

[Blame the planning system for flood damage](#) [1]

Written by [Whig](#) [2] | Friday 10 January 2014



Much of the coverage over recent winter flooding in the UK has focussed on immediate issues. The Prime Minister was given a grilling in Yalding over failures to restore power supplies. This neatly demonstrates our loss of the principle of subsidiarity - the PM is not, and should not, be responsible for power supplies, they are both beneath and outside his purview. If we expect our politicians to control such matters, they will, invariably with unintended and deleterious consequences. Such is the creeping collectivism evident in our society, it is no wonder we have such an over-mighty state.

Some debate has centred around whether flood defences are sufficient or whether future funding will be reduce - much of this is simply political point-scoring. Again, there is the question of whether the state should be responsible for such issues - if we worry about the state delivering insufficient supply, surely this is an argument for private supply? Further, how can we discern whether the state is, actually, over-supplying flood defences? Without a price mechanism in operation, there is no means to tell.

Subsequently, the debate seems to have shifted over to whether the floods are related to climate change. Without adopting any stance on climate change, it is '[bad science](#)' [3] to link such particular weather event to the phenomenon. Environment Secretary Owen Patterson has been castigated by the left-wing press for 'climate scepticism' - in reality his position of moderate, evidence-based scepticism (in the philosophical sense) seems far more reasonable than the [PM's comments](#) [4].

In reality, the floods demonstrate something quite different - the failure of planning policy. The problems have been caused not by the flooding itself, which is actually pretty common in winter, but increased levels of building in floodplains leading to - surprise, surprise - increased flooding. To quote the Chair of the Flood Protection Association 'It is absolutely barking mad to build on a flood plain when there are so many other places that could be built on.?'

Why, therefore, is development taking place in such unsuitable locations? Step forward our old nemesis Planning Policy. Instead of allowing a sensible, functional market in land planning, which would factor in such costs and mitigate against such illogical development. Instead, the bureaucratic and public choice factors inherent in collectivised control of land use lead to such suboptimal outcomes - not only do we have grossly [insufficient new housing](#) [5] we also have it poorly situated. Moreover, such policy further imposes costs - flooded voters demand flood defences, funded out of additional the tax system and with all the deadweight costs associated with bureaucratic management. This is a typical feature of most interventions - they create additional costs and unintended consequences.

What this does tell us about climate change is that government policy is a poor way to deal with its effects, but also may well worsen them. Central planning creates suboptimal choices and inflexibility. Dynamic

phenomena such as environmental demand adaptability, entrepreneurialism and efficient allocation of resources. Political and bureaucratic choices offer none of these.

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