

River basin planning: Significant Water Management Issues consultation

Climate change

Question 1: What do you think is most needed to support environmental planners to make informed decisions to deliver measures in the context of climate change? Please select one option and tell us why in the box below:

Open-access datasets to make it easier to use future information in risk assessments and planning activity (please specify below which data you feel are needed but not already available or not accessible in a usable format)

Bespoke products and guidance (please explain using the free text box below)

Training, perhaps aligned to a competency framework, to help environmental planners deepen their knowledge of climate change and skills

Legislation to set out precisely when and how climate change should be considered in environmental plans (please use free text box to suggest how prescriptive this should be)

No Response.

Please tell us why:

No Response.

Changes to water levels and flows

Question 2: What criteria should we consider when deciding where to prioritise abstraction reductions?

No Response.

Chemicals in the water environment

Question 3: What more could we do to provide you with information and materials to help you understand the challenge posed by the chemicals in the water environment?

No Response.

Question 4: What action do you intend to take, if any, in tackling the challenge posed by chemicals in the water environment (e.g. influencing others, communicating the problem to others, changing your behaviour)?

No Response.

Would this action be community level, or as an individual?

Individual

Community

No Response.

Please provide details:

No Response.

Question 5: If there any citizen science initiatives you feel could support this area of work, please provide details

No Response.

Question 6: What additional action do you think public bodies need to take to regulate or address chemicals in the environment to achieve environmental objectives?

No Response.

Invasive non-native species

Question 7: Are there any barriers stopping you adopting good biosecurity when you are in or near water?

No Response.

Question 8: Do you think that our approach to invasive non-native species is appropriate?

No Response.

Question 9: Please share any challenges or good experiences relating to prevention, control, eradication and management:

No Response.

Physical modifications

Question 10: What duties, powers and responsibilities could present, or future water regulators have to effectively respond to, and deliver measures for, physical modification pressures across rivers, catchments and coasts?

No Response.

Question 11: How might these duties, powers and responsibilities evolve to support delivery of measures to deliver water body environmental objectives and wider nature recovery, climate resilience and sustainable development?

No Response.

Question 12: How should success in addressing physical modification pressures be defined and measured in environmental, social, and economic terms?

No Response.

Pollution from agriculture and rural sector

Question 13: How effective do you think current government policies, such as agrienvironment schemes (e.g. payments for environmental land management), or targeted habitat restoration, are in improving water quality?

No Response.

Question 14: How effective do you think farming regulations are in dealing with agricultural pollution?

No Response.

Question 15: What kind of advice and support do farmers and land managers need to take effective action to improve water quality?

No Response.

Question 16: Who do you think is best placed to provide advice farmers and land managers?

No Response.

Question 17: How can trust in advice to farmers and land managers be strengthened?

No Response.

Question 18: Based on your experience, what types of evidence or monitoring would help build confidence in understanding agriculture's impact on water quality?

No Response.

Question 19: How should regulation, financial support, and market incentives be balanced to help the farming sector reduce its contribution to water pollution?

No Response.

Pollution from towns, cities and transport

Question 20: What do you see as the main causes of pollution in urban areas?

No Response.

Pollution from water industry wastewater

Question 21: Which pollution issues linked to water industry wastewater should be prioritised and why?

Pollution from storm overflow discharges due to the significant health impacts for people and wildlife, and the extent to which these spills occur. There have been many instances of illegal spills evidenced, and the severity and duration of storm overflow discharges is contributing to the poor ecological status of waterways. Alongside, essential upgrades to infrastructure and assets with investment to ensure this is fit for purpose.

Question 22: Which measures do you think should be prioritised in dealing with wastewater pollution?

- Stronger and stricter regulation and enforcement action for breaches
- Ensuring that wastewater company work programmes and Asset Management Plans regularly review local plan housing trajectories to ensure infrastructure keeps pace with expected housing growth. Some wastewater infrastructure improvements in our area, particularly at Oxford Sewage Treatment Works, have been delayed and this has had impacts on housing delivery.

Question 23: Is the balance right between taking short term solutions and considering longer, more nature friendly solutions?

No Response.

Question 24: How can new data and technologies help to address pollution from water industry wastewater?

The scale of the pollution from the water industry is so huge and getting more so, that it is an industrial problem which dwarfs the capability of NbS. New data and technologies can absolutely reduce pollution from UK water industry wastewater, but they need to be applied a scale that matches the problem, consistently and backed by regulation and investment.

There are a host of treatment methods that go beyond traditional filtration and biological processes, including: membrane filtration which removes microplastics and fine pollutants, advanced oxidation which breaks down pharmaceuticals and chemicals and nutrient recovery systems capture phosphorus and nitrogen which can be recycled eg [Home - Salinity Solutions : Salinity Solutions](#). Technology alone won't fix the fact that much of the UK's sewer infrastructure was built by the Victorians and overloaded, combined sewer systems still discharge during heavy rainfall and investment and enforcement are ineffectual.

Pollution for abandoned mines - South West and Northumbria River Basin Districts

Question 25: What can be done to address pollution from abandoned mines in these river basin districts?

No Response.

State of nature decline

Question 26: What do you see as the biggest opportunities and barriers to scaling up and accelerating nature recovery through these approaches?

Opportunities

- Multiple benefits from single interventions - eg reconnecting rivers to floodplains improves water storage, reduces downstream flooding, enhances biodiversity, and captures carbon. This "stacking" of benefits makes nature-based solutions far more cost-effective over the *long term* than single-purpose grey infrastructure. (Grey infrastructure is needed in the short term until the sewer infrastructure is fit for purpose).
- Synergies with climate and net-zero goals - eg Peatlands and wetlands are among the UK's largest terrestrial carbon stores, and woodland creation contributes to sequestration targets. Scaling up should encourage the evolution of climate finance (carbon markets, corporate offsetting) as a major funding stream.
- Policy - In the UK, frameworks like Environmental Land Management (ELMs), Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), and 25 Year Environment Plan commitments are pushing land use toward recovery. Nature-based solutions can sit at the centre of all three.
- Public support and co-benefits - Access to green space, improved landscapes, and wildlife recovery tend to have strong public backing, which helps justify investment and political will.

Biggest barriers

- Fragmented funding - Funding is often short-term, competitive, and siloed (flood, biodiversity, carbon all separate). Landowners/ managers face complexity and uncertainty about income streams, which discourages participation at scale.
- Complexity of land use trade-offs - Woodland creation and wetland restoration can compete with agricultural production. Without confidence in Agri-environment schemes viable

financial returns or long-term security, farmers may resist changing land use to Nature-based solutions.

- Governance and coordination challenges – Catchments frequently straddle administrative boundaries. Delivering nature-based solutions at scale requires careful coordination between regulators, local authorities, landowners, non-governmental organisations, and water companies; these groups don't always have the same priorities. This co-ordination requires skilled, experienced officers with a long-term commitment to building relationships across the catchment – they need to be paid well.
- Evidence and confidence gaps - While nature-based solutions benefits are well documented, there's still lack of confidence in some sectors (especially engineering and finance) about reliability, timescales, and performance compared to traditional infrastructure.
- Skills and capacity - Designing and delivering nature-based solutions, especially natural flood management requires specialist expertise that isn't yet widespread.
- Monitoring and governance - To unlock private finance (especially carbon and biodiversity markets), outcomes must be measurable and credible. Monitoring systems can be costly and technically complex.

How could these challenges be overcome (are there good examples we can learn from)?

These challenges are all surmountable with long-term local investment in people and projects. Dedicated, skilled project officers are key to building trusted relationships, developing a project pipeline, seeking funding and delivering long-term gains for people and nature. There are many good examples doing great work eg [Evenlode Catchment Partnership](#), [River Thame Conservation Trust](#) and the [Norfolk Rivers Trust](#).

Question 27: What data and information do you need to target investment and action to deliver wildlife-rich water habitat and benefits for water-dependent species (locally and on a larger scale)?

To effectively target investment and action to deliver wildlife-rich water habitats in the UK, we need to have access (preferably all in one place) to ecological, spatial, hydrological, and socio-economic data at a catchment scale. This list is not exhaustive:

1. Ecological and biodiversity data:
 - Species distribution and abundance
 - Species richness, population trends
 - Presence of invasive non-native species
 - Habitat condition/ quality of rivers, wetlands, ponds, lakes etc
2. Spatial & Habitat Mapping Data:
 - Land use and land cover
 - Habitat connectivity
 - Floodplain mapping
 - Historic maps
3. Hydrological & Water Quality Data
 - River flows and water levels
 - Seasonal variability, drought/flood patterns
 - Groundwater and surface water interactions
 - Water quality
 - Water chemistry
 - Pollutants
 - Catchment connectivity

- Location of barriers to fish passage
4. Pressures, Risks & Drivers of degradation.
- Pollution sources (diffuse agriculture, sewage discharges, road run-off)
 - Water abstraction pressures
 - Physical modifications (channelisation, weirs, dams, dredging)
5. Socio-Economic Data
- Land ownership
 - Agri-environment schemes

Question 28: What actions are needed to enable the recovery of estuarine and coastal environments, ensuring they deliver long-term benefits for biodiversity and climate resilience, while supporting thriving coastal communities?

No Response.

Local Partnerships

Question 29: How can local delivery partnerships be strengthened to better achieve priority outcomes in the water sector, while preserving their unique local relevance?

Every catchment partnership is different. Some catchments are large (in area and membership), well-funded and highly effective; others rely on short-term project funding and limited technical capacity with one or two key individuals doing the work. Catchment Partnerships have the potential to do a huge amount of the heavy lifting around LNRS delivery but currently, funding streams are fragmented, spatially, temporally and financially and partnerships often bid for projects, rather than being trusted delivery bodies. But there's no single mechanism to commission catchment-scale outcomes, except maybe Landscape Recovery which is competitive and few and far between. This keeps catchment partnership work small-scale and reactive. Catchment Partnerships need core, long-term funding to be able to access professional skills (scenario modelling, data analysis, project development, finance, facilitation).

Question 30: What information, guidance, or tools do local partnerships need to drive action towards a healthier water environment with broad environmental, social, and economic benefits?

See answers to Q27 and Q29 but the truth is we can have all the information, guidance and tools known to man but if the water companies continue to be allowed to pollute our water courses then any environmental, social, and economic ambitions will move further and further from our grasp.

Supporting information

Question 31: Do you agree that we are focussed on the potential environmental effects?

No Response.

Question 32: Is there any other information that we should be considering as part of the assessment?

No Response.

Evidence

Question 33: Let us know if there is an issue you consider significant which hasn't been covered in this consultation (tick box that applies or add under 'other')

- Fine Sediment**
- Plastics**
- Microplastics**
- Pollution from abandoned mines**
- Pollution from private domestic treatment plants**
- Other**

No Response.