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Outline working proposal: Cumbria River Catchments Authority

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OUTLINE WORKING PROPOSAL:  
FOR DIALOGUE AND DEVELOPMENT WITH CUMBRIA FLOODS PARTNERSHIP

**CUMBRIA RIVER CATCHMENTS AUTHORITY**

***“A Strategic Proposal”***



**Prepared by Carlisle Flood Action Group**

**Hallmark Hotel, Carlisle - 22 April 2016**

April, 2016

To: Partnership Members

We have been, like you, poring over flooding and its contexts for weeks. What strikes is the extent of complexity, its intensity, but also wider implications of what large-scale disruption might mean. Radical re-thinking and action appears justifiable under these conditions. With the implication these events might positively impact resistant areas of lived-life, such as education and economy. This wider discussion, rich, remote and interesting as it is, which I think is important, and part of re-thinking, is paused in preference for this proposal. This issue of capacity appears a dominant factor and sits as fundamental. The Cumbrian economy and its interdependency with flood resilience cannot be stressed enough.

Dr Stephen Gibbs  
Chair, Carlisle Flood Action Group

## Executive summary

- The Group recommends formation of research-based executive-led *Cumbria River Catchments Authority*, informed conceptually by elements of *Somerset Rivers Authority* model, and in partnership with EA.
- A stakeholder model, with Executive, Trustee and Advisory Boards, placing executive authority in a Chief Executive Officer. Inclusion of community and business leaders.
- Process commences with *resource-based strategy* formulation, including mapping capabilities and competencies from multiple-agencies. Strategic intent and objectives built from this iterative process.
- Executive Board's powers extend to structuring according to need, partners, and buying-in of resources where capability gaps are identified.
- EA, Councils, key bodies move to lead partner/second-agent role. The Authority takes first-agent lead in delivering short, medium and long-term objectives, reporting direct to government.
- Feasibility Working Group (FWG) first report by end July 2016. Authority in place by end of year 2016. FWG led by Executive Trustees; Cumbria University Research Team Members; Project Lead: Senior Manager from global natural assets design consultancy e.g. Arcadis; Sponsor: Rory Stewart MP, UK Government.
- In the final outworking strategic/operational transparency and project management reporting via publicly available online dash-board metrics ("modernisation").
- FWG budget required to cover full-time Executive Project Managers (corporate infrastructure experience on major floods infrastructure work), secondments, Carlisle office.
- FWG makes recommendations for national frameworks that support its sustainability. Government budgets built from Authority calculations ("modernisation").

### Who is the Carlisle Flood Action Group?:

The Carlisle Flood Action Group formed in January 2016 after successful community meetings. It is independent, made up of volunteers. Vision: Fighting for a safe and prosperous city. Mission: To be fearless powerful voice for the people of Carlisle (and districts).

### Questions posed:

- Who is leading the protection of county and city? Where are they? Can they do the job?

### Immediate threats:

- Cumbria suffering 10% business income loss, maybe worse, including business closures, with threats to major employers. Yildiz may yet move McVitie's production to one of its 53 global sites. Nervousness in business community leads to lack of future investment.
- Communities vulnerable both personally and financially.
- Threat of repeated flooding this autumn.
- City vulnerable to independent actions from land owners.

### Terms of reference:

- *"The time has come to disperse power more widely in Britain today."* The Prime Minister, May 2010 (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011).
- *"The new paradigm of FRM is most clearly illustrated by the government's 20-year strategy, Making Space for Water (MSW) (Defra, 2004a, 2005a). This applies a new vision for FRM that aims for all decisions and operations to be underpinned by sustainable development principles taking full account of the social, environmental and economic elements. Decision-making processes are to be participatory and transparent whilst recognising the significance of long-term drivers and their associated uncertainties"* (Johnson & Priest, 2008: 515).
- The Group's Objectives are: 1 Reduce circumstances that cause flooding, minimise effects when it is unavoidable and maximise protection of vulnerable areas. 2 Identify political leadership government/agency structures that will deliver this.

### Methodological approach to this paper:

- The Group adopted a 'business strategy' methodology. Classical modern strategic thinking does create force of argumentation, which itself is a factor in complex debates such as ours. Such a shift represents a 'modernised' approach. This paper touches on strategy context, content and process.

### Assumptions:

- Progress blocked by contradictory political and technical debate. Thereby a complex problem, involving social, political, technical and economic issues, best addressed by 'open tent' dialogue, such as Cumbria Floods Partnership.
- Can the EA assess an optimal flood defence system?: *"The EA has never carried out this exercise, and its [assessment] techniques are not designed to"* (Helm, 2016).
- *"conventional approach to flood defence, carried out by the Environment Agency (EA)... is at best inefficient. Sometimes... counterproductive, encouraging the sorts of land use... that can actually make flooding worse..."* (Helm, 2016).
- Government agencies have lost most of their autonomy (King, 2015).
- Is there a genuine paradigm shift?: *"Flood risk management (FRM) in England is currently undergoing a major paradigm shift as it moves from an ideology concerned with 'keeping flood water out' to one in which its citizens are being asked to 'make space for water'"* (Johnson & Priest, 2008: 515).
- 13 April 2016 EFRA Select Committee. Chair Neil Parish MP to Sir James Bevan, CEO EA *"You [Bevan] said 'The capacity of a river doesn't matter!' You've got to be certain the leopard has changed its spots. And I will keep repeating this. You haven't really given us an answer as to whether you have monitored the situation. I'm fearful. You allowed the River Parrett to silt up you allowed the Tone to silt up, you allowed the tributaries to silt up, and then it flooded."*
- *"The EA don't provide [quotes for work] when doing projects so we can't compare like with like [other project providers]. There is an argument for transparency on your spending."* "You say the right words and hold onto your power" (Defra, 2016).
- 'To flood a hectare of agricultural land costs £425 in damages. A hectare of urban space costs £2.5m in damages when flooded' (Defra, 2016)
- '42% of water courses are cut off from their natural flood plain, due to overprotection by barriers, including rivers upstream' (Defra, 2016).
- CEO of EA: 'Flood defence works' 'My sense is we are pretty good' (Defra, 2016)
- The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: *"turn Defra into, '.. a highly responsive, open and data-driven department that will be a trailblazer for contemporary government, driving environmental improvement and economic growth, especially in the countryside, and providing better protection from natural threats'"* (Truss, 2016)

Carlisle context:

The second 1 in 1000 year flood event within 10 years occurred in Carlisle and Cumbria in December 2015. Many Carlisle residents conceived the 2010 £38m flood defence system, led by a partnership of Cumbria County Council, Carlisle City Council, the Environment Agency and United Utilities would prevent further catastrophic flooding in their lifetime i.e. it would convert flood zone 3 to zone 1. To the extent some did not renew their flood insurance cover. Some argue its efficacy was over-communicated.

There is no generally agreed analysis and publicly available report on these events, and their causes.

It is reported that no significant defence works will commence for some years, and these works will be pilots for catchment management. Some capital monies have been allocated.

Approximately 2,000 homes and businesses were flooded on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> December 2015. Many victims were flooded for the second time. Many homes are dry and restoration work is commencing. Many victims of the 2005 flooding accepted their flood event was unlikely to re-occur in their lifetime. Many determined to restore 'life as it was before the flood'. The 2015 event has brought about different future expectations. People are both personally and financially vulnerable. Carlisle contains differing socio-economic groups, some without the resources to sustain. The prospect of a further flood event in these communities could take people beyond their ability to cope.

The community have expressed a wish for immediate action. To date there is no substantive communication from government as to plans for new defence, and when the city will be safe. Many are not clear what is taking place, and who to turn to for advice and guidance. In particular who represents the government's lead on the ground.

Capabilities mapping – 1 = low, 5 = high capability

	Whole catchment system analysis	Complex management and project management	Strategic Leadership	Functional/ administrative leadership	Executive authority	Situated knowledge accretion
Cumbria County Council	0	1	1	4	1	1
Carlisle City Council	0	0	1	4	1	1
Environment Agency	0	2	1	4	1	2
New River Catchments Authority	5	5	5	4	4	5
Outsource partner E.g. Arcadis	5	5	4	5	0	3
Devolved Cumbria Structure	0	2	3	4	5	1

Figure 1: *These are approximations from secondary literature and participant observation of organisational activity since the December 2015 floods, and no doubt contested, but it is illustrative and indicative. A new Authority would move to detailed analysis focusing on mapping catchment requirements from multiple sources: “Environment Agency... main weaknesses revealed have been lack of managerial focus... Although the Environment Act 1995, which set up the Environment Agency, required it should take account of the costs and benefits of its activities, in practice, the Environment Agency has not given such assessments a central role, and its senior staff have tended to reflect scientific and engineering interests, rather than economics.” (Helm, 1998: 15) and “Flooding crises tend to follow an established pattern. First, there is immediate help and assistance. Then second, there is a “review”. On occasions, this leads to a third stage of genuine reform, but in most cases “sticking plasters” are applied. These are incremental and often sensible, but typically fail to address the core issues and hence provide only a temporary respite.” (Helm, 2016: 1)*



## Capacity and modernisation

When capabilities are mapped in Figure 1 capacity becomes dominant concern. Any capabilities' mapping will be contested. But such a resource-based approach invites dialogue about Strategic Architecture in combating complexity. And is a modernised methodology. This includes asking if agencies have resources which are 'imprisoned' and unlikely to be released easily. The question then is how strategic architecture is shaped if partners are unwilling to lend their capabilities to others freely (Lampel, Mintzberg, Quinn & Ghoshal, 2013). This is likely where multiple partners are engaged (Helm, 2016).

One way to avoid such large-scale re-thinking might be to enhance existing structures, such as the Environment Agency's capabilities, through insertion of new skills in order to close gaps. Within an institutional setting this will probably be 10-12 years' work. Evidence from company mergers and acquisitions, which are often aimed at re-engineering around capabilities, show such efforts often damage rather than deliver increased performance. Frequently organisations choose re-structuring rather than bolting on capabilities.

More feasible is moving existing agencies to back-office roles, especially if their activity is 'runners and repeaters' work, not 'stranger' work such as periodic floods. Nationally structured bodies can perform well in back-office support roles, as their dominant leadership ethos is functional/administrative, their staff responding well to the perspective distance provides. The EA, in crude military terms, become the Intelligence Corp and Royal Engineers combined, with the 'teeth arms' delivered to the 'enemy' via the new Authority.

Here we propose the new Authority would design and build much of its own architecture. Resource allocation would then become a transparent process for stakeholders. With all partners able to see the logic of priority allocation. It is this transparency of process which profoundly affects practice.

There is a lot to say here also about how such transparency creates liminal engagement with community and business stakeholders, re-shaping future horizons.

## Process

A Feasibility Working Group should include external expert management experience from outside existing players, preferably global experience in delivering major flood alleviation projects in similarly complex environs as the Cumbria catchments.

End.

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