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Ref: PO340975

April 2014

The Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP
From the Secretary of State

Thank you for your letter of 5 March enclosing advice from the Adaptation Sub-Committee on the Somerset Levels and Moors Action Plan.

As you know, the Action Plan, which was developed by local partners in Somerset and is supported by Government and its agencies, was published on 6 March. The plan is wide ranging, covering specific flood risk management projects, farming and land management interventions, transport infrastructure, planning and community resilience issues.

It contains a mix of short term actions that aim to reduce flood risk and respond to specific local calls for action. It also includes longer term measures that will reduce the risk levels over time. The priority actions are:

- dredging eight kilometres of the rivers Tone and Parrett;
- flood and road infrastructure repair and enhancement works, in particular improvements to the Sowey and the culvert on the A372;
- making permanent the current temporary facilities at Dunball that help in pumping water off the levels.



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**

In the longer term:

- develop evidence for a range of potential infrastructure works that would be funded in the usual way under national schemes/criteria, including additional dredging if it proves effective;
- accelerate work on design and financing options for the Bridgwater barrage;
- develop new arrangements that give much greater local self-determination for management of the Levels, taking on more maintenance work locally and with more local fund raising capacity;
- catchment sensitive farming measures to retain water in the upper catchment;
- minimise urban run-off and implement sustainable drainage approaches to reduce pressure of water entering the system;
- enhanced local business and community resilience to flooding.

The Action Plan can be found at:

<http://somersexnewsroom.com/flood-action-plan/>

The Plan sets out a number of actions which reflect the points you make, specifically in respect of:

- **Land management.** The Plan reflects the role farmers and land owners can play in reducing flood risk and soil erosion. It highlights the role of effective land management through the entire catchment, in particular to secure benefits in the upper catchment.
- **Funding.** In total Government has committed an additional £20.5 million specifically for Somerset. This includes £10 million from Defra for dredging eight kilometres of the Rivers Parrett and Tone and other flood management work. The Department for Transport has provided £10 million to support the Action Plan and the Department for Communities and Local Government has provided £0.5 million to Somerset under the Severe Weather Recovery Scheme. Local partners have identified a further £1.5 million. Together, this funding will support delivery of the Action Plan.

I have made clear from the start of the process that where funding has not been identified for specific projects, detailed assessments and business cases will need to be produced to make the case for the investment choices. This includes how they compare to other projects across the country.

- **Urban Water Management.** The Plan includes actions to ensure new developments do not increase flood risk further downstream and that policies and standards are robust for the future.
- **Shared responsibility.** The Plan considers how to address flood risk over the longer term. Local partners will set up a new Somerset rivers board to take more responsibility for water management on the Levels and will establish new ways of funding this. We will help them to do that.



Looking to the future of the Somerset Moors and Levels, a partnership approach between Government and all local partners will be essential to deliver the Action Plan. An important part of the overall plan will be finding ways for Somerset to be able to take more responsibility for and have more control over water management on the Levels. This is an opportunity for Somerset to have greater self-determination and test new approaches. It also means greater responsibility, including for funding some of the ongoing work, for example, maintenance of dredging. Further work is required to establish the new structures and financing models that will deliver this new approach.

I will continue to work closely with Somerset as the Action Plan is delivered.



THE RT HON OWEN PATERSON MP

