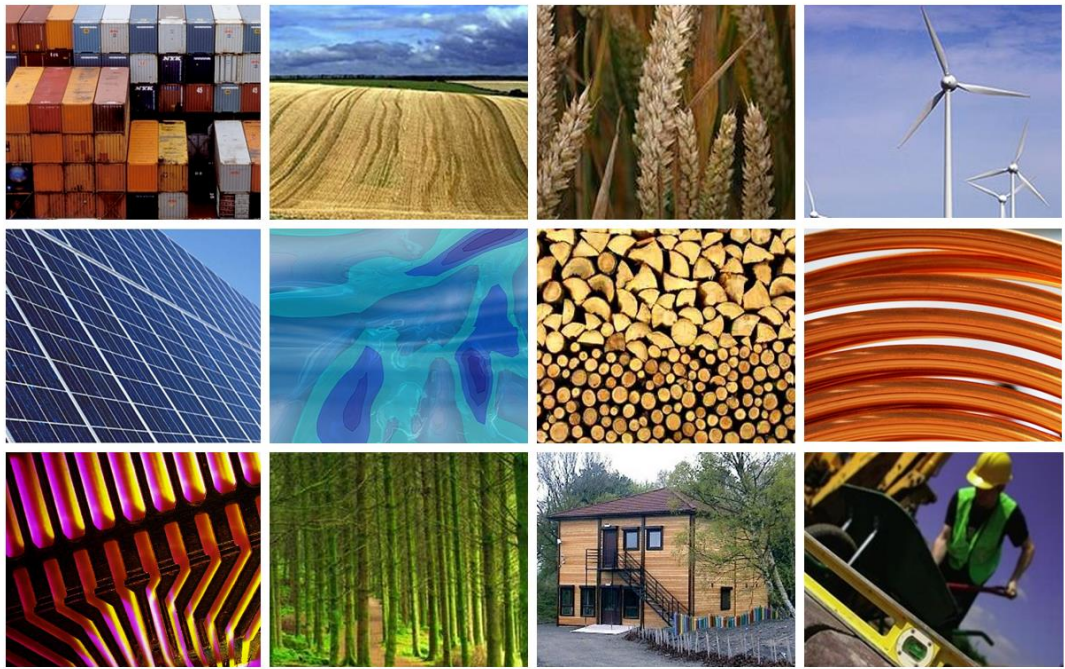


Defra and UKRI Sciencewise

Evaluation of a Public Dialogue on Climate Adaptation

Final impact report

November 2023



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Acronyms and Glossary

Adaptation	The process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects in order to moderate harm or take advantage of beneficial opportunities
ARP	Adaptation Reporting Powers
BEIS/DBT	Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, now the Department of Business and Trade
CO	Cabinet Office
CCA	Climate Change Act 2008
CCC	Climate Change Committee
CCRA	Climate Change Risk Assessment
CNI	Critical National Infrastructure
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DESNZ	Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (previously part of BEIS)
DfE	Department for Education
DfT	Department for Transport
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
NAP	National Adaptation Plan (5 year plan)

Executive summary of an independent evaluation of a public dialogue on climate adaptation

This evaluation is of a public dialogue commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and co-funded by the UKRI Sciencewise programme. The public dialogue was designed and delivered by Ipsos in collaboration with Leeds University.

Context

- The UK Government is required, under the 2008 [Climate Change Act \(CCA\)](#), to publish a [Climate Change Risk Assessment \(CCRA\)](#) informed by the work of the Climate Change Committee every five years. The CCRA sets out the key risks and opportunities facing the UK from climate change. Defra is the lead government department tasked with responding to the CCRA in the form of a national adaptation plan (the NAP) for the next five years. The NAP pulls together priorities and actions to address specific types of sectoral risks assigned to different risk holder departments, including Defra.
- NAP3 was prepared in response to CCRA3 and aimed to be more ambitious than previous NAPs, setting up a 5-year programme of action. The Public Dialogue was commissioned by Defra, with Sciencewise, to inform the NAP3 process, and to build the evidence base on climate change adaptation, including bringing public voices into adaptation policymaking. The public dialogue aimed to deepen understanding of what the public think about climate impacts and risks, and priorities for responses in various landscape settings (such as coastal, upland and urban areas) where the concerns might be different.
- The timings for the public dialogue to feed into NAP3 drafting were tight, with NAP3 due for publication in summer 2023. This was further compressed by a delay in procurement of the dialogue. Nevertheless, the dialogue was completed and the messages ready for sharing by mid-July 2022. However external events, including the political changes of the second half of 2022, led to a long delay in Defra sign-off and publication of the [dialogue report](#), which was published at the same time as [NAP3](#) on 18th July 2023.

Dialogue approach

- About 110 participants from four geographically and demographically diverse locations (Greater Manchester, Inner London, Dartmoor and Exmoor, and Hull and East Riding) took part in online evening workshops in groups of 25-30 over a three week period in March and April 2022. Over the course of six workshops the participants heard from both national and local specialists about unavoidable climate change, impacts, risks and potential adaptation responses.
- Participants deliberated in small groups about what mattered most to them: working through structured scenarios, they explored their priorities and the values that informed them. This process surfaced a strong consensus for fair adaptation - focusing support on the most vulnerable groups - action now and for responses such as nature-based solutions, that might be less costly than engineered ones and deliver co-benefits for net zero, nature restoration or jobs. A smaller group of 28 participants were reconvened for a national summit to help develop a vision for a well-adapted England.

Meeting the dialogue objectives

- Despite the ambitious scope and timetable pressures, an experienced delivery team overseen by a large and very engaged oversight group (OG) of adaptation experts were able to design and deliver a high-quality process that met all five primary dialogue objectives, while also generating useful ideas on how to communicate with and involve the public in the NAP3 process (a secondary objective).
- Key factors which helped deliver a high-quality process were: the effectiveness of the core management team and governance arrangements; the topic expertise embedded in the Ipsos/Leeds University team; previous lessons learnt in running large online dialogues; and contributions from some renowned climate specialists in sharing information and answering participants' questions.
- Small, geographically organised groups heard from both national and local specialists and were ably supported by highly experienced facilitators. The groups went on an emotional roller-coaster journey, starting with shock and gloom as they got to grips with the scale of the issues, but gradually becoming more hopeful as they considered different types of response and worked through the inherent trade-offs. By the end of the process, participants felt that they had been able to make meaningful suggestions to government: many had also started thinking about how they and their communities could start to take action to protect their homes, livelihoods and health.

Policy impacts

- Despite the delays to publication of the dialogue report and dissemination of its messages, Defra was able to share messages internally with other risk holder departments (such as DHSC, DLUHC, FCDO, DfE, DfT and Cabinet Office).
- Neither the dialogue process nor the report are directly referenced anywhere in the NAP3 documentation or website but, nevertheless, analysis of the text suggests that a number of key messages have permeated, in the following areas:
 - Including a vision for a well-adapted England for the first time in a NAP. Although this was not the full dialogue version, commentators consider this a useful first step in helping wider audiences visualise what good adaptation will look like and as a tangible goal against which progress can be measured.
 - Reflecting the public participants' overriding concern for fairness and equity, the report highlights the importance of protecting the most vulnerable (because of age, health, income or where they live). NAP3 chapters include various actions to provide groups with more granular information on risks and to continue spending on flood protection in high flood risk areas. However, no support is envisaged for retrofitting of individual homes as participants had hoped for.
 - The NAP3 does not yet include any plans for a public awareness-raising campaign or for involving the public in NAP3 roll out. However, Defra and other stakeholders hope to address this gap in the future, echoing the strong messages from public dialogue participants about the need for better communications from trusted messengers.

Lessons and recommendations for future dialogues

For commissioners and Sciencewise

- Where a dialogue is designed to inform a specific policy process, ensure a realistic timescale – including contingency for slippage in the procurement process – so that findings can have the desired impact. In this case the procurement process was so complicated and slow that it may have been worth Sciencewise and the commissioners pausing the process and considering whether an alternative approach would have been simpler and more efficient.
- If there are likely to be delays to publication of the dialogue report – as in this case – ensure key messages can inform the policy drafting process in other ways such as by involving members of the drafting team and key members of other related policy departments as workshop observers, sharing findings informally with other policy departments, or continuing to involve OG members as stakeholders after the dialogue has finished.
- If the commissioner team is expected to deliver information to participants during early workshops, try to anticipate how this might be received, what questions it might raise and how to get them answered, including explaining where some information may not yet be available. This is an important part of building trust in the process and confidence that the commissioners will use what they hear through the process.
- Do not under-estimate the time required to convene and get the most out of a large Oversight Group. In this case, time spent by the Defra secretariat in selecting the right individuals, briefing the chair, logging OG comments and how they had been taken into account, really paid off in allowing the OG to make valuable contributions at key points in the process (and to continue doing so after the dialogue was finished).

For delivery contractors

- Consider embedding topic specialists within the team where the topic to be covered is broad or complex and the timescale is compressed. In this case, respected academic expertise allowed the delivery team to make rapid progress in producing an overall design with broad and unbiased background workshop materials, which then allowed the core team and OG members to identify gaps where different perspectives or more specific information needed to be provided via external specialists.
- If timing allows, build in a pilot stage (ideally with members of the public or with team members who have not been closely involved in the design) to test the flow, materials and the types of questions that may need to be answered.
- If the topic is likely to be emotionally upsetting to participants, build in support options (such as chill-out space, talking to empathetic listeners, links to support organisations, suggestions for individual actions). In this case recognising the eco anxiety that the topic induced in many participants allowed the team to support them using all of the above elements so that they felt more hopeful and empowered by the end.
- Where the design includes delivering workshops in multiple locations, consider how to make best use of specialists' time. In this case a combination of moving specialists between parallel groups and pre-recording their presentations worked well to ensure everyone heard the same key information.

- Where there are not enough specialists to have one in every small group throughout the discussions, weigh up alternative approaches (such as plenary Q+A or written answers shared between sessions) to getting participants' questions answered.
- Encourage the commissioning body to involve drafting team and policy team members as observers so that participants feel confident that they have been heard and that their insights will be used.
- Online microsites can add real value to the overall design as a repository for sharing materials, providing answers to questions between workshops and for collecting further data on individual deliberations. However, recognise that such a site will require additional staff time for design, moderation and analysis.
- Consider a variety of formats for workshop sessions including a mix of unprompted and more structured small group discussions, group elicitation exercises and moments for individual reflection.
- Wherever possible share stimulus materials with participants in advance (by post or at a microsite) so that they can have them at hand for small group discussions. If this is not possible, equip facilitators with summary slides or the ability to reshow presentations as needed in small groups: this is particularly important where specialists are likely to be sharing data-rich presentations.
- Consider using a variety of techniques not just transcriptions and simultaneous notetaking to capture participants' views (e.g. visible notes taken by facilitators, interactive whiteboards, Zoom polls) so that participants are able to review and challenge what is being captured, and to get an idea of how others in the room are thinking.
- Pre-recorded plenary presentations by the lead facilitator can be an effective way of providing participants with the same introduction and recap where the same workshops are being repeated in multiple locations.

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

URSUS Consulting Ltd has prepared this final evaluation report of a public dialogue on climate adaptation commissioned by the Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (Defra) with co-funding and support provided by the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Sciencewise programme.¹ The public dialogue was designed and delivered by Ipsos in collaboration with the University of Leeds.

This draft report draws on evaluation observations, qualitative and quantitative feedback from public participants, specialists and members of the Oversight Group (OG) and from core project management team members at a wash up meeting in October 2023. The report focuses on the potential impacts of the dialogue (*Section 2*), lessons on how good practice has enabled the dialogue to meet its objectives (*Section 3*) and recommendations for future dialogues (*Section 4*). Supporting evidence is shown in a separate annex document.

1.2 Background and context

The UK Government is required, under the 2008 [Climate Change Act \(CCA\)](#),² to publish a [Climate Change Risk Assessment \(CCRA\)](#)³ every five years which sets out the risks and opportunities facing the UK from climate change. The CCRA is informed by the [Climate Change Committee's \(CCC\) independent advice report](#).⁴ The third of these published risk assessments, CCRA3 published in 2022, identified 61 risks and opportunities and concluded that many climate risks are not being effectively managed and that the country is less prepared than it was five years previously. As part of its independent advice on CCRA3, the CCC recommended that the Government undertook public engagement to help prioritise risks and courses of action, to consider how to address inequalities and to identify responsibilities across society.

Defra is the lead government department responsible for domestic adaptation and coordination of other risk holder departments responsible for specific types of risk or their impact on relevant sectors. It is also the lead body for drafting the [National Adaptation Programme](#) (NAP3 – 2023-8) which is the government's five year programme responding to CCRA3. As part of the NAP3 drafting process Defra wished to understand different public's views on climate change adaptation and the level of support for adaptation measures to

¹ Sciencewise helps to ensure policy is informed by the views and aspirations of the public. The programme is led and funded by UKRI with support from the Department for Business and Trade (DBT). [Involve](#), the UK's leading public participation charity, provides expert advice, assurance and support to the programme.

² The [Climate Change Act 2008](#) requires the Government to publish a climate change risk assessment (CCRA) every five years and to develop a National Adaptation Programme (NAP) to respond to the risk assessment.

³ [Climate Change Risk Independent Assessment Report \(CCRA3\)](#), 2022. The [first](#) risk assessment was published in 2012, and the [second](#) in 2017.

⁴ Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk Advice to Government for the UK's CCRA3, <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/independent-assessment-of-uk-climate-risk/> includes a technical report, research projects and summaries of advice.

build on what was already known from quantitative surveys ([RESIL-RISK project](#)).⁵ The team was particularly interested in understanding what the public thinks a well-adapted UK should look like, their priorities for action and how to achieve them. Defra therefore sought support from the UKRI Sciencewise programme to commission a large public dialogue (more than 100 participants from across England) to help fill these gaps.

The dialogue findings had potential to inform the NAP3 report and to help shape the programme as it is rolled out over the next five years. The ambitious timeline to commission and complete the dialogue by July 2022 was designed to allow findings to inform Defra and other risk holder departments in shaping the NAP3 later in 2022 for publication in 2023.

1.3 Public dialogue objectives

The dialogue had five main objectives as follows:

- To understand participants' views on what an England well-adapted to climate risks should look like.
- To understand how participants prioritise different climate risks and adaptation actions.
- To understand participants' views on which actors are responsible for different adaptation actions.
- To further develop understanding of public awareness and initial public responses to climate risks and climate adaptation measures.
- To gather evidence on how the views of participants who live in and experience different physical landscapes vary on climate risks and adaptation actions.

Other lower priority objectives were to gather participants' perspectives on how to engage and communicate with the public during adaptation policy setting, in particular:

- To explore how and how much to involve the public with the five-yearly iterations of the NAP and the policies and programmes that the NAP3 comprises.
- To explore how the public should be engaged as part of the rollout of adaptation measures implemented with National Adaptation Programmes.

1.4 Dialogue framing

- The scope of the dialogue was very broad and needed first to give participants some background understanding of how climate has already changed and how it will continue to change in future according to how successful mitigation measures are in working towards net zero (NZ) globally. It was agreed by the commissioners and OG members that the discussions would focus on two time key policy time frames: 2030 and 2050.
- Rather than trying to cover all 61 priority risks identified by the CCRA, the agreed focus was on five groupings of climate hazards (flooding, coastal erosion, overheating, water stress and storminess) and four vulnerable sectors (natural environment, infrastructure, human health and business) which captured many of the CCRA risks and mirrored the expected coverage of NAP3. International climate dimensions were not explicitly

⁵ [RESIL-RISK: Understanding UK Perceptions of Climate Risk and Resilience](#), 2020 based on a representative survey of 1,400 members of the public and report [British Public Perceptions of Climate Risk, Adaptation Options and Resilience](#), March 2020. This showed that the UK public has much less understanding of climate risks associated with unavoidable climate change than it does about mitigation and net zero.

included in the design (although they are covered in NAP3), but were anyway raised by some participants in terms of their implications for trade and migration patterns.

- Since climate risks and vulnerabilities differ between landscapes, participants were recruited from four different locations which together represent a mix of coastal/inland, upland/lowland, and urban/rural landscapes as follows:
 - **East Riding of Yorkshire:** lowland, coastal with a mix of urban and rural/fishing communities (key risks: flooding, coastal erosion, overheating).
 - **London basin:** lowland, urban, coastal (key risks: overheating, water stress, flooding).
 - **Greater Manchester:** urban and rural (key risks: flooding, overheating).
 - **Dartmoor and Exmoor:** upland, coastal, rural (key risks: flooding, coastal erosion, overheating and wildfire).
- The 30 participants recruited in each location were expected to bring a mix of attitudes about climate change (although this was not screened for during recruitment), including some individuals expected to have lived experience on the basis that the postcode area they lived in had experienced serious flooding. In the event, many more participants had direct experiences gleaned from a series of three major named storms (Dudley, Eunice and Franklin) which hit the UK within a 7-day period during the workshop period in early 2022. The combination of high winds, surge and rain caused extensive damage to property, transport and energy supplies.
- Underlying views may also have been shaped by the invasion of Ukraine by Russia (February 2022) and mounting concerns about food and energy security and the cost of living. The period was also characterised by political upheaval around the Boris Johnson premiership.

1.5 Dialogue approach

- This large dialogue was project managed by a core project management team made up of Defra, UKRI Sciencewise, the delivery contractors and the independent evaluator.
- An 18 person Oversight Group (OG) chaired by Kathryn Brown of the Wildlife Trusts was convened by Defra to help ensure the process was robust and credible. The OG brought together a good mix of academic, public sector, business and non-governmental perspectives across a range of climate science, social and environmental disciplines. The group met three times online between March and June 2022 to help frame the dialogue, refine the recruitment brief and inform stimulus materials. Six members also took the role of specialists in the public workshops (see *Annex A* for a list of members).
- 112 participants (25-30 for each area) were recruited through free-find methods: the sample was designed to be reflective of both the demographics of each area (age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic segments) and England as a whole. In total 103 participants attended six weekday evening online workshops (Zoom) over the course of three weeks (see *Annex B*). A smaller group of 30 (selected from the four geographic groups to reflect national demographics and attitudes to adaptation) were invited to attend a final national summit. See *Annex B* for more detailed information on the dialogue methodology.
- Information on the evaluation approach and methodology, including evidence gathering methods, is also given in *Annex B*.
- The final dialogue report (originally planned for July 2022) was published at the [Sciencewise website](#) in July 2023.

2 Potential for impact

2.1 Policy impact

2.1.1 Opportunities for impact on the NAP3

As a first exploration of what different publics think about climate impacts and priorities for adaptation, the dialogue had potential to help move the NAP3 forward and make it more ambitious than NAP2 had been⁶. As one policy interviewee put it: *"Having compelling scientific and economic evidence has not got us where we would like to be – bringing in public views will help bring it to life"*.

The timing – with field work completed around Easter and a report ready for publication in July 2022 - was specifically designed to maximise opportunities to inform the drafting and priority setting process. The dialogue’s findings were expected to feed into the NAP3 process and report in several ways:

- Helping shape Defra’s overall approach (structure, vision, level of ambition etc.).
- Informing the risks and priorities that specific risk holder departments identified, including land and nature (Defra), education (DfE), transport (DfT), health and social care (DHSC), business and trade (DBT), energy (DESNZ), aid and foreign policy (FCDO) and the Cabinet Office.
- Informing Defra’s consultation with other stakeholders.

2.1.2 Sharing the public dialogue’s findings with key risk holders

- The fieldwork and a high-quality report which had been signed off by the then Defra Adaptation Minister (Jo Churchill) were produced to the agreed timeline so that they could be shared by Defra with internal teams, at cross-departmental meetings and in stakeholder engagement. An online webinar was planned for mid-July as the first opportunity to share the findings and public’s priorities with a high-level cross-government group of climate risk owners. Ipsos, Leeds University and a small group of public participants were all primed to take part.
- However, external events intervened. Amid the resignation of the then Prime Minister, the responsible Defra Minister also resigned, resulting in delays to the clearance and publication of the report. The report was published alongside the NAP3 in July 2023.
- While the Defra drafting team were awaiting final clearance of the report, they shared key findings internally with the NAP3-related departments and through meetings with policymakers in other relevant departments, as summarised in *Figure 2.1*. They have also continued to work with OG members, such as the Director of Climate Sense who was seconded to support the Defra evidence team.
- The Defra team were struck by the report’s powerful messages that participants were very interested in the adaptation topic, saw the NAP3 as a programme for everyone, and saw a role for the public as part of the roll-out process. They also noted the message that there is an urgent need to raise public awareness (on a footing with mitigation and net

⁶ In his evidence to a [parliamentary committee](#) in Autumn 2022, the Defra Minister suggested that this was still the intention.

zero) and communicate actions that government and others have already undertaken, including some positive success stories.

Figure 2.1: Key messages from the public dialogue for risk-holding departments



2.1.3 Embedding public dialogue messages in the overall NAP3 approach

- NAP3 describes itself as a whole-government programme for action on climate adaptation. The document sets out objectives for adaptation and policies, timelines and metrics for responding to the risks identified in the CCRA3. As shown in *Figure 2.2*, the document covers risks to infrastructure, the built environment and health, the natural environment, business and industry and local government. The report describes relevant policies and funding and new actions to be taken by risk holders.
- Partly due to its publication close to summer recess, the NAP3 attracted limited press or stakeholder coverage, and what coverage there was tended to criticise a lack of ambition or immediate action.
- Despite being published on the same day, the public dialogue process or report are not mentioned anywhere in the NAP3 (in the foreword, executive summary, introduction, sectoral chapters or footnotes) and no link is included at the gov.uk website.
- Nevertheless, OG evaluation interviewees are hopeful that it has had a subtle influence. As one noted: "*NAP3 had largely been written when [the public dialogue] was published, but the Defra official leading on this was also integral to NAP3 development - so I hope it got in through that route.*"
- The following paragraphs summarise the extent to which the public dialogue messages appear to have had an influence.

Sharing a vision for a well-adapted UK for the first time in a NAP

- '*The UK Government's vision for adaptation is for a country that effectively plans for and is fully adapted to the changing climate with resilience against each of the identified climate risks.*' Both the executive summary and Chapter 1 include the Government vision which is shorter and "less compelling" than the public dialogue version produced after the national summit (see *Figure 2.1*), but is nonetheless considered a valuable step forward by OG members, stakeholders and the Defra adaptation team (see *Box 2.1*). Commentators felt that having a clear statement of what good adaptation is will help communicate it to others and set a goal against which progress can start to be measured. The Defra team hope that the dialogue vision can be referred to more as NAP3 is rolled out (e.g. in conversations with senior policy makers).

Box 2.1: Stakeholder views on the importance of a shared vision for adaptation

- Those involved in the dialogue (OG members and core team) welcomed the public participants' vision in encapsulating the important issues:
 - "Having a vision developed by participants is definitely a highlight."*
 - "For the first time, the public has articulated what a well-adapted England should look like. I hope this work will help the Government and other key stakeholders better define the aims and objectives of national adaptation policy."* (Leeds University blog)
 - "I loved the vision for adaptation in England created by the dialogue group."* (OG chair, Kathryn Brown [on LinkedIn](#)) and Liz Parkes' response - *"It's a great vision."* (Environment Agency).
- Wider stakeholders responding on LinkedIn also underlined the value of this vision:
 - "A compelling vision for 'Adapted Britain 2050' is needed, with all the benefits that it might have. Everyone can imagine what a net zero world might look like."* (Insurance company)
- The public's version has also been shared with wider stakeholders via a presentation by Rachel Harcourt of Leeds University at a [University of Exeter](#) workshop (Sept 2023).
- The corporate leader's group [adaptation advocacy guide](#) stresses the importance of having a clear and measurable vision in making progress measurable and considering the trade-offs for investment.

Including examples of action that has already been taken

- Defra has also taken on board the message that many public participants were unaware of what action has already been taken and that NAP3 should describe what cross-government risk owners are already doing, where funding is being invested and also provide success stories. This seems to have been reflected in the introduction (Chapter 1) and to introduce topics in other chapters, with a handful of positive case studies sprinkled through the report. An Annex dedicated to monitoring and evaluation of NAP3 outlines how adaptation progress will be reported over the next five years, with a first report due in 2025.

Embedding the concept of fairness and prioritising the most vulnerable

- The consensus view from all public participants was that health and welfare impacts will fall disproportionately on those who are most vulnerable due to their health, age, income or location. An underlying concern for equity and fairness in supporting the most vulnerable emerged as a strong message. While the public dialogue is not mentioned, these concerns are highlighted in Chapter 4 (on the built environment and health) which acknowledges who will be most vulnerable to extreme weather, flooding and heat stress and the need to provide support via the bodies responsible for caring for them (NHS, UKSHA, DHLUC, DfE and Local Authorities).
- This chapter does not, however, reflect all of the participants' messages about the need to retrofit existing properties and the need for financial support to households to do so. Instead the focus is on how properties will be protected via the planning system and higher building standards for new builds.
- Investment will also continue to be made to protect properties at risk from coastal erosion or surface flooding via existing flood and coastal protection funds on the basis of cost-benefit analysis and via a new fund to support projects in high risk communities.

Recognising the need for improved ongoing and widespread communication and engagement with the public on key climate risks and adaptation actions to help improve resilience

- NAP3 does not include provision for the type of wider public awareness campaign that the public participants increasingly felt was needed. Instead, actions are identified to share risk and resilience information with different groups according to the specific risks they face. For instance, in chapter 4 actions include collecting more granular information about risks and sharing it with vulnerable groups (such as the elderly, disabled, children and residents in high flood/erosion risk communities). Elsewhere actions include generating more detailed information to share with infrastructure operators (chapter 2), businesses and workers (chapter 5) and local authorities (chapter 7) to enable them to plan for resilience.

Potential for future impact on the roll out of NAP3

- Over the next five years as the programme is rolled out, the public dialogue vision will be helpful to Defra in describing the public's aspirations and concerns to senior policy makers. The team also intend to use the data and evidence as the NAP3 develops and evolves and to develop a fuller communications programme.

- OG members responding to the evaluation survey also described the potential to revisit the dialogue findings – described as rich, nuanced and granular – to help push for more ambitious action:
 - "Key people in the Defra climate change team know and like the work so I think it will have an influence."*
 - "The public dialogue will be useful information to keep returning to: on the vision; on the need for real action; and on making the case for more support for local government on adaptation capacity."*
 - "Useful additional evidence to have ... which helps people to keep pushing for more ambitious and urgent action."*

2.2 Potential for wider impact on adaptation policy and research

2.2.1 Dialogue messages were welcomed by OG members

- At the final OG meeting in summer 2022, almost all attendees reported finding the key dialogue messages encouraging and expected to share key messages with colleagues and through their networks.
- Most welcomed the clear public interest in adaptation, the support for acting now and messages about the need for fair adaptation, synergies with net zero goals, and increasing support for nature-based solutions as the dialogue progressed. These findings resonated with their own quantitative work indeed, one OG member noted: *"Don't worry if some about the findings seeming a bit bland... the findings triangulate with quantitative survey results."*
- Some were surprised at the degree of consensus that emerged from the four groups, regardless of where participants lived: *"It was pretty surprising that the views from the four cohorts were very, very similar with very few differences."*

2.2.2 Messages may be reflected in communications approaches

- Many OG members were very interested in the emphasis that participants put on the need for better communication. They noted the interest in a public awareness campaign, avoiding an overly depressing tone, and suggestions on who might be considered trusted messengers (such as the Environment Agency, the Climate Change Committee and the Met Office working with non-governmental organisations). The need to avoid being too gloomy in communicating with local communities is reflected in business guidance in the [new adaptation advocacy toolkit](#)⁷ developed by the Corporate Leaders Group (a business group convened by the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership), a member of which sat on the OG (see *Annex A*).

2.2.3 Some opportunities to share messages were missed but others are now arising

- Plans by OG members to share the reporting and its findings via conferences and roundtables during summer 2022 had to be put on hold due to the delay in the dialogue publication. Opportunities were also missed to influence other policy processes and research or to get greater media coverage (which could have been very significant if the

⁷ Corporate Leaders Group, [Climate adaptation and resilience advocacy toolkit](#), July 2023, Policy: Climate Adaptation and Resilience Advocacy Toolkit

report had been published in the week when climate change topped the polls as the number one issue facing the country (Ipsos opinion polls) due to unprecedented 40°C temperatures experienced during the summer 2022 heatwave.

- *Table 2.1* summarises evidence of where findings have been shared via the networks of Wildlife Trusts, Climate Sense, Natural England, Ipsos and Leeds University.
- Most notably a LinkedIn post by the OG Chair, Kathryn Brown (Wildlife Trusts) about the NAP3 and the public dialogue report got considerable traction. The post described the dialogue report as "*a firecracker of a report*" but "*released quietly*." Key dialogue messages were highlighted and read by some 450 individual readers from a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental organisations and disciplines from across England and beyond. Comments made by about 30 individuals endorsed the importance of public involvement in the NAP3 process, and welcomed the messages of public interest in adaptation and the need for action now. As one reader noted: "*I thought the word cloud of what the public thought once their eyes had been opened was very powerful and the conclusion - Government must act and act with urgency - inescapable.*"

2.2.4 Informing other policies, research or practice

- The delay in publication has limited opportunities so far to inform other areas of policy, research or practice.
- Core team members (Ipsos and Leeds University) have shared the findings at the recent Impacts and Risks Conference at Exeter University (September 2023) and through the work of Professor Suraje Dessai have fed into the parliamentary inquiry on climate adaptation and the NAP3 process.
- Over the next couple of years there is some potential to make further use of the huge volume of qualitative and quantitative data generated by the dialogue for academic research. Anonymised transcripts from the dialogue have been added to an archive available to researchers: the Leeds University team has plans to use the rich data as the basis for further research on national and local perceptions about specific hazards. Cardiff University's Professor Nick Pidgeon (an OG member) also reported seeing potential for an academic paper linked to previous quantitative work on public perceptions about climate risks.
- As noted above, there may also have been an indirect influence on the recently published Corporate Leaders Group's [business guide on adaptation](#) (July 2023) which echoes dialogue messages (e.g. on the roles of government and business, integrating adaptation with mitigation and nature protection, and on the tone of communications), although there is no direct reference to the dialogue process or report. Likewise, the [parliamentary inquiry on climate adaptation](#)⁸ (published Autumn 2022) makes no mention that Defra commissioned a public dialogue in its reference to the NAP3.

⁸ [Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Readiness for storms ahead? Critical national infrastructure in an age of climate change, 27th October 2022, page 35](#)

Table 2.1: Examples of how the dialogue findings have been shared more widely to help inform research, policy or practice

Organisation	Dissemination	Intended use of findings
<p>The Wildlife Trusts</p>	<p>Kathryn Brown post on LinkedIn sharing the dialogue vision and key messages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Participants were shocked by the seriousness of the risks from climate change to the UK. Initial awareness of the risks was low.</i> • <i>Participants felt that government should have done more sooner, and the time to act is now. This message remained constant as the dialogue progressed.</i> • <i>There was widespread support for awareness raising, measures to protect vulnerable communities and property, and ecosystem-based approaches, followed by engineering, built and technological changes.</i> • <i>Participants were emphatic that national government had primary responsibility for adapting England to climate change. They suggested that adaptation needed cross-party agreement or to be led by an independent body, to ensure that party politics and election cycles do not constrain decision-making.”</i> <p>450 individual readers⁹ from a wide variety of organisations and disciplines from England and beyond,¹⁰ 110 reposts and 30 comments</p>	
<p>Leeds University Department of Climate Change Adaptation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof Suraje Dessai acted as Specialist Adviser to the parliamentary inquiry on climate adaptation¹¹ (published Autumn 2022) and continued to work with Defra reviewing documents linked to NAP3. • Findings were shared in a blog for the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures The public are calling for immediate climate adaptation action, July 18th, 2023 • Rachel Harcourt presented ‘<i>What should a well-adapted England look like? Findings from a Defra-funded public dialogue on climate risks and adaptation.</i>’ At Impacts and Risks conference in September 2023 • Some stimulus materials may be shared via YouTube (e.g. Climate Resilience Network Channel). • Anonymised dialogue evidence (qualitative and survey results) was provided for further research. Funds are being sought to allow analysis of public views on actions by location, immediate risks and socio-economic conditions. 	
<p>Yorkshire Water</p>	<p>Ipsos shared interim headline findings with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water sector adaptation network meeting (May 2022) • Consumer Council for Water (CCW) are expected to build on the findings in their follow-on to the 2017 report on customer willingness to pay (WTP) for climate on behalf of all water companies (but dialogue not quoted in their most recent report). 	
<p>UK Corporate Leadership Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opportunity to share the report at the Business Resilience task force stakeholder roundtable in July 2022 missed. • But findings seem to be reflected in a new adaptation advocacy toolkit (July 2023) intended to help businesses play a leadership role in climate adaptation and resilience. For instance, four of six key messages reflect those of the dialogue (e.g. government leadership and coordination, business leadership, integrating adaptation and mitigation approaches and using nature to build resilience), as do messages on the need for a shared (and measurable) vision for a well-adapted Britain, a national conversation around acceptable levels of climate risk, and avoiding a tone of extreme pessimism in communications. 	

⁹ Including Government departments (HM Treasury, BEIS, Defra, EA, Met Office, Welsh Government, Scottish Enterprise), Climate Change Committee, Green Finance Institute, Royal Society, local authorities (from districts to combined authorities, universities (Universities of Leeds, Oxford, Cambridge, Newcastle, Sussex, Exeter, LSE and Nottingham), businesses (insurance, bankers, lawyers, management and engineering consultancies, power sector) and many individuals.

¹⁰ Scotland, Wales, US, Canada, Australia and Sweden, UNPRI, UN Climate Change, World Bank and EC

¹¹ [Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Readiness for storms ahead? Critical national infrastructure in an age of climate change, 27th October 2022](#)

<p>Climate Change Committee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reported that dialogue findings were as expected “<i>but with interesting granularity.</i>” • CCC’s report to parliament on progress with adaptation¹² (March 2023) echoes dialogue findings in its call to government to: “<i>include community engagement activities (such as citizens’ assemblies) under NAP3 to put fairness at the centre of efforts to implement a vision for a well-adapted UK. This engagement programme should focus on exploring issues of fairness in some of the most challenging aspects of adaptation (e.g. coastal retreat) and in the provision of public funding for adaptation.</i>” However, the dialogue process is not cited.
<p>Environment Agency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key messages shared with internal adaptation team in 2022 and will be used for EA’s report building on 2021’s “Adapt or Die” • Liz Parkes (an OG member) also posted on LinkedIn: “<i>It’s a great vision... We’ll be drawing on the findings wherever we can, here at the Environment Agency.</i>”
<p>Cardiff University</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings resonate with Cardiff’s quantitative RESIL-Risk surveys but add useful nuance. • In summer 2022 suggested a journal article on the dialogue but this has not yet happened.
<p>Ipsos</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to report on Ipsos website. • Rachel Brisley Blog highlighting public call for immediate action and prioritising vulnerable and high risk communities, 18th July 2023 • Will feed into Ipsos’s Just Society: Just Adaptation • Presentations of findings as opportunities arise e.g. via The Planner and UK Climate Resilience Network

2.3 Support for further public engagement

2.3.1 Commissioners and OG members

- In evaluation feedback, both the commissioners and OG members appreciated the richness and understanding of public views that a public dialogue process had been able to deliver. Those who had been able to see the public workshops first-hand (specialists and Defra observers) particularly valued the opportunity to watch how participants’ views evolved as they heard from specialists, negotiated with each other and, in some cases, did their own research. Interviewees reported enjoying:
 - “*The process of seeing opinions formed and advice given to Government from a representative group of people not previously connected with climate change adaptation. Their recommendations were hugely valuable.*”
 - “*Value of the process lay in gathering clear evidence of the importance people attach to adaptation, once they are aware.*”
 - “*The quite rare insight into what the public thinks when they actually know about it.*”
- Both the Defra team and other stakeholders are now keen to address one of the key findings, namely that the participants showed less awareness about what Defra, EA and local authorities are already doing (e.g. on flood protection) than they had assumed. They also noted the real appetite for more information on what actions people can take to protect their lives, property and health, and were impressed that individuals shared (in evaluation feedback) how they had been energised to take action and were keen to “*spread the word.*”

¹² Climate Change Committee, [Progress in adapting to climate change report to parliament 2023: Key messages](#), March 2023

- At the final OG meeting those present were keen to see any future public awareness-raising by Defra include simple guidance on actions that individuals and communities can take to become more resilient.
- The Defra team recognise the need for more work with the public during the NAP3 roll out. We understand that CCC may be interested in revisiting the public dialogue findings in their work on CCR4, but there are no clear plans yet on what form this will take.

2.3.2 Increasing public interest in being involved in this topic

- Almost all participants were enthusiastic about their role in informing the NAP3 and took their opportunity to participate very seriously. They enjoyed the experience and the process, despite initially finding the topic distressing and emotionally taxing (see *Annex D* and *Figure 2.2*). A large minority were keen to be involved in any future public engagement on this topic. *"I loved it and want to do it more."*

Figure 2.2: Three words describing feelings about taking part (most common shown largest)



- Many participants found the journey an emotional roller coaster (see *Box 2.2*), but by the end almost all were fully supportive of public involvement in this topic: *"I can't think of a better way to get opinions and a wide range of people to engage"* and *"It's our world after all!"* By workshop 6, most participants had become more confident that Defra and other agencies were listening to their views and would take them on board.¹³ Their confidence reflected both Defra's visibility in the workshops and their own confidence that they were making a meaningful contribution.

¹³ A mean score of 72 out of 100 on a scale where 0 = not at all and 100 = completely confident

Box 2.2: Participant journey from shock to wanting to see action

- Many moved through initial shock at learning about the scale of unavoidable climate change, anger at perceived inaction by government and businesses so far, and eco-anxiety by the end of the first week. Typical evaluation feedback was that "*the doom that comes from this topic was difficult at times.*"
- As participants had the chance to hear from specialists and each other and heard local examples of adaptation, most seemed more hopeful that action now could make an impact. By the final session many described themselves as pleased, grateful, honoured, privileged, proud or happy to have taken part.
- By the end many participants reported that they felt valued and empowered: "*I feel I may have made a difference for future generations.*"

2.4 Comparing the dialogue costs with potential economic benefits

2.4.1 Dialogue costs

The total financial cost of the dialogue was £273,840 (excl. VAT) for the design, recruitment and thankyou payments to participants, online workshops, analysis and reporting. The sum also included the independent evaluation. UKRI Sciencewise contributed £154,420 (excl. VAT) matched by a £119,420 (excl. VAT) contribution from Defra plus £35,000 of staff time in-kind. We estimate that taken together OG members, specialists and stakeholders contributed a further 24 days (valued as £12,000 at an opportunity cost of £500/day) in time spent at meetings, reviewing documents and participating in workshops.

2.4.2 Potential economic benefits of the dialogue

- It is too early to trace how the dialogue findings reflected in the NAP3 report will impact on the programme roll-out and therefore to estimate what economic benefits the public participants' insights might contribute.
- However, rough estimates by [the Climate Change Committee \(CCC\)](#) suggest the costs of taking no action could result in damages as high as £5-10 billion a year by mid-century simply for nine of the more than 60 risks identified in CCRA3. The costs of taking action will also be high and are estimated as investment needs of about £5 billion a year for the rest of this decade.¹⁴ However, CCC's [Monetary Valuation of Risks and Opportunities in CCRA3](#)¹⁵ also suggests early adaptation action – as favoured by the public dialogue participants – may reduce future costs and represent good value for money. Benefit-cost ratios for early action may range from 2:1 to as high as 10:1 (i.e. every £1 invested in early adaptation could result in £2 to £10 in net economic benefits).
- If government is able to take insights encapsulated within the participants' vision for a well-adapted England, and press for more ambitious action now, using a range of solutions (not just engineered ones) including those with little cost (such as behaviour change), this could help to reduce costs in relation to benefits. The type of options that the public favoured also have potential co-benefits in terms of green jobs, delivering net zero or nature restoration.

¹⁴ Paul Watkiss, [The Costs of Adaptation, and the Economic Costs and Benefits of Adaptation in the UK](#) (Climate Change Committee, 2022)

¹⁵ Monetary Valuation of Risks and Opportunities in CCRA3 Report to the Climate Change Committee as part of the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 3 <https://www.ukclimaterisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Monetary-Valuation-of-Risks-and-Opportunities-in-CCRA3.pdf>

- Furthermore, if government chooses to work with trusted intermediaries on public awareness campaigns including simple ideas for adaptation – as favoured by participants - then there is a strong likelihood that the wider public will also be interested and keen to take actions to protect their homes and communities, so reducing the costs of damages from putting off adaptation to unavoidable climate change.

3 Lessons on factors which allowed objectives to be met

3.1 Overview

Despite the challenges for this dialogue – the compressed timescale for the design phase, the breadth of the topic, and the complexity of the science on climate impacts – the dialogue has successfully met all of its five primary objectives (see *Table 3.1*) and also generated useful ideas on how to communicate with and involve the public in the NAP3 process (secondary objectives). Key factors in achieving this were a very experienced delivery team and a large and supportive OG who helped shape the design and played a key role in sharing information with participants. Small, geographically organised groups were able to hear from both national and local specialists: an excellent facilitation team supported them on an emotional roller-coaster of a journey as they went from gloom and despair to feeling able to provide meaningful recommendations to government and to start thinking about how they themselves could take action.

Table 3.1: How the dialogue met its objectives (✓ extent it was met)

Objective	How it has been met
To understand participants' views on what an England well-adapted to climate risks should look like.	<p>✓✓✓</p> <p>A consolidated vision compiled from two individual exercises in the final sessions pulled together the many shared elements into a compelling single vision. As summarised in <i>Section 2</i> and <i>Box 2.1</i>, this vision appealed to stakeholders but has not yet been fully reflected in the NAP3 more bland version.</p>
To understand how participants prioritise different climate risks and adaptation actions.	<p>✓✓✓</p> <p>A clear structure and effective elicitation exercises helped meet this objective: introductory workshops (1 and 2) built participants' understanding of impacts and risks; scenario exercises (3 and 4) worked well to surface priorities for action (timeframe and type). The exercises surfaced strong underlying principles of equity and for action now. These and messages on specific priorities shared with risk holder departments (see <i>Figure 2.1</i>) are detectable in NAP3.</p>
To understand participants' views on which actors are responsible for different adaptation actions.	<p>✓✓✓</p> <p>Introductory workshops explored the key actors in adaptation and an exercise (workshop 5) and follow-on discussions (National Summit) explored roles for central government (leadership, policy, coordination) and others summarised in a graphic which OG members found helpful.</p>
To further develop understanding of public awareness and initial public responses to climate risks and climate adaptation measures.	<p>✓✓✓</p> <p>Unprompted discussions (week 1) highlighted participants' limited starting knowledge, evolving into shock/anger as they learnt about the scale of impacts and risks (echoing national polling). The strength of emotion and the participants' journey through grappling with trade-offs and becoming more hopeful was important for policy makers. Tracking data on individual views collected between workshops could have added context, but low response rates limited its use.</p>
To gather evidence on how the views of participants who live in and experience different physical landscapes vary on climate risks and adaptation actions.	<p>✓✓✓</p> <p>4 geographic groups were effectively run as parallel mini dialogues which helped them gel around a local identity and hear directly from specialists about local risks and adaptation options. This brought issues alive and helped participants envisage priority responses. While priorities reflected some location-specific risks (flood /erosion in coastal and heat/water stress in urban/inland areas), the most striking finding was the consensus on protection for the vulnerable and fair adaptation.</p>
Understand participants' perspectives on how to engage and communicate with the public during adaptation policy setting	<p>✓✓✓</p> <p>Final workshops (6 and national summit) were designed to generate recommendations: a strong message on the need to consider adaptation on a par with NZ and for a public awareness campaign have been noted by Defra and OG but not yet acted on.</p>

3.2 Broad perspectives and experience within the project management and oversight groups

An experienced project management and delivery team worked well together and were able to make a rapid start on designing the process, materials and recruiting specialists to meet a challenging timetable

- The commissioners were very clear about the broad scope of insights needed and had planned a timetable designed to maximise opportunities to inform the NAP3 process. Unfortunately the procurement process proved bureaucratic and slow (partly due to capacity constraints during Covid) and delays meant that the already tight timeframe for delivery was further compressed putting the design team under some pressure in order to complete field work before the summer. In hindsight, the team felt that it might have been helpful to pause the process and consider whether a different approach might have resulted in a more streamlined process.
- The core project management team (Defra, Sciencewise, UKRI, Ipsos, Leeds University and the evaluator) were able to make swift decisions at key points to inform the design.
- The combined experience of the Ipsos and University of Leeds team brought together lessons on how to get the most out of the online format and how to communicate with the public across the breadth of adaptation field in an unbiased way. The climate experts within the delivery team were respected by the OG and enabled the delivery team to mobilise quickly, map out a design which covered all the objectives and develop background materials to share with participants. This allowed gaps where additional expertise or perspectives to be identified and filled via Defra and contractor networks to a very tight timetable. The commissioners found the delivery team very responsive.
- Defra was able to benefit from the online format to involve members of the NAP3 drafting team as observers at the workshops. Those involved were able to hear directly from the participants and this proved especially important in integrating some of the dialogue messages into the NAP3 over the year between the dialogue finishing and its publication. Defra officials also described the NAP process and how the dialogue would feed in during the first workshop. With hindsight it would also have been helpful to include key policy officers from other risk-holder government departments.
- The compressed time frame for design and fieldwork led to some compromises (no formal pilot, and participants' packs were not sent until after workshop 1), but these issues were partly addressed via the weekly facilitators' briefings, which were used as an opportunity to fine-tune timings, flow, prompt questions and the tone of upcoming workshops.
- Unfortunately the lack of a pilot made it difficult to prepare for how participants might react to what they heard from Defra officials in the first sessions: the range of questions was so broad that the vague answers from the Defra team left some participants with the impression that there had been no action and that the public was now being asked to step into the breach. This was interesting learning but created a slightly negative tone and lack of trust in the process which the team then had to work hard to overcome.

A large, engaged OG brought together expertise from non-departmental government agencies, leading academics and NGOs to help frame discussions and deliver information as specialists

- Excellent chairing of the 18-person group enabled them to feed constructively into the initial scoping (framing, recruitment, identifying gaps in knowledge or perspectives that would need to be filled by specialists). Six individuals and their colleagues also contributed as specialists and were able to see the public workshops first-hand. They were able to make helpful suggestions about how the findings should be presented and shared to have an impact on the NAP3 process. As noted in *Section 2*, a small number of OG members have continued to work closely with the NAP3 drafting team to embed the findings in the programme.
- The delivery team, the commissioners and the OG members appreciated the role they had been able to play, agreeing that their combined expertise had been able to help ensure the process involved all relevant groups and that information shared with the participants was comprehensive, balanced and accessible to a lay audience. One noted: *"It's been an enormously useful group...people have provided comments that go so far beyond the remit"* while another reported *"A fantastic group to work with: great contributions over an intense process."* All interviewees agreed that the breadth of the perspectives within the group would give policy makers and stakeholders confidence that the dialogue had produced *"robust, in-depth evidence."*

3.3 Design and structure ensured all objectives were covered

The wide framing and links to the NAP3 process gave a satisfying sphere of influence for participants

- The breadth, complexity and unfamiliarity of the topic (relative to mitigation) meant that this dialogue was longer than most Sciencewise dialogues (18 hours contact time over an intensive 3-week period) in order to cover the necessary background and then explore each of the areas of interest to the commissioners. Despite the intensity of the process, a combination of over-recruitment, staggered thank you payments and the everyday relevance of the topic all helped to keep a diverse group of over a hundred participants fully engaged (with 95% attending all 6 sessions).
- With the benefit of hindsight, the scope could have perhaps been narrowed down to provide more in-depth findings in a few key areas (such as nature-based solutions vs. built ones). Nevertheless, as noted in *Table 3.1*, the overall design was able to ensure each objective was addressed.
- Participants and the OG were largely satisfied that they received enough information to understand climate risks and vulnerabilities from all the key perspectives so that they felt able to make informed contributions to the individual workshops and to government policy on adaptation. The finding that many would have liked more information on past delivery against previous NAPs (while indicative of some frustration about the answers Defra was able to give) was nonetheless useful to Defra in planning future communications and including some case studies in NAP3. Many would also have liked more data on comparative costs for the different adaptation options.

Online delivery allowed four geographic small groups to be run as mini dialogues. Two groups meeting in parallel allowed the Ipsos chair and national specialists to be in two locations on the same evening (making specialists slightly easier to recruit)

- The approach had the following advantages: it allowed national specialists and the Ipsos “Chair”¹⁶ to be with one group before and the other after the break; groups were able to gel around their sense of local identity which was further strengthened by hearing from local specialists about local risks and responses; and the data generated could be analysed by location to the level of granularity that Defra and the OG were hoping for.

Participants were able to hear both from specialists and those with lived experience within their own small groups. All participants felt they had heard a full range of perspectives, including lived experiences of extreme events, flooding and heat waves from within their own group.

- All participants were able to hear the same information from national specialists via pre-recorded presentations: they also had some opportunities to ask questions as they moved around small groups. A slight downside meant that the comfort break had to be staggered and some participants felt this made either the first or second half of the evening feel rather long. Each group had only limited time with each specialist (sometimes less than 5 minutes), and not always at the most useful point in their discussions. A number of specialists also felt they would have liked longer with each group. Nevertheless, participants highly valued their input, appreciated their ability to answer questions in an accessible way and took hope from the examples of successful adaptation that they shared.
 - “Every single one was amazing! So informed and engaging in their presentations and in the question times.”*
 - “Specialists sharing their knowledge, research and understanding but also taking a focus on action felt really positive.”*
- Contributions from local specialists worked particularly well: they were able to stay with their geographic group for the whole workshop; they provided local colour and examples of successful adaptation; and were able to answer many more questions in plenary. Wildlife Trust specialists were singled out for praise: they were seen as clear and more upbeat and probably had an influence on the generally positive role that participants felt nature-based solutions should play.
 - “The inclusion of experts from local communities and the ability to tie it back to local areas and priorities was really effective and helped bring the message about climate change and the need to adapt home.”*
- Initially the design team had hoped to include specialists with lived experience of climate impacts such as farmers and emergency responders. This did not prove possible within the timeframe but those perspectives were brought in via the scenarios (see below) and through those participants recruited specifically because they lived in postcodes susceptible to flooding. In practice almost all participants had experienced recent travel or utilities disruption caused by named storms just before the workshops.

¹⁶ The Chair was the lead designer and responsible for introducing and closing each workshop, but without responsibilities for small group facilitation

Carefully designed scenarios worked well to introduce concrete examples around which participants could explore priorities and their underlying values around addressing climate risks

- The scenarios incorporated wider perspectives (e.g. of different actors) and worked well to explore preferences for timescales and types of action. Many participants liked the concrete examples and appreciated the structured way of talking about risks, vulnerabilities and responses compared to the more free-flowing discussion of initial workshops. An early decision to slim the scenarios down (for instance getting groups to look at just one timescale and level of risk rather than 2030/2050 and low/high) helped prevent the exercises becoming too repetitive. A handful of participants would have liked scenarios to have been more detailed and include cost estimates.
- As they worked through the exercises, participants appreciated the opportunity to dig deeper into the issues and come to terms with the full complexity of the trade-offs involved in developing adaptation policy (e.g. action now vs. later, Government vs. individual responsibility and maintaining current vs. adapting new lifestyles).

"The scenarios were really good as they directed the conversations well. I found these parts far easier to engage with rather than broad open-ended questions about what our reflections were."

"The scenarios enabled conversation to flow really well and were a great talking point for exploring wider issues and delving more in-depth than we maybe otherwise would have."

"I had an idea of what I thought was important prior and these sessions helped me understand different views and perspectives I hadn't thought of."

3.4 Lessons from running large online processes reflected in delivery

Excellent facilitation and anticipation of the potential for the topic to cause emotional upset and eco-anxiety

- **A large pool of facilitators - who together brought considerable experience of public engagement on climate issues - made participants feel comfortable and supported.** Detailed briefing sessions, appropriate small group sizes (ratios of 1:6), availability of simultaneous notetakers for most groups, and no expectation of presenting technical data or taking visible notes enabled facilitators to focus on encouraging a natural flow of conversation and working through the exercises. In just a few cases we noted that facilitators who had not been involved in the introductory workshops sometimes allowed discussions to stray off topic to the frustration of others in their group.
- **The design team had anticipated emotional support needs from the outset** and allowed for a virtual chill-out space, opportunities to talk to the Ipsos Chair (a trained mental first aider) and provided links in the participant pack to organisations who could provide support. Only a handful of participants used these options but all were appreciative of the thought and care taken and a typical view was that they felt "*safe and valued throughout*."
- **The team also responded with additional resources as the extent of eco-anxiety became apparent.** The delivery team shared links to organisations who could suggest constructive adaptation actions for an individual or group; facilitators with prior climate experience were also able to suggest a slight reordering of the final workshop activities

so discussions ended on a more upbeat note. Facilitators also shared their private notes with the Ipsos chair allowing her to recap on what had been said across all groups via pre-recorded videos for the opening and closing sessions.

- **Participants found facilitators professional, independent and empathetic.** Specialists also praised the productive environment that they created. As one participant put it: *"All the facilitators were engaged with and supportive of our contributions, and it felt as though they were also involved in this research process, as opposed to simply just facilitating it."* While an OG specialist noted that: *"The engagement and support from everyone was excellent, and it felt really encouraging as the sessions progressed to see that the majority were in agreement on priorities and preferred action going forward."*
- **Keeping small groups together for a week and then mixing them up worked well.** Quieter individuals enjoyed the chance to get comfortable, while all benefited from hearing the diversity of experiences and opinions across their area. For many participants, being exposed to this diversity of views, seeing a consensus evolve over the process and feeling a sense of solidarity around the need for action now were major highlights of taking part (see *Annex D*).
- In this case pre-recorded introductions from the Ipsos lead facilitator worked well to recap on previous sessions, but final recaps might have worked better coming from a lead facilitator in the room able to acknowledge the challenges of the sessions and respond to the feel in the 'room'.

There was a lot of data-rich information shared with participants and initially some felt quite overwhelmed. However, by the end of the process almost all participants felt well enough informed to contribute meaningfully to small group discussions.

- Neither materials developed by the core team nor specialist presentations were shared with participants in advance, although they were made available at a micro site (CMNTY) after each workshop. However, only about half of participants accessed the CMNTY site, citing a number of different reasons including difficulty getting on and navigating the site, lack of value added compared to the workshops, and lack of time since they were already meeting twice a week.
- **For the initial sessions, many participants found there was a lot to get to grips with and would have appreciated having key information to hand for the small group discussions** (such as figures, types of adaptation, costs etc.). Some facilitators took the initiative and shared screen shots of key slides and this worked well as an *aide memoire*.
- **By the second week, participants felt more comfortable and reported that they had a lot of information and that it was balanced and accessible.** Typical views were that there was *"Lots of information that made you think, but wasn't information overload"* and *"It was fantastic to see so much information disseminated in an understandable, compact and impactful way."* Indeed, some participants would have liked even more information (e.g. on costs and benefits of potential adaptation options) and some did their own research to try and fill these gaps. *"I think we could have done more but we had enough to work with. Aware there are time pressures and you wanted to hear from us more than telling us stuff."*
- **During workshop 6 and the national summit, participants relished individual reflection moments** spent on exercises such as 'complete three sentences' and 'letter

from the future.’ Several commented that they would also have liked some space to gather their thoughts before being called on by the facilitators during other workshops.

- **More could also have been made of the CMNTY site for individual deliberative exercises or tracking how individuals’ attitudes were evolving over the process.**

Instead, this information was collected via questions embedded in an email which participants returned with their answers, but this achieved relatively low response rates and proved cumbersome to analyse and so did not add much usable information for the dialogue report. In retrospect, an in-meeting Zoom poll, a link to an independent eSurvey or a homework task on the CMNTY site are likely to have been more effective.¹⁷

¹⁷ The evaluation SurveyMonkey after workshop 6 achieved a 96% response rate compared to only 60% for formative evaluation questions included in the email survey after workshop 1.

4 Conclusions, lessons and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

This large dialogue was well-designed and efficiently delivered over a short time scale in order to feed into the NAP3 process. The dialogue benefitted from the experience and energy of the delivery team, OG and core project management team. The overall design, involvement of national and local specialists, use of different exercises and quality of facilitation all contributed to both primary and secondary objectives being fully met over an intense period of field work (24 three-hour online workshops over three weeks, six in each of four locations). The innovative approach of running four mini dialogues in parallel (two groups per night) made the most of senior specialists and the Ipsos chair in moving between small groups and ensuring that all heard the same information.

External events (several changes of Defra Ministers) contributed to a long delay in publishing the final dialogue report (outside the contractual timeframe laid out in the UKRI Sciencewise funding agreement) which limited opportunities for dissemination of the findings. Nevertheless, the involvement of members of the wider team as observers in drafting the NAP3 is likely to have helped in integrating some of the key lessons in the intervening period. Dissemination of the public dialogue report and findings by the Chair (via LinkedIn) and members of the OG have enabled the findings to reach a wide audience.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 For commissioners

Procurement, timetabling and sign-off

- **Where a dialogue is designed to inform a specific policy process, ensure a realistic timescale** – including contingency for slippage in the procurement process – so that findings can have maximum impact. Once the dialogue has been completed there should be an expectation that commissioners will reference it in the policy report, describe how they have used it to help inform policy and publish a link at the gov.uk site.
- **If there are likely to be delays to the sign-off and/or publication of the dialogue report, then consider other ways to share key messages with other policy makers.** In this case, Defra was able to share high level messages with key risk holder departments to ensure that the dialogue messages were not lost. They were also able to continue working with selected OG members to feed messages into the NAP3.
- **Having commissioners in the room increases confidence in the process and that key messages will be taken into account.**
- **If team members plan to introduce the workshops try and anticipate the kind of top-of-mind questions they may ask and a process for identifying the most important questions to be answered during the session, and those that will be answered later.** The ability to ensure that key questions get answered immediately or by subsequent sessions is an important part of building trust and avoiding frustration with the process. Where frequently asked for information (such as the costs of different options) is not yet available, then take this opportunity to explain why.

Governance

- **Plan for the time required to convene a large Oversight Group.** In this case, time spent by the Defra secretariat in selecting the right individuals, briefing the chair and logging the group's comments to show how they had been addressed paid off and allowed the OG to make really valuable contributions.

Maximising policy and research impact

- **Take advantage of opportunities offered by an online format to involve as many officials involved in policy development as possible.** In this case, Defra specialists were involved both in introducing the NAP3 process and the dialogue objectives and as observers at many of the 24 workshops. This meant that although there was a long delay in publishing the dialogue report, the team had heard messages directly and were supportive of the work. With hindsight it would also have been useful to invite key officials from risk-holder departments to participate as observers at the workshops.
- **Continue keeping OG members (and delivery contractors) informed and involved until publication** in order to encourage them to use their networks to share dialogue findings. In this case the OG Chair, other OG members and the delivery contractors took the lead in making sure that important dialogue messages were disseminated via social media, blogs and workshops so that they were heard more widely.
- **Consider whether the benefits of anonymising transcripts for national archiving outweigh the additional costs for the delivery team.** In this case the additional effort required to make the rich data available to all researchers is already expected to result in further academic research and publications of wider interest to the field.

4.2.2 For delivery contractors

Team and overall design

- **Where the topic is broad, complex and the timescale is compressed consider embedding topic expertise for design and delivering information within the team.** In this case an embedded approach involving a team of highly regarded and unbiased specialists had real advantages in being able to put together a comprehensive design and develop introductory information quickly, and to identify gaps in specialist knowledge or perspectives which would need to be filled by specialists.
- **Include a variety of formats for workshop sessions:** in this case open-ended discussions, structured scenarios and individual reflection exercises all worked well to enable participants to form and express their views, but some additional opportunities for individual reflection time (e.g. before sharing views in small groups or online between sessions) could also have been useful.
- **If timing allows, build in a pilot stage (ideally with members of the public)** to test the design flow, materials and help identify participants' initial responses and the type of questions they will want answered. Alternatively, as in this case, make use of briefing sessions with experienced facilitators to help suggest final amends to the design and materials.
- **An online micro site can add real value to the overall design to share materials and collect further data on individual views** (e.g. via individual deliberations and surveys). However, recognise that this will require some additional staff time for design, analysis and integrating the findings into the final report. If expectations are clear and the topic is

interesting, most participants are likely to use the site without requiring additional financial incentives.

Duty of care to participants

- **Consider whether the topic is likely to be emotionally upsetting to participants and build in support options accordingly.** Even if most will not use support – such as provisions for time out space, opportunities to talk to a designated empathetic listener or links to supportive organisations in this case - simply knowing it is available can help participants feel supported and valued.

Making best use of specialists

- **Where the design includes delivering a set of workshops in multiple locations, consider how to make best use of specialist time while ensuring all groups hear the same key information.** In this case running two sessions in parallel with pre-recorded videos of presentations worked really effectively to ensure that all participants heard the same key information and perspectives.
- **Where there are not enough specialists to have one in every small group throughout the discussions, weigh up alternative approaches to getting participants' questions answered.** For instance, rather than rotating specialists around small groups for very brief appearances it may be more effective to collate questions across small groups and have them answered in plenary, or to make a commitment to get answers and share them with participants during the process (e.g. at a dialogue microsite or at the introduction to the next session).
- **Encourage observer participation by the commissioning body's policy team.** This gives participants confidence that their views are being heard and enables policy teams to have a deeper appreciation of those views. It may also enable a drafting team to take the findings of a process into account in developing policy before the final dialogue report has been officially signed off.

Sharing information and capturing participants' views

- **Wherever possible share stimulus materials with participants in advance (by post or at a microsite) so that they can have them at hand for small group discussions.** Failing that, consider whether facilitators can have access to a single summary slide or a whole presentation to share in their small groups as an *aide memoire* if required.
- **Pre-recorded plenary presentations by the lead facilitator can be an effective way of providing participants with the same introduction and recap to workshops across all locations:** in this case pre-recorded introductions worked well but final recaps might have worked better coming from a lead facilitator in the room able to acknowledge the challenges of the sessions and respond to the feel in the 'room'.
- **Use a variety of techniques to capture participants' views (e.g. visible notes on shared screens, interactive whiteboards, Zoom polls, not just transcriptions).** This can help participants to build on each other's thoughts in free-flowing discussions and to also enable them to hear and recall what others in the room are thinking.
- **Consider whether the breadth and depth of data gathered during the dialogue could be used for further academic research.** If so, this might need additional resources in order to anonymize transcripts so that they can be shared in a national or specific university archive.