



The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Tuesday 25th October 2022

Dear Thérèse,

Avian (Bird) Flu

I am writing on behalf of my constituents to raise very urgent and serious concerns about the spread of avian flu throughout Mid Norfolk and the country.

As you will be aware, there have been several outbreaks of the highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 virus in my constituency and across Norfolk. In particular, a highly pathogenic strain has been confirmed in commercial housed poultry at a premises near Dereham in my constituency.

I am glad that swift action was taken to introduce mandatory housing measures for all poultry and captive birds, requiring bird keepers in Norfolk to keep their birds indoors and follow stringent biosecurity measures to help protect their flocks from the disease.

However, these measures alone are not enough.

I have been in contact with a number of affected constituents who have raised their concerns with me and called for more action and support to address this very serious crisis. I have included a few comments from affected constituents below:

- “Within our business we now have four confirmed cases, with more suspects awaiting testing. So far, **we have lost over 100,000 birds and I fear that this could get worse**. Other poultry businesses in the area have lost hundreds of thousands. By the end of this it will without any doubt be in the millions.”
- “**The situation is completely out of control and is getting worse by the day**. We have lost count of the number of farms in our area that have been infected and it is impossible to decipher the APHA interactive map listing all the sites – there are so many. **Farmers are losing their livelihoods and businesses and employers are in jeopardy**.”
- “**This is a major incident** and needs to be treated as such with some sort of co-ordinated action or crisis management.”
- “**We need to change the way farmers are compensated for their losses** and to put this in line with compensation for notifiable diseases in other species where farmers get paid the full value of all stock on their farms, rather than simply for animals culled, as is the case in poultry.”
- “The answer to stop this disease is simple: **we have to vaccinate**. It is my understanding that there are vaccines available that could be used, but it is legislation that is holding things up. We need government help to make this happen.”

Constituency Office

8 Damgate Street, Wymondham, NR18 0BQ



George Freeman MP
Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk
House of Commons, London SW1A
oAA

- “My son works for a local hatchery. They have been hit with a suspected case of bird flu, and if tested positive they stand to lose the entire flock... **Without vaccination or similar there doesn’t seem to be much hope for the local poultry industry**, which is a big part of our local economy.”

As you can see, this is a very urgent crisis which is having a significant impact on livelihoods and our rural economy. A number of local farmers have made it clear that, unless urgent action is taken to tackle the crisis and support businesses, they will go under. Conservationists are warning that local bird populations will be completely devastated too, with some even becoming extinct.

I would be very grateful for your urgent attention on this matter and would appreciate the chance to sit down with you and discuss the situation as a matter of urgency, as soon as possible this week.

Yours,

George Freeman MP
Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk
Former Chair of the APPG on Science and Technology in Agriculture
Patron of Aviornis UK

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