

David Willetts, MP
House of Commons
London
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Haying Island Flooding

Thank you for your letter of 11th December, following our recent afternoon "tour".

As you mentioned in your letter, we have included £1.8m in our regional Capital Plan for flood risk reduction projects across the northern part of Hayling Island. We have identified three priority locations for this planned spend - at Mill Rythe, Saltmarsh Lane, and between Langstone Bridge and Stoke Common.

At Mill Rythe, we are proposing to improve the defences further, to protect the two schools and the holiday village, and to increase the protection afforded to the A3023. Work here would include building two new secondary flood embankments.

We plan to improve the standard of the defences at Saltmarsh Lane, either by upgrading the existing defence or by realigning the defence line at the Hayling Billy Trail.

Between Langstone Bridge and Stoke Common, we intend to repair or rebuild the defences to their original standard of protection. As well as protecting households, these works would reduce the likelihood of the single access road to Hayling Island becoming flooded during storm conditions.

With regard to scheduling of these works, all projects are prioritised on a national basis. Although precise timings are not clear yet, the latest indications are that funding to start designing our north Hayling works will be available for the financial year 2011/12 - a little later than we had hoped. Construction works would follow in 2012/13, following completion of the detailed design and the necessary environmental assessments. I am aware that this delay will be disappointing news, and we will continue to make the case for the funding to be allocated sooner.

It is not quite accurate to say that "not much has been done in the last few years" on Hayling Island. The South Hayling Sectoral Strategy recommended improvement works at Eastoke. These were completed in 2005, at a cost of £2m. Further work here, at Bracklesham Road, is scheduled to start in the Spring of 2009.

Havant Borough Council is carrying out a rolling programme of beach nourishment with shingle recycling along the south-facing sea frontage. This is a £2.5m programme which will continue

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for the next four years. The Council is also carrying out a feasibility study this year, for a proposed £4.5m project to begin shingle replenishment works at Eastoke Point from 2011/12.

As you have indicated, the economic case for improving the sea defences at Northney over the long term is not strong and would be unlikely to qualify for Government funding. Most of the recent problems here have been due to surface water flooding, rather than the sea overtopping the coastal defences. The threat to the Southern Water pumping station at Northney is a particular concern, and we will talk to them about how they can best protect this critical infrastructure.

Our primary concern has to be protection of life and domestic households from the effects of flooding, although we also assess the risk from access roads being flooded. To our knowledge, only one house (at Gutner Lane, Tye), has been directly affected by recent flood events. We believe that the road flooding, although distressing for the residents, would not have prevented access by the Emergency Services, had this proven necessary. We do not take into account the value of the properties affected by flooding. Defra guidelines allocate a specific cost for damage to a property, based on its level of flood risk (and irrespective of its market value).

As you say in your letter, sea level rise as a result of Climate Change is predicted to be small over the next 20 to 30 years, before becoming more and more significant. Please note that there is an important distinction between "repairing" a defence structure to its current standard of defence (which will thus reduce as the sea rises) and "improving" the standard of defence. We would not object to a private initiative to repair the existing sea defences at Northney, to enable them to last for another 20 years or so.

I cannot speak for Natural England, but would expect them to be similarly sympathetic, provided that we are talking about a repair activity and not an improvement. Our understanding is that securing compensatory habitat would not be an issue for a private landowner, under these circumstances.

The North Hayling Sectoral Strategy will be concluded shortly. As it does not address coastal erosion, it will not meet the current requirements of Natural England and the Environment Agency's National Review Group (NRG). It is anticipated that a "whole island" strategy will be prepared following completion of the revised North Solent Shoreline Management Plan 2 (SMP2), the draft of which is due at the end of 2009.

Rather than wait for this, we have used data from the sectoral strategy to investigate potential flood risk management schemes which are likely to qualify for central government funding. Hence our proposed schemes at Mill Rythe, Saltmarsh Lane, and between Langstone Bridge and Stoke Common. Havant Borough Council is working closely with us to deliver these improvements and, in initial discussions, Natural England have indicated that they will not object to our proposals for defence works outside of a full strategy, as long as the works can be shown to be urgent and would not significantly damage the existing environmental designations.

I hope that this clarification has been helpful. If you or your staff should require more detail, do please contact Gordon Wilson (my Asset Systems Management Team Leader, whom you met), who may be reached on 01903 703968.

JAMES A HUMPHRYS
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