



DRAFT DRAINAGE AND WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT PLAN CONSULTATION

**SUMMARY OF IN-HOUSE
CONSULTATION AND EXPLAIN'S
CUSTOMER RESEARCH**

DRAFT DWMP SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

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INTRODUCTION

In July 2022, every water and wastewater company in England and Wales published their draft drainage and wastewater management plan (dDWMP) for six weeks of consultation. We [published three main documents](#), which together formed our dDWMP. These were a technical report, a [non-technical report](#), and a [customer-friendly summary](#) of the plan. Our consultation opened on 8 July 2022 and closed on 30 September 2022.

Our dDWMP was developed in collaboration with customers and stakeholders with an interest in planning, development, risk management and the environment. It sets out the investments needed to make sure the drainage and wastewater system can cope with future demand. This is balanced against working at a pace, which is affordable to our customers, being fair to the communities we serve, and delivering the highest environmental performance.

Our dDWMP consultation focused on three main areas: reducing the use of storm overflows, reducing the risk of flooding from the wastewater network and the cost of these investments.

APPROACH

We took a two-phase approach to consultation.

Phase one was managed in-house. We hosted three online surveys, one for customers, one for employees and one for stakeholders. Participants were asked about their preferred approach to reducing the use of storm overflows, reducing the risk of flooding and the affordability of potential approaches. Stakeholders were asked about the value for money different approaches offered and how well our [non-technical dDWMP](#) described our approach.

Phase two was delivered by our expert research partner, [Explain Market Research](#). Explain hosted online and face-to-face deliberative workshops with household customers. They also engaged customers with experience of a wastewater failure and non-household participants via telephone interviews.

Explain's research was divided into first and second approaches. This was because during the initial research activity (first approach) it became apparent that the dDWMP customer summary document did not give participants sufficient information to be able to make an informed decision regarding their preferred approach. This meant that the second objective of the research; to understand which of the four options was preferred by participants, could not be achieved. The decision was taken to pause fieldwork, and to revise materials. Within the next set of sessions (second approach), a much more detailed approach to explaining the context of the customer summary dDWMP and the issues at the core of the plan was taken. In this way, participants felt that informed and able to choose their preferred option.

To reflect this iterative approach, and for the reader's clarity, Explain's research is referred to as a 'first approach' and 'second approach'.

This report brings together and summarises the findings of our in-house consultation and Explain's research. For more detail on either phase please refer to their separate reports.

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THE OPTIONS

All participants, across both phases of research, were asked to state their preferred approach to reducing the use of storm overflows and reducing the risk of flooding. In the in-house consultation and Approach 1 of Explain's research the options were summarised as:

- **Option one** - Our plan will work to achieve the targets the Government has proposed in its Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan in the cheapest way possible (predominantly by building concrete tanks underground to temporarily store rainwater). No other benefits are achieved so this option includes little flood risk reduction benefits to local properties. We estimate this option will increase the average bill by 13% (around £49 a year) by 2045. This doesn't include the rate of inflation.
- **Option two** - This option includes everything in Option one and in addition, we would work collaboratively with the Northumbria Integrated Drainage Partnership to reduce flooding risk from all our operations together. This option would see the risk of internal sewer flooding (during a 1 in 20-year storm) being reduced for 2,464 properties from 2025-30 and for an estimated 2,200 – 2,500 properties every five years from then up until 2045. We estimate this option will increase the average bill by 17% (around £64 a year) by 2045. This doesn't include the rate of inflation.
- **Option three** - Our plan will look at the best value way to achieve the targets the Government has proposed in its Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan by looking at the cost against each drainage community. These are typically an area around a storm overflow, sewage pumping station or wastewater treatment works. Communities are more likely to enjoy the societal benefits of using, natural solutions to solve problems, rather than built infrastructure (such as creating natural habitats such as swales and ponds to store water). We would also work collaboratively, as described in option two. This option would see the risk of internal sewer flooding (during a 1 in 20-year storm) being reduced for:
 - 8,084 properties in 2025-30
 - 4,560 properties in 2030-35
 - 9,884 properties in 2035-40
 - 5,475 properties in 2040-45

We estimate this option will increase the average bill by 34% (around £123 a year) by 2045. This doesn't include the rate of inflation.

- **Option four** - This option includes faster delivery of everything in options one and two and everything in Option three. In addition, we would work towards our ambitious goal of having zero internal property flooding by 2040. This option would see the risk of internal sewer flooding (during a 1 in 20-year storm) being reduced for:
 - 11,527 properties in 2025-30
 - 10,786 properties in 2030-35
 - 11,285 properties in 2035-40

We estimate this option will increase the average bill by 38% (around £138 a year) by 2045. This doesn't include the rate of inflation.

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In Approach 2 of Explain’s research the options were summarised as:

	Storm Overflow Reduction Plan met in the cheapest possible way – concrete tanks	Storm Overflow Reduction Plan met using natural solutions where possible	Working with others to reduce the risk of flooding from all sources	Reduced risk of internal flooding for at risk properties	Delivered by	Total increase to average bills by 2030	Total increase to average bills by 2045
Option 1	✓			0%	2045	£9	£49
Option 2	✓		✓	27%	2045	£12	£64
Option 3		✓	✓	75%	2045	£18	£123
Option 4		✓	✓	90%	2040	£34	£138

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the consultation was to gain feedback from stakeholders, customers, and employees on our dDWMP and options for reducing the use of storm overflows and reducing the risk of flooding. Specifically, we sought to understand:

1. Participants’ views on the clarity of the customer summary dDWMP, produced by NWG. In particular, we sought understanding of whether the customer summary of the dDWMP achieved the following:
 - a. Provides confidence that existing service levels to current and future customers will be maintained in the face of increasing population; economic growth; climate change; tightening environmental standards; and rising expectations of customers;
 - b. Clear indication of the improvements required where the service levels are not currently good enough;
 - c. Clear description of the risks that remain to long-term resilience for customers and if these are acceptable to customers, as far as possible;
 - d. Explanation of the potential risks that can be created by customers, such as the impact of the incorrect disposal of single-use items.

2. Participants’ preferences regarding the four options presented in the customer summary dDWMP. The reasons underpinning these preferences was also understood. Emphasis was placed on understanding the following:
 - a. Which option offers best value;
 - b. Which option is considered the most affordable;
 - c. Which option is the most acceptable in terms of their priorities;
 - d. Which option is the most acceptable in terms of appetite for risk.

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NUMBER OF RESPONSES

A total of 235 individuals took part in our dDWMP consultation. 105 individuals participated in the in-house consultation and 130 individuals took part in Explain's research:

Phase One: In-House	Explain research: Approach 1	Explain research: Approach 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 18 Stakeholders began the survey, with 6 completing every stage• 3 stakeholders responded by email (outside of our survey)• 60 Northumbrian Water customers began the survey, with 40 completing every stage• 24 NWG employees began the survey, with 14 completing every stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 21 household customers attended deliberative workshops• 8 household customers who had experienced a wastewater failure took part in an in-depth interview• 9 non-household customers took part in an in-depth interview]• 49 online People Panel members* took part in discussions about the dWMP over two sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 14 household customers attended deliberative workshops• 29 customers took part in face-to-face face groups (Thornaby-on-Tees, Amble, Blyth and Consett)

**Please note, the People Panels are regular, monthly online panels, conducted with customers of Northumbrian Water and Essex & Suffolk Water.*

RESULTS

Clarity of the Customer Friendly Summary

In Explain's first approach to research participants were asked to read the [customer friendly summary](#) and comment on its clarity. Explain found that the customer summary was unclear to participants and that they struggled to understand it:

- It was felt the document was **too corporate** and therefore not suitable as a customer summary. Participants felt that they needed to read it more than once to digest the information. They, and some NWG employees, desired the use of **simplified (jargon-free) language to improve accessibility**.
- **The business problem wasn't felt to be clearly stated**, i.e., why Northumbrian Water needed the dDWMP. Participants wanted to see this clearly stated at the beginning of the customer summary document.
- **More information** was required on the proposed options.
- **Better presentation** of information would have been helpful to participants. Participants generally felt the visual information and four options section were the parts which caught their attention the most.

Critically, this meant that participants in Explain's first approach were unable to make a decision regarding their preferred option. Based on this feedback, we paused research activity and revised the research materials for use in Explain's second approach.

Preferred option

Across both the in-house research and Explain's second approach to research **options 3 and 4** (nature-based solutions) were preferred by participants.

- In the in-house surveys **Option 4** received the highest share of preference by stakeholder and customers. **Option 3** was the preferred choice of the employees who took part.
- In Explain's second approach participants preferred the nature-based solutions offered in **options 3 and 4**.

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Affordability

Participants in the in-house customer and employee surveys were asked to rate how affordable they would find each option, if it were added to their bill from 2025. **Option 1 (the cheapest option) ranked as the most affordable option** and option 4 (the most expensive option) the least for both parties.

Participants, who took part in Explain’s second approach stated that **options one and two** were the ones they could afford, considering their current financial situations. However, they preferred options three and four and wished these were more affordable.

Value for money

Stakeholders in the in-house survey were asked to consider to what extent each option represents value for money for society and the environment over the long term. Stakeholders were asked to rate each option on a scale of 1-10 where 1 represents value for money and 10 does not represent value for money.

Six stakeholders responded to this question; Durham County Council, Northumberland Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA), North Yorkshire County Council, a housing developer and two stakeholders who chose to respond anonymously. We have banded the data into scores of **1-3, suggesting the option is considered more affordable**, **4-6 for mid-range responses** and of **7 to 10, suggesting the option is considered less affordable**.

	Option 1 (5 responses)	Option 2 (3 responses)	Option 3 (3 responses)	Option 4 (4 responses)
Durham County Council	1	-	-	-
Northumberland Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority	4	3	4	3
North Yorkshire County Council	6	6	-	6
A housing developer	2	2	5	6
Anonymous stakeholder	-	-	-	1
Anonymous stakeholder	1	-	1	-

Deliberative workshop participants, who took part in Explain’s second approach felt **option 4 offered the best value for money**, with six votes in total, followed by jointly favoured options 2 and 3, with three votes, respectively. One participant thought ‘none of the above’ options provided best value for money. Significantly, no participants thought option 1 offered the best value for money.

Stakeholders – further questions

Stakeholders who took part in the in-house consultation were asked to rate their level of agreement ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree on seven statements. Responses were received from a housing developer, Northumberland IFCA, Durham County Council, North Yorkshire Council, Gateshead Council and individual stakeholders.

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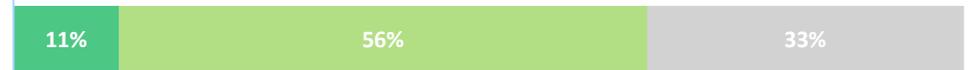
STAKEHOLDERS' AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENTS PRESENTED

■ Strongly Agree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Unsure
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly disagree

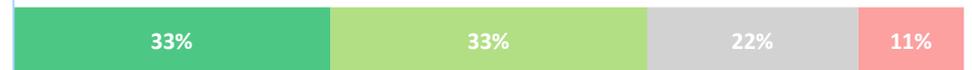
The plan takes into account the potential impacts of increased 'urban creep' (this is where land that naturally soaks up rain water is covered with impermeable surfaces such as flagstone, block paving or hardstanding) (9)



The plan provides a clear, transparent, and consistent planning approach that is adaptable to long-term drivers for drainage and wastewater services (9)



The plan facilitates partnership working between organisations (9)



The plan takes into account customers rising expectations of the wastewater services Northumbrian Water provides (9)



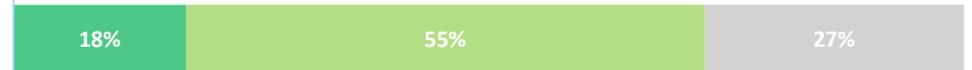
The plan takes into account the potential impact of population growth (10)



The plan takes into account the potential impact of climate change (9)



The plan provides a long-term view of drainage and wastewater management in the North East of England (11)



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CONCLUSION

When affordability isn't considered participants across all research approaches preferred options 3 and 4. In the in-house research Option 4 received the highest share of preference for stakeholder and customers, but not by huge margins. Option 3 was the preferred choice of the NWG employees who took part. Explain's second approach found an overall preference for options 3 and 4.

When participants across all research approaches were asked to consider how affordable each option would be, if it were added to customers' bills, options 1 and 2 were considered the most affordable.