



# Fens 2100+ Case for Change and Partnership Action Plan

Enabling partnership investment in critical coastal,  
flood and water management infrastructure

March 2026





# Foreword



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Chair of Anglian Northern Regional  
Flood and Coastal Committee



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## From strategy to action

The Fens are entering a period of significant and accelerating risk. Ageing assets, increasing climate pressures, and growing expectations from communities and industry mean that our existing approach to managing water, flood, and coastal risks is no longer sufficient. The evidence is clear: without timely and coordinated intervention, the resilience of this nationally important region will continue to decline, increasing long term costs and exposing communities, infrastructure, and the wider economy to avoidable risk.

The Fens 2100+ Partnership provides a shared platform for addressing this challenge. Built on strong principles and cross sector collaboration, it aims to secure a climate resilient future for the Fens by aligning investment, strengthening system performance, and ensuring the decisions we take today are the right ones. This directly supports the core purposes of the Regional Flood and Coastal Committees (RFCCs): enabling coherent regional planning, encouraging efficient and risk based investment, and strengthening links across all Risk Management Authorities (RMAs).

This Case for Change sets out why decisive action is required. It highlights the urgency to enhance the health of existing assets, shift from reactive maintenance to proactive system resilience, and move towards system level investment that brings together place-keeping and place-making endeavours. These actions are essential because, without the critical flood, coastal, and water management assets, and the day to day management that sustains them, the Fens simply would not exist.

The next decade will be critical. The 17 point Partnership Action Plan outlines a targeted programme of actions to halt decline, build asset resilience, and position the region to secure the right investment at the right time. It also provides a clear framework for aligning flood and coastal management with broader social, environmental, and economic priorities, ensuring value for money and long-term benefit for local communities.

The Fens has a long history of innovation and collective stewardship. With clear direction and coordinated action, we can continue that legacy: protecting communities, supporting sustainable growth, and strengthening the resilience of this nationally significant region.

# Our Partnership

This partnership report is written for and on behalf of the Fens 2100+ Partnership, including regional leadership and representation from:



This document builds on a number of previous studies including:

- Future Fens Integrated Adaptation Manifesto
- The UK Fens Climate Change Risk Assessment, Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research
- Fens 2100+ Outcome Statements
- Fens 2100+ Systems Insights
- Fens 2100+ Summary Baseline Report and Catchment Baseline Reports

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This document has been produced by Arup in collaboration with the Environment Agency, Rivelin Bridge and the Fens 2100+ Partners as part of a wider programme of work, drawing from engagement across the area and sector.

**Key**

- Fens 2100+ study area
- Key asset
- Main Rivers
- Tidal Main Rivers



# Navigating this report

This Case for Change is structured in three parts:

## 1. What the evidence tells us

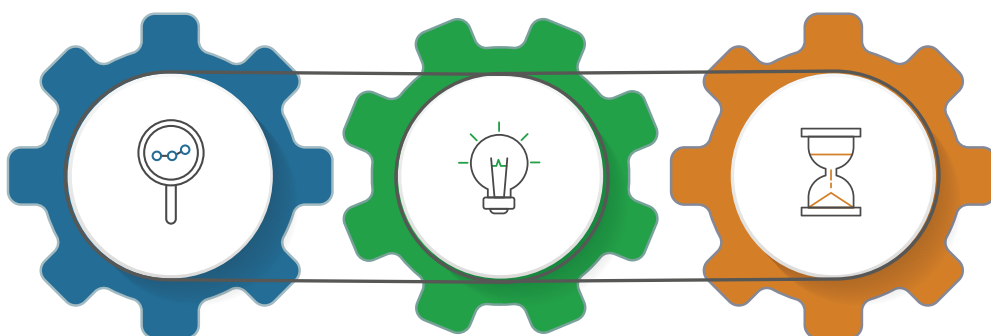
Drawing evidence from the Fens 2100+ summary baseline report, and other documents produced since 2020, this section sets out the need for change. This evidence has revealed challenges related to the current and future vulnerability of the asset system that the region depends on for everyday safety, security and prosperity.

## 2. Transforming our approach

Given the evidence we now hold, it is essential that we continue to innovate and transform our approach to asset management. This requires aligning asset strategies and regional investment priorities to maximise impact. This section sets out a partnership approach to halting the decline in our assets, embracing opportunities to deliver lasting benefits for current and future generations, and secure sustainable regional investment for the years ahead.

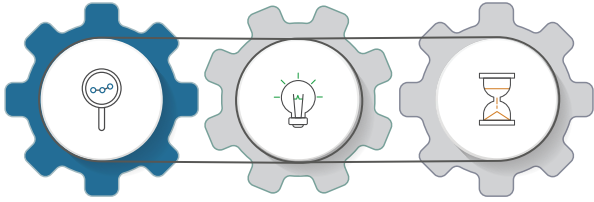
## 3. Our Partnership Action Plan

This section sets out the commitments of the Fens 2100+ Partnership over the next two years. The 17 point Partnership Action Plan includes actions and initiatives to secure a Decade of Action and investment, and align asset management and regional growth and investment strategies.





"Together, we are transforming our approach to secure a climate-resilient future for the Fens."



## Our journey to date

### Building the Case for Change



**JULY 2020**

Fens measure included in the national Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy.



**JUNE 2021**

Tidal River Nene Baseline Evidence Report completed.

**SPRING 2023**

Fens 2100+ began work, including stakeholder interviews which influenced setting up a partnership board and programme governance.

**APRIL 2024**

Outcomes workshops collaboratively developed for four plausible and possible futures for the Fens, underpinned by investment in flood risk infrastructure.



**OCTOBER 2024**

The UK Fens Climate Change Risk Assessment outlined key climate risks in the Fens and the urgency for change.

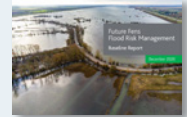


**NOVEMBER 2025**

Catchment baseline reports produced the first complete picture of the asset system.

**DECEMBER 2020**

Future Fens: Flood Risk Management Baseline Report set an evidence baseline for the Great Ouse catchment.



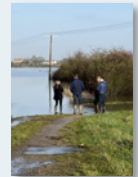
**NOVEMBER 2021**

Future Fens Integrated Adaptation Manifesto was launched at COP26, setting out ten key strategic outcome ambitions of the Taskforce.



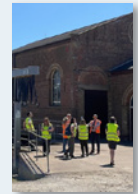
**DECEMBER 2023**

Site visits during winter 23/24 revealed impacts of flooding during this period, including meetings with flood-affected farmers.



**SUMMER 2024**

Lived experience workshops and site visits across the Fens to better understand the reality of challenges and operations of the assets.



**JANUARY 2025**

System Insight Stories set out landscape-scale insights and understanding of the system, wider context of the area, and how to work together.



**DECEMBER 2025**

The Case for Change. Our plan for immediate actions over the next two years.



# What the evidence tells us

## Measure 1.5.4 of the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy (2020)

This measure set out the need for a long-term plan for managing future flood risk in the Fens. The first step was to gather data to produce a comprehensive evidence baseline across the whole Fens system.

### History of change

The Fens today reflect investment decisions made over the last 400 years. Large-scale drainage schemes transformed wetlands into productive farmland, a success achieved through collective action and shared responsibility. This history offers hope: when stakeholders unite behind a common purpose, dramatic change is possible.

### Critical infrastructure

Unlike most landscapes, the Fens cannot exist without active water management. 87% of land in the Fens is below the mean spring tide level, making it extremely vulnerable to flooding from rivers and the sea. The safety and productivity of this man-made landscape depends entirely on the active management of a complex network of Flood and Coastal Risk Management (FCRM) assets. These must be operated 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

### A single asset system

The resilience of the Fens relies on an integrated system of approximately 17,000 assets, including: 271km of tidal defences, 1,082km of Main River defences, six flood storage areas, together with the pumping stations, watercourses and sluices which drain the low-lying land.

Approximately 35% of assets are owned and managed by the Environment Agency, with 65% the responsibility of the Internal Drainage Boards, other Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) or riparian owners. Many of the assets are multi-purpose, managing water for flood risk reduction, navigation, water resources and environmental value. The expertise of asset managers is therefore critical.

Because these assets are interconnected, failure in one part can cascade across the system. This interdependence demands investment and maintenance strategies that treat the Fens as a single, integrated system, and not a patchwork of local interventions.

### Asset condition

The baseline reports reveal a critical and unsustainable situation: an ageing asset system under acute stress, operating beyond its intended capacity. By 2040, 31% of assets in the Fens are predicted to be beyond the end of their foreseeable design life. Many embankments are more than 125 years old and pre-date modern engineering standards. Furthermore, climate change is accelerating risks to crucial embankments, pumping stations and sluices.

Particular challenges have been identified, including at Dog-in-a-Doublet Sluice, the Denver Complex, Hobhole Pumping Station, and many of the Main River embankments. The future use of the Crowland and Cowbit Washes also requires partnership decisions. Choices about these and other assets will influence the wider system and present opportunities for early action and learning.

## Climate risks

Present day risks from chronic stresses to ageing critical infrastructure and acute stresses from extreme weather events are already being compounded by climate change.

Alongside sea level rise, the UK Fens Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) and baseline reports identify multiple, compounding hazards including higher peak flows in rivers, increased surface water, more frequent and severe droughts, and increased heat risk. All of these will place greater strain on the ageing FCRM asset system, as well as agricultural productivity, biodiversity and human health.

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“Looking to the future, climate change (including sea level rise and other climate related trends) alongside socio-economic drivers is set to increase these challenges. If current and future risks are to be well managed, strategic choices need to be made today about the long-term vision of the Fens and investment secured to realise that vision. This is an urgent need, and not one that can be delayed. In the absence of an agreed vision, investment in mal-adapted infrastructure and stranded assets is a real risk. Sea levels will continue to rise for decades and centuries to come...and although the future is yet to be revealed, much is known, providing a window of opportunity now to set out a future vision for the Fens that responds and builds resilience to these challenges.”

Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research

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## Rivers and the sea

Flood risk in the Fens is shaped by the interaction between rivers and tides. Tide levels in The Wash control river discharge and add risks through tidal flooding, as seen in the tidal surge of 2013.

Decisions on where the coastline and tidal limits are held alter the landscape response

and the wider flood risk management approach. The inland system is completely dependent on the shoreline system, making cohesive management of both essential.

## What is at stake: the value of the Fens

The Fens is an area of enormous regional and national significance. It contains 48% of England's Grade 1 agricultural land, produces a third of England's vegetable crops, and supports 80,000 jobs in the food supply chain. The region holds more than 4,000 cultural heritage assets, as well as vital transport and energy infrastructure. It delivers £500 million of natural capital benefits annually. Failure to safeguard this region would threaten this value, and the lives and livelihoods of more than 600,000 people.

## Beyond business as usual

The scale and urgency of the challenge means that current 'fix-on-fail' approaches to asset replacement cannot keep pace with the growing risks. The investment required is in the billions, far exceeding current budgets and demanding a step-change in how we plan, fund, and deliver infrastructure renewal.

Without this urgent change, the ageing FCRM infrastructure will deteriorate further, increasing the likelihood of catastrophic asset failures, such as embankment breaches or the break-down of pumping stations or sluices, resulting in widespread flooding.

## A call for innovation

To combat this threat, innovation and collaboration are essential. Throughout the history of the Fens, collective action has transformed the landscape, through vision, collaboration and a willingness to innovate to adapt to the problems of their time. This legacy provides a strong foundation for tackling today's complex risks.

## What is needed?

### A Partnership for change

The Fens is a man made landscape that requires constant management. Without critical flood, coastal, and water management infrastructure, the Fens simply would not exist. This infrastructure is fundamental to the Fens and the economic vitality of the surrounding region.

Continuing with current asset management approaches will not be enough to safeguard communities, agriculture, and the environment; or support regional growth and long-term resilience.

### Collaboration

No single organisation can solve this challenge alone. Strategic coordination and governance is essential. Effective asset management in the Fens will require collaboration across multiple agencies, authorities and stakeholders.

### Flood, coastal and water security

Managing this complex landscape requires a systems-based approach that recognises that flood management decisions affect, and are affected by, other choices.

Decisions about flood infrastructure must align with broader strategies such as the Shoreline Management Plan, regional water resource plans including the proposed Lincolnshire and Fens reservoirs, and Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

### Growth and resilience

Investment decisions must also play a central role in delivering the Government's Growth Agenda, by safeguarding one of the UK's most economically significant and strategically connected regions.

The Fens support vital east–west and north–south connectivity, securing road, rail and energy corridors linking Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk. Protecting this infrastructure is essential to sustaining economic stability and future growth in cities such as Lincoln,

Peterborough and Cambridge, where housing and employment opportunities rely on flood resilience and water security.

Decision-making must also reflect the nationally significant contribution the Fens make to food security and innovation. The region's unique agricultural and environmental assets underpin high-value, globally competitive sectors such as life sciences and agri-tech, where continued success will depend on reliable water management and resilient infrastructure.

### Investment

The investment demand to improve asset health and performance across Environment Agency and Internal Drainage Board assets is projected to be in the order of £6-9.4 billion. It is forecast that 50% of this investment is needed within the next four decades to sustain the current Standard of Service.

To further safeguard the region against climate change, and provide the confidence and capacity to support regional growth, additional investment will be required to adapt and transform the asset-system.

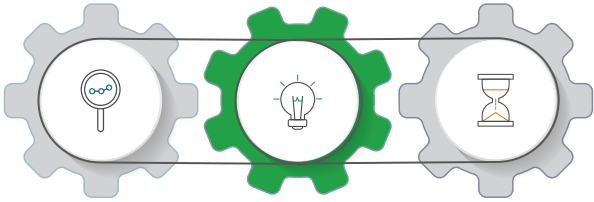
The scale of investment cannot be met by public finances alone. It will therefore be necessary to work with stakeholders and beneficiaries to explore innovative funding and finance models, to secure local contributions and private investment.

### Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

Learning from past events, new evidence, and the experience of RMAs will be essential to promote effective management strategies which are responsive to emerging risks and opportunities.

### A carbon strategy

The high energy demand of the FCRM asset system, driven largely by the need for pumping, adds to its vulnerability and the increasing cost of asset operation and renewal. A clear strategy for carbon reduction is needed to increase resilience.



## Transforming our approach

Securing a climate resilient and vibrant future for the Fens



### A TURNING POINT

Business as usual is no longer an option. Urgent change is needed.



### SHARED COMMITMENT

The Fens 2100+ Partnership



### SECURING THE RIGHT INVESTMENT

The right money, at the right time, in the right places, on the right things, and in the hands of the right people.



### DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

Responding to evidence and insights to deliver benefits for current and future generations.



### SHIFTING THE PARADIGM

- Asset health and resilience
- System-level investment



### PLACE-KEEPING & PLACE-MAKING

A bold programme of actions to halt asset decline and deliver regional growth and prosperity.



### A DECADE OF ACTION

17 point Partnership Action Plan

# Transforming our approach

## A turning point

The evidence is clear: business as usual is no longer sustainable. Urgent action is required to safeguard people, agriculture, and the environment, and to provide the confidence needed for future regional investment, growth and prosperity. The combined pressures of ageing infrastructure, accelerating climate change, and rising societal expectations mean that continuing with traditional water management, flood and coastal resilience practices, without significant adaptation and investment, will fall short.

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“The future of the Fens cannot be secured through local tactical actions to improve a particular barrier or embankment, but demands a long term ‘whole of Fens’ strategy...that is appropriately transformative (to address the big challenges) and reflects the critical timescales for action”.

### Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research

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To meet these challenges, we must rethink and transform our approach, embedding resilience, innovation, and long-term planning into every decision. This is not optional; it is essential to protect the Fens, secure economic stability, and deliver on the ambitions set out in the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England (2020), the UK Infrastructure – A Ten-Year Strategy (2025), The UK’s Modern Industrial Strategy (2025) and The UK Government Resilience Action Plan (2025).

## A shared commitment

The Fens 2100+ Partnership is resolved to address this challenge and committed to shaping a climate-resilient and vibrant future for the Fens. We will work collaboratively with organisations such as the Future Fens Integrated Adaptation Taskforce and Water Resources East to deliver integrated solutions.

The Fens 2100+ Partnership is founded on a set of principles that are fundamental and non-negotiable:

- The Fens is nationally and regionally significant, underpinning food security, economic prosperity, environmental value, and community wellbeing.
- FCRM assets are critical to sustaining this value, providing the infrastructure that protects people, businesses, and ecosystems.
- Maintaining these assets is becoming increasingly challenging, as pressures from climate change, ageing infrastructure, and resource constraints intensify.
- Urgent action is required now to safeguard this unique region and its benefits for future generations. Delay will increase costs, risks, and the scale of future interventions.
- No single organisation can meet this challenge alone. Collaboration across sectors, governance levels, and disciplines is essential to deliver integrated, long-term solutions.

This shared premise provides the starting point for coordinated action, clear accountability, and innovative approaches to investment and planning. It guides the approach to transformation and action planning described in this Case for Change.

## Securing the right investment at the right time

The history of the Fens, spanning sixteen generations, demonstrates what ambition, targeted investment, and collaboration can achieve in managing water, assets, and transforming landscapes. Building on this legacy, our future responses must remain intentional, innovative, and sharply focused, because the need for action is urgent.

Evidence shows that much of the region's critical FCRM infrastructure is ageing and increasingly vulnerable. At the same time, climate risks projected for the 2040s, such as rising sea levels, more intense rainfall, and prolonged droughts, will bring more frequent and severe challenges. With long lead-in times required for major investment and system upgrades, the window for action is now. Delay will only escalate costs and compound risks for communities, businesses, and the environment.

To achieve current and future goals, we must creatively secure the right money, at the right time, in the right places, for the right things, and in the hands of the right people. This will require continued technical innovation, alongside governance and investment models that put people and place at the heart of impactful decision-making. The scale of investment required will need both public and private investment to meet the asset challenge and realise the full potential of the region.

The pace of this transformation cannot be delivered by engineering and technology alone; it will depend on collaboration, trust, and shared purpose.

## Drivers for change

The evidence presented in the Baseline Reports, alongside other partnership resources such as The UK Fens Climate Change Risk Assessment and emerging regional spatial plans, provides a strong strategic foundation for decisive action. To build and strengthen the Fens 2100+

Partnership, it will be critical to continue harnessing new and emerging data, lived experience, and foresight.

This approach will enable us to confidently shape regional choices, align flood and coastal investment priorities, seize funding opportunities, and future-proof decisions.

The futures explored with regional stakeholders underscore the vital role of water management and flood and coastal infrastructure in safeguarding the Fens. These systems are essential not only for the safety of local communities, but also for agriculture and food security, the health of terrestrial and marine habitats, and effective land use and carbon management. Many of these challenges carry regional, national, and even international significance.

Decision-making must therefore serve both current and future generations, addressing regional and national needs. This requires looking beyond immediate pressures to ensure investments are resilient and adaptive. Climate change, population growth, and economic transitions will shape the Fens for decades to come. Our choices today must anticipate and respond to these long-term dynamics.

## Shifting the paradigm

To secure timely and effective investment and respond to the broader drivers for change, we must transform how we manage and invest in flood and coastal infrastructure. This shift is critical to delivering national policy ambitions and aligning with recognised best practice in asset management.

As a partnership, we propose to prioritise asset health and resilience, moving decisively beyond reactive maintenance and "fix-on-fail" approaches. By extending the life of existing assets, optimising performance, and halting decline, we will maximise the value of our finite resources and ensure that every pound spent strengthens the system against future shocks and stresses.

Secondly, we will transition to system-level investment across all partners, treating assets not as isolated components but as parts of an interconnected network.

This approach will:

- Enable integrated solutions that address the entire asset system: coastal defences, Main River defences, flood storage areas, and pumped and gravity drainage systems.
- Reflect the multiple functions of the assets, supporting wider land-use planning, socio-economic priorities, and environmental ambitions.
- Unlock innovation in funding and finance, by aggregating investments where beneficial to scale and attract both public and private investment.

Together, the shift toward asset health and resilience, combined with system-level investment, will enable us to better manage near-term acute risks such as flooding, while taking early action to address chronic risks including sea-level rise and ageing infrastructure. This paradigm shift will position us to deliver an asset-system that is resilient, adaptive, and sustainable; one that protects communities, supports economic growth, and meets the challenges of a changing climate.

### Alignment with NEPC’s “Reviving Our Ageing Infrastructure”

The National Engineering Policy Centre 2025 report reinforces the urgency and direction of our proposed paradigm shift. It calls for proactive maintenance, system-level coordination, and innovative funding, principles at the heart of our approach.

By prioritising asset health and resilience, we respond directly to the report’s evidence that early intervention delivers significant economic and risk-reduction benefits. Our commitment to system-level investment reflects NEPC’s recommendation for integrated stewardship across interconnected infrastructure networks.

Finally, by strengthening governance and unlocking new financing models, we align with the report’s enablers for change, ensuring that our strategy is not only ambitious but grounded in best practice and national policy priorities.

### Place-keeping and place-making

Building on lessons from strategic investment programmes on the River Thames, the Humber, and the Lincolnshire Coast, this transformation will be delivered through a bold and integrated programme of:

- Place-keeping actions that support Risk Management Authorities in halting asset decline and safeguarding the security of the region.
- Place-making actions that enable regional Partners, including Local Government, the Coastal Group, and the Future Fens Integrated Adaptation Taskforce, to align flood and coastal strategies with wider spatial planning and growth ambitions, ensuring integrated, future-ready infrastructure and sustainable development.

This approach will strengthen governance and funding arrangements, creating a clear and accountable framework for delivery. It will enable the rapid implementation of no-regrets asset management investments, essential actions that deliver immediate value and reduce risk in the near-term. It also lays the groundwork for long-term strategic decision-making. By aligning flood and coastal strategies with spatial planning and economic growth priorities, we can ensure that future infrastructure and development are resilient, adaptive, and aligned with national objectives.

In short, this dual focus on near-term action and long-term planning will give partners greater certainty, unlock investment opportunities, and position the region to respond to a changing climate with confidence and clarity.

## A Decade of Action

The Fens 2100+ Partnership is committed to driving a step-change in how we collectively manage and deliver asset resilience across the Fens system. Our shared responsibility demands bold thinking and collaborative action. Key questions at the heart of this transformation, include:

- How do we collectively deliver 21<sup>st</sup> Century asset management in the Fens to improve asset health and achieve value for money for the partners, the public and the region?
- What should a future-ready asset system look like in 10 years? Where should we focus resources to deliver an impactful Decade of Action and secure the necessary public and private investment?
- How do we align water management, flood and coastal strategies with regional growth and prosperity? How can we sustainably meet the needs of current and future generations?

These questions underpin the 17 point Partnership Action Plan set out in the next section. The Plan is designed to complement the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy and to align the efforts of the two Regional Flood and Coastal Committees and their partners, ensuring that regional and local responses are coordinated, effective and impactful.

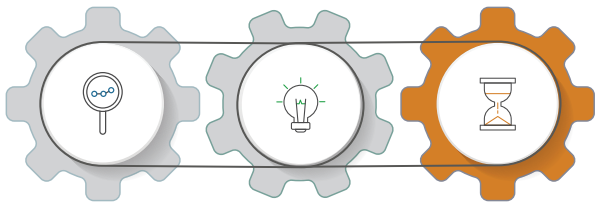
Over the next two years, the Partnership Action Plan will lay the groundwork for a **Decade of Action**, turning strategic ambitions into targeted capital and revenue investment and coordinated partnership delivery. The plan addresses all four pillars of resilience:

- **Plan** – taking proactive steps to prepare for and adapt to the current and future impacts of climate change, while responding to the specific asset management needs and ambitions of local places.
- **Protect and Maintain** – reducing flood risk to safeguard communities and critical locations, supported by essential maintenance, renewal, and where necessary, decommissioning of infrastructure.
- **Respond** – strengthening the ability of people and places to effectively manage and respond to flooding incidents.
- **Recover** – enhancing the capacity of communities and places to rebound quickly and sustainably after flooding events.

The Partnership Action Plan recognises that transformation is not a one time intervention but an ongoing process. To support collaboration, innovation and continuous learning, a monitoring and evaluation framework will be embedded within the Action Plan. This will ensure every decision strengthens resilience and accelerates progress toward a climate-resilient, thriving Fens.



"Securing the right money, at the right time, in the right places, for the right things, and in the hands of the right people."



# Fens 2100+ Partnership Action Plan (2025-2027) and commitments

## Goal



**"Transform investment in critical FCRM infrastructure to halt asset decline, overcome funding challenges, and create a vibrant, climate-resilient Fens for generations to come."**

## Outcomes



- 1. Strengthen asset health and resilience**
- 2. Secure a Decade of Action and investment**
- 3. Agree the long-term mission**

## Key Outputs



- **Strategic Outline Case for a Decade of Action, including Funding and Finance Strategy**
- **Early Partnership investments identified**
- **Clarity on the long-term choices for the Fens and the Wash coastline**

## Actions



### Place-keeping

1. Supplementary baseline evidence
2. Value of the Fens
3. Communication and engagement
4. A Decade of Action
5. Funding and finance
6. Asset management

### Transition Interventions

7. Programme design and management
8. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
9. River Nene tidal limit
10. Future of Denver Complex
11. Witham sustainable recovery
12. Hobhole Pumping Station
13. Crowland and Cowbit Washes

### Place-making

14. A well-adapted Fens
15. Growth and Water Position Statement
16. Roadmap for aligning flood and coastal strategies
17. Enabling farmland reservoirs

## Influences & Engagement



## Inputs



# Our Partnership Action Plan

This two-year Partnership Action Plan marks the first step toward securing a Decade of Action and investment to strengthen near-term asset health and resilience. It also supports partners in preparing for longer-term investment needs. Through learning from action on the ground, the plan will help transform our approach and shape a climate-resilient and thriving future.

## Place-keeping actions

Actions 1 to 6 are designed to deliver near-term improvements in asset management and support the co-development of a system-wide programme of investment for a Decade of Action.

### 1. Supplementary baseline evidence

Continue to build momentum around gathering evidence with partners and other organisations, with a focus on drawing in greater knowledge about the Wash and the coast.

### 2. Value of the Fens

Develop a shared narrative that demonstrates the value of the Fens, what is at stake and its future potential, to inform and strengthen investment decisions.

### 3. Communication and engagement

Create and deliver a bold communication strategy for Fens 2100+ that ignites interest, connects partners and projects, and unites programmes under a shared vision. Map stakeholder links and align efforts to ensure every piece fits together seamlessly.

## 4. Decade of Action

### Define the 'desired end-state'

Work with partners to define the target end state for the Fens asset system, specifying desired levels of reliability and performance aligned with long-term resilience objectives. This will describe the ambition for the next decade and set the path for future delivery.

### Co-create a partnership Decade of Action

Collaborate with partners to develop a Decade of Action for the system and each catchment across the Fens, aligning with the national investment steer.

The Decade of Action will cover all four resilience pillars – Plan, Protect and Maintain, Respond and Recover – across all Risk Management Authorities, and will support achieving the desired end-state for the system and outcomes for the Fens. This will consider:

- What appropriate legal and compliance aspects need to be considered?  
This includes environmental and health and safety requirements.
- What maintenance and refurbishment activities are needed?
- What are the no-regrets asset renewal and replacement choices?
- What are the no-regrets rationalisation and decommissioning choices?
- Where does the asset system need transformation?
- How can we enhance future response and recovery to create safety and security?

## **10 year costed plan for data and evidence**

Develop a costed and prioritised plan for future data and evidence gathering where needed to support FCRM planning and delivery over the next decade.

## **Carbon pipeline and action plan**

Develop a costed and prioritised long-list of projects for decarbonisation, aligned to the desired end-state and Decade of Action. These will span multiple scales and focus on reducing emissions across the Fens asset system.

## **5. Funding and finance**

### **Strategic Outline Case**

Develop a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for the Decade of Action, which secures the investment, resources and commitment needed to deliver as a Partnership programme. This will include establishing governance and partnership delivery mechanisms to deliver at pace.

### **Green Finance**

Conduct a spatial and financial assessment of opportunities for green funding and finance within the Fens, to identify how it can enhance the use of public and private investment.

### **Leveraging existing funding and finance mechanisms**

Explore how to make the most of current funding mechanisms, and identify where there may be opportunities for future innovation.

### **Unlocking new revenue streams and models**

Work with the Future Fens Integrated Adaptation Taskforce and the Fens Transition Lab to identify opportunities to access landscape scale investment from the private sector.

## **6. Asset management**

### **Fens asset class: Asset management position statement and guidance**

Develop a joint position statement across both Fens Regional Flood and Coastal Committees that defines the approach to lowland embankment maintenance across the Environment Agency and Internal Drainage Boards, focused on making the most of maintenance budgets.

Work with partners and alongside the Environment Agency's Lowland Resilience Team to develop and trial a lowland embankment maintenance performance standard in the Fens, and develop an approach to how we determine asset health in lowland embankments to deliver reliability and performance.

### **Decommissioning and asset transfer**

Implement the national decommissioning guidance set out in the national investment toolkit in the Fens. Explore and define the resources, and ways of working needed to embed FCRM asset decommissioning, asset transfer and de-maining within a lowland system, pilot the approach within a specific location, and share findings with the national FCRM team including the lowland resilience team.

### **Post-flood principles and scenarios**

To support decision making during and immediately after flood events, we will:

- Develop post-flood principles that adapt national guidance to local catchments, clarifying decisions on whether to build back, do something different, or focus on local resilience, to ensure transparent decision making.
- Develop an opportunities map to inform regional decision making, identifying critical areas for replacement, and areas that could look for different approaches such as storage or switching to resilience-based approaches.

## Transition interventions

Actions 7 and 8 are designed to set up the team and programme for delivery beyond 2027. Whereas actions 9-13 address immediate investment challenges with significant potential to scale learning across the partnership and wider system.

### 7. Programme design and management

Establish a team for programme delivery beyond 2027, including governance and partnership arrangements.

### 8. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

Implement a monitoring and learning plan to foster accountability, transparency, knowledge sharing, and impact reporting.

### 9. River Nene tidal limit

Strategically appraise FCRM investment scenarios for the replacement of Dog-in-a-Doublet Sluice, and associated investment choices and opportunities; including potential synergies with the Fens Reservoir proposals and wider water resource infrastructure and investments.

### 10. Future of the Denver Complex

Strategically develop the long-term investment scenarios for the future of the Denver Complex and explore future FCRM asset renewal and replacement options.

### 11. Witham Sustainable Recovery

Continue to support sustainable recovery works on the Lower Witham, and draw out learning that can apply to the wider Fens.

### 12. Hobhole Pumping Station

Support partners in the delivery of the Hobhole Pumping Station replacement, drawing out lessons to support wider investment and delivery across the Fens.

### 13. Crowland and Cowbit Washes

Understand the choices for the Washes and the value water storage can have within the Welland and Nene system, to future proof against climate risks.

## Place-making actions

Actions 14 to 17 are designed to support medium to long-term partnership investment planning, and the bringing together of place-keeping investment with regional place-making choices and growth ambitions.

The Fens 2100+ programme is not the forum for making political and democratic decisions regarding regional growth and spatial planning. These partnership actions will however support engagement with regional and national decision-makers regarding the long-term vision for the region and whole-system leadership.

### 14. A well-adapted Fens

Work with regional stakeholders to understand the spatial choices and plausible futures for the Fens, drawing on national and international best practice to support future public dialogue and engagement.

### 15. Growth and water position statement

Support development of an actionable place-based growth and water position statement for the Fens, working with the Mayoral Authorities and other partners to inform regional spatial planning.

### 16. Roadmap for aligning flood and coastal strategies

Work with the Wash Coastal Group and partners to develop shared principles, boundaries and outcomes for aligning short- to medium-term coastal, flood risk and water management investments. Identify practical steps for tackling evidence sharing, solution dependencies, governance, engagement and investment timings.

### 17. Enabling farmland reservoirs

Support an update of the guide to planning, designing, constructing and commissioning of water storage reservoirs (Environment Agency and Cranfield University, 2019). In the Fens, this will support integrated water management approaches and a dependable supply of water.

# Looking forward

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The evidence leaves no doubt: we are now firmly beyond the point where business as usual approaches to asset management can be relied upon to deliver resilience, security, and prosperity for the Fens.

The existence of the Fens was hard won, through centuries of land drainage and reclamation, reminding us that this unique landscape cannot be taken for granted. Past generations responded to technological change and societal need with vision, ambition, and a willingness to adapt. Today, the Fens stand as testament to what can be achieved when partners unite behind a common purpose. There is no reason we cannot continue to innovate at pace, harnessing that same spirit of ingenuity.

The risks of delay are stark. Without urgent and sustained investment, the Fens' critical flood and water management infrastructure will continue to decline, placing communities, businesses, and the environment under unacceptable and escalating threat. Inaction will lead to the loss of nationally significant farmland, further biodiversity decline, and disruption to essential infrastructure. This will undermine the region's economic vitality and weaken long-term growth and resilience. These are not future possibilities but present realities, demanding immediate, coordinated, and collective action.

With long lead-in times required for major investment and system upgrades, the window for action is now. Delay will only escalate costs and compound risks for communities, businesses, and the environment.

Looking forward, Fens 2100+ Partners must work together across agencies, authorities, sectors, and communities, guided by the dual objectives of place-keeping and place-making.

This report has set out a specific and actionable agenda for the next two years. The 17 point Partnership Action Plan provides a clear roadmap for halting asset decline, strengthening system resilience, and unlocking new models of investment. It identifies the critical interventions needed to address immediate risks while laying the foundations for long-term transformation.

Key outputs by 2027 include:

- A Strategic Outline Case for a Decade of Action, including a funding and finance strategy;
- Identification of early partnership investments; and
- Clarity on the long-term choices for the Fens and the Wash coastline.

Successful delivery will not only safeguard the future of the Fens but will also strengthen economic growth across Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, and Norfolk. It will play a central role in realising commitments to the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England (2020) alongside regional and national growth ambitions.

The Fens 2100+ Partnership is committed to delivering this bold programme of place-keeping and place-making to realise our goal of 'transforming investment in critical FCRM infrastructure, halting asset decline, overcoming funding challenges, and creating a vibrant, climate-resilient Fens for generations to come'.



**"No single organisation can solve this challenge alone."**

