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Sent: 17 March 2014 18:08
To: 'secretary.state@defra.osi.gov.uk'
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Welney Causeway



Elizabeth Truss MP

Member of Parliament for South West Norfolk

The Limes

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Dear Owen,

The flooding in Somerset has captured public attention. However, residents and businesses in Norfolk have also been affected by flooding not just this year but on an annual basis.

In particular, the village of Welney in my South West Norfolk constituency has suffered with flooding of the Ouse

washes rendering its causeway impassable for approximately 130 days in the past year. This is having a huge economic and social impact on the village. The school struggles to recruit pupils from the other side of the Ouse washes and villagers face a 20 mile round trip to reach the other side. Efforts by the Parish Council to encourage development are being stymied, with a housing association no longer investing in the area citing concerns over the causeway. The cumulative effect of the road closures is going to have significant long-term impact on the local economy, including businesses like the Lamb and Flag pub.

No-one is disputing the importance of allowing the Ouse washes to flood. They are specifically designed to drain water from the Fens and play a vital role in preventing flooding across the region. However, it is clear that the people of Welney are paying an ever greater price for this protection. According to the Environment Agency, between 1990 and 1997 the road was flooded for a total of 100 days; in the period 2000-2007 it was impassable for almost 300 days. That the causeway was impassable for 130 days in the past year reflects a growing trend. In an effort to allow nature to take its course the Environment Agency must recognise that the Ouse washes are man-made and as such need to be managed – as they have been since the 1600s.

What is needed is a long-term plan to alleviate the escalating impact of flooding on the village. The local community contributes over £200,000 annually through the three drainage boards in the area and they are keen to engage with authorities to find a solution to this problem and to ensure the funds are reaching the front line. Solutions, including work to raise the road, have previously been considered and I would urge that they are looked at again in the light of the increased impact from flooding.

In addition, there are concerns that the cost benefit ratio of £1:£8 used by the Government to judge whether plans to protect agricultural land are viable does not accurately reflect the value of this land to our communities and wider economy. Food and farming is the largest manufacturing industry in the UK and proper investment in flood protection can ensure that this sector continues to provide food and jobs in the local area.

I would be grateful if you could consider the points raised in this letter and update me on the measures that DEFRA is taking to help communities like Welney. I am convening a meeting on the 16th May at 4 pm in Downham Market with the Internal Drainage Boards, Environment Agency and local councils. It would be helpful if a representative from DEFRA could also attend this meeting.

Best wishes

Elizabeth Truss MP

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