

# UK: Hebden Bridge and Mytholmroyd residents describe flood destruction

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Hebden Bridge, a market town, and Mytholmroyd, a village a mile or so away, were deluged by floods on Boxing Day (December 26).

Hebden Bridge, population 4,500 and Mytholmroyd, 4,594, lie in the Upper Calder Valley in West Yorkshire, England.

Over 2,000 homes were flooded in the area as the River Calder burst its banks, with many people forced to relocate to the nearby town of Halifax or stay with relatives. Mytholmroyd was completely submerged and the nearby market town, Todmorden, was cut off.

Hebden Bridge and Mytholmroyd lie in hilly countryside, with crags and vales. It was pivotal to the industrial revolution. Textiles and hill farming were the mainstay of the area, but these have long since declined, with the local villages and towns becoming commuter satellites for the nearby cities of Bradford, Leeds and Manchester.

Residents are angry that the government and local authorities left communities to fend for themselves.

**Mark Coop**, who owns a mobility shop [wheelchairs and scooters] in Hebden Bridge, said, “When [Prime Minister David] Cameron says, ‘We are all in it together,’ it’s a lie. There’s no work up on the hills, only grazing sheep, so there is nothing to stop the water.

“People in Todmorden and Mytholmroyd found it more difficult than those who lived in Hebden. We’ve had a lot of people helping out, especially from the Sikh and Muslim communities from Bradford and further afield, but the media has not picked up on that.

“There has been absolutely no Local Authority coordination over the Christmas period. Everything was done by local people. I have lost £24,000 in uninsured stock.”

**Caroline**, a small trader, said, “I think Cameron was

frightened of coming here as he wouldn’t have had a very good reception. The most disgusting aspect of it all is that so many people have no insurance and lost everything because the insurance companies refused to insure people.

“People might think twice about setting up a business in the town centre as most will be refused insurance. This will end up a ghost town. There has to be better defences than this.”

In Mytholmroyd, **Caroline McBride**, a carer, said, “I have lived in Mytholmroyd all my life. I was in shock, as this has never happened before, then afterwards it was devastation and upset. But then it got to anger because it wasn’t just our town that was affected; it was everywhere else. As soon as York [which was also flooded] got mentioned on TV we were forgotten. The army has come and the Muslims with food and resources have come over and things are better now than on Boxing Day.

“Some people are staying in hotels in Halifax, and family members or strangers have taken people in. My house hasn’t been flooded but it has affected us. Things that we take for granted, like going to the shops, post office, banks. The nearest one is a shop in Hebden, as they have no cash machines working here. Travel has been affected. There is a massive crack along the main road. Midgley Road is blocked off at the top, as the walls have fallen down. At the top of Scout Road there’s a mudslide.

**Caroline** added, “A lot of people aren’t insured against storms and water damage because it costs too much money due to previous floods in Hebden. A lot of insurance companies won’t insure. Ruby’s [her daughter’s] school on Burnley Road are having to relocate to Savile Park, which is five miles away. Calderdale are providing transport for the children and

teachers. Her school will be closed for at least six months. One age group will be going to Savile Park and another to Calder High, so for many families it will be difficult, especially as they will be coming up to the exams.

“It makes me laugh that the Labour Party are all sorry after the fact that it’s happened. They were told months ago this would happen and they cut the floodwater defences. They are all sorry after it’s happened and it’s not good enough.

“My eldest daughter who is autistic has found this really hard. The taxi service that takes her to school was floating down Sowerby Bridge. The taxi rank cabin was floating down the high street, but their taxis distributed food. The entire community in Calderdale from Todmorden, Hebden, to Sowerby and Mytholmroyd all came together to help each other out.”

**Tim**, a detox support worker, has been coordinating the relief effort at Elphin Court, a sheltered housing estate for the elderly. He explained, “When the rain fell on Boxing Day, people were running around like headless chickens and thought it can’t go on like this, it needs sorting out. I stripped out the community hall and the water went out as fast as it came in.

“My first instinct was to get the elderly out of the ground floor. I waded in and carried them to safety in the top-floor flats. I found elderly people sitting on sofas crying. The mountain rescue and police thanked me for my response, but they weren’t here when it happened. Once we had rescued the residents, we went back in to grab any personal items. We found a man sat on his chair chest deep in water. It took a number of us to get him up to my flat. They reckon it will be three to six months before anyone can move back.

“The flood down here happened in half an hour, so if it wasn’t for volunteers the rescue wouldn’t have happened.”

**Alix** is a cleaner at the Elphin Court sheltered housing estate. She told us, “These flats house people from aged 60 to the end of life and they have lost everything. A lot of them have ended up in nursing homes and won’t come back. I’ve stayed here for them. We scrapped Christmas this year and come every day to help and sort things out.

“It was only the week before that we had the Christmas Party in there. We couldn’t believe what happened a week later! A lot of the residents were

confused and don’t understand what’s happening and why they can’t go home. There used to be a warden here but not now.

“A lot of them have no family to go to and have ended up in hotels in busy areas. Many are not insured because of the high premium.”



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