

*[Graham Stuart in the Chair]*



[Toby Perkins Chair, Environmental Audit Committee, Chair, Environmental Audit Committee 4:00, 24 June 2025](#)

I beg to move,

*That this House*

***has considered the matter of improving flood defences in Chesterfield.***

I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce the debate. Flooding is a critical issue for my constituents in Chesterfield and a problem impacting people right across the country. I have seen at first hand the appalling impact that flooding has on our communities. I keenly recall the floods in 2007, when I was a councillor for Rother ward on Chesterfield borough council, and how many of those who were flooded felt abandoned. Following those floods, I, along with Lifehouse church, Chesterfield rotary club and Soroptimist International Chesterfield, set up the Chesterfield flood victims appeal, which raised around £16,000 for flood victims without flood insurance. The work the appeal did, meeting flood victims and helping them as they tried to put their homes and lives together, had a lasting impact on me. It became clear that once someone had been a flood victim, they were forever a flood victim.



[Jim Shannon DUP, Strangford](#)

I commend the hon. Gentleman on bringing this debate forward. He is right to underline the issue for Chesterfield, but there is a real problem across all the United Kingdom. Thinking of my [constituency](#), and Newtownards in particular, 25,000 houses and properties are in the floodplain, which is bolstered by the floodbanks to make sure they do not get flooded out, and one in 33 in the coastal areas are flooded as well. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is time to have a flood strategy not just for Chesterfield, but for all of this great [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#), so we can respond in a more global way?



[Toby Perkins Chair, Environmental Audit Committee, Chair, Environmental Audit Committee](#)

The hon. Gentleman is right that we need a holistic approach; I look forward to hearing what the [Minister](#) has to say on that. Whichever community they are in, flood victims do not just lose irreplaceable possessions or even replaceable furniture and fittings; they lose the peace of mind that most of us take for granted. People in a property at risk of flood—as more than 6 million people across the United Kingdom are—live in fear, every single time there is heavy rain, that it will happen again. Those in flood risk areas will receive Environment Agency text warnings; in the weeks after the floods, every time they get those warnings, they will start lifting all their property upstairs in preparation for potential floods. After two or three false alarms, they stop doing that, but the fear of being flooded again never leaves them. Being insured is important but, even for those who are insured, being flooded and forced from their home for months at a time is a hugely disturbing and disrupting experience.

Following the 2007 floods, two things happened. First, in 2008 the Government, in conjunction with the insurance industry, updated the 2000 statement of principles, which subsequently morphed into the [Flood Re](#) scheme, which should mean that all residents, even in flood-hit areas, are able to obtain flood insurance. I stress to anyone who has been flooded that they can still get flood insurance through the Flood Re scheme. That is very important. Many of the people I met after the floods in 2023 said, “Oh well, no one will give us flood insurance round here.” They did not realise that with the Flood Re scheme, they could have been insured.

The second thing that changed was that we got a 250,000 cubic metre flood alleviation scheme on the [River Rother](#) at Wingerworth. Although that was welcome, [Storm Babet](#), which hit Derbyshire so fearfully on October 20 2023, demonstrated that tragically, even that scheme was not enough in itself to keep Chesterfield safe. Storm Babet had a devastating effect on Chesterfield, leading to the River Rother and the [River Hipper](#) bursting their banks. As many as 600 homes and dozens of businesses were flooded, many of them the very same ones that were flooded in 2007. One of my constituents, Maureen Gilbert, tragically lost her life, drowned in the front room of her own home.

The economic cost to residents, businesses, communities and our nation is enormous. The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs and the Environment Agency estimated that the 2015-2016 winter floods cost the nation's economy £1.6 billion. The risk of flooding and the associated costs are only projected to rise over the coming years, due to climate change. The Environmental Audit Committee, which I chair, has been investigating the Government's approach to flooding resilience in England. We have heard from expert witnesses about the historical under-investment in flood defences across the country, and about the importance of investing in and maintaining existing flood defences, as well as building new ones.

In Chesterfield, while the Wingerworth flood basin was not enough to prevent that flooding in 2023, it has come into its own over this past winter, as the floods that hit on new year's day and the following weekend did not lead to any further flooded homes. However, there is still a need for improved protection from flooding for residents on Tapton Terrace; in Brampton, around the Chatsworth Road area; in Birdholme, off the [Derby Road](#); and around [Horns Bridge](#) roundabout.

In meetings with management at the Environment Agency locally, I was told that the cost of protecting the homes on Tapton Terrace would actually cost more than the homes would be worth to buy. I was told that it would be cheaper for the [EA](#) to buy them than to protect them, so I said, "Go on, buy them then. At least give these people peace of mind." The truth is that many of the people who live in flood-hit areas lose so much of the value of their homes. For the vast [majority](#) of us, the value of our homes is the biggest and most expensive asset that we have. If a person's house goes from £200,000 to £130,000 over the course of a day, there is nothing that they can do about that—they are effectively trapped in that property. In fairness, the Environment Agency investigated, but it came back and said, "Well, that isn't something that we can do."

I have to say that Tapton Terrace is a particular worry to me because of its proximity to the River Rother, whose geography means that the speed with which it floods poses a real risk to life—we have already had one fatality there. It is very hard to see how anyone living in those properties who does not have the mobility to get upstairs is not very seriously at risk, as Mrs Gilbert tragically was in 2023.



[Lee Pitcher Labour, Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme](#)

Does my hon. Friend agree that, in areas where we have significant risk of flooding, it should be compulsory for schools to educate children on building flood plans as part of the curriculum? If people knew that there was a flood coming, they would then actually know what they should be doing. I know for a fact that, if people have a plan, they bounce back and their resilience is greater afterwards, if they become flooded.



[Toby Perkins Chair, Environmental Audit Committee, Chair, Environmental Audit Committee](#)

My hon. Friend raises a very important point about the importance of plans and the issue of ensuring that children feel supported. The [Minister](#) and I are both former [shadow](#) Education Ministers, and we know there is no end to the number of

things that people think should be on the school curriculum, but that is something that should be considered.

More broadly, communities need to understand that the Government cannot always build a wall and save them. On some occasions, particularly as we go forward, floods are going to happen, and there needs to be a local plan for how we support people during floods and protect life in those times. The whole community needs to be involved, and that is a very important point.

If the Government accept that in some cases they cannot do more to protect an area such as Tapton Terrace, can the Minister explain what mechanisms might be in place? Who do we need to get around the table to discuss a plan, which might involve knocking homes down and potentially building flood-resilient ones there? We previously had a plan about having all the living space on the first and second floor, and just garage space downstairs. I would be grateful to hear from the Minister how we can look at getting people around the table to discuss that.



[Louise Jones Labour, North East Derbyshire](#)

In my [constituency](#), which borders my hon. Friend's constituency of Chesterfield, we are affected by exactly the same issues that he has been outlining with exactly the same rivers. I note how interlinked all this is—my hon. Friend has spoken previously about getting people round the table. One of the things I found frustrating was coming up time and time again against the issue of riparian owners and the vital role they play in maintaining water courses. Many riparian owners do so very diligently, but others are not even aware of their responsibilities. What should be the Government's way forward on that?



[Toby Perkins Chair, Environmental Audit Committee, Chair, Environmental Audit Committee](#)

My hon. Friend raises an important point. It is not one that I was planning to refer to, but I am sure that the [Minister](#) will respond to it because my hon. Friend is absolutely right. To an extent, we have taken for granted over the years the contribution that farmers and others play. They need to be compensated for it. Many of them want to be a part of that conversation, but it is very difficult in the current climate.

I was delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister joined me in Chesterfield earlier this year to see the Wingerworth flood basin in the [constituency](#) of my hon. Friend [Louise](#)

[Jones](#) and hear why we need a similar scheme in Holymoorside to protect us all from the [River Hipper](#).

I warmly welcome the Government's recently announcement of significant funding for flood defences, including the record £2.65 billion in the next two years, a £4 billion injection for the three years after that and an additional £7.9 billion over the next decade. It is a welcome sign that the Government are taking flooding seriously. However, we are now waiting for the Government to consult on the revised formula, which will determine the allocation of that vital funding.

When an area is flooded, the local authority is compelled to produce a report, known as a section 19 report, to investigate how the local response worked and identify recommendations for future flood readiness. Derbyshire's section 19 investigation took an inordinate amount of time to produce what is a relatively short document, and set out a number of potential recommendations and investigations. The final report took more than 16 months from the day of the floods before it was put before the county council's [cabinet](#) for approval, and it appears that very little of that report has led to concrete action to mitigate the flood risk in Chesterfield. It will soon be two years since [Storm Babet](#), and some people are still not able to return to their homes. If we have another flood event this autumn without my constituents seeing any significant efforts being made to protect homes and businesses, they will understandably feel very let down.

The section 19 report stated that, to protect central Chesterfield and Tapton Terrace, Derbyshire county council, in partnership with the Environment Agency, is looking to identify potential sites for flood storage within the [Spital Brook](#) catchment to slow its flow into the [River Rother](#). It is also looking to identify potential sites for flood storage within the Holme Brook Catchment, including at Linacre Reservoir, to slow the flow of Holme Brook, again to protect central Chesterfield, Tapton Terrace and the Brampton area. The report also stated that [DCC](#) is exploring the feasibility of removing the bridge at Crow Lane near Tapton terrace, that the Environment Agency is investigating whether an updated dredging assessment is required on the Rother near Tapton Terrace and that the [EPA](#) is exploring options to be able to progress a scheme to deliver upstream flood storage on the River Hipper, which would also reduce flood risk to downstream communities in Chesterfield.

The option that is really needed is the major scheme on the River Hipper at Holymoorside, but it is unclear what other schemes are being considered, what investigations are taking place and when decisions will be made or work completed. I am also told that [Yorkshire Water](#) is investigating the feasibility of a storage measure at [Horns Bridge](#), to be introduced during the next asset management programme period. I am pursuing that with Yorkshire Water. While I would always prefer to have a roundabout flooded rather than people's homes, I would like to see some real urgency

to act, as the closure of Horns Bridge roundabout brings Chesterfield to a standstill and hugely affects transport between the [M1](#) and Sheffield, Derby and Manchester.

Derbyshire county council set up the Derbyshire Strategic Flood Group. I attended the first meeting, at which the council said it would start to investigate the costs and feasibility of the schemes I referred to. That was over 18 months after Storm Babet had taken place. The next meeting is not planned for months while that work is investigated. Again, that makes me question how seriously and urgently Derbyshire county council is taking its job of flood risk management.

The message I want the Government, Derbyshire county council, Yorkshire Water, the Environment Agency and all the other bodies involved to hear from this debate is that we need to see real urgency in the approach to reducing flood risk and protecting Chesterfield. Can the Minister explain what she can do to help me imbue the local authorities with more of a sense of urgency about these works, both large and small?

Secondly, does the Minister believe that the section 19 process is fit for purpose? If a section 19 report identifies the cause or causes of flooding and makes recommendations for what is needed to reduce the risk in future, but there are no statutory requirements on what measures are needed or even timescales for investigations into what work is needed to reduce the risk, how will the public have confidence in that process?

Thirdly, can the Minister update the House on her new funding formula and give us any indication on whether we are more likely to see flood funding for Chesterfield as a result? How will this formula be different from what went before? In the meantime, residents of Chesterfield are looking ahead to another potentially rainy autumn and winter. Can the Minister give the people of Chesterfield an assurance that she understands how desperately we need to see action to further protect people's homes? Is she aware that the River Hipper scheme will also support a major regeneration project in Brampton on the former Robinson site, as well as more than 50 businesses flooded in 2023 and many more that were nearby and escaped on that occasion?

I am glad that I have had this opportunity to give voice to the frustration that flood victims in my constituency feel. I look forward to the Minister giving me some hope to take back to the people of Chesterfield following this debate.



[Emma Hardy](#) The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 4:16, 24 June 2025

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stuart. My hon. Friend [Mr Perkins](#) is right to highlight the mental health impacts that flooding has on communities

and individuals; he was also right to say that once someone has been flooded, they are always a flood victim. He discussed the appalling, awful and tragic loss of life in his [constituency](#), as well as similar cases that we have seen, sadly, in other parts of the country. I hope it goes without saying that I am happy to give any assistance I can in getting people around the table.

I will have a look at why the section 19 report has taken so long and how it compares with other section 19 reports around the country so that I can understand what is happening: whether the one my hon. Friend has mentioned is an anomaly or whether it is standard—if it is standard, we clearly need to do something about that. Let me take that point away.

I hope that I can express, if nothing else, the urgency I feel when it comes to dealing with flood risk. My hon. Friend, and everyone else, is right to say that climate change is real and makes flood risks more common. We know from the [NAFTA 2.0](#) reports that one in four homes will be at risk of flooding by the mid-century. The Government are putting in a record amount of funding, but at the same time climate change is making the situation worse. The situation is urgent.

I completely understand how anxious my hon. Friend's constituents feel when, as he described, they see rainclouds and feel nervous about what will happen. It was really helpful to be in his constituency with him and see the schemes and the streets for myself. That helped me to really picture the individual circumstances they faced, so I thank him for that invitation. I spoke to the Environment Agency ahead of this debate, and want to give you an update—



[Emma Hardy](#) [The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#)

I can also give you an update, Mr Stuart, but I would like to give my hon. Friend an update, too. The [EA](#) recently completed the project to refurbish a section of the floodwall on the [River Rother](#) that was damaged during [Storm Babet](#), and £75,000 of [DEFRA](#) flood defence funding has been allocated to the avenue for the storage reservoir, which my hon. Friend and I visited together. As he rightly said, it operated during Storm Babet, but there was still widespread flooding downstream.

That funding will allow the EA to investigate any improvements that can be made to how it operates to hopefully reduce more flood risks. [The Environment Agency](#) is working with the council to investigate the removal or raising of several bridges along the Rivers Hipper and Rother. That is at an early stage, but it will help us look at how to improve flow and reduce the risk of blockages, which is an issue that was raised previously.



In addition, the Environment Agency, Derbyshire county council and the Don Catchment Rivers Trust are exploring natural flood management opportunities for the Hipper and [Spital Brook](#) catchments—my hon. Friend knows I am a fan of natural flood management; I will come to the flood funding formula and how that can enable natural flood management. They have also secured just under £400,000 of funding towards the [River Hipper](#) flood alleviation scheme to support the development of the business case, so they are on to the development stage of the project. It includes £275,000 of local levy from the Yorkshire Regional Flood and Coastal Committee and £60,000 from Chesterfield borough council. The scheme will protect over 200 homes and businesses.

Pre our funding formula review, at this moment, the scheme is estimated to cost £16 million, with a funding gap of under £40 million, but that is under the current rules. However, that could change as a result of our funding rules. I will say a bit more about our funding consultation. The current approach to the flood funding formula was drawn up by the previous Government in 2011, and is outdated and not working as it should. It neglects more innovative approaches such as natural flood management. In fact, the solution the previous Government had was to set a separate fund for natural flood management rather than integrating it into how the formula works as a whole.

Our proposed change looks at full Government funding for the first £3 million of projects. That unlocks lots of natural flood management because many smaller natural flood management schemes are less than £3 million; they are struggling because they cannot get the partnership funding to close the gap. Fully funding projects up to £3 million means we can get on with the smaller schemes. Then there is a flat rate of 90% Government contribution and 10% partnership funding. If the project of my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield is successful with the business case, it would be looking at 90% Government funding and having to find 10% partnership funding, which is very different from the current situation.

We would also fully fund the refurbishment of existing flood assets. Understandably, people say, “Why do we need partnership funding to maintain an asset that already exists?” Our flooding formula consultation says that we would fully fund refurbishment of assets as well.

The changes make natural flood management much easier. However, that means that many projects move through to the prioritisation stage. The first stage is: does it meet the tests to go through to prioritisation? Then there is prioritisation; even though we are putting a record amount of money into flooding, there is a certain amount there to be allocated, so the consultation looks at prioritisation. What do we want to prioritise when deciding which projects go ahead and which do not? Are we looking at very basic value for money in terms of numbers of properties protected? That would have an impact on rural communities. Are we looking at prioritising natural flood management? Are we looking at prioritising areas of deprivation? What are the prioritisation criteria? That is



what the consultation asks. Are we prioritising “frequently flooded” as another criterion, to put weighting towards which ones actually go through to be built?

The consultation is happening at the moment. At this moment, I cannot say whether it would make it easier or harder for my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield to get his scheme developed. But the partnership funding that has held up my hon. Friend’s scheme would be dealt with under our consultation, because 90% would be Government funding and 10% would be partnership.

We need to prioritise which ones are done first. The consultation is genuinely open in listening to people about the criteria they want to prioritise. We obviously have to be really careful when spending any Government money and need a fair and transparent system when it comes to which projects get built first and which do not.

As has been mentioned, we are investing a record amount: £4.2 billion over three years to build, maintain and repair existing flood defences. That is a 5% increase in our annual average investment compared with our existing spend, which was already a record amount. I hope that demonstrates the Government’s commitment and sense of urgency. The current funding will continue to support 1,000 flood schemes, better protecting 52,000 homes and businesses by March 2026. On top of that, a further 14,500 properties will have their expected level of protection maintained or restored through essential maintenance activities.

As my hon. Friends know, we inherited flood defences in their worst state on record. The condition of key flood defences in England was at its lowest since the financial year 2009-10, with only 92% of assets at the required condition. In the current financial year, we are putting £430 million into constructing new schemes, and using a further £220 million to restore flood defences to the condition that they need to be in. That full list was published in March. Last week, we announced £7.9 billion of funding, which is the largest flooding programme in history, as part of our landmark infrastructure strategy.

We are introducing many other changes, but I can see that I am running out of time. On compulsory purchasing, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield recognises that the Environment Agency can compulsory purchase something only if it is for building a specific scheme. Sadly, he and others around the country have raised the problem of properties devaluing when they are continually at risk of flooding. I wonder whether in those particular circumstances, which I saw for myself, there is another conversation to be had about property flood resilience measures and whether more can be done to support those homes.

We have had a radical change with our flooding formula. It has made the system much simpler, so that people around the country can clearly understand that the first £3 million will be fully funded, and after that it will be 90% Government and 10% partnership funding. That is intended to equalise the system everywhere, because at

the moment nobody quite understands why one scheme may have a partnership funding gap of £40 million, as in my hon. Friend's case, and another may have no partnership funding gap at all. This formula makes the system much clearer.

I urge everybody to respond to the flooding consultation and to think about how they want Government money to be prioritised, so that we can protect as many people as possible from the devastating impact of flooding, which causes such a problem not only for the local economy but for mental health. We will continue to build and repair flood defences while delivering natural flood management and sustainable drainage systems, and we will make sure that this country is more resilient to floods.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Sitting suspended.*