

IWA World Water Congress & Exhibition 2026

4-8 October 2026 | Glasgow, UK



Integrated Regional and Catchment-scale Planning for Growth and the Water Environment in Eastern England

Daniel Johns, Ben Fitzsimons, Teresa Meadows: Water Resources East
Dr Geoff Darch, Jo Ledger: Anglian Water Services



inspiring change

Introduction to WRE

- Independent, not-for-profit membership organisation
- One of five regional water resources planning groups
- Key sector interests form our board and fund our core costs



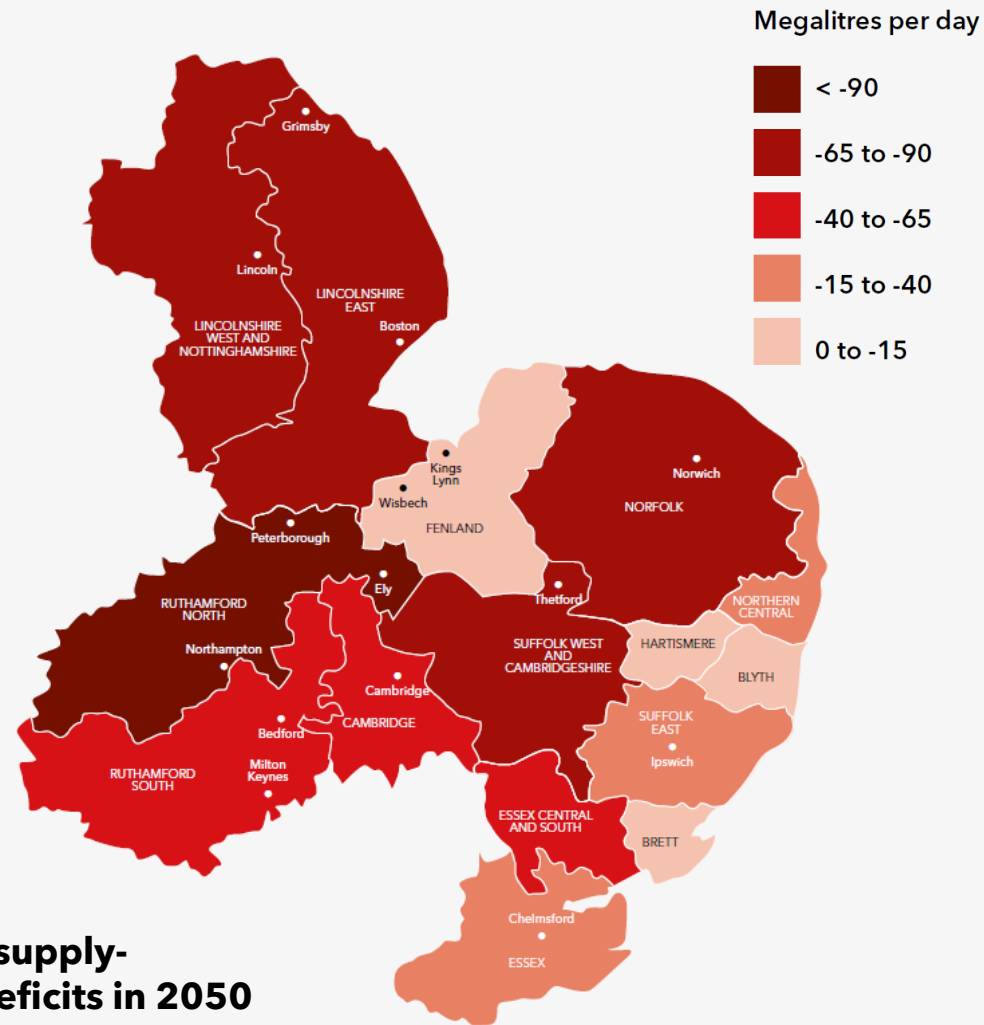


Regional Water Resources Plan for Eastern England

December 2023

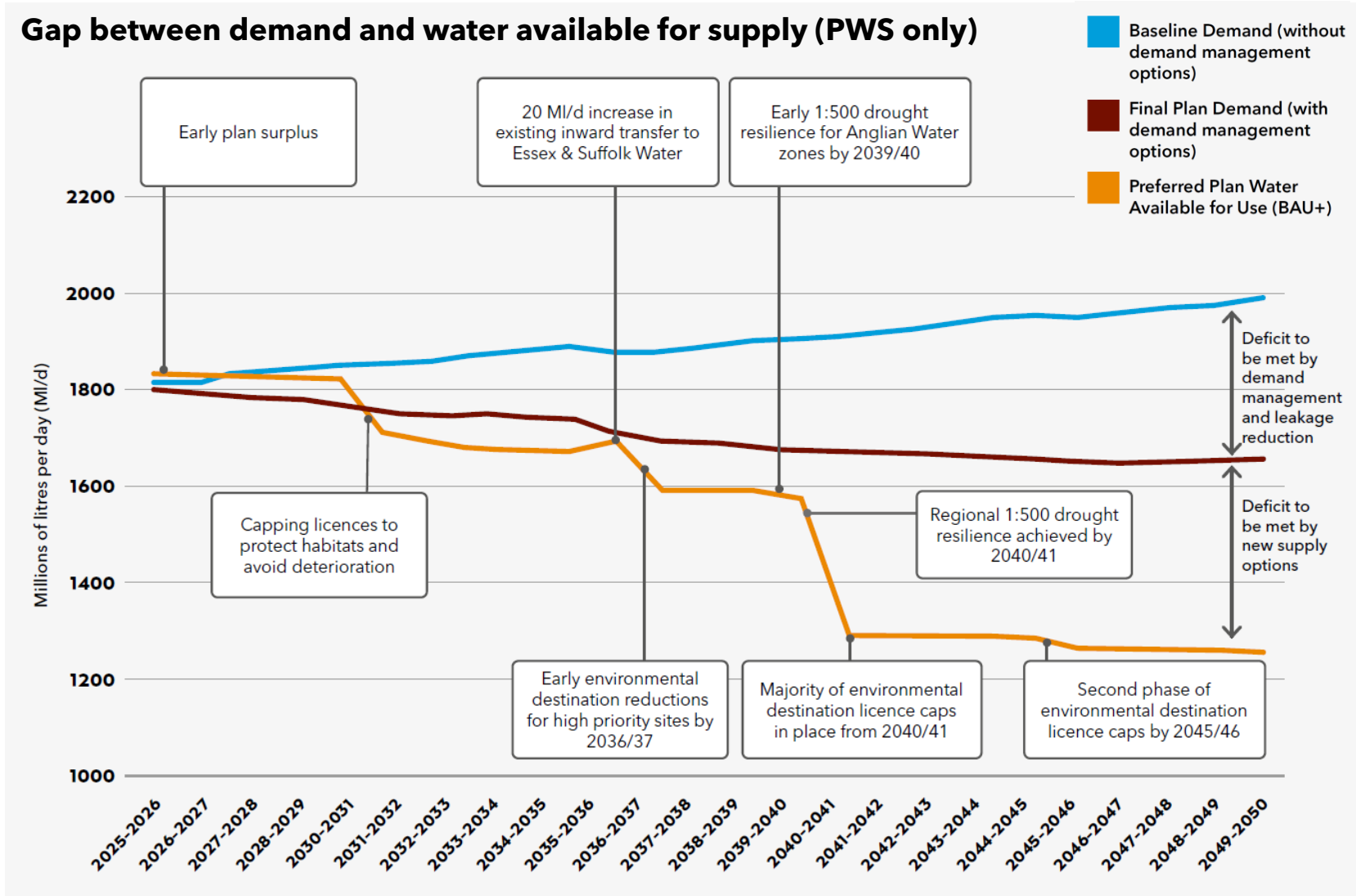


Economic prosperity and the health of the water environment at risk



- 800 million litres of water per day (ML/d) shortfall projected for 2050
- Constraints already emerging for agriculture, housing and economic growth
- Regional Plan identifies the 'best value' approach to meeting the projected deficits in the public water supply in ways that maximise co-benefits for other sectors
- Aims to deliver sufficient water to meet:
 - Growth projections within adopted local authority development plans
 - Increased drought resilience by 2040
 - Highest environmental ambition

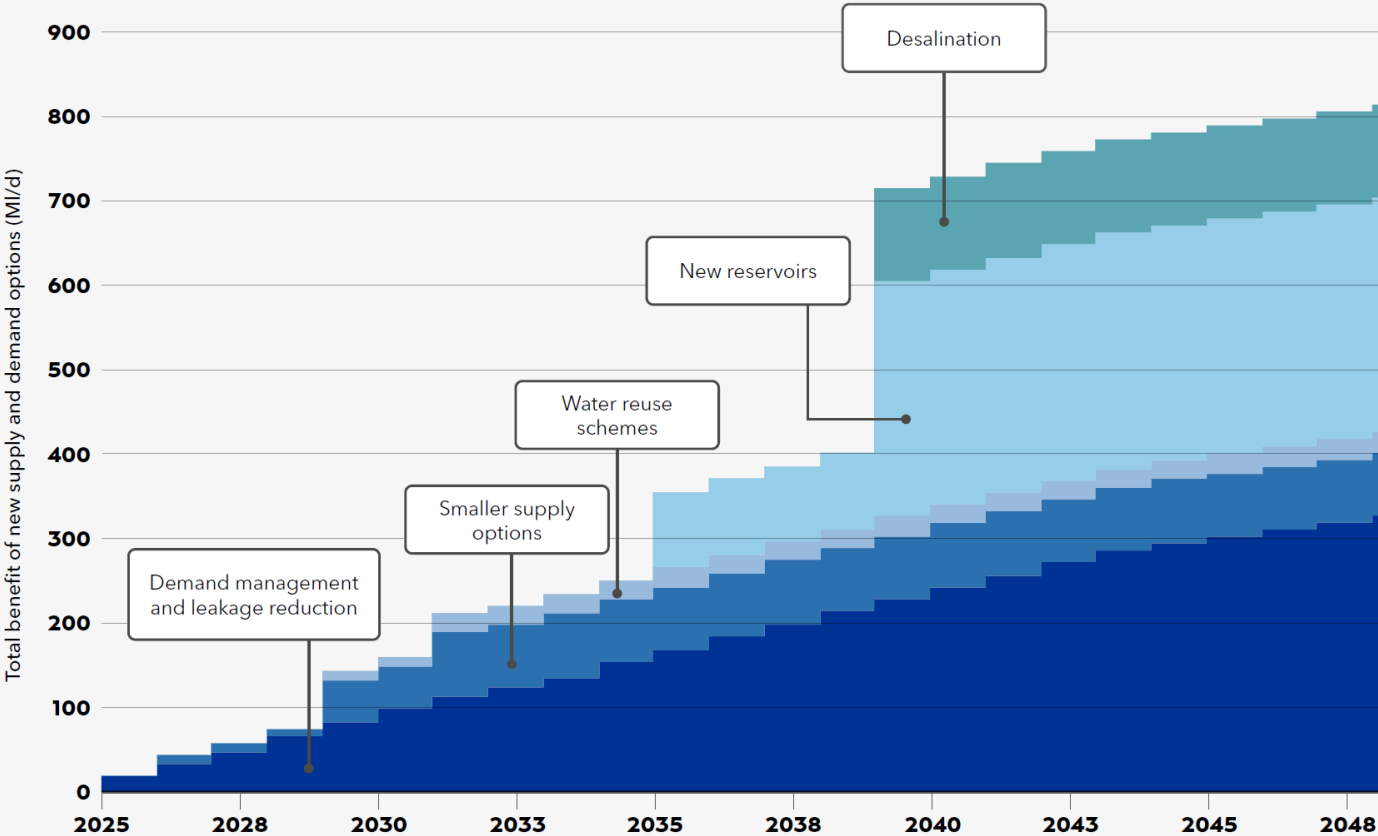
An 800 ML/day deficit by 2050



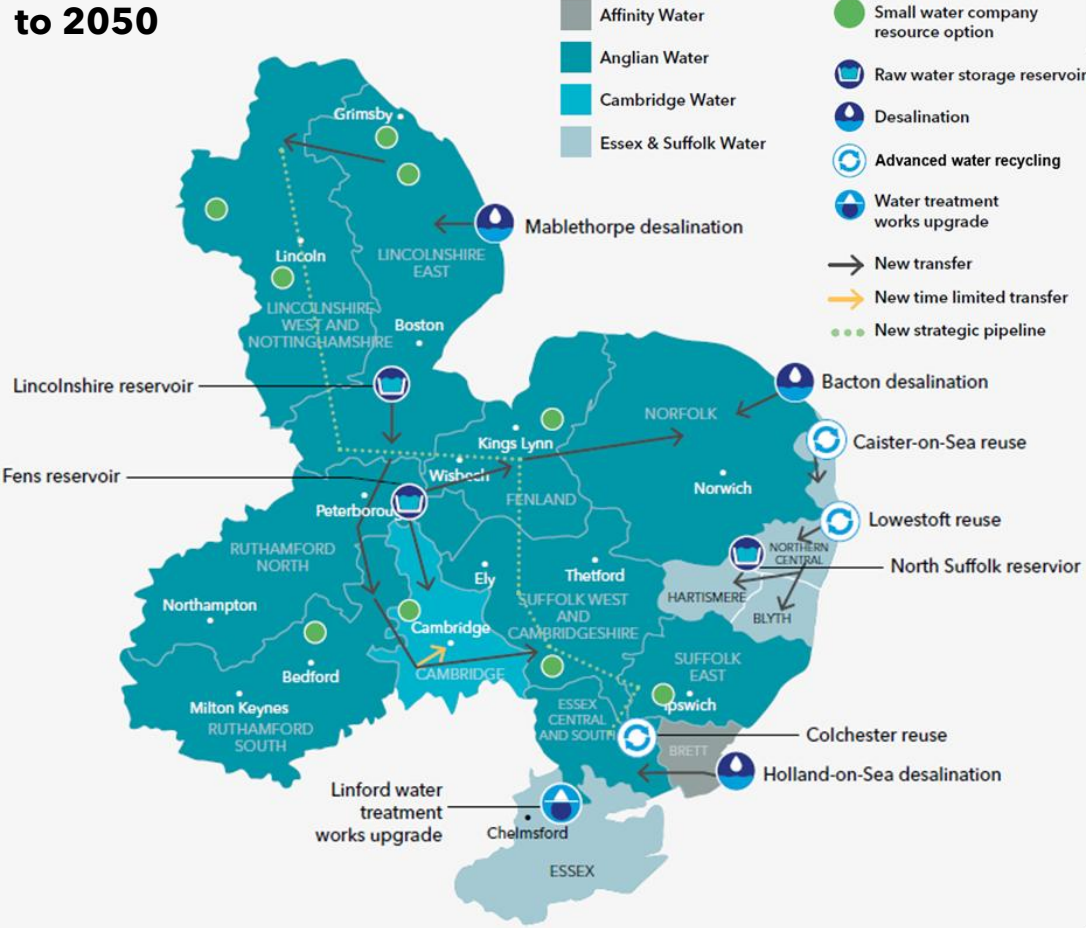
- Early surplus becomes a deficit by 2030
- Demand management and leakage control assumed to offset growth in water consumption
- Some 'Environmental Destination' abstraction reductions delivered by 2036, and almost entirely by 2040, to support flows
- Resilience to 1-in-500 year drought to be achieved by 2040

Components of the Best Value Plan

Bridging the projected public water supply deficit over time



Best Value Plan to 2050





Regional Water Resources Plan for Eastern England: 2025 Progress Report

January 2026



WRE's 2025 Progress Report on a page

National and regional headlines:

- New National Framework for Water Resources launched by the Environment Agency in June.
- Independent Water Commission final report published in July. Government responded with a white paper on 20 January 2026.
- Draft redeterminations of Price Review 2024 (PR24) business plans for Anglian Water and Northumbrian Water (including Essex & Suffolk) published in October 2025.
- New statutory Environmental Improvement Plan published in December 2025.
- Consultation on water efficiency standards in new development closed in December 2025.

Multi-sector: WRE funded to commission data analysis and network investigations to support the South Level Water for Cambridge project.

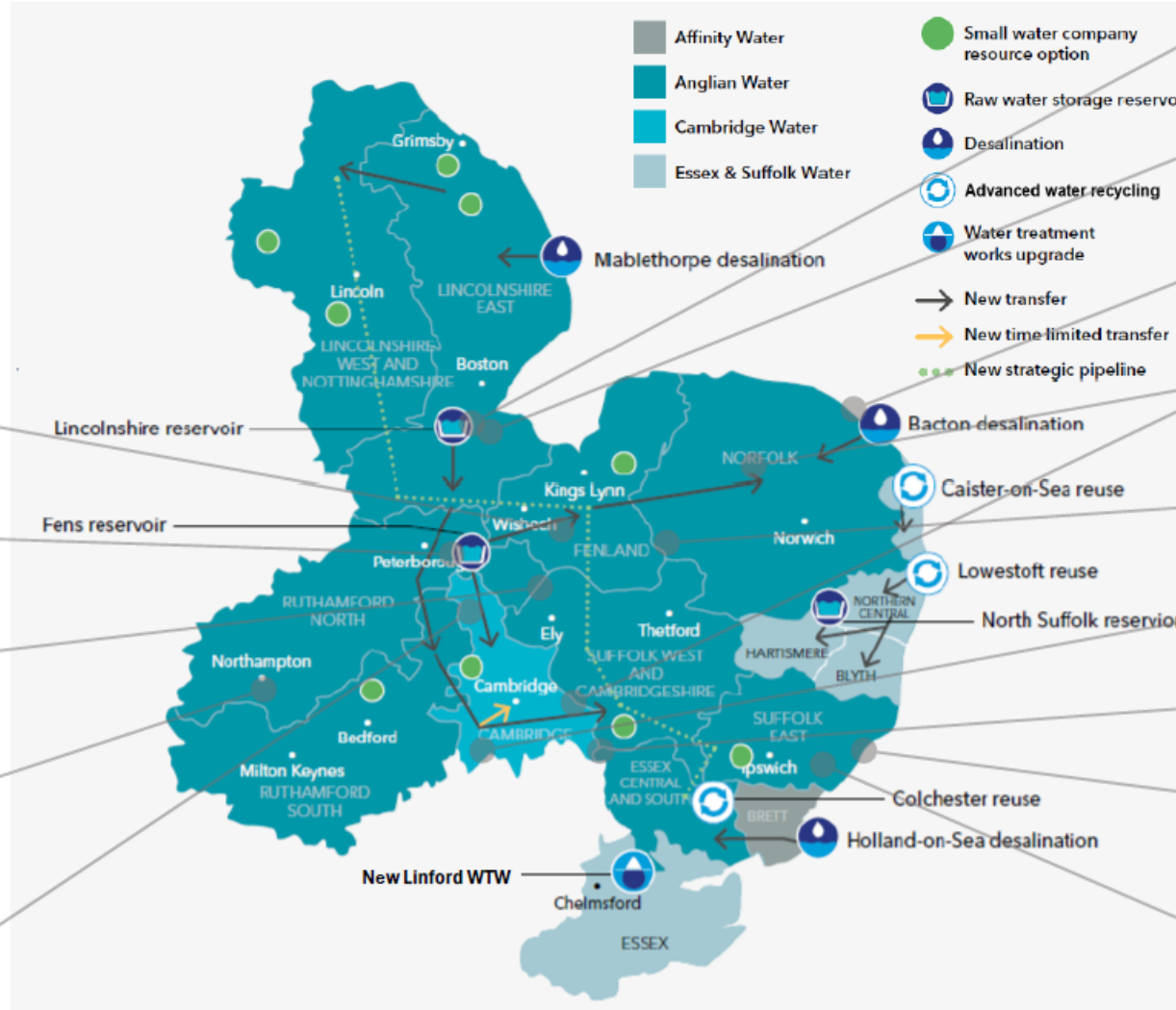
Public Water Supply: Third round of public consultation on Fens Reservoir launched in October, concluded in December 2025.

Agriculture: Second phase of Local Resource Option (LRO) studies commissioned by the Environment Agency, many in the WRE region.

Public Water Supply/Navigation: Preferred routes and sites selected for the Grand Union Canal transfer scheme ahead of further consultation in 2026.

Public Water Supply: Per capita consumption (PCC) in Cambridge Water's area remains very low at 119.9 l/p/d, Anglian Water's metered households also had a very low PCC of 119.7 l/p/d - unmetered households consumed 163.8 l/p/d.

Figure 1: Supply-side options in the best value Regional Plan to 2050



Public Water Supply: Ground investigations underway in earnest for the Lincolnshire Reservoir including four 5-metre deep observational trial pits.

Agriculture: Food and Farming Opportunity Study suggests a net benefit for agriculture as a result of the Fens and Lincolnshire Reservoirs, despite the loss of some farmland to the two reservoir sites.

Public Water Supply/Energy: Desalination options in Norfolk and Lincolnshire could be part of regional net zero energy and industry plans.

Environment: First NbS run-off attenuation features constructed in the Wensum and Cam catchments, complete with full baseline monitoring and control sites to demonstrate their benefits.

Multi-sector/environment: Multi-sector Environmental Destination workshops underway, starting with Lark, Glens and Witham catchments.

Public Water Supply: Consultation on the route of the Grafham Water to Cambridge transfer scheme launched in October 2025.

Agriculture: WRE funded by Defra to run smart agri-abstraction trials in the Upper Cam.

Public Water Supply: Regional leakage proving a challenge, rising by 7 MI/d last year, 20 MI/d behind planned trajectory toward regional targets.

Public Water Supply: Rollout of smart metering continues with Anglian Water installing 290,000 in 2024/25. The entirety of Anglian Water's region plus Essex & Suffolk's water resource zones in Suffolk will be fully smart metered by 2030.

IWC report: headline recommendations

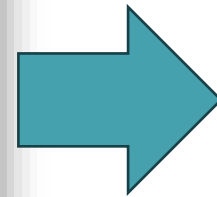
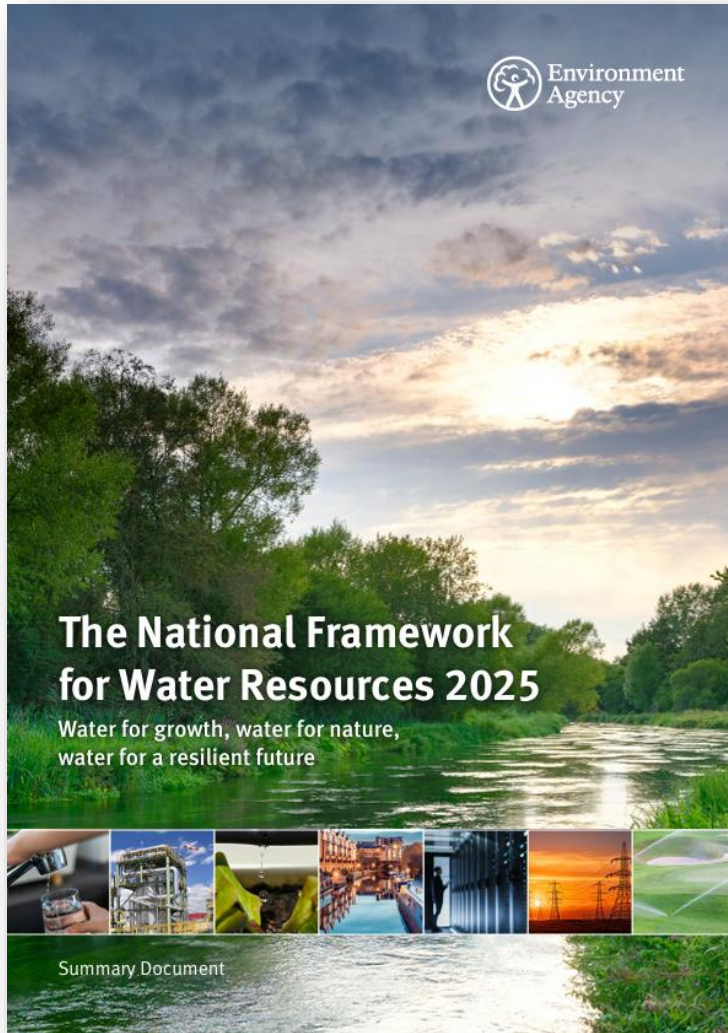
- New **National Water Strategy for England** covering all sectors that impact the environment
- Combined **ministerial statement of water industry priorities** to replace Strategic Policy Statements solely to the economic regulator
- Creation of an **integrated water regulator** combining environmental and economic regulation plus the Drinking Water Inspectorate
- Creation of **regional water authorities**, responsible for integrated and holistic water system planning working to hydrological boundaries
- A 'light' **national water systems coordination function** to ensure consistency in scenarios, assumptions, etc used in regional planning
- Retaining the **five-year price review cycle**, but with investment plans that look 10 and 25 years ahead
- **Rationalising water company plans to two frameworks** for 'water supply' and the 'water environment'



Regional water authority proposals

- Eight system planners (**'regional water authorities'**) organised along river basin district boundaries.
- Responsible for planning, funding, setting water body objectives, and monitoring delivery of plans.
 - Primary function is to produce **strategic, cross-sectoral spatial plans**, based on regional and national objectives, to ensure that the water system delivers outcomes that benefit society, both now and in the future
 - Covering **water resources and the water environment** but 'aligned with flood planning' arrangements
 - Ability to **direct funding toward national and regional objectives**, including water company expenditure, supplemented by possible levy raising powers
 - Their plans would **replace or incorporate river basin management plans**, supported by regular progress reporting
- Strong emphasis on **independence and accountability**
 - **Strategic board with independent chair** appointed by ministers. Regional political leader to be deputy chair. Other board members to include local government and environmental interests plus engineering, public health etc
 - **Secretariat of 20-50 people per region**. Regulators would provide advice at the objective-setting stage
 - **Choice on how constituted:** as a new independent body/ies or as part of the new water regulator

New National Framework for Water Resources 2025



Strengthening multi-sector planning and resilience

Take a multi-sector approach (Essential)

Engage with stakeholders to enable them to be active participants in relevant decision-making processes. (Essential)

Planning to protect and improve the environment and address environmentally unsustainable abstraction across catchments

Have an environmental destination plan (Essential)

Take a catchment approach (Essential)

Should coordinate and facilitate local uptake of nature-based solutions where they deliver value for water resources

Should embrace and promote opportunities for a variety of market mechanisms such as third-party bidding systems for options and opportunities around funding for nature-based solutions.

Supporting an integrated approach to water management

Should demonstrate leadership in an integrated approach to water management across catchments.

Actively seek options that include wider benefits, such as resilience to floods and droughts, improvements to water quality, and resilience improvements to drainage and wastewater systems, in alignment with DWMPs. (Essential)

Assess possible implications of government commitments with water resources implications such as those relating to net zero carbon targets and AI/data security. (Essential)

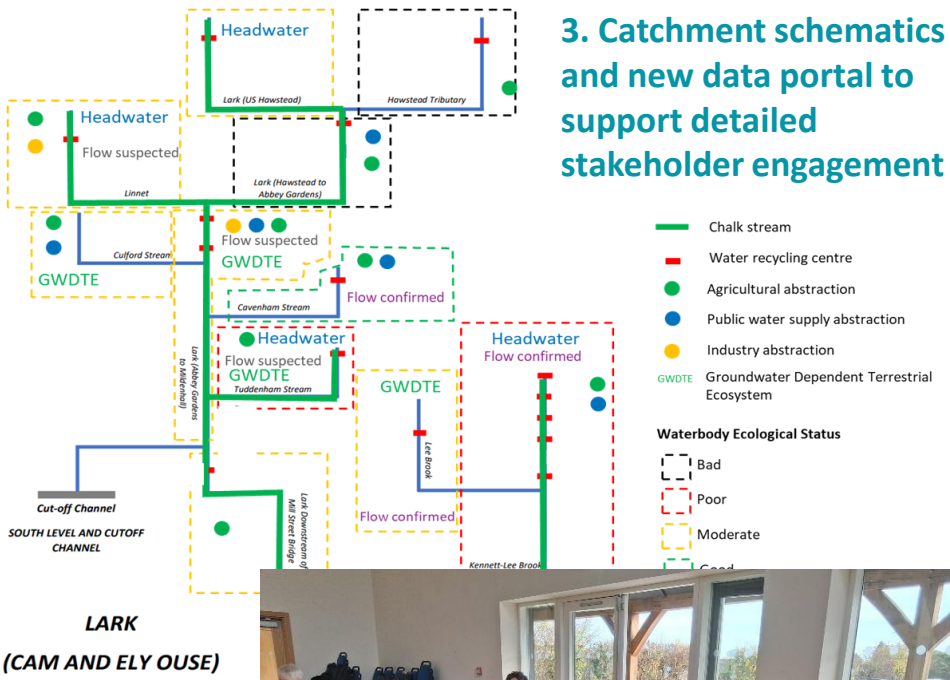
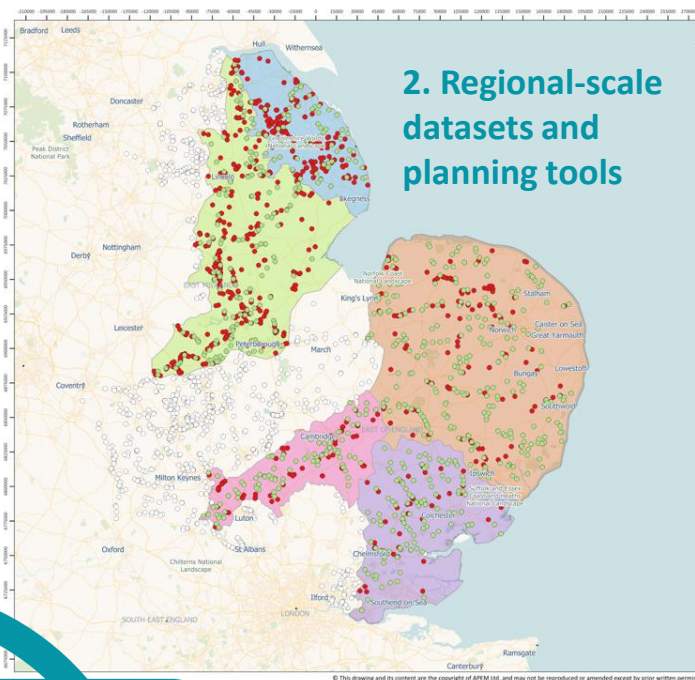
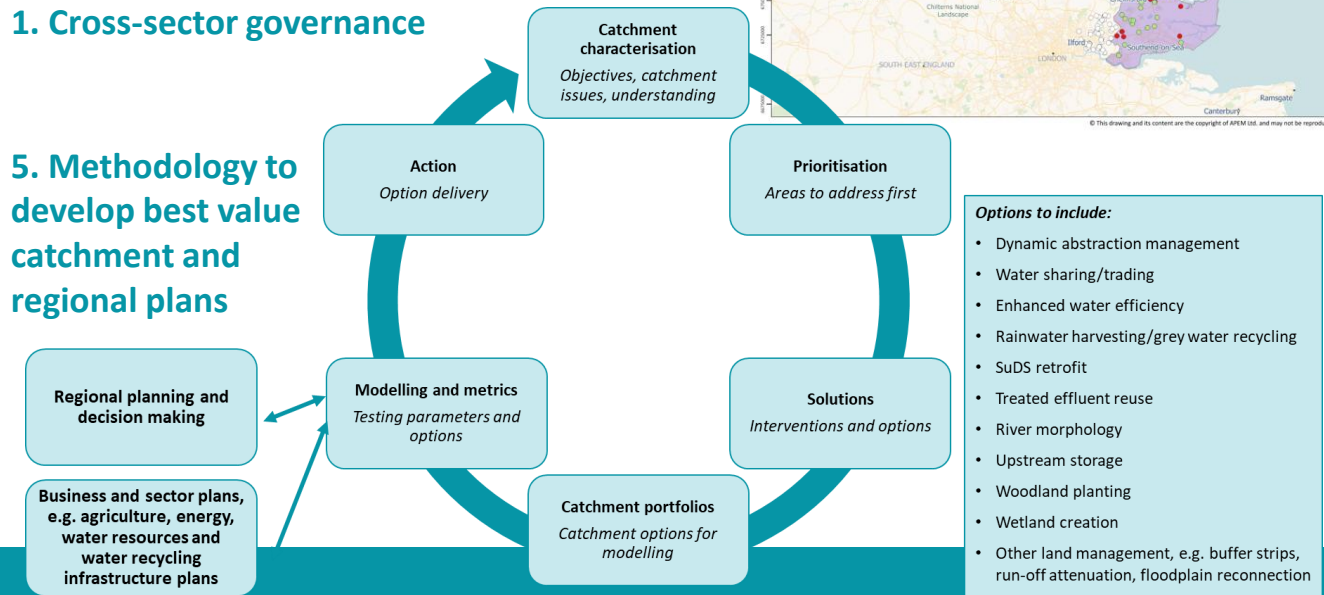
Should work with other risk management authorities to ensure that long term adaptive planning for flooding and coastal change is better coordinated with the next and subsequent cycles of planning for water and wastewater investments.

Developing WRE's Regional Plan 2.0



1. Cross-sector governance

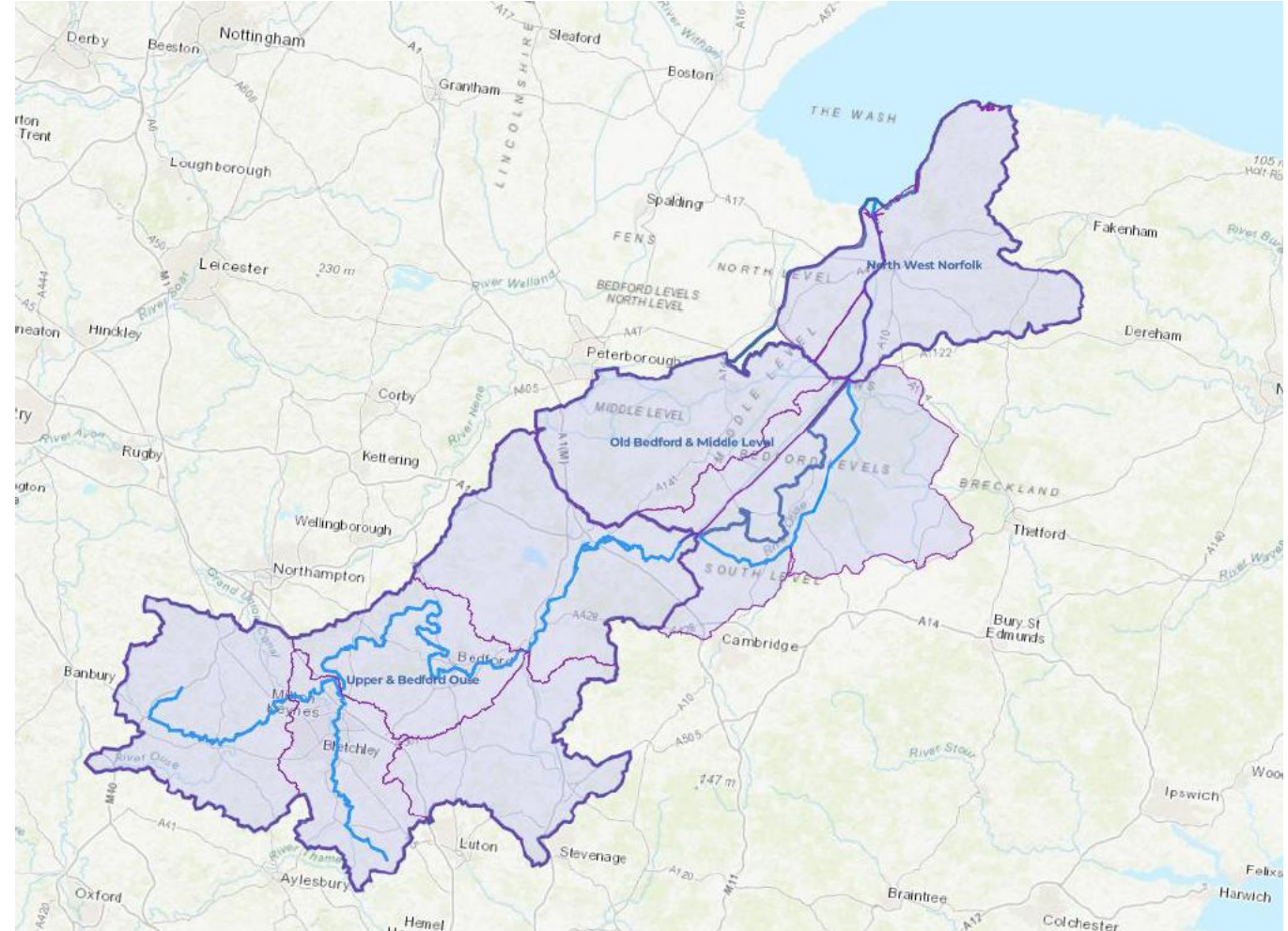
5. Methodology to develop best value catchment and regional plans



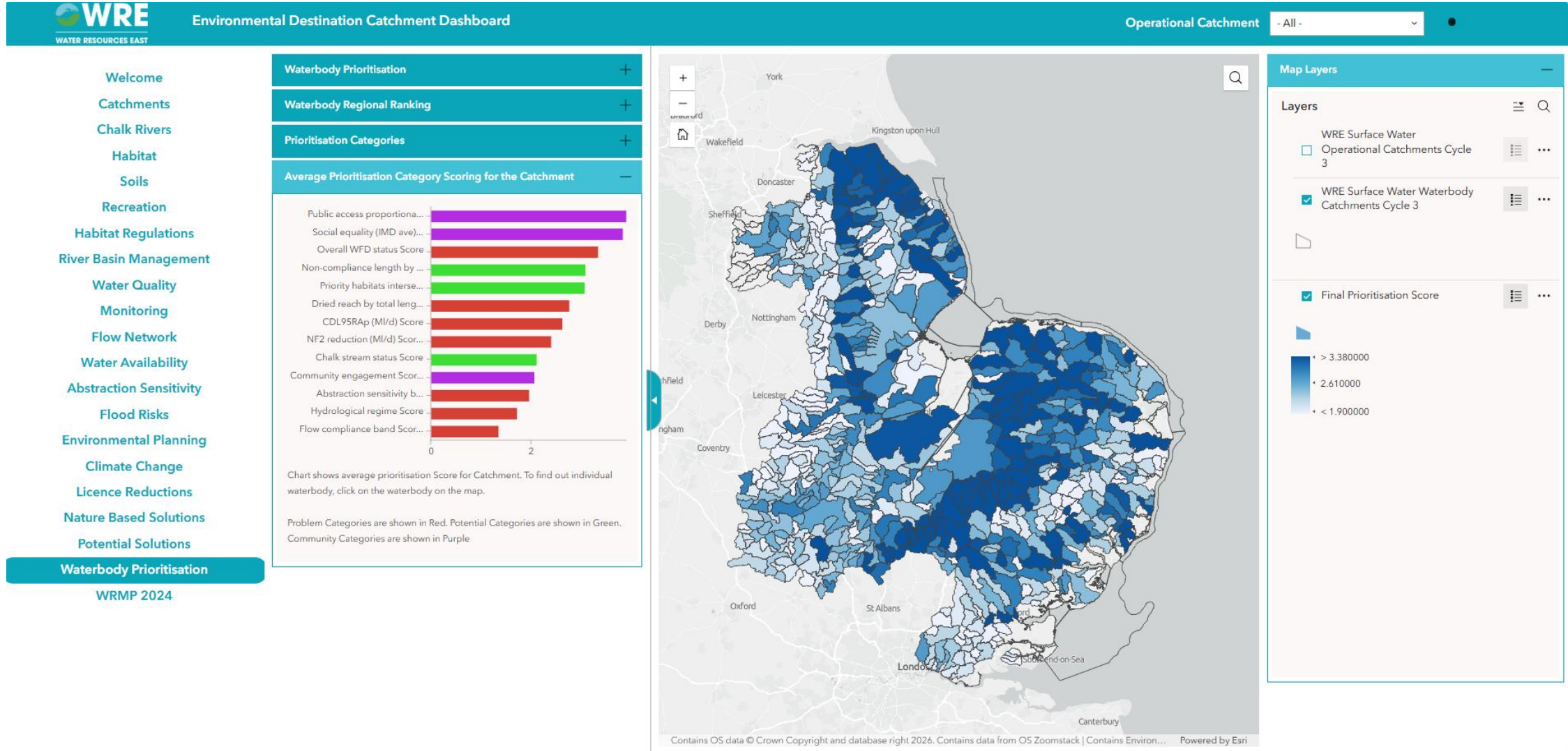
4. Stakeholder workshops to identify priorities and develop options



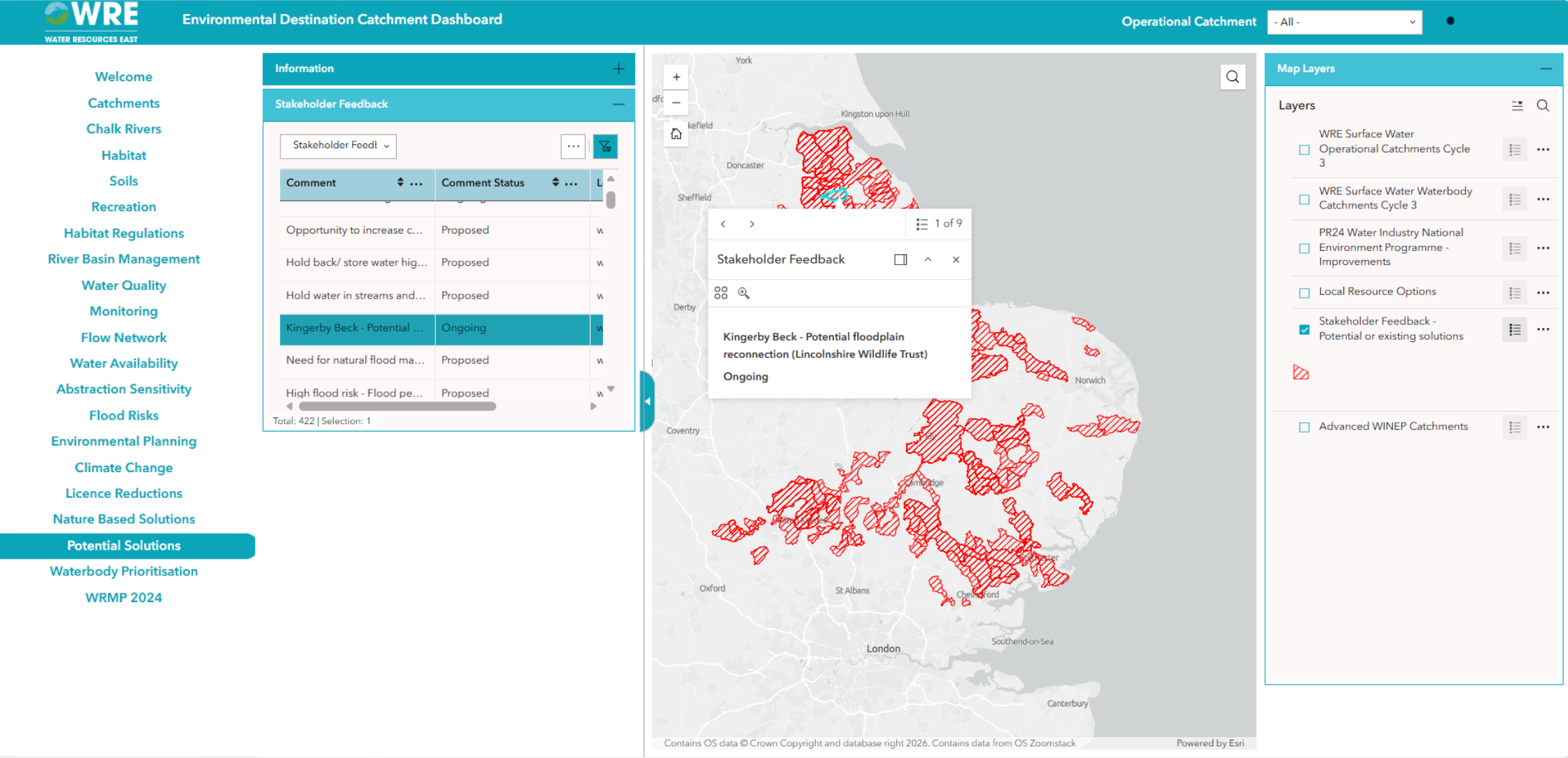
- The sustainability of groundwater abstractions from the chalk aquifer
- Nitrate levels in the Bedford Ouse, which are affecting abstraction into Grafham Water
- Capacity to accept further water recycling discharges from future growth due to high phosphorus levels in waterbodies
- The quantity (notably water levels in Spring) and quality of water undermining conservation objectives for the Ouse Washes
- The quality of raw water for abstraction and level of treatment needed for the proposed Fens Reservoir, affecting yield and costs



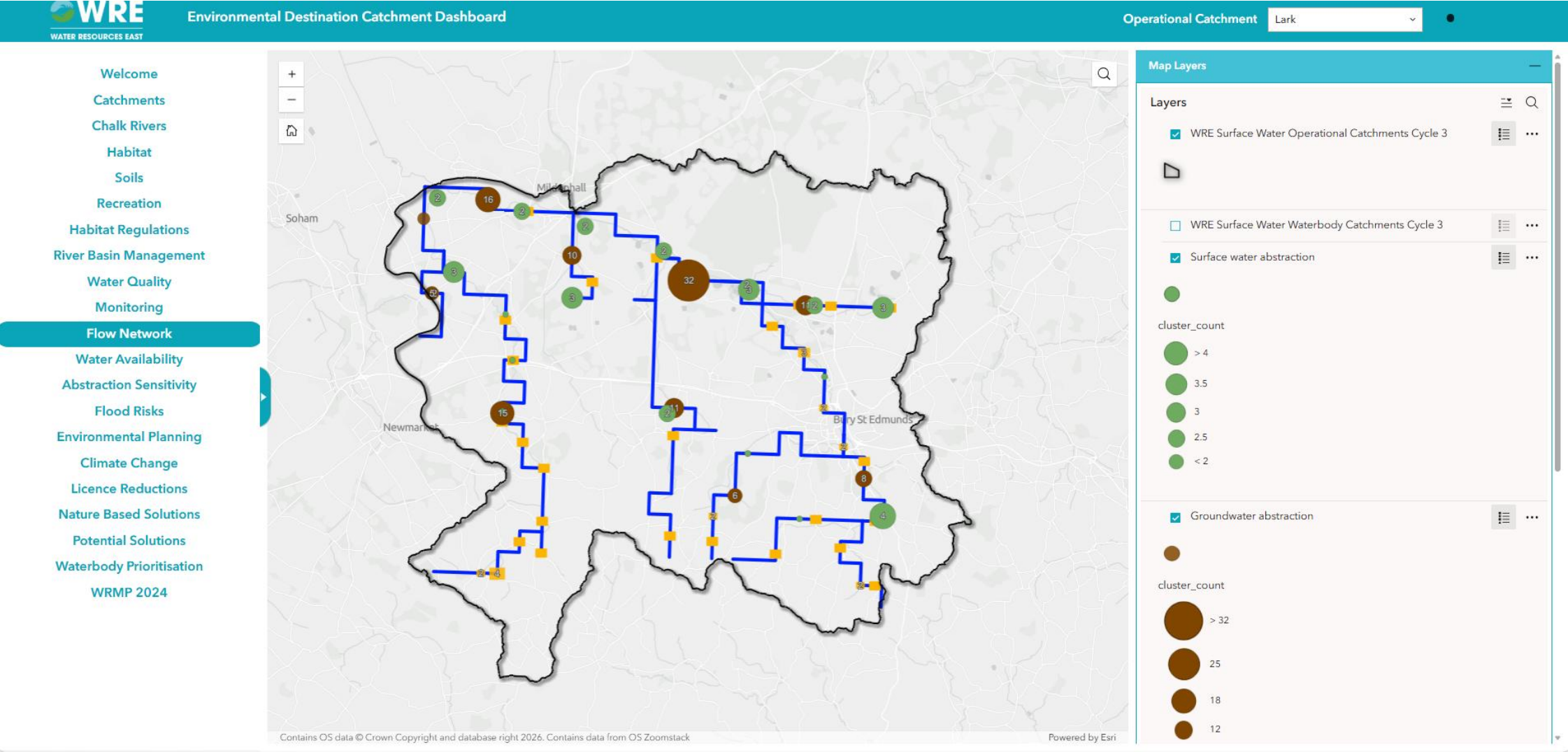
Data dashboard: waterbody prioritisation



Data dashboard: stakeholder feedback



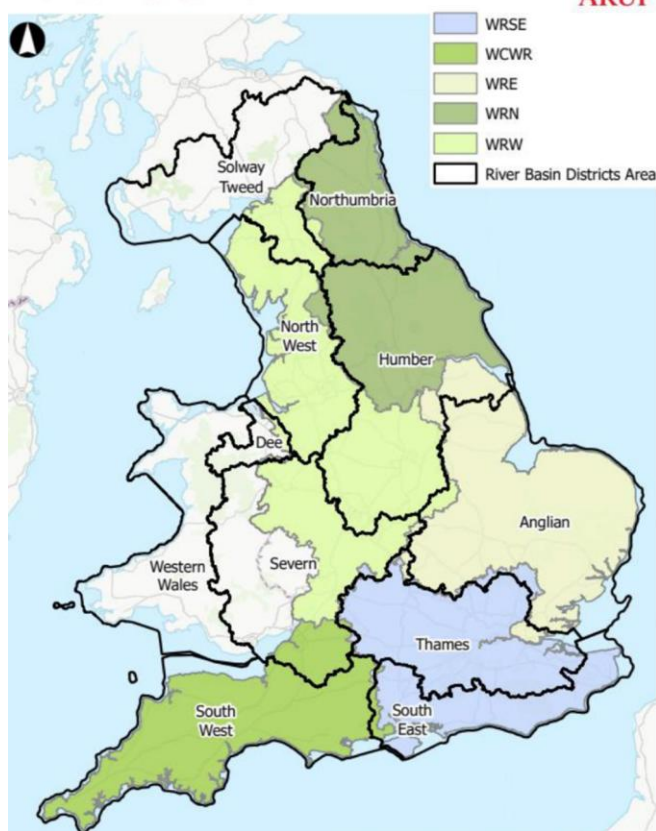
Data dashboard: potential options



WRE is already a regional system planner

- WRE's aim is to **pioneer collaborative, integrated approaches to water and environmental management**

River Basin Districts + RG



Regional system planning requirements	WRE
Regional-scale	Y
Hydrological boundaries	Y
Independent organisation, independent chair	Y
Multi-sector and strategic authority representation on board	Y
Tied in with local growth plans and LNRs	Y
Scope: Water supply planning	Y
Water environment planning, including nature-based solutions	Increasingly
Relationship with catchment partnerships and farm clusters	Y
Able to direct funding to catchment pilots and delivery projects	Y
Can coordinate consultation and engagement regionally	Y
Statutory body/planning function	N
Core costs currently funded by government	N
Team size	14

Next steps...?

- **Water white paper** published in January 2026 (right)
- **Clean Water Bill** announced in King's Speech
- Defra's **Transition Plan** due in Autumn 2026:
 - Scope and timetable for **creating the new water regulator**
 - Timetable for Price Review 2029, including **ministerial statement of water industry priorities**
 - **Supervisory approach** to water company regulation
 - Overview of **powers and duties** in Clean Water Bill
 - Next steps on **regional water system planning**





Thank you for listening



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