
DEVELOPING OUR DRAINAGE AND WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR 2030-55

Customer summary

1. INTRODUCTION

Northumbrian Water is making a long-term plan for how to manage rainwater and wastewater in the future. This plan is called the Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP).

What is the Strategic Context?

This document explains the direction of travel for our next long-term plan, DWMP28. It is not the full plan. Instead, the Strategic Context sets out the principles, challenges and goals that will shape the detailed plan we will publish in 2028.

The Strategic Context will guide how we:

- Understand future pressures and risks
- Identify where improvements are needed
- Develop the options available to us
- Compare choices fairly using a consistent approach
- Select solutions that deliver the greatest overall value

Your views at this stage will help us build the right plan from the start.

Why are we publishing this now?

We are sharing the Strategic Context early so we can explain our approach and invite your feedback before we develop the full DWMP in 2028. Your views will help shape the options we consider and the decisions we make.

What is changing in the water sector?

Recent national reviews and policy changes mean the way water companies plan for the long-term is evolving.

- In May 2025, the Government released new statutory **Guidelines for Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMPs)**, which we must follow when developing DWMP28.
- The Government asked the **Independent Water Commission** to review how the water sector works and how it could be improved.
- As part of that review, the Government has published a White Paper called **A New Vision for Water**, which sets out their action plan for reform.

These changes update the rules and expectations for water companies and provide a clearer national direction for future investment and environmental improvement.

What this means for our plan:

Publishing our Strategic Context now allows us to show how we will respond to these changes and work with customers, communities and partners to shape a plan that meets the region's needs for the next 25 years.

Building trust through improvement

Customers tell us that wastewater performance and the health of the environment strongly influence trust in water companies.

DWMP28 is one of the ways we aim to improve this, focusing on reducing flooding and pollution, improving rivers and officially recognised swimming areas, called 'bathing waters', to make our services more resilient for the future.

Find out more about us and how we are performing:

- [What we do](#)
- [Our operating area](#)
- [How we are performing](#)



The diagram on the following page shows all the main parts we use to build our DWMP for 2030-55. Think of it like a map that helps us plan the journey to a better wastewater future.

Each part of the diagram represents something important we need to think about when planning how to manage rainwater and wastewater for the next 25 years.

All these parts work together to show how our plan is built and how each one plays a role:



Strategic Objectives set out where we want to go.



Planning Areas show where we focus our efforts.



Planning Horizons mark the key moments when we check progress.



Future Trends highlight the challenges ahead.



Performance Indicators track how well we're doing at each stage.



The Value Framework helps us choose the best options along the way.





Strategic Objectives

These are our big goals. In the diagram, they represent the destination, the things we want to achieve by 2030, 2040, 2055 and beyond.

Examples include:

- Less flooding
- Cleaner rivers and seas
- Better protection for nature
- Being ready for climate change
- Supporting new homes and businesses

These objectives guide everything else in the plan.



Performance Indicators

These are the scores and measurements we use to track how well our drainage and wastewater system is performing now and in the future. In the diagram, these act like road signs keeping us on the right path.

Examples include:

- Number of flooding incidents
- Storm overflow spills
- Pollution events
- Treatment works meeting standards

They show whether we're moving closer to our goals or need to adjust course.



Planning Horizons

These are the key points in time when we look at how things are performing and what work is needed next.

The diagram shows years as “milestones” on the journey. At each milestone we check:

- How well the system is coping
- What improvements are needed next
- Whether we are still on track toward our goals



Future Trends

These are the big changes we expect over the next 25 years, like heavier rain, more people, new rules, changes in technology, or rising costs.

In the diagram, these appear like hazards or obstacles on the road. They help us plan ahead so we can avoid problems instead of reacting to them.



Value Framework

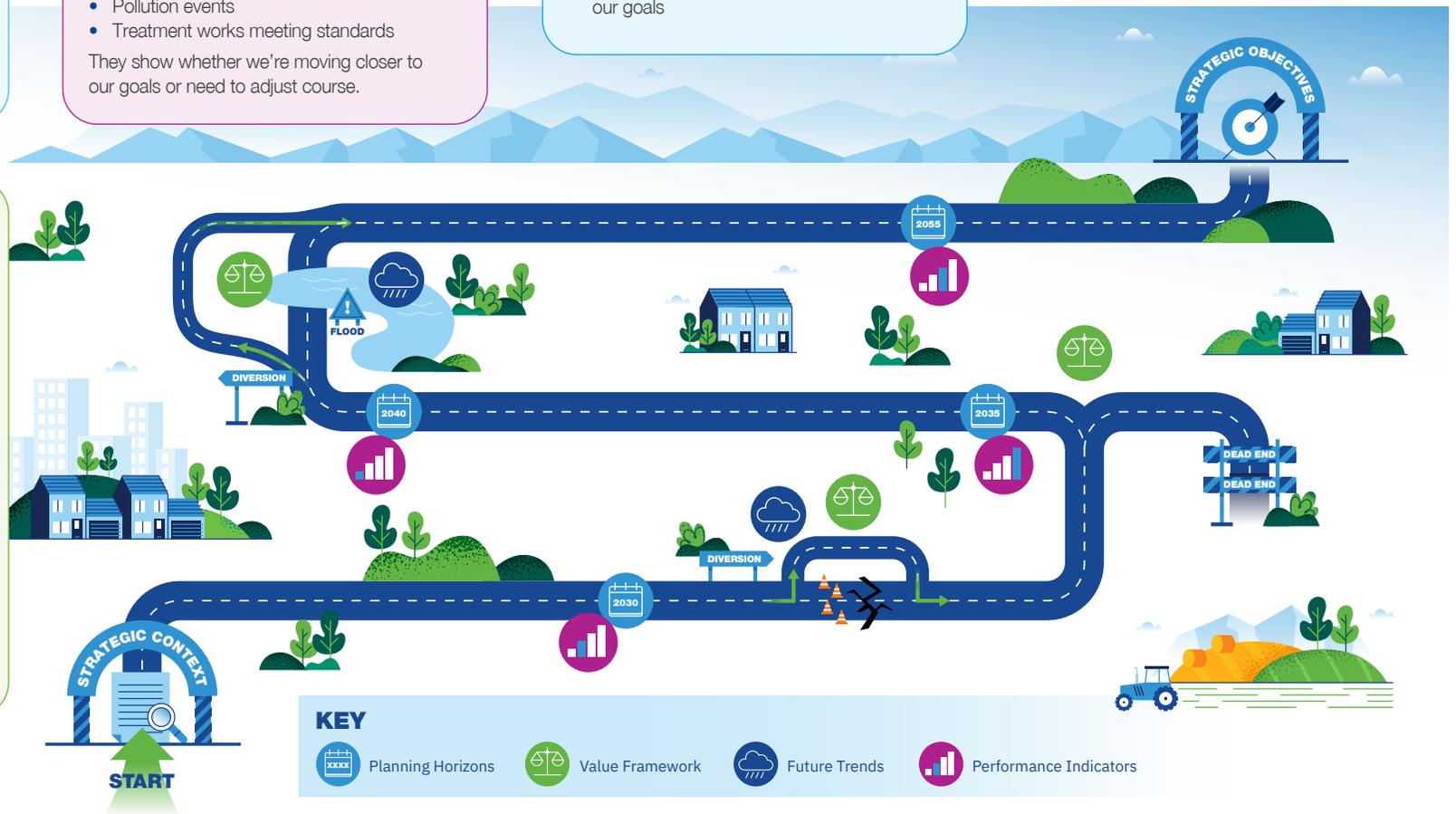
This is how we decide which options give the best value for customers, the environment, and communities.

In the diagram, it represents finding the best route—not just the cheapest quick fix, but the option that delivers the most long-term benefit.

We check things like:

- Customer benefit
- Environmental improvement
- Long-term costs
- Reliability
- Community impact

This ensures we choose solutions that deliver the greatest overall value.



2. ENGAGEMENT

HOW WE WORK WITH CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITIES

We are talking to customers and local communities alongside stakeholders such as councils, the Environment Agency, housing developers, regulators and other partners to build the DWMP together.

Customers are at the heart of everything we do. As the plan progresses, we will continue to involve customers and ask for feedback on the plan's aims, the clarity of our communications, and how people want to be kept informed.

We engage at three levels with customers, communities and partners:

- 1. Company-Wide Level** across Northumbrian Water.
- 2. Strategic Planning Area** level where we work with councils, the Environment Agency and other partners across wider areas.
- 3. Sewerage Catchments** level, where we focus on local areas often based around the pipes and treatment works serving a community.

Level 1 -
Company-wide



Level 2 -
Strategic Planning Areas



Level 3 -
Sewerage Catchments



Level 1 -
Company-Wide

Planning areas

Company level

Whole NW region

Stakeholder

Director-level senior representatives

Level 2 -
Strategic Planning Areas

Planning areas

Strategic Planning Areas

7 grouped Planning Areas

Stakeholder

Officer-level planning groups supported by existing specialist forums.

Level 3 -
Sewerage Catchments

Planning areas

Sewerage catchments

413 catchments

Stakeholder

Local interest and community groups.
Other established local forums and groups.



Over the last year, we have been speaking with customers, community groups and a wide range of partners to understand local priorities, concerns and opportunities. This helps ensure our plan is realistic, joined-up and focused on what matters most.

Listening to customers

We work closely with customers through our People Panels, which bring together current and future customers from across our region.

Customers have asked us to:

- Write in clear, simple language
- Explain why the plan matters to everyday life
- Be open about risks, costs and environmental impacts

We also shared early versions of our Strategic Objectives with customers, who highlighted where we needed to simplify language and improve clarity. This feedback led to creating this customer-friendly summary of the Strategic Context.

Our Customer Challenge Group, the Water Forum, provides independent oversight and challenge on behalf of customers reflected in our DWMP28.

Working with regional stakeholders

We have been engaging with organisations who help manage drainage, growth, planning and environmental protection, including:

- Local councils and planning authorities
- The Environment Agency
- Lead Local Flood Authorities
- Developers and infrastructure partners
- Environmental and catchment-based groups
- The Regional Flood and Coastal Committee

In October and November 2025, we held meetings with stakeholders, regional strategic groups and local technical groups. We also shared early customer insights at these sessions so partners could see what matters most to the people we serve.

Stakeholders have told us they want:

- A plan that copes with climate change and future growth
- Clear communication
- To work together closely

How this is shaping the plan

Feedback from customers and stakeholders is already influencing how we design DWMP28. It is helping us:

- Identify shared priorities across our region
- Develop clearer performance measures
- Explore partnership projects and joint funding
- Make our communications simple, open and easy to understand

This engagement will continue throughout 2026 and 2027 as we develop the options for the full DWMP.

How you can stay involved

We want to keep hearing from customers, communities and partners. Your views will help shape a long-term plan that protects homes, the environment and the places people care about.

Your ideas help us make better decisions and find solutions that work for everyone. We would be really grateful for your feedback on this document. You can access the feedback form [here](#) and through the [QR code](#) at the end of this document.

If you wish to contact us about this document or about the DWMP, please do get in touch via DWMP@nwl.co.uk and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

We work closely with customers through our **People Panels**, which bring together **current and future customers** from across our region.

3. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

WHAT WE AIM TO ACHIEVE

We have set goals (Strategic Objectives) to improve services for customers and protect the environment.

These goals will help us deliver the service our customers have told us they want, and achieve the government targets we must meet.

Our goals are designed to improve customer service, protect the environment, and make sure we are ready for the future.



CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITY GOALS INCLUDE:

- Reduce flooding from sewers
- Reduce river pollution
- Keep treating wastewater to required standards
- Support building new homes and businesses
- Continue to adapt to climate change
- Use less water

We will also contribute to better places for local communities, enhancing wildlife, and reusing and recycling materials.

Customers said the most important goals to them are:

- Reducing flooding
- Reducing pollution

See the [Strategic Context](#) for further technical details about the Strategic Objectives.



ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS INCLUDE:

- Improve bathing water quality (e.g. rivers and the sea)
- Make rivers healthier
- Reduce spills from storm overflows
- Meet all wastewater treatment targets
- Reduce carbon emissions
- Use nature-based solutions (e.g. wetlands)
- Recycle sludge safely



River Wear, Durham

4. FUTURE TRENDS

WHAT THE FUTURE MIGHT LOOK LIKE

Our technical experts look at what might change over the next 25 years. This helps us plan ahead instead of waiting for problems to happen.

The future will likely bring more pressure on our drainage system, from both the natural world and customer demands. Planning for future changes is a key strength of the DWMP, supporting us to plan ahead with long-lasting solutions, rather than relying on quick fixes. The DWMP will assess each trend so we can plan the right investment at the right time.

Understanding these trends helps us act early and make sensible decisions.

See the **Strategic Context** for further technical details about the Future Trends.

The trends fall into six groups:



CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

We expect heavier rain, more storms, hotter, drier summers, wetter winters, rising sea levels and changing river levels. This may cause:

- More flooding
- More pressure on sewers
- Less water in rivers in summer.



DEVELOPMENT AND POPULATION

We expect an increase in people and more houses. This means:

- More wastewater going into sewers
- More surface water going quickly into sewers rather than draining slowly into the ground
- Possible need for larger pipes, pumps and treatment works.



NEW RULES AND REGULATIONS

Government rules may change. This could mean:

- More places becoming protected nature areas
- Higher standards for water quality
- More checks, monitoring, and funding to meet the higher standards.



THE ECONOMY

Changes in costs of living and cost of resources may affect:

- How much improvements cost
- How much customers can afford
- Choice of low-carbon or nature-based options.



TECHNOLOGY

New tools will help us:

- Spot problems earlier and fix things faster
- Use low-carbon building methods
- Help improve performance and reduce cost.



CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR

People may:

- Use less water and use more water-saving devices
- Flush fewer items that block sewers
- Travel or work differently, changing water use patterns.

5. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

HOW WE MEASURE PROGRESS

To check if the plan is working, we use “Performance Indicators” or PIs. PIs help measure how well the system is performing now and how it may perform in the future.

The whole industry measures things like:

- Flooding inside homes and gardens
- Storm overflow spills
- Treatment works meeting the rules
- Pollution incidents
- Impacts on rivers and beaches.

We are also considering two of our own measures:

- Asset health – how reliable our pipes, pumps and treatment works are
- Bioresources – how we safely treat and recycle sludge from the treatment works.

These are called ‘bespoke’ indicators, and they help us track the health of our assets and how safely we recycle sludge.

We will report these results clearly and regularly so customers can see how the plan is progressing.

See the [Strategic Context](#) for further technical details about the Performance Indicators.



6. VALUE FRAMEWORK

HOW WE CHOOSE THE BEST OPTIONS

We want to choose options that will solve problems and give the best long-term value, not just the cheapest short-term fix.

When we look at how to solve problems in our drainage and wastewater system, we want to choose options that offer lasting value, not just the quickest or cheapest fix. To do this, we use a tool called the Value Framework.

The Value Framework helps us compare different solutions in a fair and balanced way, looking at how each option performs for customers, communities, the environment, and long-term affordability.

This means we look at:

- Benefits for customers
- Benefits for the environment
- Long-term costs
- How well the solution supports communities
- Whether it helps us work more efficiently.

How does it work?

- **Checks the options**
Looks at different ways to solve problems
- **Measures the value**
Uses scores to see how much each option helps
- **Pick the best plan**
Chooses the option that gives the most benefit for the money.

See the [Strategic Context](#) for further technical details about the Value Framework.



Fellgate SuDs



7. REPORTING AND NEXT STEPS

We will:

- Review the DWMP every year
- Update the plan if something important changes
- Share progress openly
- Continue to ask customers for feedback.

Questions for customers after reading this document:

- Is there anything else you'd like included in the Customer Summary?
- How clear was the information on the 'Strategic Objectives' page?
- How clear was the information on the 'Future Trends' page?
- How clear was the information on the 'Performance Indicators' page?
- How clear was the information on the 'Value Framework' page?
- How would you like customers to be involved in the shaping of the Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP)?
- Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

Scan this QR code to access feedback form



What happens next?

We will use the Strategic Context, along with the feedback received, to begin developing the detailed options for the DWMP during 2026 and 2027. These options will then be assessed through the Value Framework before we publish the draft DWMP for consultation in 2027.

Your ideas help us make better decisions and find solutions that work for everyone. By sharing your feedback on this document through this [link](#) or the QR code at the bottom of this page, you can help shape our approach and the choices we take forward.

The DWMP documents we will be publishing:

- **Strategic Context:**
Why the plan is needed
- **Customer Summary:**
Simple, easy-to-read version
- **Non-Technical Summary:**
More detail but still clear
- **Technical Summary:**
For experts
- **Area Summaries:**
Local issues and plans
- **Environmental Assessments:**
Impact on nature
- **Options Register:**
All ideas we considered
- **Data Tables:**
The numbers behind the plan



River Tees, Teesdale

