

BFI Elected Members Forum

Minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2025

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Present

Jan Davis- Broadland District Council (Chair), Harry Blathwayt- North Norfolk District Council, Andrée Gee- East Suffolk Council, Noel Galer – Great Yarmouth Borough Council, Tony Grayling- Broads Authority, Richard Price- Norfolk County Council, James Reeder- Suffolk County Council, Robert Savage – South Norfolk Council, Matt Shardlow- Broads Authority, Paul Wells- Great Yarmouth Borough Council.

In attendance

Amy Capon- Environment Agency, David Cobby- Jacobs, Peter Doktor - Environment Agency, Kellie Fisher- Environment Agency, Catherine Harries- Environment Agency, Mairi MacArthur- Environment Agency, Hannah Purkis- Suffolk County Council, Rob Rogers- Broads Authority, Kylie Moos - Broads Authority (minutes).

1. Apologies for absence and welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the online meeting.

Apologies: James Bensly, Richard Elliot.

2. Updated BFI objectives

David Cobby (DC) introduced the updated Broadland Futures Initiative (BFI) objectives which has been streamlined from 13 to 10 and explained why the objectives have been updated:

1. To be relevant to the Flood Risk Management (FRM) Action Pathways
2. Remove affordability from objective Economic Viability & Development
3. Ensure independence for use in Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA)

The following table shows the proposed changes in objective descriptions. Note no change is proposed for the objective Built Environment (BE) and so it is not included.

Original Concise Description	Updated Concise Description
<p>Engagement and Participation (EP) Communities and stakeholders are knowledgeable about flood risk and resilience activities, so that they are motivated and empowered to be involved in collaborative actions that provide mutual benefits</p>	Communities and stakeholders are knowledgeable about flood risk and resilience activities, so that they are motivated and empowered to be involved in collaborative actions that provide <u>multiple</u> benefits
<p>Cultural Heritage and Sense of Place (CHSP) The social environment is improved, whilst retaining and, where possible, enhancing the special qualities of the area, including the landscape</p> <p>The historic environment, heritage assets and their settings are conserved and, where possible, enhanced.</p>	The social environment is improved, whilst <u>conserving</u> the special qualities of the area that <u>includes the landscape, heritage assets, and their settings</u>

<p>Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) Flood risk and water resources are managed in an integrated way through the catchments from upstream rivers to the sea and coast, maximising opportunities for nature-based solutions</p>	<p>Flood risk and water resources are managed in an integrated way through the catchments, from upstream rivers to the sea and coast, <u>maximising opportunities for nature-based solutions</u></p>
<p>Healthy Waters (HW) The quality of surface waters is improved, with ongoing and sudden increases in the salinity of sensitive freshwater environments minimised as far as possible</p>	<p>The quality of surface waters is improved, with ongoing and sudden increases in the salinity of sensitive freshwater environments minimised <u>as far as possible</u></p>
<p>Climate Adaptation & Mitigation (CAM) Actions fit into adaptive pathways that perform well under possible future changes in climate and prioritise choices with low regrets Actions take as much carbon out of the atmosphere as they put into it, as measured along the 100-year pathways and within the wider Norfolk and Suffolk area.</p>	<p><u>Adaptive pathways prioritise actions with low regrets and are carbon neutral within the 100-year plan period</u></p>
<p>Natural Capital (NC) All opportunities are taken to conserve and enhance the natural environment, including internationally and nationally designated sites, for the continuing benefit of our unique biodiversity and all who live, work, and visit.</p>	<p>All opportunities are taken to enhance the natural environment, including internationally and nationally designated sites, <u>and to maximise opportunities for nature-based solutions, for the continuing benefit of our unique biodiversity and all who live, work and visit</u></p>
<p>Economic Viability & Development (EVD) Pathways of actions are cost-beneficial and can be afforded by the partnership of government, organisations and people who benefit. Flood management contributes to sustainable growth in the local rural and urban economies</p>	<p>Pathways of actions <u>deliver Value for Money</u> <u>Flood management contributes to sustainable growth in the local rural and urban economies</u></p>
<p>Sustainable Agriculture (SA) Flood management and sustainable agriculture are aligned and mutually supportive and improve overall climate resilience</p>	<p>Flood management and sustainable agriculture are <u>mutually supportive and contribute to sustainable growth in the local economy</u></p>
<p>Recreation, Tourism & Navigation (RTN) Access to recreational and tourism activities is supported, and impacts to navigation are minimised</p>	<p>Recreational, tourism and navigation activities are supported and <u>contribute to sustainable growth in the local economy</u></p>

A member noted that the updated cultural heritage and sense of place objective has lost the possibility of enhancing as well as conserving and would like to see the reference to enhancing remain in the description. They suggested that the Natural Capital (NC) objective should also refer to conserving and where possible, enhancing the special quality of the area. A member

agreed with the suggestions made but cautioned that there is a chance that enhance could then be applied to all the objectives.

Regarding the updated description for the Economic Viability & Development (EVD) objective, the Chair suggested elaborating on Value for Money because as it stands, it does not reflect the Defra framework.

The Chair asked if sustainable growth in the local economy as set out in the updated Sustainable Agriculture (SA) objective is possible given the current circumstances. A member recommended keeping in 'growth' even if it is challenging, it should still be the goal within the economy.

A member commented that the loss of urban economies from the EVD objective, it is not replaced by SA or RTN objectives which are more towards rural economies. Urban economies refer to businesses in towns which is why it was kept separate. The Chair suggested 'pathways of actions to deliver Value for Money as per the Defra Framework to contribute to sustainable growth in rural and urban economies.' DC added, regarding flood economics, urban damages and damages avoided are what drives the benefits for flooding and the funding that is available. In the current system, agriculture and recreation are not strong contributors for flood economics. DC agreed to review the updated description.

A member suggested that the process of scoring and ranking of the objectives should be carried out again now that the objective wording has been changed.

Regarding the NC objective description, a member commented that there has been considerable change in the description and that Nature based Solutions (NbS) are different from biodiversity which has been removed as part of the update. The original description had clear objectives whereas the new description has lost this and includes "maximise opportunities for NbS" which are different. Several members agreed that the original description should remain for the NC objective and the text "maximising opportunities for NbS" should stay under the Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) objective.

Regarding the conversation around biodiversity being represented in the objectives, a member commented that the BFI is not only covering a Protected Landscape, but it is for the entire Broadland catchment. There is a concern that the focus is on the National Park and Landscape instead of the whole area and the people living, working, and breathing within it.

DC commented that the purpose of the change was for the pathways to be recognised in one objective rather than two. A criterion of the MCDA is for the objective to remain independent which was not clear in the original 13 objectives. A member commented that there is a slight overlap between whether these are guiding the opportunities that are being considered or judging the opportunities which is a difficult blend to make.

DC agreed to review the feedback and circulate a new proposal for the updated objectives ahead of the next EMF.

3. Criteria to measure fulfilment of objectives

DC presented the 22 criteria that have been developed to measure the objectives. Objectives are broad and as demonstrated during today's discussions, can be interpreted several ways. The criteria are SMART and facilitate robust and transparent decision making, they will also measure the performance of the objectives against the pathways. Two to three criteria have been developed for each objective.

A member commented that whilst road and rail is critical infrastructure as set out in the Built Environment (BE) criteria, there are also other aspects to consider such as water supply, treatment works and electricity sub stations that are vulnerable to flooding. DC responded, road and rail was selected as this type of infrastructure is more likely to generate funding for FRM. A member suggested revising the criteria to the following: "...reduce the flood damage to critical infrastructure such road or rail." DC agreed to review the criteria description.

The Chair asked if the sensitive landscapes which are included as part of the criteria for Cultural Heritage and Sense of Place (CHSP) are referring to both the negative and positive impacts on the landscape. DC responded, it is only possible to score negative impacts for landscape assessments. An alternative wording could be: "Will the pathway cause detriment to sensitive landscapes?"

A naturally healthy beach/coast, as set out in the ICM objective refers to the natural process of sediment movement. A member noted that the criteria is like a Shoreline Management Plan objective. Catherine Harries (CH) noted that this criteria is due to the open coast between Eccles and Winterton which is part of the BFI plan area where there are currently hard defences and there is a link to the Shoreline Management Plan. In the latter part of the century when sea levels are expected to be higher, the hard defences will be under more pressure and there is a likelihood that the beach will not look the same as now. Within the pathways, some of the actions included increasing the defences, but as a result the beach will suffer, alternatively, there are other actions that do not include raising the defences and they look more like managed realignment. The impacts of the either action needs to be considered for the wider Broads area which is why the criteria has been included.

A member commented that the criteria for ICM is different to the original objective which included inland flooding and considered places like Great Yarmouth. The criteria has narrowed the objective down to the storage of floodwater, beaches and coasts which is a narrow measure for judging the success of ICM. DC responded, the original objectives recognised that it is a source to sea process, out of this, two elements which are important to the land and coast which can be measured have been selected for the criteria. DC recognised that it can be difficult to measure some of the other integrated aspects of ICM and shared an example of the ICM criteria scoring against the objectives. Kellie Fisher (KF) added, it is not unusual to have this type of measure when it comes to beach management. It has long been recognised in coastal risk management that healthy beaches are better risk management assets, and every time a concrete wall or groyne is put in place, natural processes are disrupted in some way. Measuring this is difficult and with the upcoming new appraisal guidance and policy statement, it is likely

that there will be more of this type of measure and a move towards natural flood management and working with natural processes to deliver coastal risk management.

A member noted that the detailed criteria to measure the objectives for ICM does refer to natural inland processes, but it is not included in the criteria summary. They proposed the following criteria: “Will the pathway contribute to natural processes in the management of inland and coast.” DC agreed to review the criteria description.

The NC objective will be reviewed to include biodiversity following on from the discussions had during agenda item 2.

A member commented that based on the funding gap for the Lowestoft flood barrier, it is unlikely that Great Yarmouth will have the investment for a barrier and questioned if the barrier pathway should now be dismissed. A member responded that a Great Yarmouth barrier was just one example and there could be other options under the same pathway. There are also large sums of money being discussed for the Epoch 3 flood defence scheme in Great Yarmouth.

Regarding the criteria for objective SA, a member commented that sustainable agriculture may mean that there is a change, but that does not mean that there must be a change to the land. For example, paludiculture and changing the way that higher grade agricultural land is used may not conflict with floodwaters. DC responded, if the protect pathway was in place than the criteria would remain as it is because the aim is to minimise flood damage as it is known today to agriculture. A managed adaptation pathway may allow more water on the land for paludiculture which could drive a new agricultural industry. DC added, the criteria needs to be only true in some situations and not others. If they are too broad, they could be scored favourable in every situation. A member commented that removing the water is not necessarily the answer and they are concerned that the criteria is only being judged against the current situation. An alternative focus could be on avoiding constraints on agriculture. DC agreed to review the criteria description.

DC agreed to review the feedback and circulate a new proposal for the updated objective criteria ahead of the next EMF.

4. Confirming the process for appraising

DC presented the process for appraising FRM action pathways in the BFI plan. The Treasury Green Book suggests MCDA for fair evaluations across multiple criteria in complex public sector scenarios. The approach can be used as the primary approach for evaluating the long list of options, but it must be used as a secondary method to support the economic focus for the evaluation of the shortlist.

Longlist FRM action pathways

- Rank pathways
- MCDA only

- Use all updated objectives, both monetised and non-monetised.
- Tweak existing objective weights.

Shortlist action pathways

- Identify the preferred pathway.
- Cost benefit analysis (monetised objectives) supported by MCDA (non-monetised objectives).
- An opportunity to refine criteria and monetise any important outstanding aspects.
- A re-weighting of objectives retained for the MCDA may be required

DC confirmed that this is not part of an iterative process and the outcome of the two steps will be brought to the EMF for acceptance.

Elected members were asked if they agree with the approach of longlist/shortlist stages. A member requested that the process is updated with the objective and criteria revisions which were discussed earlier in today's meeting.

It was unanimously resolved to proceed with longlist/shortlist stages.

5. Programme forward look

Peter Doktor (PD) presented an overview of the programme timeline until the end of the strategy development and adoption.

Autumn 2025-Summer 2026 Modelling and appraisal

- Model and appraise the baseline scenarios (do nothing + sustain) + four pathways, based on climate change projections for 2040, 2070, 2130, applying different combinations of FRM actions.
- The outputs of the modelling will provide flood outlines and depths on maps.

Autumn 2026: Wider engagement

- Using the modelling outputs to explain future impacts if we continue with the current FRM approach and why we need to take an adaptive approach.
- Using the modelling outputs to explore the effectiveness of pathways and potential opportunities linked to future FRM actions.

Winter 2026 – Summer 2027: Develop and appraise FRM action pathways

- Sequence and appraise the longlist of FRM action combinations into pathways. Non-monetary appraisal against the BFI Objectives. Appraise shortlist of FRM action pathways, including economics
- Define future decision points and monitoring approach

Autumn 2027: Wider engagement

- Seek feedback that our appraisal conclusions are correct, focus on those places most affected in the near term, further explore opportunities

Autumn 2027 – Spring 2028: Develop and finalise the BFI Plan

- Finalise pathways based on EMF acceptance of shortlist appraisal
- Funding Strategy and draft business cases for potential ‘next step’ FRM actions in first phase (2030s)
- Sustainability Assessment including Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)
- Write the BFI Plan > Agreement from EMF and Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) > Publish.

6. Engagement and partnership working

Amy Capon (AC) has joined the Environment Agency (EA) as the Communications and Engagement Senior Advisor for the BFI and presented the partnership working and engagement next steps:

- Formalising the role of our Initiative Project Team (IPT)
- Exploring/re-visiting what their organisation needs from the BFI Plan, how they expect to use it as part of their statutory duties or business planning, what they will need to be ready to adopt the plan in 2028
- Early engagement with our IPT and EMF on what the modelling on the baselines + pathways is showing us, what it could mean for our communities, planning our wider engagement together
- Horizon scanning for opportunities and risks
- Planning for engagement milestones in 2026 and 2027

The Chair commented that the challenge of communications and engagement must not be underestimated. It is a complex topic that needs to be presented at different levels and it important for members to understand who should be involved and communicating more widely about the BFI.

7. Updated Terms of Reference & EMF briefing

A copy of the updated BFI EMF terms of reference and briefing pack were shared with members ahead of today’s meeting.

It was unanimously resolved to agree the updated EMF Terms of Reference and briefing pack.

8. Any other business

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

The local government reorganisation and devolution could have a significant impact on the BFI programme between now and when the plan is published in 2028. To make sure that the project team stay informed about ongoing changes, local government reorganisation and devolution will be added as a standing item to EMF agendas. The Chair commented that no decisions have been made yet apart from the mayoral elections which are taking place in May 2026 for Norfolk and Suffolk. Both Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, and the respective district councils have submitted their proposals to government in response to the local government reorganisation and a decision is not expected until spring next year.

A member commented that the mayor is going to be important to the programme. The BFI is strategic and that is going to be the overriding powers of the mayor.

A member commented that they have heard about a delay to the elections and a possibility for the single transferable vote in 2027, but none of this has been confirmed.

East Suffolk councillors who were due to stand for election in 2027 have been advised that this will now take place in 2028.

A member commented that the discussions had today has shown the amount of confusion there is on the topic. Both local authorities at county level and district have submitted their business plans and it is positive that both Norfolk and Suffolk are going for a single unitary option.

Meeting dates for 2026

The meeting dates for 2026 are set out as below. The format of the meetings will be confirmed closer to the time.

- Wednesday 14 January 2026
- Monday 30 March 2026
- Wednesday 22 July 2026
- Wednesday 7 October 2026

The Chair requested that any revisions following discussions at today's meeting are shared well in advance of the next meeting and consider the break over Christmas and New Year.

A member commented that they were sorry to hear of the sad news regarding Councillor Melanie Vigo di Gallidoro who was a member of the Forum and shared their condolences to colleagues at Suffolk County Council.

9. Date of next meeting

10.00am-11.30am 14 January 2026.