

Rt Hon John Healey MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

6 August 2020

Dear Prime Minister

I write following the Government's announcement on 14 July on funding for flood prevention schemes in South Yorkshire. The Sheffield City Region Mayor Dan Jarvis and leaders of South Yorkshire's four local authorities wrote to you raising concerns about the inadequate amount and the way it has been allocated on 29 July. I share these concerns.

I wrote to you on 21 February calling for your support for the South Yorkshire Priority Business and Infrastructure Resilience Flood Priority Programme, drawn up by the LAs and Mayor with the Environment Agency. The programme requested £270m from the Government for 27 projects that would protect at least 2,800 businesses and 10,300 homes – saving £1.7bn of future damage.

There can be no doubt that the £16m announced for two schemes in South Yorkshire is wholly inadequate and will leave people in our area fearing their homes, businesses and schools will be devastated over and over again.

As well as being short-changed our region has been pushed out of decision-making, with Ministers deciding from Whitehall that the money granted is to be spent in Sheffield, on the Upper Don Valley Phase 2 Scheme and the Upper Don Valley Natural Flood Management Programme.

While both schemes were included in the Flood Priority Programme the Mayor submitted to the Secretary of State earlier this year, the Mayor's office was not consulted as part of the selection process, which goes against your stated commitment to devolution.

The money allocated to South Yorkshire does not measure up to the dangers facing our communities and areas of Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster which were devastated by floods last year have been totally overlooked.

This includes two projects which would have protected parts of my constituency:

- Rotherham to Kilnhurst flood alleviation scheme (phase 2), which would protect 46 homes and 196 businesses (£24m)

- Parkgate Flood Alleviation Scheme, to protect 56 homes and around 300 businesses (£10m)

As I told you in my letter in February, in Rotherham 135 homes were flooded and more than 300 businesses affected. In Barnsley 90 homes and 20 businesses flooded.

In a 24-hour period on 7-8 November 2019 more than 82mm of rain fell, slightly more than the average for the whole month of November in recent years and equal to that experienced in June 2007 – the most serious flooding event in the region up to 2019. Levels in the Rivers Dearne and Don reached or surpassed those of 2007.

Investment since 2007 has helped limit the extent of flooding and protected many properties, but it is clear from November 2019 that significant further investment is needed.

The South Yorkshire authorities have identified £270m as urgently needed. The schemes they proposed complement each other and should be delivered together, in addition to the wider investments already under way and planned.

Announcing the flood protection funding last month, you reminded us you had “said we would do more to help people.” In November 2019 you said in the *Daily Mail* “you just have to put in the flood defences.” Please, keep your word. Our communities deserve certainty and security.

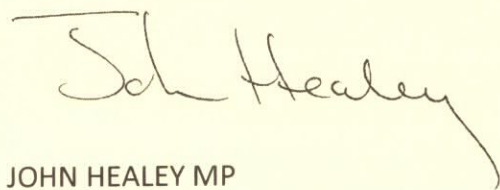
Our South Yorkshire leaders recognise, as I do, that the Covid crisis has placed great demands on the Government and welcome the increase in spending on flood defences in this year’s Budget to £5.2bn over six years. I am speaking to the Environment Agency locally about this.

But the pandemic provides an opportunity to create jobs and boost the economy on public projects that will have a lasting benefit. Flooding infrastructure is absolutely vital to support our region’s economic recovery. The South Yorkshire flood prevention programme will save £1.7bn in avoided damages alone.

In November 2019 you committed to a flooding summit to discuss strengthening flood defences across the North of England, including South Yorkshire. Nine months on, we are still waiting. That summit must now be convened as soon as possible.

I am grateful to you for considering the points raised in this letter and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours ever



JOHN HEALEY MP
Wentworth & Dearne