

A Children's Response to the National FCERM Strategy for England

Background and Context

A draft National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England to the year 2100, drawn up by the Environment Agency, has been put out for consultation. This follows months of discussions with working groups representing many sections of society. We argue that children and young people should have a say about this, particularly because they were not officially included in the working groups. Accordingly, we went back to our research with 30 children who had been affected by the severe floods of 2013/4.

Flood-affected children from rural South Ferriby on the Humber estuary and urban Staines-upon-Thames experienced very different forms of flooding at that time, many of them evacuated from their homes. Working with our [Economic and Social Research Council project](#) team over the 2014/15 school year, the children enabled adults to gain an insight into what the floods meant for them and their families and how the recovery process was unfolding. In 2015, they produced [Flood Manifestos for Change](#): sets of actions they felt needed to happen at all levels of society to prevent, better prepare for, and adapt to flooding.

To create a children's response to the Strategy, we have returned to these Manifestos and mapped the young people's concerns onto the aims and measures proposed in the current document. This is important, as this Strategy is due to be laid before Parliament towards the end of 2019 and is taking place at a time when children and young people have catalysed governmental responses to the climate emergency. Encouragingly, we found that parts of the Strategy directly reflect concerns raised by young people, but the Manifestos also highlight important gaps to be addressed.

(Maggie Mort and Alison Lloyd Williams, Lancaster University, 4 July 2019)

Annotated Response to Strategy Consultation

NB: We have synthesised the Young People's and the Children's Manifestos to create a joint 'response'. Direct quotations from the Manifestos are given below in italics.

Strategy Introduction

P 6 '...designing homes that can be restored quickly after they've been inundated with water...'

There should be more grants for floodgates and things to help make your house more resistant – and help with the red tape.

P 6 ‘...This draft Strategy paints a national ambition for England that can also work for local places. It recognises that every place is different – made up of different people, with different skills, needs and infrastructure, and often in very different environments.’

Children should go on walks (once a month) so they get to know their local area.

P 8 ‘Boston Barrier’ case study

Build more flood defences and barriers.

P 11 ‘...highway drainage and roadside ditches....’

Drains should be cleared out properly.

P12 ‘...provide timely and effective information and warnings’

*We should have more warnings, when we need them... Warnings shouldn't come when the floodwater is up to your waist – then it's too late!
Awareness could be raised via TV, newspaper, radio, social media like Facebook, and through music.... and included in weather reports.
Information should be put up in the community, like it is for fire safety, for example, on notice boards in Starbucks or in telephone boxes.
Have someone [in the family] who checks and understands the warnings.
Children should be given more information because they have the right to know what is happening.*

P 14 ‘...contributing to the achievement of sustainable development, balancing the needs of society, the economy and the urban, rural and natural environment, taking account of the cultural heritage....’

*Children recognise the need to balance protection with social/cultural concerns:
More barriers or walls on the Humber but not too big, so we can still see the view.*

Climate Resilient Places

P 17 ‘As the population grows we are likely to see the number of properties built on the flood plain almost double by 2065...’

Schools shouldn't be built on flood plains - or be built on stilts/have flood defences

P 18 ‘Strategic objective 1.1...People and places around the country need to know the impacts of the risk they face from flooding and coastal change, how significantly it will affect their lives and how best to respond. ‘

Flood education should be included in schools... There should be lessons on emergencies and floods, including how to prepare, understanding priorities when it floods, where to go, survival and first aid.... [Lessons] should start in Reception and

keep going.... It should be done without scaring children and include how they can help the community... Include flood tests at the end of the year, flood simulation events like a fire drill and a flood preparation game on the internet.

P 18 ‘...national standard of flood resilience...’

As identified above, children call for flood education for all.

P19 ‘The value people put on the look and feel of a place means we have to think even more innovatively about how to reduce the risk and create climate resilient places.’

More barriers or walls on the Humber but not too big, so we can still see the view.

P 19 ‘...**making decisions on land use**, which reflect the level of current and future flooding and coastal change risk. For example, by directing development away from the areas at risk and making sure that new development is safe for its lifetime....’

Schools should not be built on flood plains... Schools should have flood defences or be built on stilts.

P 19 ‘...**enhancing community resilience** by providing effective warnings and emergency response services, and by encouraging and supporting volunteers and community groups so people take action to move their possessions, stay safe and evacuate when needed.’

Families and communities should have a flood plan... Have someone who checks and understands the warnings... Every household and school should have a ‘flood box’ with supplies... Make sure you have a radio, batteries, candles, torches, sandbags and food...

When it floods get your things and yourself upstairs... Put photos on a high shelf, bed or attic, because you can’t retake them...

Make sure pets are safe.... Families with pets should be prepared to protect them, e.g. having a dog raft.

Community patrols should look out for people still in their houses – and make sure there aren’t any forgotten roads... Look out for people who need more help, like young children, older and disabled people.... Create local flood points – like fire evacuation points.... Develop a Community Flood Fund....

Children note that schools are part of the community and need to have their own flood plans (*Every school should have a ‘flood box’...*): *During floods, schools could provide areas for evacuation and food, open their grounds for parking, and offer sandbags... Schools could organise donations of supplies.*

Schools should communicate more with flooded families; they could use text messaging as people may not have internet access.... Open IT suite after school for students to do homework.... Teachers should have training about flooding.

Schools can help to involve children in flood resilience: Through ‘flood lessons’:
Children could write to the parish council, Prime Minister, Environment Agency or their MP to make flood defences better and help create plans.

P 19-20 ‘**...adapting property and services to boost their resilience**, by reducing the damage and disruption and making recovery quicker when a flood does happen. This includes designing and altering property and infrastructure so that they are less easily or less seriously damaged when there is a flood, and making sure that the people most at risk are mentally and physically prepared for what could happen.’

There should be more help from the Government for people with disabilities... Financial support should ensure the floods don’t cause poverty; this could help with the extra cost of food and washing clothes... There should be recognition that floods can lead to poor health, like bad diets if people can’t afford healthy food.

P 20 ‘**...recovering quickly after a flooding or coastal change event** by repairing damages, restoring the economy and supporting community wellbeing. This includes effective use of insurance to transfer recovery costs between parties.’

Insurance companies need to listen to what we need... People living in bungalows and children need special help.

More independent information should be available on what insurance companies can offer... Insurance should be fairer and cheaper... Insurance companies should make sure houses are dried out properly.

Set up a group for children who’ve been flooded so they can talk and listen to each other.

Flood-affected children understand the long process of recovery: People who were flooded will still be affected for a long time afterwards: those who weren’t will forget.

P 21 ‘Every place is different and the exact combination of tools needed will need to be tailored... There cannot be a ‘one size fits all...’

Children recognise the importance of being able to understand and interpret information in their local environment:

Children should go on walks (once a month) so they get to know their local area.

P 26 ‘Measure 1.2.1: By 2021 the Environment Agency and risk management authorities will identify frontrunner places for developing adaptive approaches for a range of different scales and social contexts, working with local places and partners.’

Will this include children and/or schools? e.g. children can *help create plans.*

Today’s Growth and Infrastructure Resilient in Tomorrow’s Climate

P 38 ‘Strategic objective 2.4: Between now and 2050 places affected by flooding and coastal change will be ‘built back better’ and in better places. Either as a proactive step or in

response to flooding, more should be done to encourage property owners to build back better and in better places. ‘

Flood defences and protection need to be better... There should be more grants for floodgates and things to help make your house more resistant - and help with red tape.

P 39 ‘If insurance companies changed their policies on pay-outs following flooding or coastal change, places could be built back better, making them significantly more resilient, so people feel safer.

The young people we worked with gave evidence at the All Party Parliamentary Group on Insurance & Financial Services meeting on flooding on 15 March 2016, where they presented: [Ten Tips for how the insurance industry can better support children and young people affected by flooding.](#)

P43 Humber flood risk management strategy.

Make sure the Humber Bridge stays open when it floods.

A Nation of Climate Champions

P46 ‘...Better use of digital tools should be key part of this due to the mobile nature of modern life.’

Awareness could be raised via... social media like Facebook BUT ALSO Information should be put up in the community, like it is for fire safety, for example up on notice boards in Starbucks or in telephone boxes.

P 46 ‘Strategic objective 3.1: Between now and 2030 young people at 16 should understand the impact of flooding and coastal change, but also recognize the potential solutions for their place, and opportunities for career development.’

Flood education should be included in schools.

P 47 ‘Flooding and coastal change are already regularly used as case studies within schools to show the impacts of natural hazards and climate change. However, more can be done and we need to take a long-term view in helping those delivering the school curriculum to further include flooding and coastal change in it. ‘

[Flood lessons] should start in Reception and keep going.... It should be done without scaring children and include how they can help the community.... It could be done in different parts of the curriculum e.g. in Personal, Social and Health Education.... Use assemblies to inform students about flooding.

P 47 ‘...short term improvement in understanding by young people, who also share information with their friends and families, enabling action now.’

Young people understand the need to support communities to prepare for and respond to flooding, for example:

Families and communities should have a flood plan.... Help your family, friends and neighbours.... Parents should be educated about how to help children e.g. at a parents’ evening.

P 47 ‘...ensuring all young people have the understanding, so when they reach adulthood they can contribute to place-based resilience and adaptive approaches...’

Young people can contribute to resilience building and be ‘climate champions’ NOW, not just in the future:

Flood education can include how to *help the community and help create plans.*

P 47 Geographical Association case study: ‘In 2018, the Environment Agency worked with the Geographical Association to produce materials for geography teachers that supported the existing national curriculum for GCSE and A level exams.’

Young people say flood education needs to start before GCSE and be for ALL children. It should include *‘lessons on emergencies and floods, including how to prepare, understanding priorities when it floods, where to go, survival and first aid.*

P 48 ‘Strategic objective 3.2... Community groups, flood action groups and wardens play a vital part in raising awareness, raising funds and running community schemes. We welcome this and want to encourage others to do the same, and to encourage all groups to have a presence, even when the memories of floods and their devastating impact fade.’

People who were flooded will still be affected for a long time afterwards: those who weren’t will forget.

Flood-affected young people understand the need for communities to *adapt.*

P 48 ‘The impact of flooding or coastal change is long-lasting and can be incredibly significant. People suffer from depression, anxiety....’

Flood-affected children want schools to support them:

Children should have time off school to help clean up... There should a group to help children get happier after a flood.... Teachers should have training about flooding.

P 51 ‘Strategic Objective 3.3...The role of the insurance industry in recovery is significant’

Flood-affected children know this and want the system to be *fairer.*