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6th February 2023

Message to Residents of Grands Vaux From Infrastructure Minister, Tom Binet

Whilst I appreciate that the open letter sent from the residents of Grands Vaux was addressed to the Minister for Energy and Climate Change, Deputy Hilary Jeune, I felt it important (as Minister for Infrastructure) to provide an additional response, given the extent to which our department was involved in this most recent flood, and the part it is likely to play should further flooding occur.

Whilst many properties were affected in various areas, it is fair to say that because 58 homes were evacuated on the day and 22 were rendered uninhabitable thereafter, Grands Vaux does require specific attention.

Since the flooding the questions most frequently asked have been ‘why was the reservoir full when the rain commenced’ and the second would be ‘if it had not been, could this unfortunate event have been avoided’? These are very valid questions that require honest and unvarnished answers. But first I will put the questions in context by touching on the issue of drainage.

Unbeknown to many, the drainage in the area is owned and maintained by several different parties; The Infrastructure, Housing and Environment (IHE) department, the Parish of St Helier, Parish of Trinity and Parish of St Saviour. Since the water has subsided, the IHE department has carried out an extensive investigation of this entire network and their findings suggest that, whilst most of the drainage system was clean and clear, some areas were not; indeed a few had not been maintained for some time.

Whilst that is important in terms of dealing with normal, even heavy rain, it becomes far less of an issue in the event of severe flooding. This is simply because, however clean the system may be, it could never cope with the volume of water that fell during the main downpour, particularly if the reservoir was full from the outset. It would require a vast underground drainage pipe, running under St Helier, from the reservoir, out to sea. Rough estimates indicate a figure in excess of £200m for that to be achieved.

Logic therefore dictates that the only serious chance we have to avoid further flooding is by dealing with the problem further upstream. This will require a fully integrated flood management plan involving all parties, rather than a reactive approach where we simply dispatch the fire service, IHE and (particularly) Andium Homes to clean up the mess, as we did on this occasion.

At present, the Island requires Jersey Water to store as much water as possible, in order to ensure we are comfortably supplied with fresh water throughout the entire year; and this they do incredibly well. However, with climate change delivering an ever increasing number of extreme weather events, that remit may well have to be extended for them to play what could become an extremely important role in flood management.

Beyond the obvious requirement for maximum water storage, there may well be reasons why the reservoir cannot be held at a low level in the higher risk months (increased exposure to pollution by agrochemicals and/or the requirement for a sufficient head of water to drive water to Queens Valley reservoir and to allow other general supply schemes to operate). And it may also be the case that the flooding would have been no different, had the reservoir been empty when the flood rains began.

But none of this can justify us leaving all those affected by the flooding without a full and easily understandable explanation of those reasons – backed up by the necessary figures. Some facts and figures have already been released, but more detail will be made available once further work has been undertaken.

So, an integrated plan (and probably an extended remit) is required. I'm pleased to say that much work has already been undertaken by the officers of all the relevant departments and this will be presented to a meeting that I'm currently arranging between IHE, Jersey Water, Andium Homes, the Minister for the Environment, Treasury Minister and representatives of the three Parishes involved.

Whilst there are no guarantees, the hope is that we can, collectively, devise a plan and series of measures that will both reduce the risk of further flooding and mitigate the effects in the event that it cannot be fully avoided.

I will also be arranging a meeting in about six weeks from now, to update all residents of our findings.

In closing, I would like to extend my sincere commiserations to all those affected, in all areas, and my thanks to all the services and individuals that worked tirelessly to deal with the crisis as it unfolded.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Binet
Minister for Infrastructure