

Minutes of a Meeting of the Planning Policy Committee held in the Council Chambers, the Hub, Mareham Road, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6PH on Thursday, 16th October, 2025 at 6.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Tom Ashton (Chairman)
Councillor Terry Aldridge (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors Mark Dannatt, Roger Dawson, Alex Hall, David Hall, Daniel McNally, Paul Rickett, Terry Taylor and Ruchira Yarsley.

Councillors Stef Bristow (virtual), Neil Jones (virtual), Daniel Simpson (virtual) and Robert Watson attended the Meeting as Observers.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Phil Norman - Assistant Director – Planning and Strategic Infrastructure
Lynda Eastwood - Democratic Services Officer

OTHER ATTENDEES:

Andy Bailey - Fens Senior Strategy Adviser, Environment Agency

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

No apologies for absence were received.

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15. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY):

At this point in the Meeting, Members were invited to declare any relevant interests. None were received.

16. MINUTES:

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 September 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

17. ACTIONS:

Members were referred to the updated Action Sheet and the actions were noted as in hand.

The Chairman provided a brief update, confirming that the Belchford and Fulletby Neighbourhood Development Plan approved at the previous meeting had progressed through the Executive Board and was now moving forward.

18. FENS 2100+ PROGRAMME OVERVIEW:

The Chairman welcomed Andy Bailey from the Environment Agency who was in attendance to present Members with an overview of the Fens 2100+ Programme. Mr Bailey outlined the historical context, current challenges, and future strategic direction for flood risk and water management across the Fens landscape.

Key points included:

- The Fens as a man-made, low-lying landscape below sea level, requiring constant water management.
- The ageing infrastructure, including embankments and pumping stations, many of which were built in the mid-20th century or earlier.
- The increasing frequency of flood events and the impact of climate change, including sea level rise and subsidence.
- The critical importance of the Fens to national food security, with a significant proportion of Grade 1 agricultural land located within the area.
- The need for strategic investment and long-term planning to sustain the landscape and its infrastructure.
- The role of the Fens 2100+ partnership, which includes local authorities, drainage boards, farming unions, and national agencies.

Mr Bailey emphasised that the programme was evidence-led and aimed to proactively address future challenges rather than react to crises. He noted that the Environment Agency was working with partners to develop a case for change and a decade of action, with key documents expected to be published in early 2026.

A copy of the presentation is attached at Appendix A to the Minutes.

NB. Councillor Daniel McNally joined the Meeting at 6.16pm.

Members were invited to put their comments and questions forward.

- A Member raised concerns about the scale of investment required, suggesting that without government funding, difficult decisions would need to be made about which areas could continue to be defended. Mr Bailey acknowledged the scale of the challenge and confirmed that the partnership was preparing a costed programme and business case to present to government.
- Members queried the extent of engagement with central government and suggested that a representative from national government should

be involved in the partnership. Mr Bailey confirmed that the Fens 2100+ Programme was established under the national flood strategy and that engagement with ministers and MPs was planned for the coming months.

- Questions were raised about how Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) might affect the programme. The Assistant Director – Planning and Strategic Infrastructure advised Members that future spatial development strategies under mayoral authorities could help align infrastructure and growth planning and Local Plans would have to be prepared in accordance with them. Members were further advised that every single district still had their own housing target and East Lindsey's target had gone up by a significant amount earlier this year.

Mr Bailey added to the discussion, stating that while LGR presented challenges, it also offered opportunities for more strategic planning and coordination. He further explained that with regards to funding, different ways needed to be found in order to fund what would be required.

- Members discussed the implications of LGR on Internal Drainage Board (IDB) funding. Mr Bailey acknowledged the complexity and confirmed that funding models were under review. Clarification was given on the current financial arrangements and potential risks.
- A comment was made with regards to having one local planning authority looking after the Lincolnshire area of the Fens instead of five local planning authorities and that it might help with IDB funding.
- At the indulgence of the Chairman, Councillor Neil Jones expressed frustration over inter-agency cooperation, citing a recent example involving Natural England and the Environment Agency.
- Following a query regarding the Lincs Coast 2100+ Project and how it was progressing, Members were informed that it was a year behind the Fens 2100+ Programme.
- A Member raised a concern with regards to the 150% housing target increase and where the housing was going to be built as the Wolds, the coast and the Fens were not viable options. It was felt that there was a need for central government to be involved.

The Assistant Director – Planning and Strategic Infrastructure informed Members that the government saw a key role for combined authorities in the planning, with a spatial level in terms of strategic planning which would help with the conversation about investment and infrastructure. With regards to the new legislation, this was still emerging.

- Following a query on how long the Fens 2100+ Programme had been running, Mr Bailey confirmed that it was set up two years previous and a lot of work had been carried out already.
- A question was raised about the potential for modernising pumping stations, including the use of electric or alternative technologies. Mr Bailey confirmed that asset rationalisation and upgrades were being considered as part of the investment strategy.
- Members stressed the importance of clear communication with the public, avoiding technical jargon and being honest about risks and potential outcomes. Mr Bailey agreed and highlighted that community engagement would be a key part of the programme.
- Members highlighted the economic and environmental value of the Fens, including its contribution to food production and the national economy. It was agreed that this value must be central to any case made to government. Members further discussed the importance of lobbying government with a compelling economic case.

The Committee expressed strong support for the aims of the Fens 2100+ Programme and welcomed further engagement as the programme progressed.

The Chairman thanked Andy Bailey from the Environment Agency for his informative update.

19. UPDATE ON S106 AND CARAVAN AND HEALTH PROVISION SUBSIDY:

Phil Norman, Head of Planning, provided Members with an update regarding NHS requests for Section 106 contributions in relation to caravan sites. The Integrated Care Board had confirmed that it continued to review its approach, with funding applications typically made in relation to sites providing permanent residential accommodation.

Members expressed concern about the long-standing nature of this issue and the lack of clarity regarding the impact of seasonal populations on local healthcare services, particularly in areas such as Skegness.

The Committee noted the response and requested that the NHS be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss the matter further.

20. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

The date of the next Meeting was confirmed as Thursday 20th November 2025.

The meeting closed at 7.16pm.



Fens 2100+

Developing wise investment
for the future

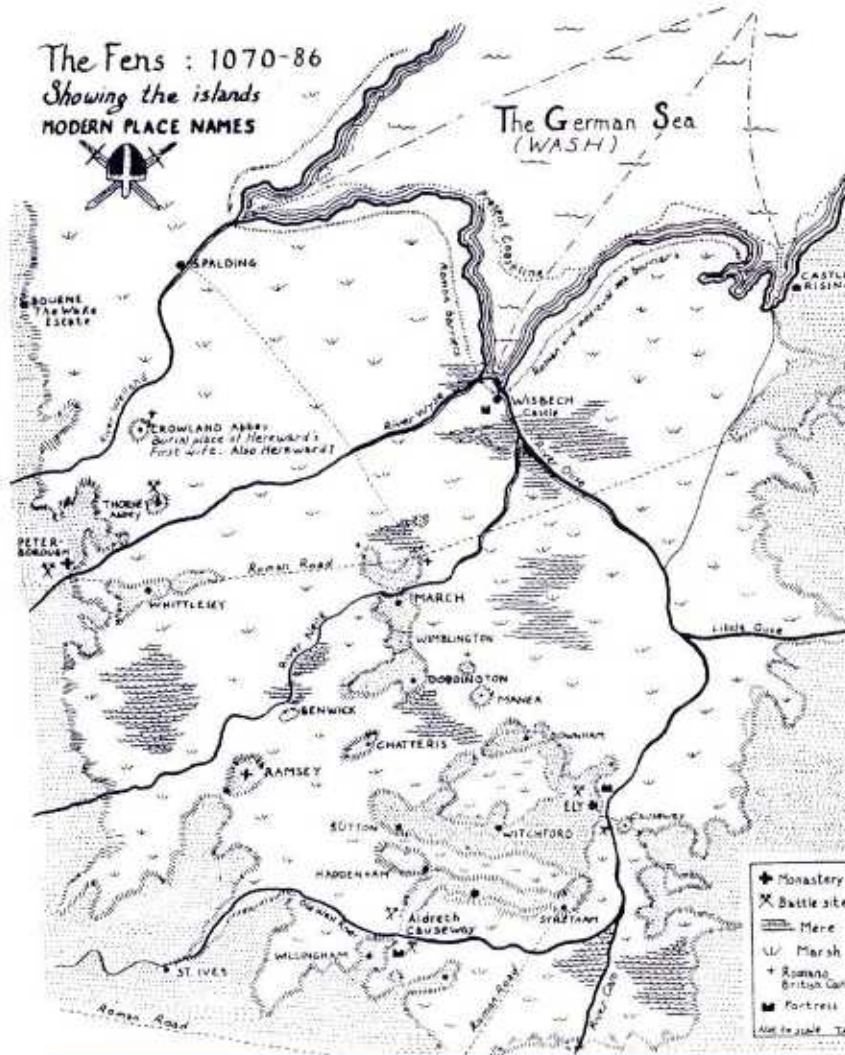
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East Lindsey District Council Planning Committee 16.10.25



Minute Item 18

A manmade landscape....



<https://pocketbookuk.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/fens1070map.jpg>



<https://www.wellandantiquemaps.co.uk/product/regiones-inundatae-map-of-the-fens-by-joan-blaeu-c-1664/>

Timeline

© Mills Archive Trust



© Heritage South Holland



© Black Sluice IDB



© Heritage South Holland



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Pre 10,000 BC

The area which was to become the Fens was forested. Even today the remains of ancient oak trees are occasionally dug out of the peat.

8000 BC

After the Ice Age, rising sea levels separated Britain from mainland Europe. Marine and estuarine silts were deposited which became the 'Silt Fens' of Lincolnshire. Further south, deposition of marine sediments slowed the flow of rivers, causing them to flood and create the freshwater bogs where peat formation could occur.

43-410 AD

The arrival of the Romans in Britain coincided with falling sea levels. They constructed the artificial channel known as Car Dyke and the raised Fen Causeway between Peterborough and Denver.

600-1000 AD

Monastic foundations were created on some of the raised 'islands' on the Fens such as Crowland, Ely, Thorney, and Ramsey. They were built on the wealth of the eels, reeds, peat, wildfowl and fish that the fens provided.

1287

A disastrous tidal surge affected Boston and South Holland, killing hundreds of people. Spalding monastery and many other churches were destroyed.

1531

King Henry VIII passed the Act of Sewers, creating Commissioners and Courts of Sewers to oversee drainage activities and the maintenance of sea defences. The Act was in operation until 1930 when it was replaced by the Land Drainage Act.

1530s

Water from the marshy East and West Fens (which had previously flowed into the Steeping River) was diverted towards the River Witham by cutting new drains.

1600

Dutch Engines (windmills) started to be used to drain the Fens.

1630

The Dutch engineer Cornelius Vermuyden was asked by King Charles I to design a plan to turn the wetlands of the Fens into productive farmland which could be enclosed.

1799

John Rennie published a report with recommendations for draining the East and West Fens.

1810

The 'Great Tide' of 1810 rose more than 1.4m above an ordinary spring tide and overwhelmed the tidal defences near Friskney, Leverton, Boston, Wyberton, and Fosdyke.

1820s

Steam powered engines began to replace windmills. One steam engine could pump as much water as eight wind-powered pumps, and could work even when there was little wind.

1851

Whittlesey Mere finally vanished due to ongoing drainage. It had formed in 5,000 BC and had once been the largest lowland lake in England, stretching six miles between Ramsey and Peterborough.

1899

Wicken Fen was purchased by the National Trust and became their first nature reserve.

1930

The Land Drainage Act created Internal Drainage Boards, and Catchment Boards for the Witham and Steeping River, Welland, Nene and Great Ouse. This enabled one authority to oversee main channels and work with IDBs to manage smaller watercourses.

1940s

Demand for greater food production during and after WWII intensified the drainage of the Fens for agriculture.

1947

Heavy rain caused a breach of the embankments of the Crowland and Cowbit Washes, flooding a large area to the south. In the same year, the River Welland Major Improvement Scheme was initiated.

1953

A severe North Sea storm caused a tidal surge, where sea levels rose 3m higher than expected. It killed many people across the Fens, even in areas far inland.

1960s

Major scheme of pumping station construction across the South Forty Foot catchment, resulting in the pumping of an additional 280km² of land into the drain.

2001

Great Fen Steering Group was set up to begin an ambitious 50-100 year habitat restoration project between Peterborough and Ramsey.

2007

Widespread flooding across the country affected the Fens, and a review of the event led directly to the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

2013

A tidal surge breached embanked defences at Wrangle and Boston, and damaged the rare freshwater dune slack habitat at Gibraltar Point when it was suddenly inundated by saltwater. It also damaged three of the five pumps at Black Sluice Pumping Station in Boston, which has since remained inoperable.

2020

Construction of Boston Barrier completed.

2023

In October, Storm Babet caused flooding in all the catchments from high river flows.

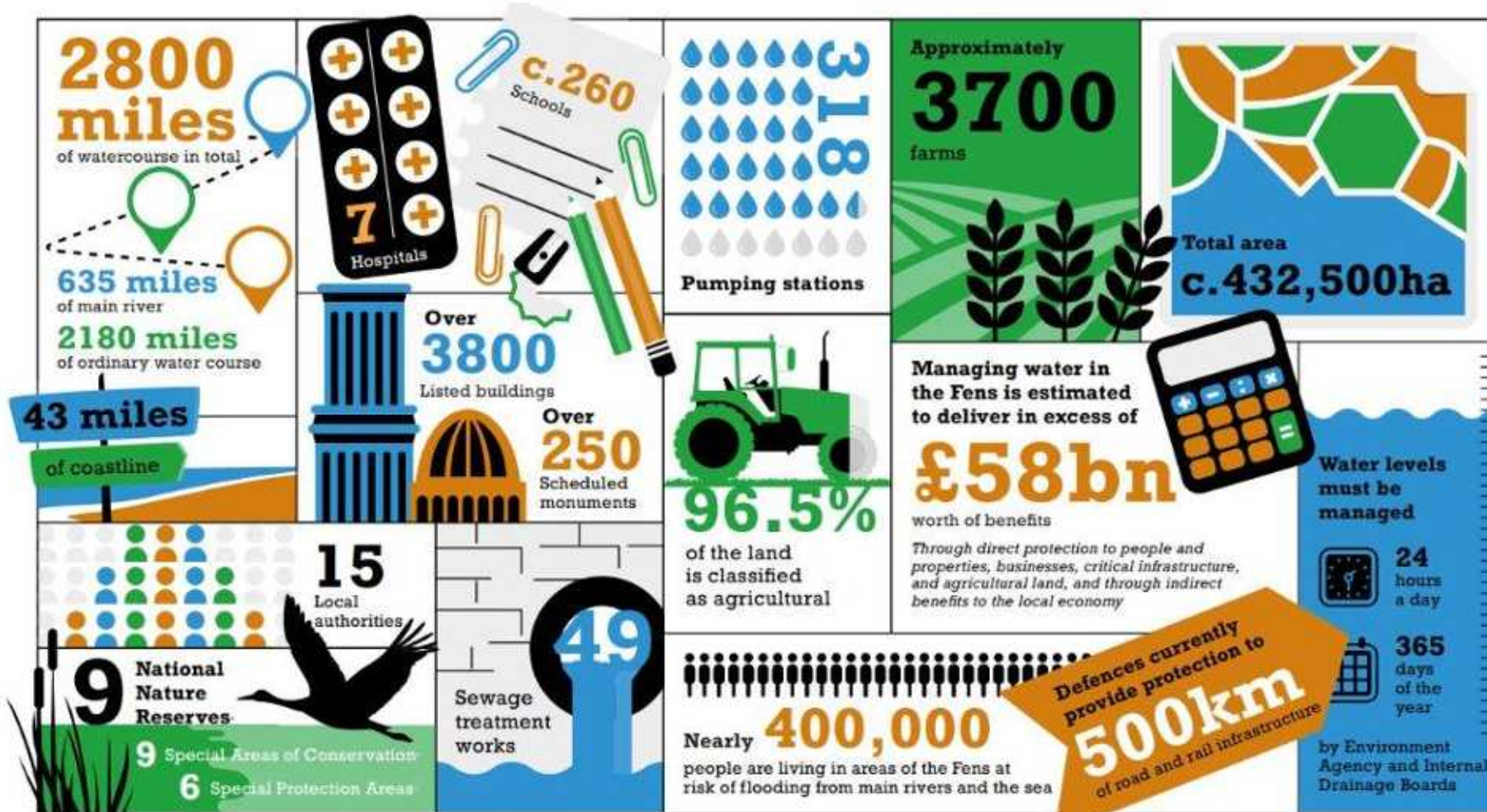
2024

Storm Henk caused severe river flooding across the Fens, as rain fell on already saturated ground.

2025

In January 2025, the highest ever recorded levels were reached in the South Forty Foot Drain after heavy rainfall.

A valuable landscape



*Note: there is considerable geographic overlap between sites for nature conservation. For example, many sites are designated as SAC, SPA, and SSSI. Almost all Ramsar sites are underpinned by the SSSI designation, and most Ramsar sites are also SPAs.

Flood events timeline

1947

The winter of 1946/1947 saw extremely low temperatures and heavy snowfall, followed by a rapid thaw that led to significant flooding across the UK.

1953

The greatest storm surge on record for the North Sea caused extensive tidal flooding across the Fens study area.

1998

Heavy rainfall fell on already saturated land causing extensive flooding across the Fens.

2007

Flooding across the Fens study area occurred as a result of the highest recorded rainfall since the records began in 1766.

2013

A storm surge caused significant flooding across the Fens.

2019

A breach of the River Steeping caused 88 properties to be internally flooded.

2020

Heavy rainfall fell on saturated ground causing several homes to be flooded in March, Wisbech and Doddington.

2023

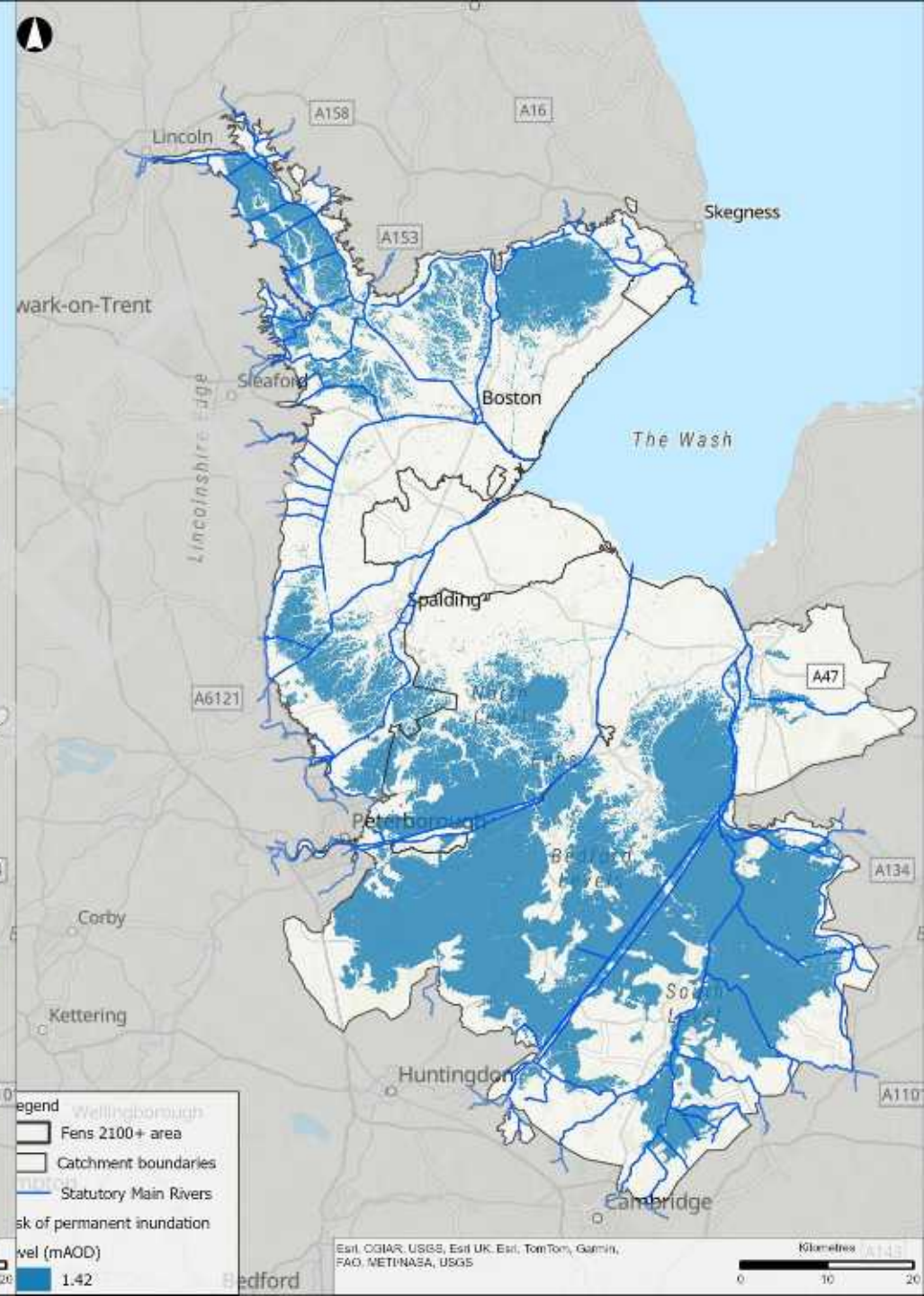
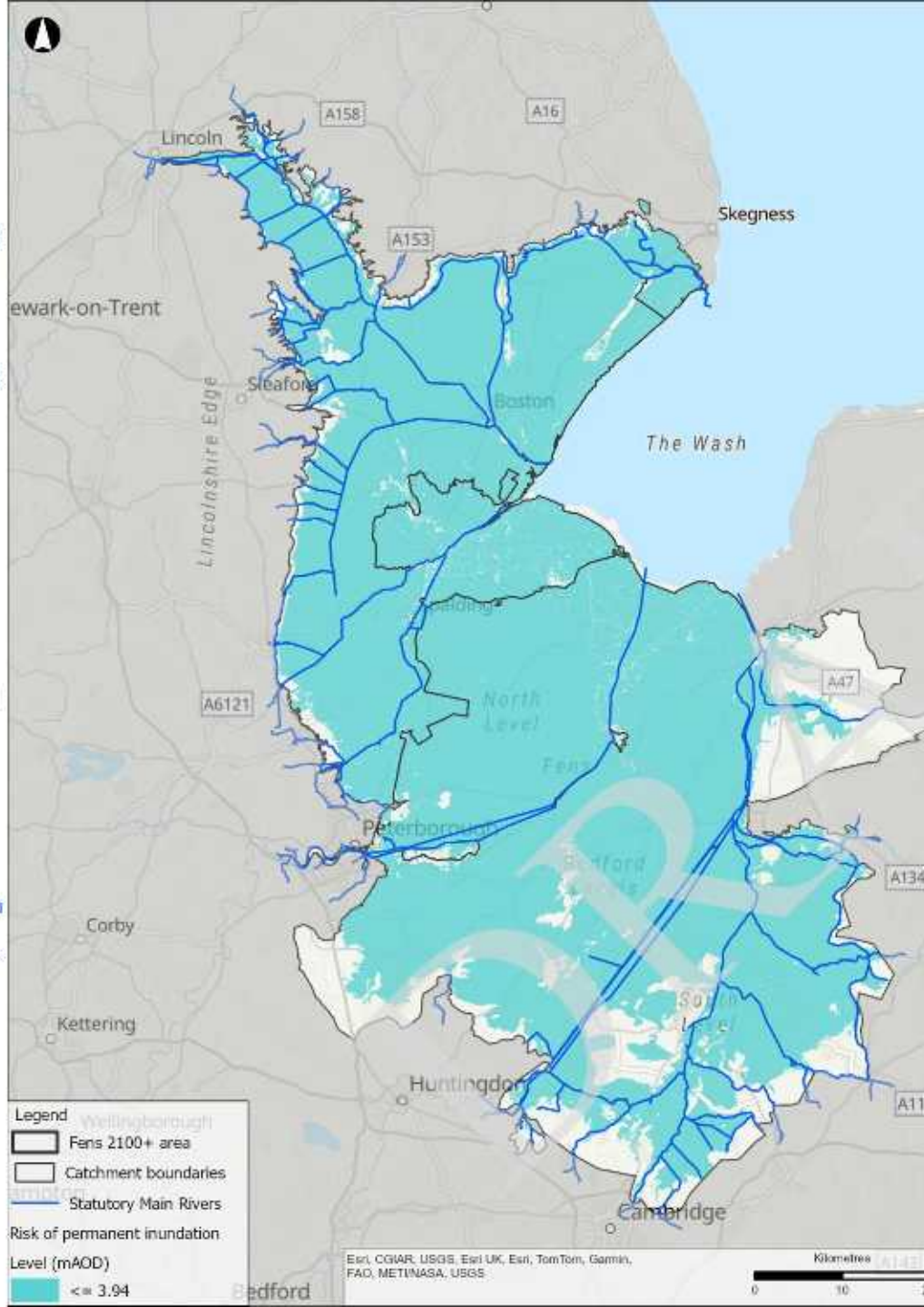
Storm Babet brought persistent frontal rain to large parts of the UK in October 2023 and this caused significant flooding across the Fens.

2024

Storm Henk brought heavy rainfall, causing agricultural flooding across the Fens. 56 properties were flooded in the South Forty Foot Drain catchment.

2025

On the 6th January 2025, heavy rainfall coincided by a high tide causing internal flooding of 30-40 residential properties in Wyberton.



Flood management system

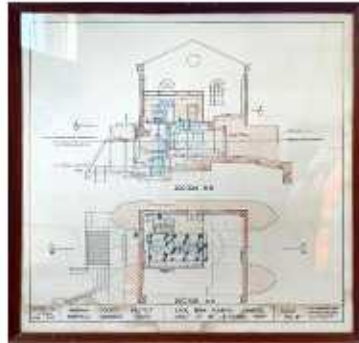
- ① **Hobhole Pumping Station** is formed of two separate pump houses, on each branch of a split channel. It lifts water up to 7m from the Hobhole Drain into the Boston Haven and is responsible for draining the majority of the East and West Fens catchment.
- ② **Tydd Pumping Station** is the largest pumping station in the Lower Nene catchment. It removes water from the North Level district by pumping it into the tidal River Nene.
- ③ **St German's Pumping Station** is the largest pumping station in Britain. It is the primary outlet for water from an area of 700km² in the Middle Level.
- ④ **Bevil's Leam Pumping Station** was constructed to boost the flow from the south-west of the Great Ouse catchment, which is the lowest lying area in Britain, and therefore very vulnerable to flooding.
- ⑤ **Black Sluice** consists of two tidal sluices, one of which operates as a navigational lock. It releases water in the South Forty Foot Drain into the Boston Haven when tides allow.
- ⑥ **Boston Barrier** was completed in 2020. It can be deployed in just 20 minutes to increase the protection offered to Boston and areas upstream against tidal surges.
- ⑦ **Grand Sluice** sits across the River Witham to prevent saltwater travelling upstream at high tides. It controls water levels for the 21 miles upstream to Bardney Lock, and an adjoining lock gate allows navigation.
- ⑧ **Marsh Road Sluice** sets the tidal limit on the Coronation Channel, and together with the nearby Fulney Lock sets the tidal limit of the Lower Welland catchment.
- ⑨ **Dog-in-a-Doublet Sluice** marks the tidal limit of the River Nene, and controls river levels upstream in Peterborough.
- ⑩ **Denver Sluice** is part of a complex of assets, which together are vitally important for managing water levels in the Great Ouse catchment. Denver Sluice controls the flow from the non-tidal branch of the Great Ouse River system (known as the Ely Ouse) into the tidal reach of the Great Ouse River.
- ⑪ **Crowland and Cowbit Washes** Constructed in 1664 adjacent to the River Welland, the Crowland and Cowbit Washes can protect Spalding from river flooding by temporarily storing excess water.
- ⑫ **Whittlesey (Nene) Washes** Located to the south of the River Nene along a 20km stretch, these washes can store as much water as 14,000 Olympic swimming pools.
- ⑬ **Ouse Washes** Britain's largest washland, it provides 90 million m³ of flood storage across 25 km².
- ⑭ **Tidal defences** consist of earthen embankments which run in sections along the coastline, protecting large areas from tidal flooding.
- ⑮ The **Wainfleet Relief Channel** diverts part of the flow of the Steeping River around Wainfleet All Saints. It sits higher than the level of the surrounding land, with raised earthen embankments to contain the channel. Similar relief channels can be found in the Lower Welland and Great Ouse catchments.
- ⑯ **Catchwater drains** are present in several of the catchments, running parallel to the Fen edge. They are designed to intercept water running off higher ground before it reaches the low-lying Fens, where the water could only be removed by the difficult and expensive task of pumping.



The challenge



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- **For Risk Management Authorities**

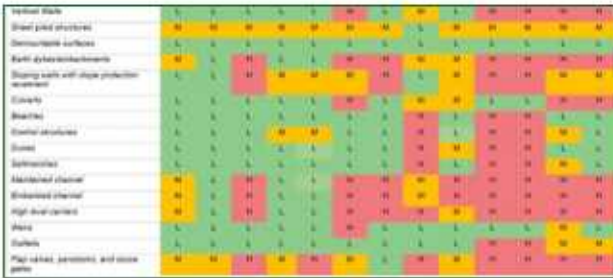
- Aging infrastructure at or nearing the end of its serviceable life

- **For Regional and National Government**

- An urgent requirement for strategic decisions on future landscape and how flood risk management and growth align beyond the 2040s.
- Without decisions in the short-term, communities will face an uncertain future and further decline in investment.



Underpinning Evidence



Asset vulnerability



Asset condition



Lived experience



Systems analysis



international learning



Asset maintenance

The Fens Narrative

Transforming our approach to investing in flood and coastal resilience for the future of the UK Fens



...The following is not questionable and not negotiable:

- The Fens are a **valuable landscape** both nationally and regionally
- The FCERM assets that underpin the fens **are critical** in securing its value
- But **sustaining them** is getting more and more **challenging**
- There is a need to **act now (urgency)** to ensure we maintain this valuable landscape
- **No single organisation** can solve this challenge alone

“The right **money**, at the right **time**, in the right **places**, on the right **things**, in the hands of the right **people** – that’s how we achieve **a vibrant and climate resilient Fens** – *the alternative is failure*”

Our 3 key projects



Case for Change

A publication exploring the value of the Fens, nationally, regionally and locally, and setting out a strategic case for continued and enhanced investment in flood risk management to ensure we have a vibrant and sustainable future fens

A decade of action

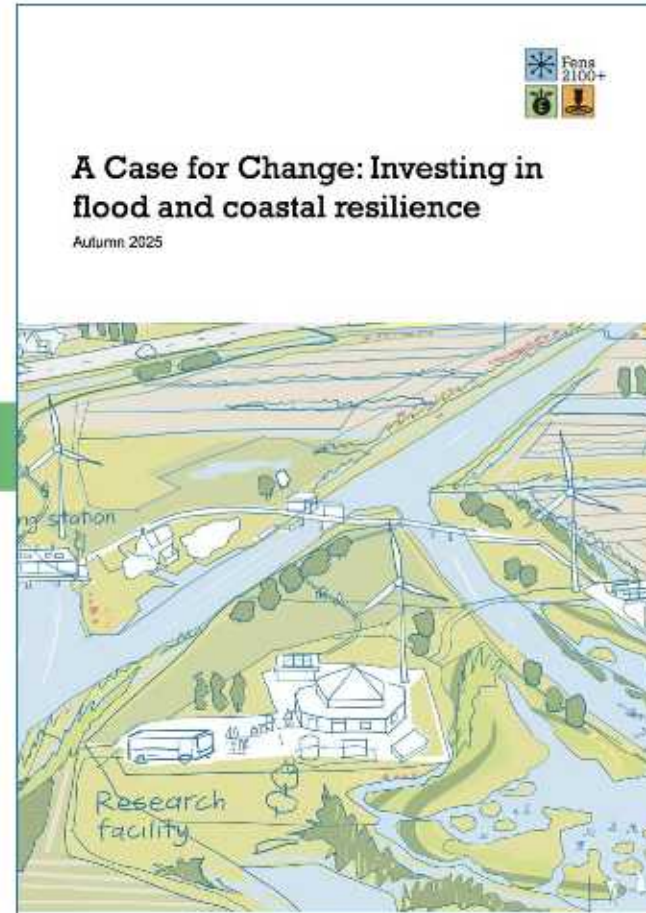
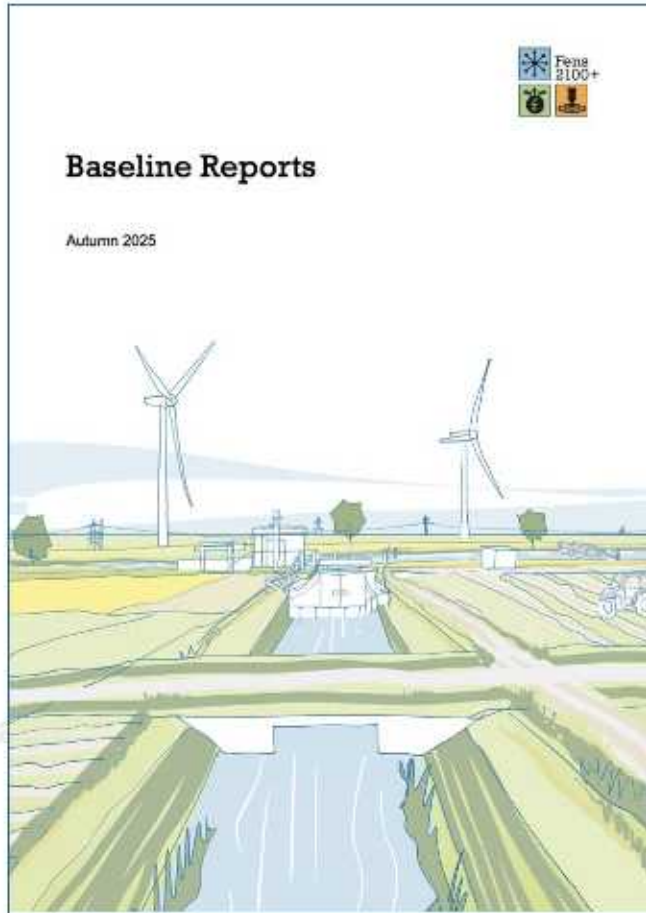
Catchment level asset investment strategies, confirming the immediate asset (and other) investment requirements across each catchment and giving clarity on the medium-term asset investment priorities to underpin a decade of action

Catchment Baseline Reports

A comprehensive and accessible evidence baseline for each catchment giving a clear picture of what we currently know and don't know, what is working for us, and what we might need to do differently in the future

Transforming our approach to investing in flood and coastal resilience for the future of the UK Fens

2 new publications – due Autumn/Winter 25/26



Delivery

(60-pages)

Next Steps



- Launch / Publication
- Political Engagement
- Delivery of Action Plan
- Working with LPAs

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