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Our Ref: SD/DW/CE/DS/ce

Your Ref:

Dear George Eustice,

Re: Storm Christoph – The Gorge Flooding, Ironbridge

Less than one year after the devastating impact of storm Dennis in February 2020, sadly Telford & Wrekin Council is writing to you again to confirm that our communities along the length of the River Severn have flooded once again. The frequency of these events is without doubt increasing and with the effects of climate change, we can only expect this situation to get worse.

In 2004, Telford & Wrekin Council welcomed the implementation of the temporary flood barriers in Ironbridge to protect 25 properties in the area from flooding. These barriers are now over 16 years old and showed sign of weakness in February 2020 where they were pushed back significantly and close to catastrophic failure – as shown below.



Barrier movement - February 2020

During the summer of 2020, we understand a significant number of panels illustrated above were replaced as a result of buckling and the system continues to be put under increased pressure going forward. The Council also understands that the same barriers failed in Bewdley during the recent floods causing devastating impacts to the local community. All this leads to a growing lack of confidence in this form of barrier going forward in Ironbridge.



The impact of flooding is a cost to us all; this cost is felt more in economic centres such as Ironbridge where the high street and businesses have to suffer the impact of road closures for the installation of the barriers as well as the flood itself. This reoccurrence is having a detrimental impact on economic activity in the area but also the internationally important World Heritage Site and birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. Telford & Wrekin Council, in supporting our residents and businesses, can typically spend up to £300,000 each time the barriers are deployed in responding to flooding along this 6km length of River in this World Heritage Site.

As delivered in other areas across the Country, our communities in The Gorge need a £40m (estimated) investment into a demountable and long-term flood defence solution for the area, with clear timeframes for delivery and greater levels of protection. Our proactive approach has seen the Council invest into the multi-agency River Severn Partnership and, as an active member of this Partnership, seek opportunity for funding through the Resilience and Innovation Fund. However, this will not deliver a much needed demountable flood defence solution for replacement of the temporary barriers. Furthermore, our residents and businesses can no longer be expected to explore stand-alone flood protection to their property both behind the temporary barriers and along the River Severn in The Gorge. As illustrated in the images below, there are many properties outside of the flood defence area that are severely and repeatedly affected by flooding with no protection currently available. Furthermore, we have concerns on the impact of 1,000 new homes planned at the former Ironbridge power station that is adjacent to the River Severn in a neighbouring authority.



Telford & Wrekin Council has a good working relationship with the Environment Agency. However, during storm Christoph it should be noted that there was a significant level of confusion and anxiety caused by the Environment Agency as a result of the inaccurate flood data being published. The same issues occurred in February 2020. Such information has a significant impact on how Risk Management Authorities are able to plan and respond to flood warnings. This has left the Council questioning the reliability of the flood warnings and requires urgent attention to prevent repeat.

In continuing to support those affected through recovery, we hope that Ministers will be shortly announcing financial support for residents and businesses affected by this flooding that largely mirrors the support of February 2020. However, Telford & Wrekin Council is still awaiting reimbursement of the £146,000 payments made to businesses under the Flood Recovery Framework from the February 2020 flooding and hope that this will be completed shortly.



The Council understands that insurance continues to be a major problem for businesses, who are not able to access Flood Re and are unable to afford the premiums. In Ironbridge, small businesses make up around a third of the properties that flood. These small businesses do not qualify for Flood Defence Grant in Aid (FDGiA), and this latest flooding further compounds the impacts of Storm Dennis and COVID on their business. The Council is aware that discussions with the insurance industry to find a solution are ongoing, this issue needs to be escalated and a method for insuring businesses found as a matter of priority.

It is hoped that the Department can support us in delivering a permanent flood defence system, that the accuracy of flooding is improved and support for affected residents and businesses is forthcoming.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Shaun Davies
Leader, Telford & Wrekin Council



Cllr David Wright
Cabinet Member for Economy, Housing,
Transport and Infrastructure



Cllr Carolyn Healy
Councillor for Ironbridge Gorge

