

## Six months after the Floods: Where are we up to?

*Progress check by Calderdale Friends of the Earth and Calder Future*

Immediately after the Boxing Day 2015 floods Calderdale we recognised that it would be essential to develop an early momentum in pressing for an effective response from central government; to set a deadline of no later than 12 months for there to be in place an effective and adequately funded flood alleviation plan for the Calder Valley at the catchment level; and to conduct regular progress checks to ensure that the Calder Valley communities arrive successfully at that critical deadline.

Since then we have been very busy - as have others - in pursuing these objectives. We organised a large public meeting on 21st January; launched a petition requesting full funding of a Calder Valley catchment plan; set up a website to allow members of the public to contribute their views about flooding causes and solutions [www.caldervalleyfloods.org.uk](http://www.caldervalleyfloods.org.uk); attended meetings of and submitted evidence to the Calderdale Floods Commission; and participated in a large number of public events and discussions. Calder Future - Calderdale's river partnership, which undertakes practical action - has meanwhile assisted in the environmental cleanup programme, and funded a number of community responses. Throughout this period we have maintained our supportive contact with the Environment Agency (EA).

### Six Month Progress Report

- We believe that the physical and economic recovery activity undertaken immediately by both Calderdale Council and the Environment Agency has been undertaken successfully. We welcome the establishment of the Calderdale Floods Commission (CFC), which we understand to be unique in this country. We also welcome the early acceptance from the government that, beyond flood schemes for the settlements of Hebden Bridge and Mytholmroyd, a catchment wide plan has to be prepared by October, and a substantial amount of funding (apparently in excess of £50m) allocated for project implementation. Together these represent strong foundations for the work over the second six month period. But **some significant weaknesses, often long-standing ones, are already visible** that need to be rectified immediately if we are not to arrive either in October or December with inadequate plans, and then frustration and anger.

- The findings of the CFC (as presented to the Council on 27th April) were insufficiently strategic and did not identify recommendations for action about flooding 'causes and solutions' that are clear and strong. (Our document of 20th April identifying weaknesses in the initial findings is summarised PTO). The promised engagement programme by which it intends to produce its final report/recommendations, and consult about their adequacy, has not been made available. **Action: the Commission needs urgently to create a process whereby the public can have confidence that its recommendations, which will have the ear of government, are sufficiently strong. This critical opportunity must not be lost.**

- The 'emerging scoping' for the EA's catchment plan has still not been made public, so consequently the community is unable to check whether its approach and resourcing are adequate. If these aren't right at this stage then we can't be certain that an effective plan will result in October. **Action: the emerging scoping for the full Catchment Plan must be published and consulted on now (June-July).**

- The EA has begun to develop a more effective engagement programme which will allow communities to contribute to its developing project plans. However there are still basic weaknesses in the online communications around flood response (where a single source/website has to be provided for information about all EA, Council and other organisations activity) such that communities are not able to keep up-to-date with developments/resources ; and the Council has still not decided whether to make public the meetings of Calderdale Flood Steering Group. **Action: the quality & accessibility of communications about the longterm response to flooding needs a further stepchange improvement.**

- The EA's first [project plan, for Mytholmroyd](#), was published on time on 26th May and will now be the subject of detailed community consultation. At first glance there appears to be an over-emphasis on traditional flood alleviation approaches in the river channel and town centre, and hints of a reduced role for work in the uplands to retain and slow flood waters before they reach the valley bottom. ("While there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that natural flood management measures can have a positive impact on reducing flood risk, it is often difficult to quantify this and due to the large scale nature of measures required, can take many years to implement and establish.") **Action: the EA need to demonstrate and quantify that they are pursuing an integrated approach that will deliver maximum flood alleviation in both the river channel/valley bottom and the uplands. Immediate discussions with those communities that support either 'dredging' or NFM solutions must be held to reassure them that their concerns will be responded to within the EA process.**

**6 Month Conclusions:** If action is not taken now (June-July) to respond to these emerging weaknesses then the ability of the EA town project plans and the full Catchment Plan to provide the most effective long-term flooding security and to command the confidence of Calder Valley communities, householders and businesses will be **substantially compromised.**

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## **Response of Calderdale Friends of the Earth and Calder Future to the Calderdale Flood Commission 'Evidence and Findings so far' - 19th April 2016**

There are a number of missing issues, and some major findings have not been captured. There is a danger that the public reaction to the Commission's final report will be one of disappointment, and a critical opportunity to send essential messages to central government will have been lost.

**1. What caused the event?:** The report needs to conclude that i) a comprehensive analysis of the Boxing Day flooding event based on the hydrological data needs to be provided (in the forthcoming Council section 19 report); because ii) this approach to the data analysis will establish the future basis upon which the catchment wide flood plan has to provide evidence in support of its recommended approach. Without adequate flooding and land management data collection and analysis it will not be possible to design effective flood alleviation interventions.

**2. What was the extent of the economic damage?:** The report needs to present the quantified scale of the economic impact of this flooding event, and what therefore might be the consequences if it were to be repeated again *before* flood alleviation projects begins to take effect. It is essential that the report sets out this possible scenario clearly so as to justify the scale of future infrastructure/alleviation interventions required to prevent it.

**3. Causal relationship between Uplands and Valley bottom:** The section of the report on upland and countryside management needs to start with a clear statement about whatever is the conclusion the Commission has reached about whether there either is or is not a causal relationship between 'what happens in the uplands' and then what is transmitted down into the valley bottom and its communities in the form of very large scale economic and social damage. If the conclusion is that 'there is a causal relationship' then a number of things follow:

i) that interconnectedness will now need to be responded to by effective action in the uplands and on the valley slopes in order to protect the valley bottom and its settlements. This must be explicitly stated.

ii) this will then require further investigation of a) the physical state of the uplands, to establish that they are adequately retaining water b) an upland alleviation plan first to design and then to implement a basket of measures; c) whether the existing regulatory framework governing uplands management is adequate, and if it's not how it needs to be amended; or alternatively whether the Commission believes that a partnership model will prove sufficient to provide sufficient alleviation? The Commission needs to state whether all the major upland landowners have engaged with their work, and identify those which have not, because if it wants to argue that a partnership model may prove to be more effective, then there will need to be evidence that all the potential landowner partners are prepared to get engaged; and d) whether existing financial payments and incentives e.g land management subsidies are contributing either positively or negatively to flood alleviation?

**4. What is the coordination framework for future flood alleviation:** the Commission needs to set out its expectations that there needs to be a single coordination framework for implementing flood alleviation programme, which all stakeholders and individual citizens can understand and access.

**5. What and where is the 'partnership working'?:** Almost everyone does not know *what* are the existing flood partnership mechanisms (actual or online) and how to contact them, and *who* are the members of this 'partnership, and how do you get to be one with meaningful rights and engagement. There is no single source of online communication, lack of access to basic information, a very large number of involved organisations, and some meetings closed to the public. The Commission needs to make strong recommendations about the characteristics of partnership working and communications with the community to be expected; and specifically that the formal brief for the EA catchment plan needs to be published as soon as possible in order to allow the community to scrutinise its adequacy.

**6. The relationship between short/medium/long term:** the Commission needs to define and set out its expectations of *how* flood risk can be **reduced** across each of these three timescales.

**7. Protecting the future against 'the next flood':** The Commission needs to express a demand on behalf of the communities in the Upper Calder Valley that their future **will** be protected against future floods, by the provision of all necessary resources; because without that reassurance how will long-term economic investment and employment be maintained, and how will communities and individual householders plan their futures with optimism?

**8. The contribution of climate change:** The Commission needs to include findings for central government about the ability of Calderdale's Local Plan to respond to flooding and climate change, and - in relation to the Council's target for 40% for carbon reduction - that government's various other policy frameworks which relate to climate change and energy need to be to be properly aligned to reduce future flood risk.