

Suffolk Business Board - 31st July 2025

Agenda Item 5 – Norfolk and Suffolk Integrated Water Action Plan

Purpose: To provide an update on the development of an integrated water action plan for Norfolk and Suffolk.

Context

Water is fundamental to life in Norfolk and Suffolk. It underpins our economy, sustains our natural environment, supports public health and wellbeing, and enhances quality of life.

Located within the driest region of the UK, Suffolk faces significant and growing water-related challenges. These include limited water availability, declining water quality, lack of historic investment in water infrastructure, increased in salinity in coastal areas and an increased risk of flooding. These issues are compounded by competing demands for water from public supply, business, agriculture, and the natural environment.

Water companies (Anglian and Essex and Suffolk) supply potable water for nearly all domestic and commercial use, but are only statutorily required to provide domestic supply. They have no duty to provide water supply to support economic growth. Water use is licenced by the Environment Agency and agriculture along with other non-potable water users (commercial/industrial) are “competing” with water companies for the available water, but without the same level of organisation, resource, planning and collaboration.

The Regional Water Resources Plan for Eastern England: 2025 Progress Report – published by Water Resources East (WRE) notes:

“A lack of available water resources is now severely constraining growth in Eastern England. This is due to higher than anticipated demand in recent years and long lead times on new sources of supply. Whilst considered on a case-by-case basis, new connections for non-domestic water use are now routinely limited to 20,000 litres per day. This is insufficient for water intensive businesses such as meat processing, food and drink manufacturing, green hydrogen, datacentres and giga factories”

The management of water - whether in terms of quantity or quality - is increasingly complex. It involves multiple layers of legislation, regulation, and a wide array of local, regional, and national stakeholders. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated, cross-sector innovations and action to ensure a sustainable and resilient future for the region.

Both Norfolk and Suffolk Business Boards have identified the need for a joint Integrated Water Action Plan and agreed to work together.

Proposed Approach

To deliver an integrated water action plan that supports sustainable economic growth, environmental resilience, and climate adaptation in Norfolk and Suffolk, aligning infrastructure, policy, and innovation with future water demands and risks.

To work collaboratively with Norfolk CC, WRE, water companies, commercial and agricultural water users to produce a localised Integrated Water Action Plan that supports the growth aspirations in Suffolk and Norfolk by identifying short and medium term (5-10 years) actions that will ensure water is available for economic growth.

The project will be managed by a steering group made up of officers from Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils overseeing the work of specialist consultants and engagement with stakeholders.

Key Outputs

An action plan containing the following information

- **Data and Evidence Base:** Forecasts of water demand, risk mapping, and economic analysis of water scarcity.
- **Plan:** Prioritized measures, stakeholder roles, and an implementation timeline.
- **Innovation Pipeline:** Catalogue of projects and solutions, from small-scale water storage to wastewater reuse.
- **Investment Strategy:** Targeted funding plans and business cases for critical infrastructure, technology and processes.
- **Case Studies:** Real-world examples demonstrating scalable water resilience solutions.
- **Constraint and Opportunity Mapping:** GIS overlays to inform land use, infrastructure, investment and growth decisions.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Captured insights from businesses, water management professionals and sector experts, alongside behaviour change strategies.

Resources

By pooling resources across Norfolk and Suffolk, we aim to ensure a cost-effective, cohesive approach to developing a tailored water action plan that identifies steps that can be taken across both counties to ensure sustainable supplies for growth, whilst meeting wider objectives on water quality and environmental enhancement. This collaboration will lay the ground for informed decision-making, unlocking future opportunities, innovation and funding for implementation.

The work will be project managed by officers in Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, engaging specialist consultants and support from stakeholders. £150k has been secured, £50k from each Suffolk, Norfolk and Reclaim the Rain (an existing innovation project covering Norfolk and Suffolk funded by the Environment Agency). Reclaim the Rain has also offered to pay for some early work that will set out the economic value of water for the area which will significantly contribute to the action plan.

Next steps

A procurement scope and relevant documents are being prepared to secure appropriate specialist technical support.

Once an appointment has been made a draft report will be produced in 6 months. With the aim to publish a final action plan in early summer 2026, with the object of early engagement with the new Mayor after the election and establishment of the new authority.

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