

Sheffield: Residents tell of losses caused by flooding

Our reporters
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A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team spoke to a number of residents of Toll Bar in north Doncaster and Catcliffe in Sheffield, South Yorkshire.

Rennie Brown's parents were badly affected by the floods in Toll Bar. Their bungalow and all its contents were completely ruined.

"The Lord Mayor Martin Winters sacrificed Toll Bar to save Doncaster," Brown said. "The Council has just spent millions on a new shopping centre and interchange, instead of new flood defences" The last time the area was flooded, she explained, was in 1947.

Robert Brown, Rennie's father, a retired coal miner who is 83 years-old and has terminal heart disease, said that he had lived in Toll Bar for 33 years and had just sold his house two months earlier to move to a retirement bungalow.

Rennie explained, "My father sold his house to move here for a fresh start. Everything in the house was fitted brand new. He came here to enjoy the last few months of his life, as it was becoming impossible for him to get up the stairs. Instead, this has made his condition worse. He now has to have six hours of oxygen a day.

"Prince Charles and all the dignitaries visited the better-off area on their visit. Charles got on a boat, even when you could see the water was not very far out. At this end of Toll Bar I was up to my waist in water.

"When the flood came, the water started to come up through the toilet and my mum and dad were trying to scoop the water out. They rang for sand bags from the Council, but it was a local builder who provided them. The water then subsided. This was on June 25. The following day, the local school was given an hour to evacuate, but no one told the residents.

"Before that, the water was up to my mum's ankles. I couldn't get to her so I called a neighbour to get my parents out. They took my parents out with no shoes on.

"They are very ill and just couldn't understand what

was happening. They were eventually rescued by boat at three in the morning. My dad was totally distressed and I only found him by driving round the leisure centres. The volunteers got an oxygen tank and chair for him.

"He lost all his medication and documents in the flood. This caused a lot of problems, and I had to have a showdown with the authorities to get his tablets and some oxygen."

Helen Phillips, who lives next door to Rennie, said, "Late on Tuesday evening the police told residents not to bother moving."

Diane Cooper, a single parent, added, "At the time it happened, it was total chaos and abandonment. The house was under about eight inches of water and the Council wasn't aware that there was a problem. This was on the Monday morning before the big surge came.

"On the Tuesday morning everyone was trying to contact the Council, saying that there was going to be a burst. The Council said that they were not aware that Toll Bar had a problem.

"All the parents got a call from the school, saying they had one hour to pick their children up. There were no councilors and no police present while we were watching the water going into our houses. The first police presence was on the Tuesday night (June 26).

"We all went to different places for refuge. We have been bombarded with information, and we don't know if it's right until someone says it is official.

"I feel let down by not getting told what is happening. I have heard rumours that they might have to knock down my house. I have lost everything, as I am not insured. The way that this estate is built is like a cup and we're in the middle."

Jane Manifold, a dinner lady at Toll Bar primary school, said, "This should never have happened. I met (Prime Minister) Gordon Brown this morning, who said there was going to be a public inquiry. About 80 percent

of people on this estate are not insured.”

Keith, another Toll Bar resident said, “The Ea Beck flood defences haven’t burst since 1947, and that was due to heavy snow. At its height, this flood was 15 feet high. The rugby pitch is still under water.

“We were two days without power, when they could have brought a generator down. There are other parts still without power.

“Toll Bar was totally flooded in seven or eight hours. A lot of people would not have got out without help from others in the village. There was no organised rescue. I can’t understand why they are pumping the water back into the Ea Beck if that is what has supposedly burst. It is not logical.”

John Prottery is a fire officer based in the West Midlands with ten years seniority. He was situated at Toll Bar as part of the operation to pump millions of gallons of flood water away from the village. We asked his opinion about the flooding and the pumping operation.

Prottery said, “I have been here six days altogether. This is exceptional for such a vast area to be flooded so deeply. But it is on a flood plain. The amount of rain that fell in Hull, Sheffield, Rotherham—I think something is not right.

“We were initially mobilised for the Ulley Dam to try to stop it flooding. If it had gone, there would have been just 15 minutes to turn all the power off before it reached the power station. We were then redeployed to Toll Bar on the Thursday night. Another crew also came and support was also needed in Sheffield.”

Prottery said that most of the mobile pumping stations available for the whole UK were being used in Toll Bar and the surrounding areas in Yorkshire. The stations are capable of pumping away thousands of gallons of water per hour.

He said that the amount of water pumped out of Toll Bar was the most water ever pumped in British history. “There are 14 pumps working in the Toll Bar area and 37 used in this operation in total,” Prottery said. There are only just over 40 of these pumping stations nationally.

Gavin is a resident of the flooded Catcliffe area of Sheffield His bungalow on South View Terrace lies in a dip at the bottom of the main village road, and was among the first to be flooded. It is also near to the flooded Plough public house. He is a full-time carer for his disabled wife He invited us to look at the flood damage inside his home.

Gavin said, “I know the Council is to blame partly. At 1.30 am on the night of the floods the water level had reached up to the garden. My wife asked, ‘Do you think

we should evacuate?’ The aid workers who were around said there was no need.

“A few hours later we heard a bang on the door. It was about 3:15 am and the police said we had to evacuate right now. We had five minutes to get out. They said, ‘The Ulley (the local reservoir) is going to go’. They said we had no choice.

“One officer said we could go to a centre at Dinnington. We didn’t want to go there, so we slept at relatives. We came back here three days later and the water level was nearly up to the roof.

“Actually, I came back after two days when the water was up to my waist. I waded through it as I had to get my wife’s medication. I got the medication, then left the house. Then when I came back a day later I found that I had been burgled.

“I think it is rubbish how we have been treated. We have lost everything. All I have is what I am standing up in and I am not insured. To them we are just the little people.

“This is a flood plain, but it has never been this bad ever. They have sacrificed this area in order to save the power plant from being flooded. They think we are stupid. The Council has not been checking the defences for years. It stinks and it is sickening. Everything has been wiped out overnight.

“We have had no help. Prince Charles just visited this area and the sandbags you can see were dropped half an hour before he got here to make it look good.

“I have spoken to Social Security about my losses. The guy from there went through my losses over the phone. I estimated the damage at £6,000 and they are offering me £1,900. That is the total that Social Security will allow you.”



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