

Climate Risk and Adaptation: The case for a regional “ask” for the East of England

1	Executive Summary	1
2	Background & Context.....	2
2.1	National Policy.....	2
2.2	Role of Local Authorities	2
3	What do we mean by “Climate Risk”?	3
3.1	Reducing the Risk: Climate Adaptation.....	3
4	Regional Climate Risk: East of England	4
4.1	Impacts of the changing climate.....	6
4.2	Challenges in Responding	7
5	Why Climate Resilience in the East of England Is a National Priority.....	7
5.1	Agriculture	8
5.2	Energy Infrastructure and Net Zero.....	8
5.3	Transport and Economic Corridors:	8
5.4	Growth and Housing:.....	8
5.5	Research and Innovation:	9
5.6	Opportunities for Change	9
6	Strengthening Regional Collaboration for Climate Adaptation in the East of England	10
7	Next Steps: A regional “ask”	10
8	References	12

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1 Executive Summary

The **East of England is particularly vulnerable to climate change** due to its natural geography, long-term underinvestment in critical infrastructure (such as flood defences and pumping stations), and existing demographic vulnerabilities.

The region is **already experiencing the effects of a changing climate**. Recent examples include widespread flooding that has damaged sugar beet crops in Cambridgeshire, heatwaves and water-stress events that have led to socio-environmental impacts and disaster responses including hose pipe bans and increased costs to businesses in Central Bedfordshire, contributing to increased wildfires in Thetford Forest, and water scarcity constraining new development. These events have also directly impacted council who are responding to these effects, for example the 2024 flooding in Central Bedfordshire cost the council c.£1million.

Looking ahead, under a 2°C global temperature rise, the region is projected to face:

- More frequent hot days exceeding 25°C - posing serious health risks to vulnerable populations.
- Increased rainfall and storm events - raising the likelihood of flash flooding and storm damage.
- Reduced cloud cover - leading to higher UV exposure, which may negatively affect crop yields, air quality, and public health.

The UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) and 3rd National Adaptation Plan (NAP3) guidance is to **prepare for a 2°C rise in global temperature, and assess the risks for 4°C**.

Without action to manage increasing climate risks, ambitions cannot be achieved and national economic and net zero ambitions will be undermined.

Climate risk is determined by three factors: Hazards (weather and climate events); Exposure (geographic location); and Vulnerability (adaptive capacity and sensitivity).

Climate adaptation refers to the actions taken to reduce exposure and vulnerability to these risks. While some adaptation activity is already underway, accelerating progress will require coordinated efforts across local, regional, and national levels. This includes appropriate funding, governance, and integration into wider policy frameworks.

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation present opportunities to scale up adaptation, but these must be embedded within national delivery frameworks that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of local authorities and their partners.

A regional “ask” of central government seeks to encourage:

- Improvement of national risk and adaptation planning to ensure it appropriately recognises the role of place-based delivery; and
- Investment in critical infrastructure and integration of climate adaptation into wider national policy

Purpose of this Report

1. To develop a regional narrative of climate risk across the East of England

This narrative will underpin coordinated climate adaptation efforts, offering a unified position on the region’s known climate vulnerabilities and priorities. It will serve as a foundation for collective action and strategic planning.

2. To support the Regional Climate Change Forum (RCCF) in advocating for climate adaptation support

The narrative will strengthen the RCCF’s ability to engage with national stakeholders, making the case for targeted investment, policy alignment, and capacity-building to address the East of England’s unique climate challenges.

2 Background & Context

Climate Resilience and Adaptation was identified as a key area of focus for the RCCF in 2023.

Against a backdrop of projections that the “world is on track for 3C of heating under current global climate plans” [1], it is known the UK is already undergoing “disruptive climate change” [2]. The findings of the State of the UK Climate 2024 report [3], published July 2025, reaffirmed the challenge: the UK is warming, temperature extremes are becoming more frequent and more acute, rainfall and flooding is increasing and sea level rise is getting faster.

Strengthening the nation’s capacity to adapt is essential to managing the most severe impacts.

The East of England is particularly exposed to climate risks, including coastal erosion, water scarcity, flooding, pest outbreaks and diseases [4], and extreme weather events. Understanding these risks and accelerating adaptation efforts will be critical - not only to prevent economic and environmental losses, but also to safeguard the region’s contribution to national priorities such as food production, clean energy, and infrastructure resilience.

2.1 National Policy

The Climate Change Act places a legal obligation on the UK Government to prepare for the impacts of climate change, with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) responsible for leading this work. Drawing on evidence and advice from the UK Climate Change Committee, DEFRA outlines England’s adaptation strategy through the National Adaptation Programme (NAP).

As of 2025, the third iteration - NAP3 - is in effect. It advises **preparation for a 2°C rise in global temperatures, while also assessing risks associated with a potential 4°C increase.**

However, the NAP has faced growing scrutiny. Independent assessments have highlighted insufficient progress and a lack of clear mechanisms for implementing its recommendations.

A new set of Climate Change Risk Assessments (CCRA) and the fourth NAP are currently in development, with publication expected in 2028. These are anticipated to place greater emphasis on the role of local and place-based adaptation, recognising the importance of devolved and community-led responses to climate risk.

2.2 Role of Local Authorities

The National Adaptation Programme states that “local government has responsibility for ensuring that the delivery of services locally is resilient to the impacts of the changing climate.”

However, there is currently no statutory duty placed on local authorities to address climate adaptation or achieve net zero. This lack of a formal mandate has left councils in an uncertain position regarding their responsibilities, leading to varied interpretations, inconsistent approaches, and fragmented delivery of adaptation measures across different areas.

Despite this, action is underway across the East of England. For example:

- Central Bedfordshire is developing its Climate Change Risk Assessment and are collaborating with the University of Leeds on its UKCP18 data which will underpin their resilience action planning. The Council is also part of the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) Climate-Health Adaptation community. The group aims to produce a systems-wide approach to adaptation across healthcare services provided in the region. The BLMK Green Plan adaptation is currently being drafted.

- Cambridgeshire County Council is developing a Climate Change Risk Assessment focused on its corporate functions. The aim of the project is to enhance the Council's understanding of how climate change may affect its ability to deliver high-quality services. It also seeks to build organisational capacity to respond effectively and drive transformative change. By embedding resilience into service design, the Council aims to ensure that emergency planning and business continuity measures are only required in response to the most severe incidents.
- Hertfordshire County Council is working in collaboration with all Districts and Boroughs in the county via the Hertfordshire Climate Change & Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP). The Partnership is reviewing and updating its Adaptation Strategy, which will incorporate Climate Change Risk Assessments (CCRAs) and prioritise actions to ensure local authorities, and their partners are prepared for future climates.

Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) are responsible for emergency planning and coordination, ensuring that local authorities meet their duties under the *Civil Contingencies Act 2004*. They are required to utilise the UK National Risk Register; climate change is not on this and therefore LRFs do not formally incorporate climate change adaptation.

The Suffolk Resilience Forum is leading a 'Trailblazer' which is a pilot scheme to improve resilience funded by MHCLG. This will include the creation of a Climate Adaptation Officer to explore and action climate integration into the LRF remit.

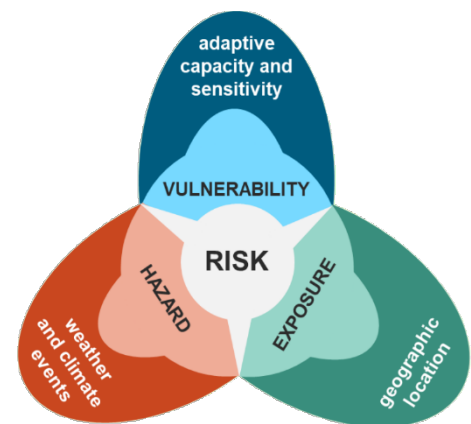
3 What do we mean by “Climate Risk”?

Climate change is altering our daily weather patterns—affecting temperatures, rainfall, and wind conditions—and intensifying the frequency and severity of extreme weather events.

The UK Met Office [5] states that the changing climate and the potential for resultant impacts depend on three factors:

- **Hazard** - weather and climate events which may have adverse effects. Their occurrence, duration and intensity may change due to climate change.
- **Exposure** - the location of people, property and other resources, relative to a hazard.
- **Vulnerability** - the likelihood of the exposed people, property or resources suffering adverse effects from the hazard.

Climate Risk brings these factors together. Managing the risk requires actions that will reduce all or some of the factors.



3.1 Reducing the Risk: Climate Adaptation

Climate adaptation encompasses a wide range of **proactive measures** aimed at reducing vulnerability and exposure to climate-related risks. It involves strengthening **climate resilience**, improving **preparedness**, and redesigning emergency responses to better manage the impacts of extreme weather and long-term climate shifts.

Effective **adaptation requires a holistic approach across all three components of climate risk. It requires a switch away from "managing the impact" to "reducing the likelihood and severity".**

- Managing the hazard: Implementing climate mitigation (net zero) strategies to reduce the likelihood or severity of climate-related events.

- Managing exposure: Introducing physical or “hard” infrastructure solutions, such as improved sea and flood defences, or relocating people and assets away from high-risk areas like eroding coastlines or floodplains.
- Managing vulnerability: Enhancing the resilience of people and places through measures like tree planting and shading to reduce urban heat, community flood preparedness programmes, and public awareness campaigns about heatwave risks. Empowering communities to adapt themselves.

These actions must be **implemented before risks are realised**. In many cases, **proactive adaptation can significantly reduce or even eliminate the potential harm**.

In contrast, **emergency response and recovery are reactive** measures that come into play after a climate event has occurred. While essential, they are focused on limiting further damage and restoring normalcy. As climate risks intensify, the “new normal” may be more extreme than current conditions—making it even more critical to prioritise resilience, preparedness, and adaptive capacity.

Example: an **emergency response to a flood involves preparedness**, such as clearing drains, reaction to the shock event (e.g. using sandbags) and recovery (clean up and treating of illness caused by the flood).

These do not deal with the stressors (e.g. a changing ability of the ground to absorb high rainfall). A future shock may therefore have a greater impact requiring a greater emergency response.

An **adaptation response transforms the system so that it pre-emptively counteracts the stressors so that a flood in the future will have lower risk**. Adaptive interventions might include SuDS improving seepage or community cohesion improving the shock response.

4 Regional Climate Risk: East of England

According to the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC), and largely irrespective of global emissions trajectories, the UK is projected to experience the following changes by the 2050s (using a 2°C global warming level, relative to the 1981–2000 baseline) [5] [6]:

- Warmer and wetter winters: Approximately 1°C warmer and 6% wetter.
- Hotter and drier summers: Around 1.5°C warmer and 5% drier.
- Rising sea levels: An increase of 30-50 cm.
- Reduced summer cloud cover: A projected decrease of 10–20%.

Each of these changes carries significant implications for the UK, with the East of England expected to face heightened climate risks. While climate hazards are broadly consistent across the country, the region’s unique combination of exposure and vulnerability makes the impacts more severe and immediate.

Although a temperature rise of 1 to 1.5 °C may appear modest, its cumulative impacts are significant. According to the UK Met Office, such an increase could result in up to 10 additional days each year with temperatures exceeding 35 °C in eastern parts of the UK (Figure 1). This highlights the disproportionate effects of even small changes in average global temperature on local weather extremes.

From a health perspective alone, the impact is significant. Estimates suggest that for every 1°C increase in urban temperatures above 16°C, A&E attendances rise by approximately 0.5% to 1%. This translates to an average increase in demand of 1% to 3% during warmer periods, with even sharper spikes observed during extreme weather events.

	0.6°C GWL Baseline 1981-2000	1.0°C GWL Recent Past 2001-2020	1.5°C GWL Paris Agreement	2°C GWL Guidance: Prepare	4°C GWL Guidance: Assess risks
 Summer Days* Daily maximum temperature > 25°C High daytime temperatures with health impacts for vulnerable people at risk of hospital admission or death. Transport disruption – e.g. track buckling on railways. Can also indicate periods of increased water demand.	19 18 to 19	32 28 to 39	35 31 to 43	42 35 to 54	77 70 to 89
 Hot Summer Days* Daily maximum temperature > 30°C Increased heat related illnesses, hospital admissions or death. Further transport disruption – e.g. track buckling on railways, road melt. Overhead power lines become less efficient.	2 2 to 2	5 4 to 7	6 5 to 9	9 6 to 13	25 21 to 36
 Extreme Summer Days* Daily maximum temperature > 35°C Increased heat related illnesses, hospital admissions or death affecting not just the vulnerable. Further transport disruption – e.g. track buckling on railways, road melt.	0 0 to 0	0 0 to 2	1 0 to 1	1 0 to 2	5 4 to 9

Figure 1 Met Office Climate Report - Local Indicators for the East of England (averaged across multiple separate reports)

Increased Exposure:

- Higher baseline temperatures: The region's proximity to continental Europe and shelter from prevailing south westerly Atlantic winds result in temperatures that are already above the national average.
- Low rainfall: Being further from Atlantic weather systems, the East of England receives less rainfall, making it the driest region in the UK. It also experiences the highest frequency of tornadoes nationally.
- Low-lying land and coastal erosion: Approximately 20% of the land lies below sea level. This land is subsiding at a rate of around 5 cm per century, and the soft rock geology of the coastline is rapidly eroding - exacerbating flood risk and land loss. Large areas of our region have the highest risk of flooding. These areas have a 1 in 100 or greater chance of flooding from rivers; or a 1 in 200 (0.5%) or greater chance of flooding from the sea each year.

These factors mean that **any changes in temperature, precipitation, or sea level** will be felt more sharply in the East of England than in other regions.

Example: Future Fens Impact Assessment (FFIA) [15] – The Fens is one of the UK's most at-risk climate regions due to its high levels of climate hazards, exposure, and vulnerability. Together, these factors illustrate why the area faces such significant climate risk

- Hazard: increased flood risk from rivers, surface water, and the sea, alongside greater drought risk due to hotter, drier summers.
- Exposure: A third of the Fens is currently below sea level, and this could double by 2100 due to sea level rise. The land is also subsiding. This is exacerbated by the lack of investment in over 300 flood risk assets, including 138 pumping stations, 95 km of coastal defences, and 405 km of river embankments.
- Vulnerability: Many communities are economically vulnerable and may lack the resources to adapt without external support. At the same time, the area spans multiple administrative boundaries and involve a complex web of stakeholders, making coordinated planning and investment challenging

Increased Social Vulnerability:

While everyone is exposed to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather, not everyone is affected equally. Vulnerability is shaped by a combination of geographic, social, and economic factors that influence a person's or community's ability to cope with, adapt to, and recover from climate-related events. In the East of England, several key factors heighten this vulnerability:

- **Poverty and Financial Deprivation:** 34% of adults in the region are experiencing financial hardship. In areas such as Norwich, over 50% of adults are believed to be living in financially vulnerable circumstances.
- **Skills deprivation** is also prevalent, particularly in rural and coastal communities, with some neighbourhoods ranking among the top 20% most deprived in the country for skills.
- **Age and Health Inequalities:** Coastal and rural areas face significant health deprivation, with poorer health outcomes and lower life expectancy. These communities are more susceptible to the health impacts of extreme heat, cold, and poor air quality.
- **Housing Availability and Quality:** Housing across all counties in the region is generally less affordable than the national average, increasing reliance on temporary accommodation. In 2021, 11.3% of occupied dwellings were classified as non-decent, equating to around 300,000 homes. High insurance costs—driven by past extreme weather events like flooding—further limit the ability of residents to invest in home adaptation measures.

Individuals and communities facing **multiple overlapping vulnerabilities** - such as poor health, low income, and inadequate housing - are **at greater risk from climate impacts**. These factors reduce their capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from events such as heatwaves, floods, and droughts. Climate risk is a just transition issue.

4.1 Impacts of the changing climate

The impacts will be many and varied, with many having knock on effects. For example, any impact that reduces crop yields may have knock-on effects for the farmers income and food security, which in turn

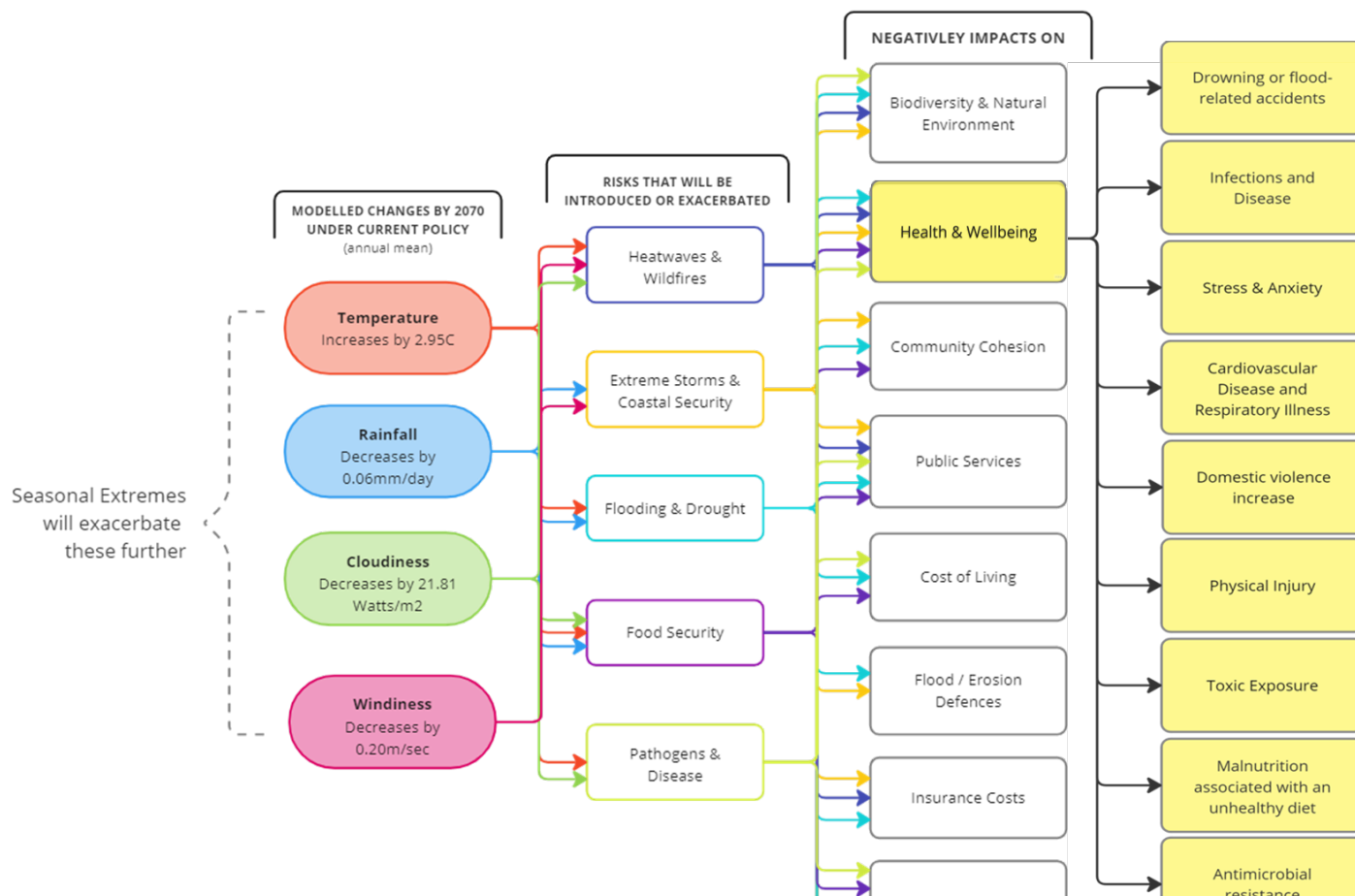


Figure 2 Adapted from Local Adaptation Tool (LCAT) using results for the East of England region, July 2024

may impact deprivation or health outcomes. The knock-on effects are referred to as “**risk cascades**.” Below are some examples of climate impacts and their cascades:

4.2 Challenges in Responding

While climate adaptation action is underway or in development, several key challenges remain that limit the scale and pace of delivery. These include:

- Governance and Leadership Gaps
 - There is currently **no single organisation** with the powers or mandate to lead a coordinated regional climate adaptation response.
 - **Co-orientation capacity**—the ability of organisations to align around shared goals and strategies—is limited and needs strengthening.
 - **Recognition from central government** of the scale and urgency of action required is essential to unlock support and resources.
- Resource and Funding Constraints
 - The region faces **significant limitations in funding and capacity**, which hampers the ability to plan and implement long-term adaptation measures.
 - A more **coordinated approach to funding**—including joint bids and pooled resources—could improve impact and efficiency.
- Data and Information Sharing
 - A **wealth of climate-relevant data** exists across various organisations in the region. However, **information governance challenges** currently limit the ability to share and use this data effectively across the public sector. Hyper-localised data-driven risk assessment is also costly, so risk assessment is likely to be based on global or national trends and local experience only.
 - While there are few true evidence gaps, **better data integration and accessibility** are needed to support risk identification and decision-making.
 - Where there are gaps is in identification of meaningful and deliverable actions; much of the data and evidence highlights the **threat climate change brings for individual sectors, but few pull this together holistically to identify system-wide actions**.

5 Why Climate Resilience in the East of England Is a National Priority

The East of England is home to a range of nationally significant sectors and infrastructure, making climate risk in the region a matter of national concern. From key agricultural production and economic growth corridors to critical transport and energy infrastructure, the region underpins the UK’s food security, energy transition, and economic resilience.

Maintaining and enabling the growth of these sectors is not just a regional priority—it is a strategic national imperative. In the face of geopolitical uncertainty and the accelerating impacts of climate change, the East of England plays a crucial role in securing:

- Energy security through its diverse mix of clean energy assets.
- Food security via its fertile soils and agri-tech leadership.
- Economic stability through high-value industries, innovation hubs, and trade infrastructure.
- Progress toward net zero by supporting decarbonisation across sectors.

However, these strengths are increasingly threatened by climate risks such as flooding, drought, overheating, and infrastructure vulnerability. Without proactive adaptation and targeted investment, the

region's growth ambitions could stall, communities could be left more vulnerable, and the UK's broader goals for net zero and economic resilience could be significantly undermined

5.1 Agriculture

The East of England is a critical contributor to the UK's food supply, particularly in arable farming, including cereals, sugar beet, and vegetables. The region is home to one-third of the UK's Grade 1 agricultural land, making it a cornerstone of national food security.

However, this vital resource is increasingly threatened by climate-related risks:

- Flooding poses a direct threat to high-value farmland.
- Drought and water scarcity are becoming more frequent, reducing crop yields.
- Soil degradation from extreme weather and intensive land use undermines long-term productivity.
- Pests and Diseases from increased flooding and temperatures are anticipated to increase.

5.2 Energy Infrastructure and Net Zero

The East of England plays a central role in the UK's clean energy economy, accounting for approximately 24% of the nation's offshore wind generation, with further renewable energy projects in the pipeline. The region hosts a diverse mix of energy assets, including Offshore wind, Solar and biomass, nuclear power (e.g. Sizewell) alongside emerging hydrogen projects.

This energy mix is vital to the UK's energy security, economic prosperity, and the decarbonisation of power, heat, and transport. However, the region's energy infrastructure is increasingly at risk from climate-related hazards:

- Flooding threatens key substations and transmission infrastructure, potentially leaving communities without power.
- Sea-level rise and coastal erosion endanger both onshore and offshore assets.
- Underinvestment in grid capacity, particularly in rural areas, risks creating bottlenecks as demand grows due to the electrification of heating and transport.

5.3 Transport and Economic Corridors:

The East of England is a critical gateway for UK trade, with strategic road and rail corridors—such as the A14, A11, and key rail lines—connecting major ports like Felixstowe to the Midlands and beyond. Notably, 70% of the UK's container traffic passes through Felixstowe, making the region's transport infrastructure vital to national and international supply chains.

However, this infrastructure is increasingly vulnerable to climate-related disruptions:

- Flooding and extreme heat can damage or shut down key transport routes.
- Historic underinvestment has left many parts of the region's infrastructure lacking the resilience needed to withstand extreme weather.
- Supply chains are highly sensitive to these disruptions—if regional infrastructure is compromised, the movement of goods and essential supplies across the UK is severely restricted.

5.4 Growth and Housing:

The East of England is a key focus for housing and economic development, with major investments in new towns, enterprise zones, and strategic growth corridors. However, the region is already facing climate-related constraints that threaten to undermine these ambitions:

- Water Scarcity: Anglian Water projects a 38% reduction in available water supply by 2050 across its service area. Water scarcity is already limiting the viability of new developments and will intensify with climate change.

- **Overheating Risks:** Rising temperatures are increasing the risk of overheating in homes, particularly in poorly insulated or densely built areas. This not only affects health and wellbeing but also reduces the desirability and resilience of new housing stock.
- **Housing Market Vulnerability:** According to AXA UK's Homeowner Resilience Report, 59% of UK adults are concerned about the impact of climate change on their homes. The UK's second-largest mortgage provider has stopped issuing loans on some flood-risk properties, raising concerns about insurability and long-term value.

5.5 Research and Innovation:

The East of England is a national leader in innovation, research, and high-tech industry, making it a key driver of the UK's economic competitiveness. The region is home to:

- World-class research institutions and science parks, including the Cambridge Biomedical Campus and Hertfordshire's BRE Science Park renowned for its research and testing facilities.
- The highest business R&D spend per capita in the UK—double the national average.
- A £136 billion GVA economy, supporting 270,000 businesses and 3.2 million jobs.
- A high employment rate of 76.3%, above the national average of 75%.
- Productivity that is 1.5% higher than the national average (excluding London).

However, this economic strength is not immune to climate risk. Potential impacts include:

- Disruption to infrastructure from flooding, overheating, or extreme weather.
- Reduced workforce wellbeing and productivity due to heat stress and poor air quality.
- Threats to long-term investment if climate resilience is not embedded in planning and development.

Impacts already experienced

- **Water Scarcity:** Development of 10,000 homes and 100,000 m² of commercial space in Cambridgeshire is on hold due to Environment Agency water neutrality requirements.
- **Extreme Heat:** The region has experienced record-breaking temperatures above 40°C. A 1°C rise during a heatwave can increase mortality by 1.8%, with nearly a 10% rise in mortality for those aged 65+ on 40°C days [9] .
- **Flood Risk:** Maintaining current flood defences in the Fens will require £1.8 billion over the next 100 years—excluding additional pressures from climate change.
- **Mental Health Impacts:** One in three people affected by home flooding may develop PTSD, with long-term consequences for public health, community wellbeing and public services well past the flood event itself.
- **Economic Disruption:** Severe weather is increasingly disrupting film production at major studios like Warner Bros. and Elstree, causing delays, damage, and rising costs.

5.6 Opportunities for Change

There are some significant issues that the region will need to address to ensure greater resilience and adaptation to climate change can happen. Despite growing climate risks, local authorities face significant structural and systemic challenges that limit their ability to lead effective adaptation efforts:

- **Lack of clarity and leadership:** Especially in sectors like water, where multiple actors operate without a clear coordinating function.

- No national framework: There is no overarching strategy or statutory duty guiding local authority climate adaptation.
- Stop-start competitive funding: Short-term, fragmented funding schemes hinder long-term planning, market development, and investment confidence.
- Limited capacity and tight budgets: Councils are expected to act, but without the resources or clarity of role to do so effectively. This is exacerbated by mixed understanding of climate adaptation issues – many still conflate climate adaptation with climate mitigation (reducing or preventing emissions).
- No secure funding mechanism: Local authorities lack dedicated, long-term funding for climate action.

6 Strengthening Regional Collaboration for Climate Adaptation in the East of England

To effectively respond to the growing climate risks facing the East of England, we must move beyond fragmented efforts toward a coordinated, place-based approach. This requires both strategic planning and practical action across sectors and geographies.

Opportunities for Action

- Influence the development of the next UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) and the fourth National Adaptation Programme (NAP4).
- Promote data sharing and the development of joint evidence bases, exploring independent regional climate risk assessment.
- Speak with a unified voice to national government and regulators.
- Establish a set of shared local ambitions for climate adaptation.
- Coordinate and align resources and funding applications to support shared regional priorities.
- Strengthen coordinated regional advocacy by highlighting the national significance and co-benefits of climate action.
- Leverage English Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation to embed climate adaptation into emerging governance and investment frameworks.
- Engage with all stakeholders to create cross [regional Rapid Adaptation Pathways Assessments \(RAPAs\)](#) to ensure best practice adaptation planning.

7 Next Steps: A regional “ask”

To unlock long-term adaptive capacity and ensure the East of England can deliver on its local, regional, and national ambitions, the region should consider advocating for central government to:

a) Transform National Risk and Adaptation Planning

- Ensure the next Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) and National Adaptation Programme (NAP4) respond to past criticisms and provide a robust foundation for local action.
- Define the role of local authorities and regional partners in climate adaptation and risk management.
- Provide statutory clarity on responsibilities and expectations across sectors.
- Support the development of independent regional risk assessments and shared data platforms

b) Invest in Critical Infrastructure and Integrate Climate Adaptation into National Policy

- Move away from stop-start competitive funding models that hinder local progress and market development, instead providing secure, multi-year funding to enable place-based delivery and unlock local innovation.
- Consider incorporating climate risk and adaptation into Integrated Settlements and future devolution deals
- Fund strategic flood defences to protect communities and key economic assets, and to enable growth in currently at-risk areas.
- Align national infrastructure and planning frameworks with regional adaptation priorities.

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