employees, military, and other government departments. The total number of responses was high with a good spread of interests and feedback.

**Several comments received during the consultation were about issues not directly covered by the Connected by Water Action Plan. This does not mean these issues are not being dealt with by other departments within the partnership organisations.**

## What you said

### Theme 1 – Responding to the Climate Emergency

64% of people responding believed this theme is covering the right actions but 23% of people didn't feel it was covering the correct actions. 13% were unsure whether the theme was covering the right actions but lots of additional comments were provided.

### Theme 2: SMART Investment

63% of people responding believed this theme is covering the right actions but 20% of people didn't feel it was covering the correct actions. 17% were unsure whether the theme was covering the right actions but lots of additional comments were provided.

### Theme 3: Technology & Operational Management

68% of people responding believed this theme is covering the right actions but 11% of people didn't feel it was covering the correct actions. 21% were unsure whether the theme was covering the right actions but lots of additional comments were provided.

### Theme 4: Communication, Engagement and Building Resilience

64% of people responding believed this theme is covering the right things but 20% of people didn't feel it was covering the correct actions. 16% were unsure whether the theme was covering the right actions but lots of additional comments were provided.



## Summary of Responses Across the Themes

Below we have summarised the responses received along with any actions we will take. Each comment has been grouped together to allow us to summarise a response.

### **Timescales, Conflicting Priorities and Working together.**

We received several questions and comments around the challenges of multiple organisations and communities working together, based on different priorities, timescales, processes, and agendas. We recognise that this is a huge challenge, that we are just starting to address through Connected by Water. We understand that we will not be able to please everyone, all the time, but through collaboration and working together we aim to collectively agree upon the best course of action. As frequently highlighted in the consultation responses, action is needed now to build flood resilience and respond to the climate emergency across South Yorkshire. Whilst working together does bring challenges, it is imperative we remain positive and committed to resolving these challenges to ensure we deliver real change across South Yorkshire.

### **Communication and Engagement**

One of the main comments coming out of the consultation was the need for improvement to communication and engagement. As an alliance we will make it our priority to engage early, with open, honest, and transparent communication and engagement with our stakeholders. This will include communities, businesses, partners, and anyone else we can identify as interested, involved or affected by the work and actions within the Connected by Water Action Plan.

Action 4.1 in the plan is to 'Produce a South Yorkshire wide communication and engagement plan.' The first stage of this will be to understand who our stakeholders are and engage with these stakeholders on the Connected by Water Plan.

How we communicate and engage with people is also important. We will use different methods of communication, recognising not everyone is comfortable using online systems. We will create easy to understand material to help deliver our messages, specifically around explaining how work which is being done in one place could be of huge benefit to people in another location.

We agree with comments received that the plan needs to be clear and written in plain English so everyone can understand what we are trying to achieve. When reviewing and producing our next version of the plan we will make every effort to ensure it is clear for all to understand, considering the comments received in this consultation.

It is important to us that we engage and involve the right people. We want to educate communities and groups and involve them in our decision making and delivery where possible. As an alliance we can learn a lot from engaging with local people and understanding local issues from past and present. As part of our engagement strategy, we will make every effort to understand local issues as part of our evidence base for developing flood schemes.



We asked for suggestions of any groups that may be interested in getting involved in Connected by Water and we received a large number of different groups. As we start to develop our engagement strategy these groups will all be contacted to explore how they can get involved.

### Landowner Engagement

We know that in order to deliver several actions within our plan we will need to engage early with landowners. We are already engaged with several landowners in the catchment, and we will continue to develop these relationships and engage further with other landowners.

### Development/Influencing Policy

We received several comments around the concerns and challenges relating to development in flood risk areas and the impact this may have on others. This is especially challenging considering climate change and what our future holds. To address these concerns, we need to understand the planning system governing the approach of Local Planning Authorities and the role of the Environment Agency (and other Risk Management Authorities) as statutory consultees. The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.

'Local plans' are the key documents through which local planning authorities can set out a vision and framework for the future development of their area, engaging with their communities in doing so. Local plans address needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the local economy, community facilities and infrastructure. They should safeguard the environment, enable adaptation to climate change and help secure high quality accessible design. The local plan provides a degree of certainty for communities, businesses and investors, and a framework for guiding decisions on individual planning applications.

Producing the local plan should be a shared endeavour – led by the local planning authority but in collaboration with local communities, developers, landowners, and other interested parties.

Development planning requires balancing the need for sustainable development and growth with suitably available land. Developments proposed in flood risk areas are required to pass a sequential test and, where applicable, an exception test before approval. The sequential test determines whether there are alternative development sites at a lower risk of flooding which could accommodate the development.

If the sequential test is passed, the exception test shows how flood risk will be managed on the proposed site. An exceptions test needs to show that the sustainability benefits of the development to the community outweigh the flood risk. The proposal will also need to show that the development will be safe for its lifetime considering the vulnerability of its users and that it won't increase flood risk elsewhere. This process is to seek to ensure that development will be safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk to others.



More detail on the planning system can be found here: [Plain English guide to the planning system - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plain-english-guide-to-the-planning-system)

The Environment Agency and other Risk Management Authorities advise local planning authorities on the implications of development proposals on all sources flood risk both now and in the future. You can find a list of Risk Management Authorities and their remits here: [Flood and coastal erosion: risk management authorities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-authorities)

In line with National Planning Policy all new developments are required to limit or reduce surface water run-off from site. Ahead of adoption of national statutory guidance on Sustainable Drainage Systems in South Yorkshire we have been requiring developers to follow our Interim Local Guidance for Sustainable Drainage Systems since 2015. For example, in Sheffield the updated local plan will strengthen existing policies in flood & water management to reduce risk and improve the environment. Further information on this is available on the Planning pages of the Local Authorities websites.

### **Land use/Natural Processes/Environmental Enhancements**

You referred to the importance of considering land use across the catchment to deliver flood risk reduction along with broader environmental improvements. Some of you raised the potential challenge of aligning this with farming needs and food production.

This is a key area of work for the Climate Theme, and we are already engaged with a range of landowners and land managers to take this forward. We will be mapping existing land use to ensure we make the most of what we already have and to identify areas with potential for improvement. Between the project partners and some key stakeholders, we have direct influence over significant areas of upland and in conversation with others we will look to advise and influence on the most mutually beneficial ways forward. Moorland restoration and tree planting, where appropriate, will be part of this work.

### **Climate Change**

You asked how Connected by Water and the project partners are responding more broadly to the climate emergency. Connected by Water's objective is lessening the impacts of and building better resilience to flooding across South Yorkshire.

You questioned some of the wording of the Climate Theme and if Connected by Water is limited to reducing flood risk. We will look to maximise the wider benefits of interventions within the theme, including making environmental improvements and reducing carbon impact.

Connected by Water is however only one part of a much broader response from the project partners to the Climate Emergency. We will revisit some of the text of the document to clarify this and signpost wider plans, programmes, and initiatives where appropriate.



## **Maintenance**

You asked us about several issues relating to current river and drainage maintenance such as gully clearance, and debris and shoal clearance from our rivers and watercourses.

The EA prioritise maintenance work on rivers that pose the greatest flood risk for people, homes, and businesses. Our annual maintenance programme includes a range of activities that are prioritised and timetabled using information from inspections, maintenance standards, levels of flood risk, and from legal and statutory obligations. This allows us to monitor assets, identify damage to earth embankments, structural damage to outfalls/penstocks etc and if required instigates remedial works.

### ***Routine maintenance***

As part of these re-occurring activities, we carry out the following:

- Embankment grass cutting
- Wracking
- Vermin control of embankments
- Conveyance walkthroughs (only in specific locations where properties are present) which includes cutting back vegetation, de-weeding (pioneering works in Financial Year 2021/2022 to allow for better monitoring) and the removal of minor obstructions which are causing an immediate flood risk
- Treatment of Invasive Species
- Maintenance and calibration of telemetry gauge boards and gauges
- Minor repairs to outfalls/penstocks and floodwalls etc to ensure the assets are operational
- Mechanical and electrical tests for pumping stations and penstocks

### ***Intermittent maintenance***

Additionally, we carry out intermittent works such as tree works, repairing defected assets, repairing access tracks, and responding to Public Safety Risk Assessment recommendations including the installation of fencing and signage. We undertake tree works to both improve conveyance within the watercourse and to improve the structural integrity of the embankments. All works are carried out with the approval of our internal Fisheries, Biodiversity and Geomorphological department or framework ecological consultants who advise on environmental and wildlife legalisation and mitigation measures.

The four Local Authorities have a statutory duty to maintain the highway surface water system, this includes the cyclic cleansing and emptying of the surface water network as well as any routine or unplanned maintenance works the network may require. This continuous programme of maintenance reduces the impact heavy rainfall has on the surface water system and improves the resilience to surface water flooding across the South Yorkshire area.

### ***Routine maintenance***

As part of these re-occurring activities, Local Authorities and partners carry out the following:



- Cyclic gully emptying
- Surface water sewer connection clearing
- Trash screen clearance
- Soakaway cleansing & emptying
- Weed and leaf clearance
- Kerb and channel drainage
- SuDS features cleansing

### ***Intermittent maintenance***

Additionally, maintenance and repair works will be carried out on damaged surface water sewers or areas requiring capacity driven upgrades, the four local authorities also carry out critical infrastructure cleansing before and after heavy rainfall and storm events to ensure the capacity of the surface water system is not compromised.

Connected by Water is taking a strategic approach to delivering flood risk reduction at a catchment scale, refocusing local maintenance may play a part in this but if you have current issues with the condition of rivers, watercourses or local drainage then please contact the Environment Agency for main river or your local authority for local drainage issues.

Below are links to the Environment Agency and each Local Authority webpage for reporting flooding and blocked drains.

### **[Flood advice and information – Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council](#)**

**[Report flooding on roads and blocked road drains \(sheffield.gov.uk\)](#)**

**[Drainage and flooding \(barnsley.gov.uk\)](#)**

**[Reporting flooding - Doncaster Council](#)**

**[Report a flood or possible cause of flooding - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)**

### **Funding Challenges/Processes**

#### *Partnership Funding*

Several comments related to the funding process for flood risk schemes. In the past, the government paid the full cost of a limited number of large flood alleviation schemes. There were always more schemes proposed than there was government funding available in any one year. Now, the costs of schemes are shared between national and local sources, under a partnership funding approach. This allows a larger number of schemes to be put in place overall enabling more local choices.

The amount invested in the latest capital flood risk management 6-year investment programme in England has doubled to £5.2 billion for 2021 to 2027. This will better protect 336,000 properties and



is forecast to reduce national flood risk by up to 11% by 2027. It will help to avoid £32 billion of wider economic damages. The programme will invest in around 2,000 new defence schemes. This investment for managing flood risk in England is known as 'Flood Defence Grant in Aid' or 'FDGiA'. This funding can be accessed by a number of bodies responsible for managing flood risk including the Environment Agency, Local Authorities, and Internal Drainage Boards.

The amount of FDGiA allocated to a particular flood scheme is calculated by the number of properties protected; the estimated value of damages being prevented; and other benefits a particular project will deliver, such as environmental improvements. The maximum amount available to any project based on the outcomes it is expected to achieve is expressed as a 'Partnership Funding Score'.

Some flood schemes will be fully funded by FDGiA. However, for many others there will still be a funding gap even after FDGiA has been allocated. In these cases, further partnership funding contributions will have to be sought to be able to meet the full cost of delivering the individual project.

This means many flood schemes that are or have been delivered are made up of a 'patchwork' of funding from different sources. These sources are primarily those organisations where the building of the flood scheme brings particular benefits. Sources of potential investment can include the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, Highways England, Network Rail, Local Authorities, Local Levy, and local businesses.

### Grey Water/Best Practice

The Connected by Water engagement strategy is in development and aspires to encourage members of the community to manage their water usage wisely and slow the flow of water in their homes, businesses, and places of work across South Yorkshire. Feedback from this consultation will be fed into the strategy development.

Yorkshire Water run a social media campaign #loveyorkshirewater to encourage all customers to use water wisely and share tips. More water saving tips can be found here [Yorkshire Water - Save water](#)

### Water Pollution

Some comments were relating to pollution in our watercourses. The Connected by Water action plan contains actions to separate surface water from the combined sewer network to increase sewer capacity and reduce the risk not only of flooding, but also pollution and the use of combined sewer overflows.





### Water Resources

Yorkshire Water produce a Water Resource Management Plan every 5 years which details the plans in place to secure sufficient water supply to homes and businesses across Yorkshire in the face of future challenges such as climate change, population growth and environmental pressures.

Yorkshire Water will continue to manage water resources in this way as per their statutory duties, and this lies outside of the Connected by Water scope. As a lead partner in the Connected by Water Alliance, Yorkshire Water will ensure that the two plans are aligned.

### Enforcement

The Environment Agency enforcement strategy is available online, there is an enforcement in Flood and Coastal Risk Management (FCRM) review currently ongoing and this is likely to be focussed on delivery of more outcomes. The Environment Agency only enforce on FCRM matters on main rivers; planning breaches are dealt with by other organisations.

### Data issues

Flood Risk data is a key element in helping us target our investment to ensure we are achieving the maximum flood risk benefits across South Yorkshire. One action within the plan is the development of the Flood Risk Investment Tool which will be a method enabling us to better focus our investment across South Yorkshire. We will be working with partners, stakeholders and anyone who has relevant data to be shared into the tool. Of course, data alone cannot solve all issues but having the evidence base allows us to make informed decisions alongside other evidence.

This tool will also bring together information on wider investment and funding opportunities, to enable us to proactively identify additional sources of funding to enable further flood risk management schemes.

### Telemetry/Monitoring

We are constantly trying to improve our current gauge network as information collected from these sites feeds into our businesses cases for future works including both Natural Flood Management and hard engineering within the funding limitations. By working collaboratively across different organisations, we can utilise gauges during incidents which can improve our understanding of flood paths and routes. The current telemetry network can be found on the Gov.uk website