Investment in Farm Reservoirs Conference
Baston 16th April 2026

Supported by:

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Future Fens Integrated Adaptation (FFIA)

Norfolk and Suffolk County Council

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and multiple partners from the wider region

Background

On 16th April over 60 farmers and representatives of regional and national organisations who support the industry, met at Thetford Farm Conference Centre, Baston to debate how the farming industry can use on farm reservoirs to capture and store more peak flow or flood water. The development of on farm reservoirs aims to: secure water supplies for agriculture; reduce flood risk; and increase water storage across the landscape to benefit biodiversity, and decrease potentially harmful abstraction at low flow.

The event helped to:

- Shape a shared understanding of the practical barriers to on-farm reservoir development.
- Identify where policy, regulatory or operational changes could enable delivery.

This report outlines the key findings from the day, based on the inputs from a panel session, case studies and, most importantly, three rounds of facilitated roundtables which covered:

- **Roundtable 1: Challenges and Opportunities:** what economic, environmental, and societal opportunities could be delivered through more on farm reservoirs; what is stopping the region from delivering more on farm reservoirs currently.
- **Roundtable 2: What Needs to Change:** what needs to change to facilitate the creation of more on farm reservoirs, including, but not limited to: implementation of current planning, regulatory or permitting systems; policy at national or regional level needed to support more farm reservoirs; greater use of local partnerships for delivery; delivering more holistic water management at catchment level; funding and tax incentives.
- **Roundtable 3: Priorities for Change:** what are the priority changes needed to accelerate farm reservoir construction, from the long lists developed in roundtable 2.

Chairs Welcome

The conference was chaired by Kelly Hewson-Fisher, a Director, and Head of Rural Research at Savills.

Kelly welcomed delegates and explained how important the event was given the growing pressures on farm water supplies, from a combination of climate change, abstraction reform and the focus in the supply chain on competitiveness and product quality. Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk together produce 43% of the UK's vegetables, 30% of potatoes and 80% of sugar beet, which also means it is the region with the most demand for irrigation.

Kelly also urged everyone to approach the event in a spirit of partnerships, so that together the region can develop solutions for farm water supply.

Panel Session

The Conference featured a panel session including:

- Mima Boardman, Environment Agency Senior Advisor – Water Resources Resilience (agriculture)
- Robert Caudwell, Chairman of the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA)
- John Patrick, Sustainable Water Solutions LLP
- Teresa Meadows, Stakeholder Lead: Nature Recovery and Water Resources, Water Resources East (WRE)
- Matthew Doran, CLA Land Use Policy Advisor: Climate Change and Water

The chair introduced the panel by saying that we have enough water, but need to improve the way that it is managed as climate change leads to more extremes, both flood and drought. The implication is clear, there is a need to capture and store more water in times of surplus to meet the need for water during droughts. Key panel discussion points were:

- John Patrick reflected on 10 years focusing on developing farm water resources, primarily in Suffolk and East Anglia, after managing farms in Lincolnshire. In the last 3 years this has included 19 on farm reservoir projects, with another 30 in planning. John stressed that collaboration is key, both with regulators like the EA, as well as with other farmers e.g. through Water Abstractor Groups. There is also a need for the industry to spell out the case for water supplies for agriculture, by demonstrating the economic value and jobs it delivers.
- Mima Boardman reflected that there is likely to be a move from abstraction licences to environmental permitting, given the need to ensure that abstraction does not damage the environment. There is a need to do more to understand how much water is available, especially during high flows, when abstraction is low risk. If climate change leads, as expected, to more extreme rainfall events, this could provide opportunities for abstraction.
- Teresa Meadows explained that her role was to engage across industries and stakeholders for WRE whose role is to develop the regional water resources plan to balance water supply and demand across the region. Teresa also set out the case for collaboration to capture and store water. There are multiple regional projects, e.g. small abstraction trials in the Cam catchment led by WRE and Local Resource Option (LRO) studies which are doing this, but a big question for the future is how best to fund more collaboration at catchment and local level.

- John also reflected that farmers can often deliver water projects more cost effectively, e.g. a farm reservoir is only c.10% of the cost of Public Water Supply (PWS) projects per m3, and the construction of sea walls costs 10 times as much if contracted through the EA (projects delivered by IDBs fall in the middle of this range, typically at c.2-3 times farmer costs).
- Matthew Doran discussed the need to ensure we make the case for water security and how this links to food security. The water management fund in the farm transition programme is welcomed by industry, but because it only opens for short windows this can compress contractor availability and inflate costs. There is also a need to look in more detail at how to fund investment in reservoirs, including the potential to fully expense them, support with grants and the potential for external finance. It also has to be recognised that neither farms or banks will invest unless abstractions licences are secure over the full payback period.
- Robert Caudwell discussed the fact that Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) have an aspiration to help secure water for on farm storage, but that there is no funding to do this as it falls outside their statutory role. This means legislative change is needed so IDBs can generate income from helping farmers secure the water needed or by delivering reservoir capacity directly. Europe is currently much better at having a holistic approach which unites water supply and drainage, with for example the Po Valley in Italy building 10,000 small reservoirs on farms to capture storm flows to smooth out flood and drought periods.
- The potential of water credits was discussed, but this was not considered viable by the panel as it would create real uncertainty and make farming more difficult.
- Planning permission can be hard to secure, but John reflected that in Suffolk whilst the first 6 reservoirs were hard, it has now become easier as planners now have more understanding of the need for farm reservoirs. Matthew argued for more use of Permitted Development Rights (PDRs), with increases in the size allowed under a PDR before an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is needed, as well as a need for more consistency between councils in how they respond to applications. The need for BNG for farm reservoirs was also questioned, as they by their very nature already deliver biodiversity improvements.
- There was also discussion about at which level planning for on farm reservoirs should be dealt with as local government reorganisation (LGR) takes place with the move to larger unitary councils and (Mayoral) County Combined Authorities (CCAs). This is a complex issue, and strategically on farm reservoirs would align well with the CCA level and its focus on economic development, but there is also a need to engage the local level to ensure support. To help sell the case for farm reservoirs, there is also a need to develop better evidence, regionally and locally, about how farm reservoirs can support economic growth.

The panel all concluded that the key issues looking forward were: to take an evidence led approach to make the case for water for farms; to develop collaborative and holistic solutions which unite flood management and water supply; and to ensure that there is funding, from multiple sources, to invest in long-term solutions.

Guide to On Farm Reservoirs

Professor Jerry Knox (Cranfield University) and Melvyn Kay (UK Irrigation Association) presented a preview of the revised and updated guide to developing farm reservoirs, which has been supported by the Environment Agency (EA) and Water Resources East (WRE) and which is being officially launched on 6th May. This builds on the original guide launched in 2008, and will be accompanied by a detailed Suffolk and Essex Coast and Heaths specific guide to reservoirs, given that this area is National Landscape with additional rules.

The guide identifies how to move through a 4-stage process to develop an on-farm reservoir including: defining the need; undertaking a feasibility assessment; securing the necessary permissions; and, delivery of the reservoir.

Jerry and Melvyn stressed that securing necessary permissions is typically the hardest stage of the process and that farmers should expect this process to be iterative and non-linear, because of the interactions between the permissions which are needed. Whilst it adds cost, larger reservoirs will typically need professional support given the complexity of the requirements and the negative consequences of not getting the case and technical details correct.

The revised guide has updated the construction cost estimates for on farm reservoirs, based on 20 reservoirs constructed in 2024-2025. With construction work now needing to use white diesel as opposed to red, the costs of moving soil have increased substantially and begun to close the gap between a lined and an unlined reservoir (which relies on clay). Costs for all reservoirs have increased, but larger reservoirs tend to have smaller costs per unit of volume, now estimated at £3-4/m3 for smaller reservoirs, and £2-3/m3 for larger reservoirs.

Case Studies

Case study 1: Steve Moncaster, NEFF

Steve spoke about the work of Norfolk Environment Food and Farming (NEFF) which works on behalf of Norfolk farmers to secure water supplies for food production. NEFF is a 'modernised' water abstractor group (WAG) which grew out of the former Broadland WAG. It operates at county and catchment level, but also has a few members beyond this. Its core role is to help farmers with technical assessments, making the case for water locally and signposting to all the services and best practice which can help farmers with abstraction and reservoirs.

There are currently severe problems for many Norfolk farms with abstraction licences being reviewed and revoked and similar impacts will impact other farms in the next 2-3 years. We need new solutions, such as more farm reservoirs, and to provide enough time for farmers to secure the permissions needed and build them before they lose (summer) abstraction licences.

The advice from NEFF is to be proactive and not to wait to be told there is a problem, but to collaborate and develop shared solutions proactively which can secure future water supplies for irrigation. This can also help reduce costs of technical reports and help to contribute to reviews of regulations and costs.

Case Study 2: South Forty Foot Water Bank project in South Lincolnshire, David Matthews

The South Forty Foot Water Bank project was developed by G & D Matthews Ltd, Lindsay Hargreaves, Cranfield University and University of Lincoln. It was part-funded by the Defra/Innovate UK Farming Innovation Programme (FIP) with additional support from Anglian Water, to optimise water resources for the benefit of agriculture, the environment and other water stakeholders at the sub-catchment scale in the Lincolnshire Fens.

The project built on the observation that significant volumes of water are pumped out to sea at times of surplus, but the area also sees water shortages during drought, which acts as a direct constraint on high value agriculture. The project brought together: a catchment study on water flows; the development of a water management group to assess the options and business models for collaborative working. The aim is to take collaborative work forward in the area.

Case Study 3: The South Level project in Cambridgeshire, Lindsay Hargreaves

The UK government's Case for Cambridge (March 2024) developed illustrative growth scenarios for 150,000 new homes by 2050, to increase the Cambridge population and number of workers and deliver a potential £6.4 billion economic benefit, but this growth is constrained by water.

The South Level project is broadly based, with multiple strands to address Cambridge's water needs, including the Fens Reservoir, water transfer and water efficiency, but has also included a farmer led project to look at whether there was water available in the South Levels. These run NE from Cambridge on 60,000ha of Fen farms which are pump level dependent, with the rivers Cam, Lark, Thet and Wissey all draining into the Wash via Denver Sluice.

The project is commercially driven to explore whether farmers can help reduce the pressures on water resources, using a potentially underutilised resource and to do so quickly (2-3 years). The approach is to capture and store water in a series of farm scale reservoirs (500Ml – 1000Ml) for use elsewhere. Over the last 2 years this project has shown that: there is water available, at least enough for 100,000 households and c.250,000 people; water quality is better than anticipated; there are viable exploitation options for Public Water Supply (PWS) and other uses (including on farms); and the scheme would also reduce pumping costs. A crisis led to this project idea, but we could apply the lessons proactively and more widely.

Feedback from the Roundtables

The three roundtables, on 6 tables and with over 60 participants in total over 2½ hours generated a very large number of ideas and suggestions on how to accelerate the delivery of more farm reservoir capacity. This report does not attempt, in the interests of succinctness, to record every detail of what was discussed.

Instead, the output from all these roundtables has been combined and analysed to draw out the common messages which the large and diverse audience agreed were the most important benefits of farm reservoirs; the constraints on developing more reservoirs; and how the region could move forward to accelerate progress.

The three roundtables addressed:

Roundtable 1: Challenges and Opportunities

What economic, environmental and societal opportunities could be delivered through more on farm reservoirs; what is stopping the region from delivering more on farm reservoirs currently.

Roundtable 2: What Needs to Change: what needs to change to facilitate the creation of more on farm reservoirs, including, but not limited to: implementation of current planning, regulatory or permitting systems; policy at national or regional level needed to support more farm reservoirs; greater use of local partnerships for delivery; delivering more holistic water management at catchment level; funding and tax incentives.

Roundtable 3: Priorities for Change: what are the priority changes needed to accelerate farm reservoir construction, from the long lists developed in roundtable 2.

Key findings from Roundtable 1

The key economic, environmental, and societal opportunities which could be delivered include:

Economic:

- Increased economic impact from improved farm resilience, productivity, and food security – by enabling more reliable high value crops, the UK can strengthen domestic food production, reduce reliance on imports and directly support growth and investment in the food chain. This will support investment both by regional businesses and inward investors as supply chains seek to develop more resilient food supplies.
- Crop yield and quality – water supplies support yield especially in drier seasons, but also critically help to ensure crops meet quality specifications, reducing waste and increasing crop value. In potatoes secure water supplies can increase marketable yield by c.30%. With fresh produce critical to health this will increase consumption.
- Cost reduction for businesses and communities - in drained landscapes pumped water is currently treated as waste which imposes large pumping costs on Councils, the EA, farms, and businesses, which could otherwise be invested in productivity and growth. These costs also increase carbon emissions as most pumping uses energy from diesel pumps or electricity at times of year when renewables are generating less power.
- Long-term investment in infrastructure - farm reservoirs could be part of national water infrastructure, offering long-term economic resilience.

Environmental:

- Climate proofs food production and reduces need for imports - reduces food miles and the associated carbon emissions and water footprints with lower impacts in the UK.
- Reduce the need for summer abstraction – this would help maintain groundwater levels, river flow and water quality, all of which help deliver the environmental destination.
- Nature recovery and biodiversity - reservoirs can deliver multi-functional benefits including habitat creation, BNG and more diverse landscapes e.g. for wetland birds. They diversify the landscape especially in intensively farmed areas.
- Peat rewetting and climate benefits – reservoirs can support peat rewetting by maintaining levels and thus reduce carbon losses and protect nationally important lowland sites.

Societal:

- Protection of communities and critical infrastructure – many regional communities, homes, transport links and national infrastructure only exist because of water management. Capturing water in reservoirs helps reduce floods and underpins community resilience.
- Improved job security on farm and in the supply-chain will sustain rural communities and support secure employment opportunities.
- Reservoirs can deliver One Health, by supporting a healthy planet, healthy food, healthy people – including through recreation and active leisure, e.g. fishing, Hannam Wake Hub.
- Food security - improved water security supports UK food security, particularly for healthy fresh produce (with benefits for public health) and protects consumers from global shocks.
- Collaboration and new partnerships - reservoir development can act as a catalyst for working together to deliver wider benefits to rural communities.
- Water Abstractor Groups (WAGs), and similar partnerships, can act as a catalyst for greater collaboration, shared risk, and collective investment. These wider social values can strengthen relationships in rural communities and lead to additional benefits.

The key constraints identified in roundtable 1 that are stopping the region from delivering more on farm reservoirs include:

Policy, Regulation and Governance:

- Lack of shared national vision - there is no clear, shared vision on the role and benefits of farm reservoirs as part of national water infrastructure which supports food and community security, leading to inconsistent decision making and lack of farmer confidence to invest. If government set out a clear, long-term vision to increase UK intensive crop production and stated that water should be made available to support this, as long as farmers invested in reservoirs, this would enable much more progress and help sell the case to local planners.

- Compliance-led regulation - regulation is weighted heavily towards compliance and risk avoidance rather than enabling outcomes, restricting innovation, and imposing higher costs and long timescales which creates uncertainty and discourages investment.
- Planning and permitting is complex – projects which once took a year now take many years, with multiple approval layers (e.g. BNG, EIA, WFD, planning and abstraction licences) which increases costs and risk. Coupled to licence uncertainty this makes reservoir investments high risk, even where the benefits to the business, economy and environment is clear.
- Capacity to determine licences - EA is under resourced, e.g. hydrologists, with permitting taking too long (often 18 months) and many flow datasets are outdated or incomplete. This means closed catchments can accept no new abstraction licences, even if repeated floods occur, so reservoirs are not developed or farms suffer planning blight, reducing investment.
- Water trading – the inability and/or challenges of trading water restricts the business case for farm reservoirs, because licences are only for irrigation, so even if a farm has spare water it cannot be traded to other economic or environmental projects, reducing the economic value of the reservoir (no multi-use protocol currently exists). Inter-catchment treatment requirements to prevent invasive species also constrain landscape scale sharing.

Funding and Costs:

- Cost barrier – despite claims made by government that food security is national security, this is not reflected in the low value given to water for food in the hierarchy of water needs. Coupled to increased tax (IHT) and low write down allowances, this restricts investment.
- Reservoirs are perceived as high-risk investments - due to unclear future abstraction rights, high costs, stop/start grant schemes, and very low tax incentives. Collaborative schemes take even longer and smaller farms disproportionately put off by high risk and high costs.

Social and cultural barriers

- Trust and collaboration – while consultees liked the idea of sharing water infrastructure, the discussion was clear that genuine collaboration is hard in practice. Risk, liability, personality differences and historical independence all inhibit shared schemes.
- Skills – there is a shortage of skills in reservoir design, planning and construction for farm reservoirs which needs to be addressed.
- Perception of water as cheap and disposable - water was described as undervalued across society, with little societal or political urgency to change behaviour until there is a crisis.
- Lack of support - the absence of coordinated, catchment-scale approaches is limiting delivery, with individual farms left to act alone. While collaborative models e.g. Water Abstractor Groups (WAGs) are beneficial, these require leadership, time, and trust to establish, which are not always present. Without coordination, the burden of risk and cost remains with individual farmers, acting as a deterrent to taking action.

Roundtable 2 Long List of What Needs to Change (grouped under 6 themes for action)

Regional case for reservoirs

- Treat on-farm reservoirs as strategic national infrastructure to change the narrative and value water for food as part of the toolbox to deliver UK food security.
- Develop a proper cost benefit analysis of the value of water for agriculture and the food sector which recognises that increased production of UK intensive crops reduces the water and carbon footprint of the UK food supply.
- Help Councils and Mayors recognise the value of water for food and the environmental benefits of winter storage and flood risk reduction to inform the development of local plans.
- Develop regional guidance with LPAs on the treatment of farm reservoirs and how PDRs can be used successfully for smaller reservoirs, so application rules are consistent regionally.
- Develop the case for how farm reservoirs can help meet wider regional water needs, such as in the South Levels project in Cambridgeshire to meet housing as well as farming needs.

Delivery plan for regional farm reservoir investment

- WRE and regional partners to collaborate at regional level to build an agricultural water resources management plan.
- Integrate regional flood management and water supply options to capture and store peak flows on farms to meet agricultural and potentially other water needs (e.g. nature reserves).
- Develop a pipeline of priority projects, particularly larger collaborative projects, which can meet the water needs of multiple farms and/or end users (including the environment).
- Invest in facilitation capacity and local delivery support so farmers have access to quality advice to develop farm reservoirs, including collaborative structures like WAGs.
- Identify the constraints in skills and workforce or contractor capacity, so that the region can ensure it has the capacity needed to develop more farm reservoirs.
- Promote best practice in farm reservoir design and operation including collaborative projects, using examples from the region and overseas to show the art of the possible.

Development and use of smart technologies

- Improve data and innovation in water management through using sensors and data analytics to support real time decision making.
- Support abstraction reform using real-time monitoring to replace the current binary “on/off” abstraction system with flow-responsive rules that allow higher abstraction during high-flow to both secure water which would otherwise be pumped away and reduce flooding.
- Use real-time data to improve/automate EA decisions and communications after high rainfall and flood events to capture peak flows so that abstractors can react faster, securing more water to store and reduce flood risks and pumping costs.
- Work with regional universities, research centres, networks and technology businesses to create a regional programme of agritech development focused on farm water management.

Abstraction reform

- Shift from compliance-led regulation to enabling regulation. The grant of a licence should be based on actual flow data as it currently exists and not dated information based on historic assessments given climate change.
- Embed catchment-scale and systems thinking to unite flood management and water supply both locally and in EA teams to deliver holistic water management which sees increased water capture and storage as a public good.
- Holistic water management requires a single water team rather than separate teams for flooding and water supply, and a single budget approach which unites funding for flood management (e.g. FCRM) with water supply projects.
- Enable IDBs and the EA to play a wider role in water management, which includes capturing and storing water or supplying it to farmers at times of peak flow to reduce pumping costs.
- Employ more hydrologists in the EA so that abstraction requests, catchment flow assessments and licence renewals can be completed more quickly.

National planning policy

- Embed farm reservoirs in the new NPPF with higher size limits set for PDRs and before EIAs are needed for a farm reservoir.
- Reform planning, licensing, and permitting timescales to reduce the planning blight which is created for fresh produce and potato businesses by current long timescales.
- Develop national guidance on the treatment of farm reservoir PDRs, so that application rules are consistent across the country.
- Review the need for BNG for reservoirs given that they directly deliver biodiversity benefits and should thus not be treated like other developments which harm biodiversity.
- Review the rules for raised reservoirs in flat open landscapes e.g. the Fens, where a breech would not create a risk to life or property to reduce the need for panel engineers.

Incentivising reservoir investment

- Reflect the potential to deliver community and public benefits (i.e. public goods such as flood reduction) in an enabling tax and funding support package, so that reservoirs don't just depend on the commercial benefits to farmers. This would reflect the true value of farm reservoirs and reward farmers for providing wider benefits.
- Ensure abstraction licence (or in future environmental permit) duration matches payback period/useful life of farm reservoirs to avoid stranded assets and a lack of business case.
- Provide clear, long-term financial incentives, for example through faster write-down against tax and/or rolling grant schemes to avoid bunching of projects which increases costs and restricts contractor availability (i.e. avoid short term grant windows).
- Support feasibility studies as well as capital investment, to de-risk investment particularly for smaller farms and to encourage the development of larger collaborative schemes.

Conclusions and Recommended Priority Actions from Roundtable 3

The recommended priority actions are divided into two sections:

- Actions which Eastern England should take locally to help progress farm reservoirs.
- Actions which will require national policy changes, and which the region can come together on to make the case for change.

Regional Actions

The priority regional actions to take within the region are:

1. **Make the Regional Case for Water for Agrifood Production** – it is important to make the case for water for irrigated agriculture and the role of farm reservoirs in delivering secure water supplies for farmers growing intensive crops, to protect crop yield and quality. As well as the immediate need, driven by more climate extremes and changes to abstraction licences, the potential to grow the sector should be quantified. This would help deliver economic growth as UK supply chains seek to reduce reliance on imports and deliver the government's ambition for a horticulture sector plan to grow UK fresh produce production.

   Baseline estimates of the water needed are available for irrigation (Cranfield input to the regional water resources plan, Norfolk and Suffolk 2025 report on irrigated agriculture), and projects are shortly starting to update and broaden this evidence base to include the food chain. Building on these reports, the region needs to ensure the case for water for agriculture is integrated into Mayoral/CCA and county level economic growth plans.

2. **Use a Regional Coalition to Create a Delivery Plan for Future Agrifood Water Demand** - develop a regional plan for how the water needed for agrifood production can be delivered over 5-, 10-, 20- and 30-year time horizons to inform the regional water management plan. This should include: the provision of advice to help farmers plan and deliver reservoirs (including from Water Abstractors Groups); the scale of investment needed; where reservoirs are needed; and the sources of water and type of investment needed.

   The delivery plan should identify key projects and collaborations to increase agricultural water security in the region and look at how these priorities can be facilitated and funded.

3. **Lead the Development of Smart Technologies for Agricultural Water Management** – the region has the UK's largest concentration of irrigators nationally, and a well-developed agri-tech sector. As the pressures from climate change, water needs in agriculture and the pressures to use water more efficiently grow, the region should develop a collaborative innovation programme to develop water efficiency technologies and systems to manage abstraction and water use using real-time data. This should build on existing collaborative programmes such as the AgriFood Tech Launchpad and CERES Agritech, which have sought to develop and commercialise industry led and academic led innovations respectively. The region should promote the region's potential to lead a national water for food innovation programme to potential funders including UKRI and Innovate UK.

National Actions

The region should work with government on three key priorities to unlock more farm reservoirs:

4. **Ensure Abstraction Reform Promotes Farm Reservoirs as National Infrastructure** – the EA clearly recognise the need for growth in agriculture, housing, and industry. This is supported by local EA staff, senior managers, and the Board, but the focus on enabling growth is frustrated by out-dated approaches to abstraction licencing. Out of date flow data, delays in reviewing and approving licences and the proposed move to environmental permitting create significant barriers to farm reservoir investment. Abstraction reform is proceeding at a pace which means many farms do not have sufficient time to develop alternative water supplies, e.g. moving to winter/peak flow capture. This directly puts the region's intensive crops at risk. Losses of regional production would be replaced by imports with higher water and carbon footprints. Abstraction reform must consider unintended consequences and enable enough time for industry to adjust and support licence durations which make farm reservoirs investable e.g. by ensuring environmental permits (if they replace abstraction licences) have a long enough duration to payback reservoir investment.
5. **Planning Policy** – consultees welcomed the explicit mention of farm reservoirs in the new NPPF, but at regional level farmers are facing inconsistency in how planning authorities consider farm reservoirs, creating delays and additional costs which deters investments and reduces economic and environmental gains. There is a need for the strategic focus on growth to translate into the delivery of planning policy and linked regulations which supports accelerated development of farm reservoir capacity. For example, increasing the size of farm reservoirs which can be developed under PDRs and without the need for an EIA, would help speed up the development of farm reservoirs. Exempting farm reservoirs from BNG because they already deliver biodiversity gains is also recommended.
6. **Support Finance for Reservoirs** – the tax treatment of reservoirs, with a 33 year write down period, is much less attractive than other investments farmers can make and downplays the importance of nationally significant infrastructure. Abstraction uncertainty means licences can be withdrawn over short periods, exposing farms to investing in stranded assets. For farm reservoirs to be investable, policy must support farmers, supply chains and financial partners to invest in reservoirs, with certainty on licensing and tax treatment which reflects the government's stated position that 'food security is national security'. With government calling for an increase in UK horticulture, and the industry willing to invest in water resources, favourable tax treatment and/or grants would unlock growth at low cost to the exchequer, especially for larger more complex or collaborative schemes.

Next Steps

Regional leaders will meet to consider these recommendations and to agree how they can work collaboratively to progress actions at the regional level and come together to help promote changes nationally to unlock growth in the region through more on farm reservoirs.

Our thanks are due to all those who supported the event, and the stakeholders who took part in the conference and contributed so freely to the ideas this report focuses on in the roundtables.