

North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 18 October 2024

Held at The Old Stables, The Whitaker Museum, Rawtenstall, Rossendale, Lancashire

Attendees:

Members

Adrian Lythgo, Chairman
Councillor James Shorrock, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Jane Hugo, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Phillip Cusack, Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Elizabeth Grey, Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Mhairi Doyle, Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Councillor Laura Crane, Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Amy Cooper, EA Appointed Member – Water and Sewerage Industry
Kate Morley, EA Appointed Member – Conservation
Chris Findley, EA Appointed Member – Development and Sustainable Investment
Carolyn Otley, EA Appointed Member – Communities
Susannah Bleakley, EA Appointed Member – Coastal
Neville Elstone, EA Appointed Member – General Business and Assurance
Carl Green, Chair of the North West and North Wales Coastal Group

Environment Agency Officers Present

Ian Crewe, EA Area Director, Greater Manchester Merseyside and Cheshire (GMMC)
Carol Holt, Area Director, Cumbria and Lancashire Area (C&L)
Nick Pearson, Area Flood Risk Manager (GMMC)
Anthony Swarbrick, Area Operations Manager (C&L)
Adam Walsh, FCRM Programming Manager (C&L)
Sally Whiting, Senior FCRM Advisor (GMMC)
Andy Tester, FCRM Programming Manager (GMMC)
Rachel Harmer, RFCC Secretariat (GMMC)

Local Authority Officers:

Alison Harker, Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Jason Harte, Westmorland and Furness Council
John Davies, Lancashire County Council
Rachel Crompton, Lancashire County Council
Lorah Cheyne, Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Sarah Wardle, Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Francis Comyn, Rochdale Borough Council
Jill Holden, Greater Manchester Combined Authority
David Boyer, Warrington Borough Council
Matt Winnard, Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership
Guy Metcalf, Cheshire East Council
Paul Wisse, Sefton Council

Observers:

Christina Worsley, Newground

Francine Killey, Fernco
Andy Collier, Environment Agency

Presenters:

Tom Doyle, Arup
John Greenway, EA Catchment Engineer (GMMC)
Fiona Stewart, EA Area Incident Team Leader (C&L)

24 (34) Welcome, Chairman's Introduction & Apologies for Absence

Adrian Lythgo opened the meeting, welcomed and thanked guests and Members for travelling to Rawtenstall to see the fantastic RFCC 'Unpave the Way' garden, which has been made possible with the funding the Committee has made available.

Adrian advised apologies for the meeting had been received from Councillor Denise Rollo and Councillor Giles Archibald (Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Councillor Stephen Clarke (Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Councillor Tony Brennan (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Councillor Alan Quinn and Councillor Ged Cooney (Greater Manchester Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Councillor Karen Shore (Cheshire Mid Mersey Strategic Flood Risk Partnership); Paul Barnes (EA Appointed Member – Agriculture); Clare Nolan-Barnes (Blackpool Council); Katie Eckford (Shoreline Management Plan Co-ordinator / Coastal Group Secretariat); Stewart Davies (EA Board Member); Richard Knight (EA Area Flood Risk Manager, Cumbria (C&L)); Fiona Duke (EA Area Flood Risk Manager, Lancashire (C&L)); Ollie Hope (EA Area Flood Risk Manager (GMMC) and Crystal Orton, EA FCRM Project Manager.

Adrian welcomed observers Francine Killey from Fernco and Andy Collier from the Environment Agency, and speakers Tom Doyle, John Greenway and Fiona Stewart.

Adrian referred to his quarterly Chair's Update paper, shared on 8 October, highlighting moves from the new Government on the existing policy agenda and some new organisational arrangements including the Flood Resilience Taskforce and Rural Flood Resilience Partnership.

He reported that, since the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub group meeting, we have been asked to not share specific numbers relating to the national flood investment programme beyond 31 March 2025 in advance of the Autumn Budget statement on 30 October. Discussion around the investment programme will therefore today be slightly constrained but there is a recommendation for the Committee to reconvene to have a specific conversation about our local choices for the forward programme after the national budget event on the 30 October, which will be held virtually.

Adrian remarked about the significant amounts of rain in the North West in the last couple of days and also noted the news reports of major flooding in France, including the city of Lyon, this coming on the back of other international and national flood events over the summer. He reinforced the impact of flooding on people which drives the work of the Committee.

Adrian referred Members to the information papers including the Coastal Update report which covers the Our Future Coast project; the Quarterly Update report from United Utilities which covers how their new county-based approach is progressing, providing for good conversations locally; and finally the North West RFCC response to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation brought together by Chris Findley and Crystal Orton, where they were able to make reference to submissions from individual Local Authorities (LAs), where they were available. Adrian remarked that when pulling RFCC consultation responses together, the RFCC always sticks to the big picture and highlights points of consensus between Sub Regional partnerships to reinforce those responses.

Adrian highlighted the importance of the Local Levy vote for the 2024/25 year to take place during this meeting, and confirmed that we have the right representation around the table. He advised there are a number of correctly nominated substitutions from LLFA Elected Members and asked Members to agree the substitutions:

Members received and approved six correctly nominated substitutions for Members:

- Dave Boyer in place of Councillor Karen Shore (Cheshire Mid Mersey Partnership)
- Jason Harte in place of Councillor Denise Rollo (Cumbria Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
- Councillor James Shorrocks in place of Councillor Stephen Clarke (Lancashire Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)
- Fran Comyn in place of Councillor Ged Cooney (Combined Authorities of Greater Manchester)
- Jill Holden in place of Councillor Alan Quinn (Combined Authorities of Greater Manchester)
- Councillor Elizabeth Grey in place of Councillor Tony Brennan (Merseyside Strategic Flood Risk Partnership)

No Declarations of Interest have been received.

24 (35) Minutes of the RFCC Meeting held on 19 July and actions and matters arising

Members noted a correction required to the date in the heading (from 18 July to 19 July) and, with this correction, the minutes were proposed by Carolyn Otley and seconded by Susannah Bleakley.

The minutes of 19 July 2024 RFCC meeting were approved by the Committee.

Adrian advised there are no specific matters arising that we do not have elsewhere on the agenda and there were no further comments or questions.

24 (36) Recent Flooding Incidents

Adrian referred Members to the information report, which details a small number of properties that have been internally flooded over the last three months, particularly in Merseyside and a

couple in Lancashire. He also reflected there has been some very wet weather in the last couple of days which may well contribute to this picture, but data collection is still underway.

Adrian asked if there were any further comments or updates, noting that yesterday he had heard of some quite serious flooding in the Chester area and in Bootle, but further information on these was yet to be determined.

Dave Boyer advised he was not aware of the flooding in Chester. For Warrington, he updated there were no homes flooded, but it had been a near miss. Some Warrington roads had to be closed for 24 hours due to surface water flooding and some gardens had been flooded. He also commented on the Sankey Brook Scheme where some recent interventions had definitely prevented properties from flooding.

For Cheshire East, Councillor Laura Crane advised she had been unable to get a full flooding update, but was aware of two internally flooded properties and there had been 22 callouts.

Amy Cooper advised that United Utilities (UU) have been very involved in the Bootle flooding incidents, where there have been some 30 internally flooded properties due to prolonged and heavy rainfall. UU are continuing to monitor the situation and Amy thanked Sefton Council and the Sefton Community Centre who were able to help. Members were advised the immediate repairs have been done.

Councillor Mhairi Doyle advised the activity that went into helping during the incident was excellent and highlighted some families had to move out of their homes, with their pets. Members noted many of the residents in the Bootle area are on benefits and she raised her concern about how their relocation would affect their Universal Credit arrangements and the added challenge of then keeping in contact with those affected.

Nick Pearson advised there have been two recent flood events in the Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire (GMMC) area, one on 30 September, and then on 16 October where there were 7 Flood Warnings issued and the Flood Advisory Service was used to advise potential flooding impacts to partners. So far 10 properties have been reported as flooded and there are Community Information Officers out on the ground today to gather more accurate information.

Adrian Lythgo remarked that we are in the middle of October, where we are talking about getting ready for winter, and already the impacts are with us before the traditional winter period has hit. He highlighted operational staff across the organisations have already been stood up to prepare for wet weather for some time.

Carol Holt highlighted that this is the wettest year on record and noted this week is also Flood Action Week so anything that can be done to promote the messages will really help. Adrian referred Members to the National Flood Update which has information on this and highlighted a video on social media that covers a Sussex area surface water flooding example.

Nick Pearson briefly presented a rainfall 'heat map' slide, displaying areas of significant intense heavy rainfall across the North West.

Adrian noted September 2024 has also been the wettest September on record, which sets the context for the rest of the meeting.

There were no further comments or questions.

24 (37) Report from the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub Group

Nick Pearson highlighted the challenge of providing Members with an update on the final two years of the programme, following on from the briefing provided by Ollie Hope at the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub-Group Meeting earlier in October where more specific information was discussed. He advised that since the Sub Group meeting, the Local Choices process has been paused nationally. In the North West we are intending to hold another Sub Group meeting in November, when further information should be available following the 30 October Budget announcement.

He also reported on the significant challenge relating to over-programming in 2024/25, where we have been directed to reduce our over-programme from the 10% target at the start of the year. In July, a national assessment identified a 20% over-programme, which resulted in Areas being asked to assess their programmes in terms of priority to see if this over-programme could be reduced closer to 5%. Nick noted that the allocation for 2024/25 remains unchanged through this process.

Neville Elstone advised there is currently no further information on the Frequently Flooded Allowance (FFA) and the Affordability Allowance (AA) funding streams, both Grant-in-Aid (GiA) funding pots, which should become available following the 30 October Budget announcement.

There were no questions or comments.

Capital programme 2024/25

Andy Tester provided an overview of the current year's (2024/25) programme so far.

Nationally we are on track to deliver the properties better protected from flooding target. The North West are forecasting to better protect 3,234 properties against a target of 2,840. This is made up of 1,892 in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire and 948 in Cumbria and Lancashire. To date, we have better protected 366 properties (221 from the Penketh and Whittle Flood Risk Management Scheme completed in August) and expect to better protect a further 576 properties in the next quarter.

In terms of funding, the North West total is £109.991 Million, which includes £99.579 Million GiA, £7.66 Million Local Levy, and £2.67 Million of Partnership Funding contributions.

The mid-August forecast indicated we are expecting to draw down £121.743 Million, which is circa £12 Million more than allocated, providing a level of over-programming but which is likely to need to be reduced.

The North West actual spend to end of August 2024 was £15.4 Million (up from £8.477 Million at the end of May 2023). This means there is £94.5 Million of the forecast remaining to spend/claim.

The total value of accepted efficiency claims in Quarter 1 was £1.3 Million, which is a relatively low number compared to the number of live projects. However, several claims have already been submitted for Quarter 2. Members noted the schemes that have reported efficiencies to date and the annual target of £9.862 Million.

Andy provided an overview of the EA Resource programme for 2024/25 which includes EA asset maintenance, staff costs and resource projects. This has a total budget of £21 Million, against which the two Areas are forecasting an overspend of £7 Million.

Members received an overview of the growing challenges and pressures around asset maintenance due to EA resource budget and headcount reductions. Members were presented with figures of how the asset maintenance allocation had reduced over the last three years from £6.81 Million in 2022/23 to £6.2 Million in 2024/25.

Specific pressures in Cumbria and Lancashire area (C&L) arising from electricity costs and flood basin compensation payments to landowners, associated with the operation of EA pumping stations and flood storage areas, were noted. Members were advised that approval has been given to overspend against the budget for these costs this year and that the shortfall will be met, but that is for this financial year only. If the budget doesn't increase and the shortfall is not covered, additional budget from the asset maintenance funding will have to be diverted to cover the costs of electricity and compensation payments. Andy advised that asset maintenance is continuing to increase in costs and the same scale of maintenance will not be sustainable going forwards.

Andy explained how the EA is having to refocus maintenance priorities which will prioritise:

- Those assets that are covered by legal compliance measures, so ensuring that flood storage basins and reservoir sites comply with the Reservoirs Act and that we comply with eel passage and environmental legislation.
- Maintenance obligations, where the EA may be riparian landowners or have legal agreements in place.
- High risk assets, which are EA owned, maintained and operated (i.e. flood basins, debris screens, pumping stations, tidal outfalls, embankments and flood walls).
- Watercourse maintenance in high flood risk areas.
- Assets under notice in land drainage areas.

Members noted the risks to the asset maintenance programme including:

- The EA resource maintenance programme must spend to budget.
- Due to resource maintenance budget pressures, inspections of low-risk watercourses and third party owned culverts have been stopped and that Local Authorities and private landowners will now need to consider options to fund these activities within their own budgets.

Andy highlighted the 10 named storms between September 2023 and January 2024, which caused slippages to the programme, and advised we have again seen the same sort of weather disruption during the last couple of weeks. This could impact our delivery over the coming winter months.

Adrian Lythgo remarked that the picture of pressure on the resource maintenance programme is exactly the same in Local Authorities and also, probably to a lesser extent, in United Utilities (UU). He commented that from a public point of view that all maintenance of flood

assets is under pressure at a time and against a backdrop of the climate and weather we have already referred to. Whilst the Committee has to specifically consider the position of the EA, we also need to take account of the wider pressure in the system too. Neville Elstone highlighted the need to ensure we all work together and look for gaps where we can help each other.

Councillor Laura Crane enquired about low-risk water courses and asked if there will be a process for informing LAs. Susannah Bleakley highlighted this will be an issue for other landowners too and asked how we will communicate that there is now a role for landowners to consider options for themselves.

Anthony Swarbrick advised we will need to await the outcome of the October Autumn Statement to see beyond this year. We will need to talk to affected communities and see where the gaps are between work done previously and the work the EA is able to carry out going forwards.

Adrian Lythgo advised that following a discussion at the recent RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub group meeting there was agreement that discussions on this will be held at the Strategic Partnership Group meetings, and tactical and operational meetings, about the exact impacts on particular places as soon as they are known.

Adrian Lythgo advised Councillor Laura Crane there is a commitment to advise Members of the process, but for now there is not a specific answer on how this will happen.

Carolyn Otley advised it would be helpful to have a better understanding of what makes an asset "low risk", so it can be explained to the public. For example, is it low risk because there's only a small likelihood of it failing, low risk because the consequences of it failing are relatively minor, or a combination of these and other factors.

Adrian Lythgo suggested this be brought back to the January 2025 RFCC meeting when we have clearer information and can see what this means for the whole system, not just for particular pressure points.

Local Levy Programme Update

Andy Tester provided an overview of the North West Local Levy programme and reported a total resource at the start of 2024/25 of £16.646 Million, made up of £4.544 Million income, a balance of £10.581 Million carried forward from 2023/24, and £0.521 Million of interest earned on balances. The latest spend forecast for 2024/25 is £8.535 Million which would result in a remaining balance of £7.11 Million at the end of the financial year. This would be a reduction in the balance of £3.471 Million over the year.

Andy presented the graph which indicates how the balance is expected to change over the coming years and advised we are in a strong position and there may be some flexibility for additional use of our Local Levy moving forwards.

There were no further questions or comments.

RFCC Business Plan Update

Sally Whiting provided Members with a brief overview of progress on the Business Plan referring to the additional detail contained within the report. Progress overall on the 21 live projects is good, with 3 completed previously and a further 2 to be completed this quarter, 13 are progressing well and are on track, 2 are slightly behind schedule and 1 project is currently under review.

Sally highlighted the allocation for 2024/25 of £1.337 Million and the current forecast is for £1.441 Million to be claimed, which includes some unclaimed allocations carried over from 2023/24.

Sally highlighted the indicative investment need for 2025/26 is just over £1 Million and shared a graph which shows the even share of benefits from Business Plan investment across the Strategic Partnerships.

Members noted the Sub Group's recommendation to formally recognise the completion of two Business Plan projects.

- Project ID8 – Flood Poverty Project
- Project ID21 - Highways SuDS Design Guide

The Committee noted that the Highways SuDS Design Guide would be finalised shortly.

Sally introduced one new project proposal for the Business Plan, which is an extension to the Unpave the Way project, addressing the paving over of front gardens with impermeable surfaces. She noted that the reason for our meeting being held at Whitaker park today is because it is now home to the Unpave the Way garden, following its time at the RHS Tatton Flower Show in July.

Members noted the details of the presentation provided to the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub group on 4 October, where Members were advised of the significant amount of work still required to engage with a wide range of influencing sectors, and were presented with the proposal to extend the project by a further three years with further funding of £200k.

There were no further questions or comments.

Resolved: Following the recommendations from the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub Group, the Committee:

Capital and Resource Maintenance Programmes:

- Noted the progress on delivering the 2024/25 capital and resource programmes.
- Noted the risks not the North West programme in 2024/25.

Local Levy:

- Noted the current position and latest spend forecast of 2024/25.

Business Plan:

- Recognised the completion of
 - ID8 Flood Poverty Project
 - ID21 Highways SuDS Design Guide
- Supported and approved the continuation of the Unpave the Way (ID12) project for a further three years with an additional Local Levy funding contribution of £200k.

RFCC Business Plan Refresh

As the final update from the Finance and Business Assurance Sub Group meeting, Sally Whiting presented the proposed approach to refreshing the RFCC Business Plan going forwards. Members noted the current NW RFCC Business Plan runs to March 2025. Sally highlighted the Business Plan's five key ambitions, established with a direct line of sight to the ambitions within the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy, advising that these foundations are still very much fit for purpose and continue to cover the full scope of our flood risk management work.

Business Plan implementation is well embedded and the Plan does not need a substantial refresh. Some of the strategic aims under the ambitions would benefit from a light-touch consideration by the lead partnerships, but overall the structure of the plan is still appropriate and fit for purpose. Actions to respond to the strategic aims will continue to be developed and proposed for inclusion.

Members were presented with two options for extending the timeframe of the Business Plan, by one year, and by two years. Sally set out the pros and cons for each. Sally highlighted how option B (two-year extension) has more advantages including fitting better with the end of the current RFCC Chair's term of office. It also fits with the end of the current six-year investment programme.

Adrian Lythgo highlighted to Members that he has recently accepted a two-year extension to his current NW RFCC Chairmanship, which will finish at the end of August 2026.

Resolved: Following the recommendation from the RFCC Finance and Business Assurance Sub Group, the Committee:

- Supported Option B – to extend the time frame of the RFCC Business Plan by two years to March 2027 with light-touch consideration of aims and actions by lead partnerships.

There were no further comments or questions.

24 (38) Local Levy for 2025/26

Adrian Lythgo reminded Members this is the annual formal Local Levy vote where LLFA RFCC Members are asked to consider and vote on the rate of Local Levy funding for the following year (2025/26). This vote takes place in October every year, to provide Local Authority Finance Directors time to feed this into budget preparations for the 2025/26 financial year.

Adrian reminded Members of the wide uses that the Levy is put to and summarised its key uses including contributions to capital schemes as part of partnership funding, the funding of revenue resources to allow important work to be done, including Business Plan projects, and it provides our programme of work with flexibility and momentum, which we would not have otherwise.

He advised that he and the Committee are very aware of the pressure on Local Authorities in terms of their broader funding and noted that the levy counts towards their Council tax cap as Local Authority expenditure and is not a precept. As there is an opportunity cost to the levy the extent to which Authorities choose to raise the Levy reflects the importance that Authorities place on flooding. He highlighted there have been active conversations within sub regional partnerships about what level of Local Levy increase they would like to see and the outcome of these discussions has been that all of the partnerships support a level of Levy increase, which can be considered today.

Adrian asked if there were any comments or general points Members wished to make ahead of the formal vote.

Councillor Laura Crane said that she was pleased to see that pressures within LAs are recognised and stated that any increased demand on budgets is a struggle. She asked whether there could be a possible conversation about changing the funding model for Local Levy, advising that Cheshire East Council are one of the highest contributors to the Local Levy but receive little in return. She suggested that the Levy could be raised more in line with degree of flood risk within an area rather than numbers of properties.

Adrian Lythgo advised Members that the mechanism by which Local Levy is raised is part of national legislation. Should there be a groundswell of authorities that agreed they wanted to see a change, that could be discussed to see if there was a shared starting point. He remarked that from his personal perspective there is a discussion to be had as there has to be a local mechanism to raise resources for flooding, but that any change would need to be agreed by politicians both locally and nationally. He advised that if there was a consensus around the table that wanted to see change then this Committee could then go on to have that conversation with national government. He noted that he did not believe there to be a consensus for change, but that it doesn't mean that we shouldn't check.

Adrian asked if there were any comments from other Councillors, of which there were none.

Adrian then shared his understanding that all partnerships were supporting an increase of 3%. He asked if anyone would like to propose a 3% increase.

Councillor Philip Cusack formally proposed a 3% increase in the Local Levy, which was seconded by Councillor Jane Hugo and Councillor Mhairi Doyle.

The Committee voted that the Local Levy for 2025/26 should be increased by 3%.

Adrian remarked that this agreement is a really strong message to all local communities on how seriously flooding is taken.

On behalf of the Committee Adrian thanked the LLFAs for this support as he is very aware of the revenue pressure on LAs more generally and the other calls LAs have on this funding.

Resolved: The Committee:

- Agreed a 3% increase to the Local Levy for 2025/26

- In accordance with section 23(3) of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 it was agreed that the sum of £4.681 million be met from the levy in 2025/26 and that the Environment Agency issue a levy under section 17 of that Act on those County and Unitary Councils shown below, whose areas are situated in whole or in part in the area of the Environment Agency's North West Flood and Coastal Risk Management Region for the financial year 2025/26 The levies made on those councils shall be paid by them in four equal payments on 1 May 2025, 1 July 2025, 1 October 2025 and 1 January 2026.

County Councils:

Derbyshire, Lancashire, Northumberland, North Yorkshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire.

Unitary Authorities:

Blackburn-with-Darwen, Blackpool, Bolton, Bury, Cheshire West and Chester, Cumberland, Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Sefton, Stockport, St Helens, Tameside, Trafford, Warrington, Wigan, Wirral, and Westmorland and Furness.

24 (39) Asset and Data Mapping Project

Jill Holden and Sarah Wardle provided an introduction to this Business Plan project, which was originally identified as two separate but similar projects, under two different ambitions, and with different leading partnerships, but which were brought together and combined in a joint project venture between the Greater Manchester and Merseyside Partnerships.

As well as being logical, this change also benefitted from sharing workloads, pooling resources and ideas, and commissioning one consultant instead of two.

Tom Doyle from Arup provided Members with an overview of the work done so far, advising the project is about developing collaborative approaches to local flood risk management by:

- Improving the way data about local flood risk assets is collected, recorded and shared
- Facilitating collaboration between RMAs to address issues around complex asset ownership
- Working with public and third-party asset owners to identify opportunities for collaborative asset management and maintenance that make efficient use of available budgets.

Members received some brief detail on the project's three phases:

- Phase 1 – to look at how asset registers are being used, what data is being captured, what systems are being used and what challenges currently exist.
- Phase 2 – to see what the common challenges are, who the stakeholders involved are, what data practices are like, what data platforms are being used and what does 'good' look like.
- Phase 3 – to see why we should collaborate, when we should collaborate, ways which collaboration can be done, guidance on resolution and enforcement and collaboration next steps.

Adrian Lythgo connected the messages in the presentation to the prior conversation about assets and systems and Susannah Bleakley's question regarding third party landowners. He advised this project is going to provide specific solutions to partnerships where it was a particular priority and it will also provide guidance for the other Partnerships.

Jason Harte asked if any work is taking place with the Land Registry around identification of land owners, which Tom confirmed. Jason remarked that it would be good to see the outputs from this.

Jill advised some of the areas identified for case studies are areas with multiple landowners and some of the challenges are in identifying asset owners.

Carl Green supported the project and advised it has lots of synergies with the work going on in relation to coastal infrastructure. He asked about criticality and data sharing and if there has been any success with this. Jill advised more work is taking place with asset registers as they wish to do a gold standard template which all the districts can align to. She also reflected variability in the quality of asset register data and work regarding how information is collected and what systems can be used is still underway. Members heard this collaboration work will look to bring out a model to be used, which could bring about different ways to make best use of funding for maintenance. It was also recognised that we need to look at how we can get private landowners engaged with the process so that we don't have to go down the enforcement route.

Kate Morley highlighted how we engage with landowners will be a really positive output.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Jill, Sarah and Tom for their presentation noting even though the project is only part way through its delivery, there is clearly a lot of value for what is due to come out of a number of case studies.

There were no further comments or questions.

24 (40) Highways SuDS Design Guide

Jill Holden provided an overview of the purpose of the Greater Manchester (GM) Highways SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) Design Guide. Jill emphasised that although the guide has a GM stamp on it, it is completely transferable to all other partnerships.

The purpose of this technical guide is to support the delivery of more SuDS in complex urban environments that are buildable, adoptable, maintainable and value for money:

- Providing greater resilience of the highway network
- Providing an agreed approach to designing and delivering SuDS across GM promoting consistency, quality and supporting delivery
- By becoming a platform for engagement with developers
- By increasing officers' knowledge, skills and confidence to promote and deliver SuDS.

Members were provided with an overview of the development of the guide, its content, the audience it is intended for, the scoping work that took place and stakeholders who provided funding for its development.

The SuDS guide future scenario will:

- Inform development of integrated water management principles and standards as outlined in the GM Integrated Water Management Plan.
- Provide stronger buy-in by LAs in the absence of Schedule 3 bringing in SuDS approval bodies.
- Help leverage capital investment into GM.
- Support transition to delivering SuDS as business as usual, maximising delivery of nature-based solutions as retrofit in existing urban spaces and inclusion in new developments.
- Enable developers to deliver SuDS that LLFAs/LHAs have influence over design and finish and know what has been installed to manage the asset effectively.

Members were advised it is hoped the guide will be adopted and published by the end of October 2024, which will then bring about post adoption activities including member briefings as part of wider GM Streets for All engagement, officer training, public communication and engagement, and the continuing of conversations about the guide on its use within the planning framework.

Adrian Lythgo advised this is a good example of how if one of the partnerships wants to do a piece of work and needs some funding to get it going, the RFCC can play its part through its support. Also, if early engagement with other partnerships takes place this can also help guide the project.

Councillor Elizabeth Grey asked how this is being aligned with the Unpave the Way work as the benefits of SuDS retrofit projects could be reduced if householders continue to pave over their front gardens and increase surface run-off. Jill advised the Unpave the Way work is still evolving and the two initiatives will be complementary and work in parallel. There is a key difference in target audience as the SuDs guide is more internally focussed on LAs/highways engineers where the Unpave the Way work is outward facing, appealing to homeowners. Adrian made the link to the upcoming presentation on the Unpave the Way project which includes interesting data on dropped kerb applications for example.

Lorah Cheyne suggested it would be worth bringing this presentation to the Strategic Flood Risk Partnership Groups and Jill advised the guide is just awaiting sign off and engagement activities will then be clarified.

Chris Findley advised this is a really good piece of work. Carol Holt advised that she is aware of Susdrain and asked how the Committee can help to ensure this all feeds in in an appropriate way. Jill advised the guide does not replicate the details within Susdrain, this guide is a two-way process and all about signposting.

Adrian Lythgo thanked Jill for her presentation and there were no further comments or questions.

Sally Whiting, Rachel Crompton and Lorah Cheyne provided an overview of the Unpave the Way project for Members, following the relocation of the garden after the RHS Show at Tatton Park to Whitaker Park.

Rachel Crompton reinforced how happy the Friends of Whitaker Park are to have become the garden's custodians and will take over the responsibility of the garden. There was a small opening ceremony on 5th October which was an opportunity to help to communicate what sustainable gardening is and that it's the right thing to do.

Members noted Lloyds Banking Group are currently preparing a case study on the Unpave the Way Garden.

The Committee were advised of the future plans for the project, which will focus on different target sectors as well as including plenty of further research. One element will be exploring data on dropped kerb applications received by LAs to see how many have been approved and the correlation between these approved applications and new driveway creation.

Members noted currently 6 out of 24 Local Highways Authorities in the North West require proof of planning permission for a new driveway during the dropped kerb application process, which highlights opportunities to strengthen the process to ensure householders do gain planning permission for impermeable driveways exceeding five square metres.

The presentation also covered research findings on key barriers to sustainable front garden design, including lack of knowledge of SuDS amongst the public and not understanding the bigger picture about flood risk, financial constraints, challenges of finding contractors with suitable skills and experience, lack of knowledge about what permeable products are available, and about soil and how to manage clay soil situations.

The presentation highlighted the RHS shows survey result (186 respondents) that 70% of respondents were not aware of the requirement for planning permission requirement for impermeable surfacing exceeding five square metres.

Lorah Cheyne provided an overview of the project's next steps, including a Householder SuDS Guide, which once finalised will be available to be downloaded from the Flood Hub; and community engagement, prioritising engagement with those areas that are frequently flooded. The project will also be working with Local Authorities on strengthening things through the planning process and via website information to residents. It will also be raising awareness with the contractor sector. Members were provided with an overview of the measures of effectiveness that will be reflected upon.

Adrian Lythgo highlighted the Committee have already approved the next stage of the project and noted the ambitious scope of activity for the project's next phase. He commented that each person that leaves the meeting today is a champion of the work that has been shared today and encouraged all to share it further within our networks.

Ian Crewe advised this is an excellent project and asked if there are any plans to engage with MPs and particularly those in more greener areas, and also with schools. Sally Whiting advised the project is seeing schools as very much a part of this network and will build on educational material already available on The Flood Hub.

Councillor Philip Cusack advised he is pleased to see the planning element, noting there are a few enforcements underway for people paving over their front gardens. He advised the 2009 Planning Guidance is out of date and asked if we can look at the guidance for people installing artificial turf and asked for this to be included in the project also.

Councillor Jane Hugo enquired about community engagement and being able to access champions and local Councillors who can add value to this project and can share the information through libraries and friends of local parks.

Chris Findley advised that cumulatively this project will create a big impact and highlighted lots of people are unaware of planning conditions and of the need for greener front gardens. He asked if LAs are asking new home builders to install permeable driveways and should we be in a position where the requirement should be that the area is permeable unless there is good reason why it shouldn't be.

Adrian Lythgo advised with regard to Councillor Hugo's point, this could be facilitated by this group. Rachel Crompton advised that we can encourage permeable driveways on new homes as a preference.

Councillor Elizabeth Grey asked if we are able to identify which LAs are requiring proof of planning permission within dropped kerb applications. Sally responded that this data would be made available through the partnerships.

Sally Whiting advised that UU have been a key player in this project and advised they also have a wide reach for community engagement and a suggestion was made for them to signpost people to best practice, which Amy Cooper supported.

Fran Comyn advised it is important to ensure that rain gardens are designed to be easily maintained and are properly maintained, as there are examples of rain gardens not being cared for and therefore drying out.

Adrian Lythgo advised in the last three presentations we have had feedback on three very different projects, each of them trying to spread the flood resilience message and do very practical things that will impact on flooding and more broadly impact people's lives.

There were no further comments or questions.

24 (42) RFCC Sharepoint Site

Sally Whiting provided a very brief tour of the new North West RFCC Sharepoint site shortly to be launched to RFCC Members and support officers.

The site has been constructed in a way that is easily accessible to all.

Although slightly delayed due to capacity issues, a soft launch of the site will be done in mid-November to key users in order to review and confirm its content. Following this the site will then be rolled out to all RFCC Members and support officers. The Committee noted this is not a public website, but an internal site for the North West RFCC and partnership groups to enable us to share information more easily.

There were no further comments or questions.

24 (43) Winter Readiness

Nick Pearson advised Members he is keen to show what the EA are doing in terms of winter readiness across the North West as we move into the winter season.

For the GMMC Area, John Greenway conveyed the key message that officers are trained, resilient and ready for the winter ahead. He provided an overview of the recent Exercise Hayhurst for EA Duty Officers on the Northwich Flood Alleviation Scheme.

The Committee were advised regular catchment tours have been conducted for field incident support officers, so they are trained and ready for the winter period. Duty rotas are fully resourced. Multi-agency training has recently been carried out near Toddbrook Reservoir, and training has also taken place with EA Framework Contractors. Operational procedures are in place and we are currently ahead of asset inspections and maintenance targets.

On behalf of Cumbria & Lancashire Anthony Swarbrick advised that testing and training exercises have recently been conducted at Durranhill Pumping Station in Carlisle, the Tesco sliding flood gate in Carlisle, Cockermouth Self Closing Barrier, and the Garstang Flood Basin Control Gate, to name a few.

Fiona Stewart provided an overview of staff in the incident rooms and the work to ensure they are trained and ready for events. Members noted both the GMMC and C&L incident rooms have been audited and following the Covid-19 pandemic, people are returning back to work from the office. Training is taking place for new duty teams on reservoir awareness and flood exercises are being worked through, alongside exercises for environmental incidents.

Fiona then reminded all Members of preparations for looking after ourselves during the winter, which include; making sure phones are charged and charging cables are packed, checking weather prior to travelling and packing extra items in your car such as warm clothing, torch, food and drink and a warning triangle.

Members received an overview of winter readiness procedures from a Lancashire County Council Highways perspective covering gritting operations and equipment, sand and salt stocks, training of drivers and supervisors, and trial of a new 'Where's my Gritter' app.

Adrian Lythgo thanked the presenters and thanked Lancashire County Council for bringing this together for us as an example.

Carol Holt advised there are other ideas for winter readiness that we can take on board that are already taking place in other parts of the country.

Amy Cooper advised UU are carrying out lots of activities in advance of the winter period including carrying out infiltration reduction plans across Cumbria, inspecting storm overflows prior to November, being involved in the multi-agency response training exercise at Northwich FAS, and conducting a Winter Wise campaign for all customers

24 (44) Any Other Business

Adrian Lythgo formally introduced Amy Cooper to Members, recently recruited as the new EA-appointed Water and Sewerage Industry representative on the RFCC.

Amy introduced herself to Members, advising she is the Wastewater Quantity Strategy and Planning Manager at UU, based within the Regional Planning Team.

Adrian highlighted this has been Flood Action Week, which is always a great opportunity to take the national campaign and localise it and cascade the information as far as possible.

Adrian thanked Members for their attendance and contributions and advised following lunch there is an opportunity to visit the Unpave the Way garden within Whitaker Park.

The next RFCC meeting will be held via MS teams on Friday 24 January 2025.