

So the storm came and went earlier this week. As we consumed the news of tragedy, travel chaos and fallen trees how many of us thought to check on our elderly, especially those living alone to see if they were ok?

I took a quick walk around my own village to check on structural damage before jumping in the car and heading up to Parliament. It is only when I got here I thought maybe I should have just knocked on the doors of the older folks in the village to check that they were ok and not too frightened by the storm. That was my failure but reminds me that therein lays a deeper issue. Many of us are so busy with our own lives and the general white noise of our day that we forget those who are alone, with no one to ask for help or comfort.

Last week the Secretary of State for Health said it was a source of national shame that as many as 800,000 people in England are “chronically lonely”. Five million people over the age of 65 say that their television is their main form of company. As the nights draw in and the fear of going out into the community increases, the problem becomes more acute.

There are many reasons why our older generations feel such loneliness; some are personal such as ill-health or bereavement, but some are as a consequence of wider issues in society like our dependency on technology and poor transport links.

The Campaign to End Loneliness is one I support in the hope we can raise awareness in our own communities of those who perhaps would welcome a knock on the door, a quick chat or maybe some extra company. I failed to do my bit this week but not again. And remember if the old boy in the street wants a chat you might be the only person he talks to that day.