

This motion gives me the opportunity to bring to the attention of this Council the dire plight facing many of my constituents as a result of the recent flooding.

Heavy downpours are an act of God, but many of the consequences are a direct result of poor planning and engineering and, even worse, the lack of proper maintenance to the drainage infrastructure. Pointing a finger at which organisation is responsible is difficult, but the County Council is in the vanguard with Newark & Sherwood District Council, Severn Trent, the Environment Agency and the Newark Internal Drainage Board all sharing a proportion of the blame.

I visited many families in my ward, from Eakring in the north to Bulcote in the south, whose homes were wrecked by floodwater. Saying we are sorry and offering apologies are simple platitudes that roll off the tongue without feeling. Only those who have suffered a similar fate can comprehend the total suffering of those affected. It leaves people stressed and extremely angry at what has happened, knowing that their plight has been caused by the lack of commitment by those responsible, even more so when they see all their worldly goods in skips.

What has happened is past and no amount of bickering will change the situation, but the families affected want answers and assurances from those responsible for rain water management that everything will be done to prevent any repetition of this tragedy.

The evidence that I have gathered in the last fortnight paints a pretty dismal picture of those organisations responsible for maintaining our drainage systems. Time does not permit me to outline every case, but selecting a few will illustrate those who have failed them:-

Starting at Eakring, flooding there was due to a partially blocked culvert: culprit Nottinghamshire County Council.

In Edingley, a new housing estate flooded from inadequate drainage provision and lack of supervision by Newark & Sherwood District Council during construction. A further two homes were flooded on Station Road, courtesy of Nottinghamshire County Council laying a new road surface higher than the grass verge.

Farnsfield's plight resulted from an inadequate sewer capacity, which has been ongoing for many years and is the joint responsibility of Nottinghamshire County Council and Severn Trent.

Oxton had twenty-five homes flooded, yet the majority would have escaped if the relief dyke, built twenty years ago at the cost of £400k, had been maintained by Newark & Sherwood District Council.

Epperstone had two houses flooded as a result of lack of maintenance of street drainage on Hagg Lane.

At Bleasby, nine homes were overwhelmed by water due to the lack of dyke maintenance. So far, the total responsibility for this has yet to be established but be assured Nottinghamshire County Council is involved.

Last but not least is Lowdham, where over £3million of damage has occurred. Twenty homes on Lime Tree Gardens and Tannery Drive could have been spared the trauma if the drainage system had been maintained. The irony of this is that a dispute between Newark & Sherwood District Council and David Wilson Homes has been on going for four and a half years as to who bears the responsibility for this dyke. While they argue, people suffer. The fifty remaining properties that were overwhelmed came from the Cocker Beck where a flood protection system is already in place but to no avail. The maintenance of the beck is the Environmental Agency's responsibility, however the short stretch of the beck under the road bridges is for the County Council to maintain. A request by the Lowdham Parish Council some eight months ago to clear the soil and rubble under the bridge leading to Merevale Close never materialised, causing disastrous results.

In all, over 50% of all properties that suffered from flooding due to little or no maintenance of the drains or watercourses. Nottinghamshire County Council's record for this kind of work is poor to say the least, and I am not speaking from the advantage of hindsight because on the 7<sup>th</sup> September last year I asked Councillor Smedley if she would look into the problems of the highways drainage system. All the villages were reporting problems with blocked gullies, and drains with flooding after heavy rainfall.

Did the promise made by Cllr Smedley on that day to put more resources and machinery into the system materialise? If it did, it was too little and too late, the pigeons have well and truly come home to roost.

What is important now is for the County Council to bring together all those responsible for watercourse management to determine each and every one's responsibility and implement an urgency priority programme. It would also help if the Government were to rescind the law prohibiting hedge, ditch and watercourse maintenance taking place between April and September. We are told that this was to protect wild life. Just occasionally people should be given priority on such issues!

Two further measures which would help would be if Government could be persuaded that some of the £1billion withheld from farmers' European Union Agriculture Support be used for roadside ditch maintenance where this is the responsibility of farmers and landowners.

Secondly, to pay farmers in lieu of crop production to store flood water on their land when the situation arose. If this policy had been in place it would have saved millions of homes across the country from flooding. In particular, Lowdham would have been spared if Severn Trent - who own the flood plain to the south of the village - had this option as an alternative to cropping.

Will these two proposals come to fruition? Well, for the moment these are new Conservative proposals but in no time at all Labour will have sold them as their inspiration!

To sum up, the people affected need reassurance that all will be done to protect their homes in future, which means that Nottinghamshire County Council should start a proper maintenance programme immediately.