Floods like this week's at Doncaster are a regular occurrence. The mechanism is heavy rainfall on high ground, followed by excessively fast run-off. The effects can be greatly mitigated through measures which retain the water so that it is released more slowly. Most important of these to reduce the extent of uplands grazing, which result in loss of tree cover below the tree line and scrub cover higher up, and consolidation of the soil by the presence of the animals. Other measures would include construction of holding lakes, which could also be used, possibly, for small scale hydro-electric generation.

In the course of the Brexit debate we have been constantly told that sheep farmers will be ruined if it is not protected by subsidies and tariffs to keep out cheaper imports. This indicates that the land is sub-marginal for sheep farming and in the absence of supporting policies would go over to other uses, or be re-wilded. The increasing incidence of flooding indicates also that the land needs to be managed for hydrological control, associated with more compatible uses such as recreation and forestry, which, as an incidental benefit, would create more work opportunities.

Given the important effects of government policies, if Brexit does not happen, this is something that the EU itself should promote, since it is not a problem confined to the UK; if it does, the UK government needs to develop effective landscape planning strategies; the other side of that coin is development on flood plains.