The aim of the Environment Agency’s National flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy for England is to ensure that the risk of flooding and coastal erosion is properly managed and co-ordinated to minimise its impact.

It sets out a statutory framework, recommending a number of approaches, that will help communities, the public sector and other organisations to work together to manage flood and coastal erosion risk.

Warrington is a great example of how a partnership approach has provided the local community with a shared understanding of flood risk and long term investment needs.

Background
Warrington is a large town in North West England, midway between Manchester and Liverpool. Parts of the town are situated on the floodplain of the River Mersey. The town is at risk from both tidal and fluvial flooding from the river and the six main rivers that flow into the Mersey within Warrington.

In December 2010 the Warrington Flood Risk Management Strategy was approved. The strategy found that there are approximately 4,000 homes and businesses at risk from a flood with a 1 in 200 chance of occurring in any year. With climate change that could increase to 6,500 in 100 years time. The strategy identified all the places where we could reduce flood risk. While the focus of the strategy was on flood risk from the town’s rivers, the project was co-ordinated with a Surface Water Management Plan led by Warrington Borough Council.

Our Approach
We have used the strategy to prioritise work to reduce flood risk. Of the 4,000 houses at risk about half are at significant risk of flooding from the River Mersey. Given this we took early steps to determine the best strategic approach to reducing flood risk from the Mersey and began working on a project in this area even before the strategy was completed. We now have a project approved that will reduce flooding up to a 1 in 100 chance per year for approximately 2000 homes. The detailed design for part of the scheme has been developed and we are intending to start construction in Autumn 2012. It will take three years to complete the project.

In developing our strategy we worked closely with Warrington Borough Council and United Utilities, the water company for Warrington. We engaged with the public at several stages when developing and selecting options and made use of our strong relationship with the council to ensure local councillors were kept informed throughout. We held public workshops and exhibitions with staff from all three organisations to show the integrated nature of our strategy.

The relationships developed during the strategy were very helpful when seeking approval for the strategy. This was demonstrated when Warrington Borough Council’s Director of Environment and Regeneration came to a Large Project Review Group meeting in London to support our strategy submission.

Local Funding Contributions
The relationship with Warrington Borough Council has been crucial in developing the River Mersey Project. The strategy showed that although the

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scheme was cost beneficial getting a high enough Outcome Measure Score to secure government funding would be a challenge. We talked to Warrington Borough Council and they pledged to contribute £3.4 million.

We have also worked with housing developers who have existing permissions for housing development in the area. By doing this we have secured agreement that they will provide appropriate flood defences for the new houses they build. This will reduce the need for us to provide flood defences for these planned developments. One development is proceeding ahead of ours and the defences are already in place.

As the construction of new developments depends on the local housing market, the council has established a partnership agreement with the developers. This means that the council will underwrite the provision of flood defences in this area in the short term, and seek to recoup funding from the developers when the housing market picks up.

In addition to the local authority and local developers, we have also engaged with a statutory utilities undertaker. Early discussions have resulted in a significant contribution. This is partly due to their regulator specifying that they should protect a particular vital piece of infrastructure against a flood with a 1 in 1,000 chance of happening in any given year. They have agreed to pay us to provide this higher standard of protection around their infrastructure. They are also contributing to the scheme in return for the benefit the rest of their network will enjoy from a reduced risk of flooding.

£23 million has been approved for this scheme. We expect £17 million of this will come from the government’s Flood Defence Grant in Aid budget and approximately £6 million from the above contributions.

<table>
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<th>Contributor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warrington BC</td>
<td>In kind and cash</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statutory Undertaker</td>
<td>Cash</td>
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<td>Housing developer</td>
<td>In kind, building defences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Government</td>
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<td>£16.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>£23 million</td>
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Other sources of flooding
Our focus is on flooding from rivers. However surface water flooding can also occur when local sewers, drains and watercourses are not able to cope with very heavy rainfall. Warrington Borough Council is working with United Utilities and the Environment Agency to help understand and manage this type of flooding.

Conclusions
Working from an early stage with key partners like Warrington Borough has been enormously beneficial. This relationship has helped smooth our approvals process; saved the tax payer money; made the most of opportunities; and helped us to make a viable scheme.

Both high level support from within the council and officer level support has been crucial. This now finds us in good position to reduce flood risk to thousands of people.

What Next?
We are in the process of drawing up legal agreements to secure funding commitments from partners, going for planning permission in mid April, and preparing our contractor to begin construction in the Autumn.

For more information
If you would like more information about our work in Warrington please contact Ben Lukey at ben.lukey@environment-agency.gov.uk