



Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

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Richard Fuller MP
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Our ref: MC2025/03458/SB

13 March 2025

Dear Richard,

Thank you for your letter of 13 February to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituency about the recent government announcement of funding to protect flood defences. I am responding as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

I am sorry to hear about how your constituents in Huntingdonshire have suffered from frequent flooding and that schools, houses, roads and businesses have been affected. Flooding, of any kind, is devastating for those affected. I am glad to hear that you and the Mayor of Bedford Borough have set up the North Bedfordshire Water Management Alliance (NBWMA), providing an opportunity for Bedfordshire and the Environment Agency (EA) to work together on flooding issues.

As you highlighted in your letter, in February, I announced as part of the government's Plan for Change, a record £2.65 billion will be invested over two years in building, maintaining and repairing flood defences, better protecting 52,000 properties by March 2026 with around 1,000 projects receiving funding in 2024/2025 and 2025/2026.

This government inherited flood assets in their poorest condition on record, as years of underinvestment and damaging storms left just 92% of the EA's 38,000 high-consequence assets at required condition, meaning approximately 60,000 properties are at a higher risk. Our investment includes an additional £108 million that we are re-prioritising into asset maintenance, ensuring an additional 14,500 properties will have their expected level of protection maintained or restored. This year, an additional £36 million is being spent to undertake urgent repairs to defences damaged in last winter's extreme flooding events. For the next year, a further £72 million will go towards maintaining and repairing assets, including those damaged in recent flood events, to ensure they are as resilient as possible and operate as expected.

Where assets are not at the required condition, this identifies that work is needed. It does not present a risk of failure, or compromise performance in a flood, because mitigation measures are put in place such as more frequent inspections from the EA field teams. The EA prioritises works that have the most significant impact on protecting people and property. Details of the EA's annual maintenance programme are publicly accessible online at GOV.UK.

On the NBWMA, I am informed that you have recently met with your local EA Area Director and Area Flood Risk Manager, so you will be aware that the local teams are keen to continue working with you and wider partners in North Bedfordshire on managing flood risk and supporting communities.

Thank you for sharing the petition with me, raising the concerns of your constituents about the impact of flooding from the River Great Ouse and River Ivel. Regarding the reclassification of the St Ives sluice gates from 'Flood' to 'Navigation', the EA have advised that the reclassification does not affect the gates' eligibility for Flood and Coastal Risk Management funding. The classification change was made based on flood modelling, which indicated that the gates do not protect enough properties to be classified as flood gates. However, they do hold a head of water necessary for navigation. This reclassification may support future applications for navigation funding and therefore enable the EA to attract further funding to supplement the existing flood funding. Detailed information on the condition of sluice gates can be found at online at the [St Ives and Brownshill Staunch Sluices Information Page](#).

Dredging is included in the EA's maintenance programme in specific locations, but it is not a universal solution. The EA have explained that it may dredge areas less today than it did in the past, partly because our understanding of the flood risk benefits has improved, including how rivers and catchments function. In some locations, dredging is not the best long-term solution. On some watercourses, it is not effective due to the natural function of the river and where the silt and sediment comes from. Further information on the EA's approach to dredging can be found online at [GOV.UK](#).

The petition mentions the maintenance of rivers, however this is primarily the responsibility of riparian owners. The EA uses its permissive powers to carry out maintenance where justified, considering the benefit in terms of managing flood risk. However, these powers are discretionary, and the EA is not obliged to carry out routine or improvement works. It will do so where there is funding available and evidence that these works will reduce flood risk to people and property.

In relation to your point around housing growth, the EA is contributing to planning decisions for proposed developments, and ensuring new homes are built with adequate flood risk protection, whilst not increasing the flood risk to existing homes, communities and businesses. The EA is working closely with the East West Rail Company to ensure flood risk and other environmental opportunities are considered.

Thank you for contacting us about this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Hardy', written in a cursive style.

EMMA HARDY MP