

19-21 Broad Street | St Helier
Jersey | JE2 3RR

06 February 2023

Dear residents of Grands Vaux,

Thank you for your letter outlining your understandable concerns about the recent flooding, and the possibility of its reoccurrence. If my house had been flooded, I too would certainly be asking for information, explanations and reassurance.

My remit within Government, as Minister for Energy and Climate Change, includes working closely with the Minister for the Environment and fellow Ministerial colleagues to ensure our Island is mitigating, as far as possible, the effects of climate change and its associated extreme weather.

The Minister for Infrastructure, Deputy Tom Binet, and his team hold responsibility for the practical and physical steps that will be taken to minimise the impact of further flooding and I have therefore discussed the content of this letter with him. I'm aware he has already been to meet some of you.

Why did the flood happen?

Firstly, having spoken to colleagues across Government and other organisations, I want to provide you with a clear and detailed explanation of exactly what happened in the lead up to and on the day of the flood, to give you a complete picture.

Leading up to the floods, rainfall levels over a five-day period were significantly greater than the historic average for the whole of January and the ground was already saturated following the rainfall over the previous weeks.

We experienced significant rainfall across Jersey, and the Grands Vaux catchment, which makes up around 10% of the Island, received a significant amount of it. Due to the saturation levels, a lot of water discharged more quickly than normal, as in less saturated conditions, the land in the catchment acts like a sponge and holds water for longer.

The magnitude of the extreme rainfall event meant that the drainage system was overwhelmed. The Grands Vaux reservoir does not play a role in the drainage system, but this too overflowed. This overflow entered the drainage systems which were already at capacity.

In order to help mitigate the water levels, Jersey Water used its Grands Vaux pumping station to transfer water from Grands Vaux to Queen's Valley (which was also full but spilled to sea) and to the Water Treatment Works.

Jersey Water has continued transferring water ever since, albeit at a reduced rate, to assist downstream drainage.

Is the reservoir structurally secure?

Despite what happened, the reservoir did exactly what it is designed to do, and its structural integrity remains completely robust. The reservoir is visited daily by operational staff from Jersey Water.

Were there issues with the drains?

The drainage system is, at its core, a Victorian installation. Over the course of time, it has been altered and adapted, but, essentially, capacity in this location is the same as it was at the time of its installation.

From initial investigations, I'm told the majority of drains and drain inlets were clean at the time of the downpour. There is no way that the current drainage system could ever have coped with the volume of rain that fell, nor could the existing system be adapted for this purpose.

The Cavern under Fort Regent, which protects large parts of town in stormy weather, filled within three hours.

What investigations are we doing?

Since the floods, officers from our Infrastructure, Housing and Environment department, alongside Jersey Water, have been carrying out extensive investigations around Grands Vaux and surrounding areas. They are doing a full assessment of the drainage network, impounding areas and the reservoir itself, to work through exactly what happened, and the potential solutions available to us to mitigate such an event if it were to happen again.

This future resilience work includes various stakeholders including Government and Jersey Water. It is reviewing both our flood resilience plans and emergency planning. This includes an assessment of what worked and what didn't work, and we are doing a thorough assessment of what can be done to improve this in the future. We are still in the early days of this exploratory work.

How are we working to protect your homes/what flood defences are we working on?

We are currently working on immediate short-term flood prevention plans to protect your homes from further flooding, but also on medium- to long-term plans for better water management across the Grands Vaux catchment and other at-risk areas.

This will include reviewing alternative options for the remodelling of our drainage system, the reservoir and dam infrastructure and general water management.

With climate change having a significant impact on extreme weather, we will continue to see increases in our rainfall levels, so our team at Jersey Met is looking to develop improved weather

warning messages (how these reach Islanders, and especially what we expect from agencies and Islanders) as part of our flood management plans.

The Minister for Infrastructure has asked me to highlight that, in the immediate aftermath of the flood, he mistakenly estimated a cost of £60m to install a storm water drainage system that could cope with the volume of rain we experienced. More thorough discussions now suggest somewhere more in the region of £200m – not something that the Island could readily afford under current circumstances and, in any event, it could only work properly when the tide was sufficiently low to allow it to run to sea.

Whilst every effort will be made to stop such flooding happening again, a failsafe short-term solution may be very difficult to achieve. We are completely committed to keeping you up to date and informed about our progress.

Ongoing support

I appreciate what an unsettling time this has been and continues to be, especially for those residents who haven't yet been able to return to their homes. There is continued support from Government and Andium Homes – which I know are doing everything they can to help those families out of temporary accommodation as soon as possible.

If you are suffering from any physical or mental health issues as a result of the flooding, please contact your GP in the first instance, who will be able to advise you on the support services available.

I will continue to work closely with other Ministerial colleagues and officers on our response and I hope to arrange a formal meeting with you in the near future.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hilary Jeune', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Deputy Hilary Jeune
Minister for Energy and Climate Change

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