

COLUMN



No one should live in fear of flooding every time it rains

In his latest column, Mid Norfolk MP George Freeman highlights efforts to reduce, mitigate and prevent flooding in our area

Flooding has long been a concern for many in our part of Norfolk – with once ‘occasional’ local flood events (once every 25 years) now becoming routine, causing misery to the communities affected. It is a fact that, with climate change, pressure on the drains from large scale developments, and the neglect of proper ditch and river clearing (as well as the local drainage boards required to manage them), the situation is getting worse.

Storms Babet and Ciarán, and the heavy rainfall in between, have caused multiple local floods again. Over the past fortnight, I have been working with local councillors, community groups and key flooding stakeholders to support the dozens of households and businesses across Mid Norfolk who have been affected.

Attleborough has been severely impacted, but so have many in Dereham and its surrounding villages. For some,



Left, the A47 has repeatedly been flooded and, right, floods in Toftwood , Dereham, in May this year. Inset below, MP George Freeman



Images: SONYA DUNCAN/ IAN CLARKE/RICHARD TOWNSHEND



this is the second, third or even fourth time they have been flooded and I absolutely share their anger, frustration and

ongoing concern. No one should live in fear of being flooded every time it rains.

It is also unacceptable that we’ve seen the A47, and several other major roads in our region, closed multiple times due to flooding. Commuters and businesses should not have to face this constant disruption – and neither should the communities who suffer from increased rat-running as a result.

That’s why I set up the Mid Norfolk Flood Partnership with 30 local villages back in 2021, to identify, highlight and help

co-ordinate the practical steps needed to reduce, mitigate and prevent flooding in our area.

Established in direct response to the awful flooding of December 23-24 2020 and early 2021 (when many of us, myself included, spent much of that Christmas period helping flooded households), the MNFP gathered councillors, community groups and local stakeholders to identify flooding “blackspots” across the area and better co-ordinate the ongoing stakeholder response. Together, we also set out a list of 14 recommendations we believed were essential if stakeholders were to properly tackle flooding across Norfolk – submitting them to Lord Dannatt, then Chair of the newly established Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance.

The NSFA’s confirmation that it was adopting almost all of those recommendations was very

positive indeed, and we have seen tangible progress delivered as a result since. Our new 0344 Norfolk Flooding Helpline was established to give affected households and businesses a single point of contact to seek and obtain support and advice from specially trained staff – and was publicised through a county-wide leaflet campaign providing valuable information on other key support and services. The NSFA has also announced “tranches” of targeted support for many of the worst affected communities too (including Dereham, Yaxham and Mattishall).

This latest flooding highlights again however that there remains much more that still needs to be done. Many more homes and livelihoods have been impacted – which is why I have stood up the MNFP.

It also reminds us why vital

services like the Norfolk Urban Search and Rescue team (based at Dereham) are so important – and I remain committed to working with local councillors to impress that importance upon ministers and officials in Whitehall, having earlier this year helped secure an extension to its funding for another year.

Rest assured, I am determined to do all I can (both in Norfolk and in Westminster) to ensure the statutory flooding authorities and their wider partners are fully aware of the devastation many are facing, and that they accelerate and upscale their efforts to improve flooding response and water management, as well as strengthen flood resilience.

Full details of my campaign can be found on my website: <https://www.georgefreeman.co.uk/>