Oxford to Cambridge
Integrated Water Management Framework

Maximising planning for water

Engagement

What do professional planners think about water and the planning system?

To understand more about what professional planners thought about water and the planning system, in 2023, we held a survey across the Oxford to Cambridge area and carried out workshops with each of our partner Local Planning Authorities (LPAs). These were West Oxfordshire District Council, Milton Keynes City Council and Greater Cambridge Shared Planning team. The survey was aimed at professional planners with Local Authorities, including Mineral Planning Authorities.

We focused on the 2 strands of the planning process

1. **planning policy drafting**

2. **planning policy implementation (development management).**

We collected information on the plan-making process; barriers and enablers to devising stronger policies for water and implementing them; evidence used, and stakeholders involved in planning processes; and perceived policy effectiveness for the water system.

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

GREATER CAMBRIDGE SHARED PLANNING

Milton Keynes City Council

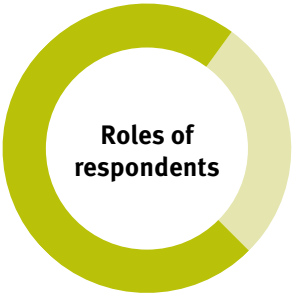
Survey responses

The roles of respondents included planning policy officers, planning officers, planning managers, and flood and water managers.

We received 33 individual responses to the survey, 29 responses from 13 LPAs and 4 responses from others including Mineral Planning Authorities. Of the 33 respondents, 24 were involved in policy drafting/production, and 9 were involved in policy implementation and application. Main respondents included planning policy officers, planning officers, planning managers, and flood and water managers.

24 involved in policy drafting/production

9 involved in policy implementation and application



Survey highlights

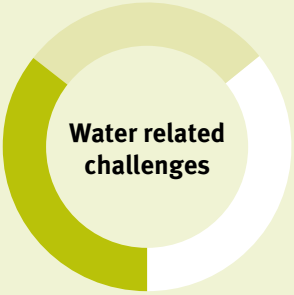
We found that

- flooding was the most considered water discipline
- flooding policies and water quality policies were seen as the most difficult to implement
- water related challenges were seen as significant by local planners. A third of participants viewed water related challenges as very significant, a little over a quarter of participants viewed them as significant, while another third of participants viewed them as moderately significant
- investment in flooding evidence was seen as more of a priority amongst those involved in policy implementation than by those in policy drafting

A third of participants viewed water related challenges as very significant

A little over a quarter of participants viewed them as significant

Another third of participants viewed them as moderately significant



Respondents said

- water availability was thought to provide the best return on investment to improve the water environment
- national planning policy is the "engagement or guidance, regulations and advice" source they most used
- engagement with the statutory consultees were considered as the most supportive factor, although was amongst the most constraining by others
- how recently the local plan was written was seen as the most supporting factor regarding the ability to implement water related planning policy
- the top 3 most constraining factors were:
  - availability of best practice examples
  - regulatory requirements for planning
  - engagement with developers over water policy
- they have good management principles and take steps to build partnerships
- they take steps to engage early with relevant stakeholders

Documents containing example policies delivering positive outcomes for water included

CAMBRIDGESHIRE FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY PDF

WATER EFFICIENCY STANDARDS AS SET OUT IN NORTHWEST CAMBRIDGE AREA ACTION PLAN PDF

Refer to the note titled "survey approach and summary of responses" for more information on our website.

Workshop summary

We found that

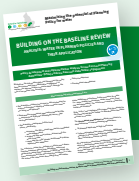
The workshops with our partner Local Planning Authorities were an opportunity to look into the details. We found common challenges and opportunities including but not limited to:

- an absence of monitoring requirements impacting LPA's ability to push for more ambitious water related policies and associated building standards
- a need for improved guidance and direction from the Environment Agency and Government whilst acknowledging the uncertainty it creates and how it often results in misalignment, additional costs, and abortive work
- the mismatch between the creation of a local plan and relevant evidence-base documents especially relating to infrastructure investment
- high level of ambitions for water and opportunities it generates at site-level
- some specific structural arrangements and approaches were said to be advantageous to water policy

Document hierarchy – Project overview

Stage 1

Policy baseline review



Building on the baseline review
Analysis: Water in planning policies and their application

Stage 2

Planning and water toolkit

Development management checklist

Instructional video

Policy case studies technical note

Pre-application guidance

Policy development checklist

Conditions technical note

Written user guide

Stage 3

Reporting – key recommendations

Reporting – key opportunities

Engagement

Engagement

Engagement, survey approach and detailed summary of responses