

This is an account of one of the victims of the flooding in Fishlake.

Jenny Palmer

Dear All,

Michael Meridith, friend of Ecological Owlthorpe, recently drew to the attention of the residents of Fishlake that Avant Homes has appealed to Robert Jenerick, Secretary of State for Housing against Sheffield City Council's decision to turn down their planning application for a housing development at Ecological Owlthorpe, Sheffield. I was touched by the effort and length Michael had gone to raise awareness of this issue among the residents of Fishlake.

Last year, as you will be aware, our village suffered devastating flooding in November 2019. Having studied geography, ecology and agriculture at the Universities of Nottingham, Oxford and Lincoln respectively, I am familiar with environmental issues including flood risk, catchment based solutions and climate change. When buying a house in Fishlake in March 2019 we therefore paid close attention to the EA's long term flood risk assessment for Fishlake - which at the time was very low risk - prior to our home purchase in March 2019.

On a personal level, the impact if the flooding on my family has been very disruptive and traumatic. A few memories that will stay with me of the flood and the months that followed:

- Having to use our own judgement to evacuate in the middle of the night with our two young children, not knowing where to go. Not knowing whether we could safely escape.
- Temporary accommodation, navigating the insurance industry for the first time, rebuilding our home, strength and lives.
- Having a job interview a week after the flood and being involved in a serious car accident on the way back, the police escorting me to safety, not having a home to go to, getting the job, starting the job, the press, HRH Prince Charles and Boris Johnson visits, the generosity of strangers, fatigue, coordinating remedial works, carrying out flood samples for Uni. of Lincoln (cadmium deposits found across the landscape), my son in hospital with Scarlet fever, my husband being promoted to an assistant head at the special school where he works, him working on the front line throughout the pandemic.
- It not being an exaggeration to say that it is a miracle nobody lost their life.

As it has been for many, it has been a tough year.

I feel so uncomfortable sharing the details of my year with all of you strangers but I am trying to illustrate that our home is our foundation and that life has been more difficult than it should be without it. Like all of the residents of the area, we are ordinary people living ordinary lives and that we do our best to be good and giving people and take care of our environment.

Professionally, I work as in nature conservation - I've worked for Natural England, the Wildlife Trusts, the RSPB, as an ecologist and for Barnsley Council and the South Yorkshire Biodiversity Research Group. The science is clear and we must plan for a future with more extreme weather. As somebody who is only in my early 30s and with two young children, this can feel quite frightening. I feel that we really must consider the carrying capacity of our catchments and look to nature-based solutions. I am starting to feel worried about our area's future - an area with a rich past (with evidence of settlement dating back at least 1,000 years) - and a vibrant and productive present, containing diverse communities and habitats.

It's so sad to think that housing could be situated on an existing biodiverse habitat (scrub is so valuable yet so undervalued) and one that also acts to slow the flow. Our wildlife is in desperate trouble and we can't afford to lose it. We need bigger, better more joined up habitats and development should be planned around nature, not the other way round.

We are grateful for the work the EA has been doing in the area, strengthening defences, etc. but we are not naive to think that these actions alone will be enough and we need to look upstream at nature based solutions to slow the flow.

I hope that you can consider the impact of this development on the livelihoods and wellbeing of lowland communities and their landscapes.

Best wishes,

Mrs J Palmer  
Fishlake