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Rural Advocate visits flooded communities in Evesham, Worcestershire

Dr Stuart Burgess Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities and the Government's Rural Advocate yesterday (Sunday 22 July, 2007) visited Evesham in Worcestershire to see first-hand the impact of the unprecedented levels of flooding in the area. Today (Monday 23 July, 2007) Dr Burgess is travelling to Yorkshire to talk to local people there about how they are coping with the aftermath of severe flooding.

Speaking after his visit to Evesham Dr Burgess said: "I have been to Evesham today to talk to local residents and business people affected by the floods. It is only when you see these areas at first hand that you can fully appreciate the severity and scale of what has happened here. We cannot overestimate the personal cost and physical and emotional stress suffered by those affected. Make no mistake, this is on the scale of a national emergency and needs extraordinary measures.

"It is encouraging that the Prime Minister has already come forward with a commitment for funding and help for residents towards recovery. It will need a national flood plan to coordinate the work of the emergency services, the freeing up of contingency funds by government and, if needed, the wider deployment of the army. I would also call on insurance companies to do their utmost to provide help as quickly as possible across all of the communities affected.

"Beyond the immediate impact, those communities and businesses affected will need long-term support to rebuild their lives. In places such as Evesham there will be a profound effect, especially on those who depend on the land or on tourism for their livelihoods".

Dr Burgess added: "In fact, the Commission for Rural Communities' press officer who lives in nearby Pershore has been directly affected by the flooding. I know that in the worst of the downpour last Friday it took him 12 hours to get home from our offices in Cheltenham, a journey that usually takes just half-an-hour. Pershore has more or less been cut off for the last couple of days and while he has been lucky to escape the flooding his mother-in-law had to be evacuated from her bungalow to stay with family for a couple of days. His relatives in Evesham living near to one of the bridges over the swollen River Avon were not so fortunate and suffered badly with the water completely flooding their home".

Dr Burgess continued: "The emergency services, local authorities and volunteers in and around Evesham have done a magnificent job in exceptionally difficult circumstances. It is also particularly rewarding to see the spirit of local communities coming together at a time of crisis to help people in the greatest need, particularly the most vulnerable such as families with young children and the elderly living alone.

"In my role as Rural Advocate I will be reporting back to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Environment about what I have seen and heard today and request a meeting at the earliest available opportunity".

ENDS

For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies on 07900 608030

Notes to editors:

The Commission for Rural Communities is an independent government body established in October 2006. Our role is to provide well-informed, independent advice to government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs of people living and working in rural England, with a particular focus on tackling disadvantage and economic under-performance.

We have three key functions:

Rural advocate: the voice for rural people, businesses and communities;

Expert adviser: giving evidence-based, objective advice to government and others;

Independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

Further information about the Commission for Rural Communities and its work can be found at www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk