



Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

[REDACTED]
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

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Matthew Kewley
Coroner's Court, Derbyshire County Council
Town Hall, Rose Hill
Chesterfield
Derbyshire
S40 1LP
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3 November 2025

Dear Coroner Kewley,

Thank you for your report of 8 September regarding the death of Mrs. Maureen Gilbert. I was very sorry to learn of her tragic death in October 2023, and I would like to express my sympathies to Mrs. Gilbert's family for what has been a deeply upsetting time for them. I would also like to thank you for your thorough investigation into the details of the incident and your report.

Flooding devastates communities. We take our responsibility in reducing these risks extremely seriously and we have acted to increase investment, change the rules around how funding for flooding is allocated and set up a Flood Resilience Taskforce to improve how prepared the country is for flooding.

With respect to flooding at Tapton Terrace during Storm Babet, I view your findings with the utmost gravity. Before responding to your specific requests, it is first important for me to be clear on the roles of the parties to whom you have written.

Defra has overall national responsibility for policy on flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM) in England, providing funding for flood risk management through grants to the Environment Agency, local authorities and internal drainage boards. It is the Lead Government Department for all flood planning and response and activates its response systems in larger flood emergencies.

The **Environment Agency** is responsible for taking a strategic overview of the management of all sources of flooding and is responsible for the operational flood response to flooding from main rivers, the sea and reservoirs. It is important to emphasise that while the construction of flood defences can manage flood risks, defences are not able to entirely eliminate the risk of flooding or a risk to life. Ahead of expected flooding, with the help of the emergency services and Lead Local Flood Authorities, the Environment Agency warns and informs people at risk and puts staff on the ground to erect defences, clear blockages and coordinate other responders.

Derbyshire County Council, as the Lead Local Flood Authority for Chesterfield, is required to manage and investigate local flood risks from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses, working closely with other risk management authorities, including the local highway authorities, water companies and internal drainage boards, among others. Evacuation and shelter are the responsibility of the local authority, working alongside the Environment Agency and others in a multi-agency response.

My department and the Environment Agency have considered the protections that were in place ahead of the flooding, the response that took place, and, in accordance with your report, considered the actions being taken and the proposed timescale for such action.

Response to Storm Babet in Chesterfield

Storm Babet in 2023 was a major flooding event. There was significant flooding across Chesterfield, with 600 properties affected. It was classified as a national flood emergency, and as the Lead Government Department, Defra stood up its Emergency Operations Centre.

Chesterfield and Tapton Terrace are located within the Upper River Rother Catchment, and the Flood Warning Service operated as it should have for this area. The Environment Agency's Avenue Flood Balance Reservoir, 4 kilometres upstream, operated and filled to its capacity. Had the reservoir not operated to its full capacity Tapton Terrace would have flooded much earlier and with substantially higher flows. Nationally, an estimated 96,000 properties were protected by the Environment Agency during Storm Babet. It is important to state that, with the impacts of climate change, we are likely to see more events on the scale of Storm Babet in the future.

Action since Storm Babet

The Environment Agency's response to you provides further detail on the response to the flooding in Chesterfield during Storm Babet. It also includes an articulation of the range of options that have been considered since 2023 to reduce the flood risk at Tapton Terrace.

A key issue that had been the subject of scrutiny throughout your inquest was whether there are any feasible further options for flood schemes that would directly protect Tapton Terrace. As you highlighted in your report, potential technically feasible options had been identified in a 2008 pre-feasibility study but none were found to comply with the government's spending rules, as set by HM Treasury's Green Book, which require all projects to demonstrate value for money in order to be considered for funding. These spending rules are key to prioritising spend across government.

Taking into account the findings from your report, the fact that 18 years have passed since the last pre-feasibility study and with the introduction of new appraisal and funding rules, I agree with the Environment Agency's conclusion that a new pre-feasibility study (which is now referred to as a Strategic Outline Case) should be taken forward and will underline to the Environment Agency's Chief Executive, when we next meet, that this should be undertaken in 2026. As the Environment Agency's response sets out, if a viable option is identified, it can then be considered for funding under the new, more straightforward funding rules, which take effect in April 2026.

In addition to considering the need for a new Strategic Outline Case, the Environment Agency, as detailed in its full response, is leading the appraisal of the River Hipper Flood Alleviation Scheme, which has secured just under £400,000 funding for the next phase of development. The Environment Agency estimates that this phase (known as the Outline Business Case) should commence in spring 2026 and is understood to take a minimum of two years to complete, subject to funding. In addition to this, there is ongoing preliminary work to explore further natural flood management and storage within the River Rother catchment, upstream of Tapton Terrace. As the Environment Agency's response to you explains, it is also supporting Derbyshire County Council with its ongoing investigations

into the removal of Crow Lane Bridge, upstream from Tapton Terrace on the River Rother. The 2008 pre-feasibility study indicated that the removal of this bridge would lower the river levels upstream from Tapton Terrace during flood events. In 2026, updated modelling work by the EA will be undertaken to assist the County Council's technical understanding of the benefits in removing the bridge.

The Environment Agency's improved 'Get flood warnings' service, increasing accessibility, reliability, and responsiveness during flood events, launched on 21 October 2025. Currently, records show that 20 out of the 26 properties at Tapton Terrace are registered to receive Flood Warnings.

Dredging is one further option considered by the Environment Agency. Dredging and main river clearance is an important part of the Environment Agency's wider annual programme of channel maintenance work. Before undertaking dredging, the Environment Agency works in close consultation with local communities to assess whether it is technically achievable, cost effective, and does not significantly increase flood risk for others downstream. The response from Environment Agency explains why, on the basis of evidence from 2024, they believe dredging the river channel at Tapton Terrace would not provide any flood risk benefit to the community.

The Environment Agency will also continue to carry out winter maintenance walkovers of the river channel at Tapton Terrace and take action accordingly.

I have discussed these issues with the constituency MP for Chesterfield. In June of this year, I responded to a debate in Parliament called by Toby Perkins MP about flooding in his constituency. I also met with him last week, on 26 October, to discuss Tapton Terrace. One of the issues raised by Toby Perkins was the potential for Compulsory Purchase Orders in relation to Tapton Terrace. I suggested to him that this would be something to discuss with the local council in the first instance. I agreed to remain in touch about potential options ahead.

Moving forward from here, as Minister for Water and Flooding, I remain committed to helping increase the resilience of Tapton Terrace, Chesterfield and the whole country to flooding. Having met with Toby Perkins MP, I will also meet with Chris Henning (Executive Director at Derbyshire County Council) and Philip Duffy (Chief Executive at the Environment Agency) to discuss flood protection in Chesterfield ahead of this winter.

Thank you once again for your important inquiry and report. Please do not hesitate in contacting me if there is anything that I can clarify.

Yours sincerely,

