

Rt Hon John Prescott, MP
Deputy Prime Minister
Department of the Environment,
Transport and the Regions
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

8 January 2001

Dear Mr Prescott,

RE.: FLOOD DEFENCE

As part of developing the Regional Assembly's role as a forum for regional accountability not only for the RDA but also for other regional bodies, we were pleased to receive the Regional Director of the Environment Agency at our plenary meeting at the end of November to report on the state of the region's environment. Given the extensive flooding the South East has experienced particularly over the past months, it will not surprise you to learn that much, though by no means all, of the debate was concerned with the need to plan better for, and to respond more coherently to, the increasing threat of flooding.

We invited the Environment Agency regionally to follow up that debate with some detailed proposals to our Executive Committee last month, and I am pleased to attach that paper for your information. The Executive Committee expressed broad support for the points put forward in the Agency's paper: baldly put, if we are to meet these environmental challenges, flood defence demands both more capital resources and more coherent mechanisms to deliver them.

cont./.....

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RE.: FLOOD DEFENCE (cont.)

However the following three specific additional points were made:

- There are a few who would disagree that the present funding arrangements for flood defence require urgent review; the current fragmentation of responsibilities amongst local flood defence committees, and between fluvial and coastal management, makes it impossible properly to prioritise investment across the region. But in seeking to rationalise and deliver more consistent investment, we should not lose sight of the importance of local democratic oversight. This might be delivered better through greater local authority representation on Environment Agency boards and committees.
- As Regional Planning Body, the Assembly is furthermore acutely aware that the need to think again about development on flood plains will have highly significant implications for plans to accommodate growth in the South East.
- The Committee additionally expressed serious concern about the impact of flooding on small businesses in the region. The impact on livelihoods compounds the difficulties faced by those whose homes have been rendered uninhabitable, often repeatedly, by flood water.

I understand the Government is committed to reviewing flood defence arrangements and planning policy in regard to flood plain development, and I am sure the Assembly would appreciate the opportunity to be consulted on proposals as they emerge.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Shakespeare', written in a cursive style.

Cllr David Shakespeare
Chair of the Regional Assembly

Att.