



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Alex Norris MP

*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Local
Growth and Building Safety*

2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our reference: MC2024/26620

Richard Fuller MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

20 November 2024

Dear Richard,

I was saddened to hear of the events in your constituency, which I now understand have resulted in two fatalities. Our sympathies are with the family and friends of the deceased. I would like to thank you for the support that you have been providing to those affected by this tragic accident.

Following the explosion, partners have come together to both respond to the immediate aftermath of the explosion, ensure the safety of neighbouring residents, investigate the circumstances of the accident and put in place a strategy to secure the borehole and stop further gas escaping. My department has had officials attending the Strategic and Tactical Coordinating Groups meeting to manage the incident and reduce the danger to life of other residents and additionally my officials have met with the chair of Bedfordshire LRF (and Chief Fire Officer), Bedfordshire Police and senior officers of Bedford Borough Council.

Financial help for eligible costs above a threshold incurred through the initial emergency response could be provided through the Government's Bellwin Scheme. I understand that Bedford Borough Council has registered an interest in making a claim under the scheme for both the combined impacts of the gas explosion and earlier flooding in September. This was followed up with a meeting between the Council's Chief Finance Officer and the Bellwin team to discuss the process and set out next steps. We wait to hear whether the Council wishes to proceed with a formal application.

Matters of insurance need to be dealt with between policy holders and their insurers. I know that the Association of British Insurers has been in contact with its network of Property Insurers who have assured the ABI that they are taking action to support any affected residents. Members are contacting their customers in the neighbourhood who may have been affected.

Additionally, as part of the Government's wider response to the tragic events, a number of specialist agencies have been supporting local partners – the Health & Safety Executive, the British Geological Survey and the Coalfields Authority, with the overall aim of providing clear assurance that further leakage of gas has stopped and, based particularly on the operational experience of the Coalfields Authority, partners understand how to provide information to affected residents as well as evidence to reassure insurers and mortgage lenders. I am

aware that Bedford Borough Council and other partners involved in the response and support to the community have put in place robust plans to support and communicate with residents.

On your question about the effect on property values, it is possible that there could be some diminution of property values, however our expectation is that property values will return relatively quickly to comparable local levels. This is certainly the experience the Coalfields Authority has shared with us.

Clearly, we all hope that residents will be able to return safely to their homes as soon as possible and the actions that are underway should allow that to happen. I am grateful for the support that partners are providing to residents in the meantime. Thank you for your engagement on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Norris', with a stylized flourish at the end.

ALEX NORRIS MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Local Growth and Building Safety