

Kent on Sunday

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Good job, but we must do better

Maidstone and the Weald MP **Helen Grant**, saw first-hand the devastation caused by the Christmas floods and witnessed true bulldog spirit as communities worked together... but lessons must be learned



AVISION of our county town that I will never forget was my view of the floods at the bottom of Maidstone High Street early on Boxing Day morning.

The waters had receded a little by the time we were there, but nevertheless the River Medway was up to the top of the Broadway Bridge arches, surging past like a massive, unrelenting torrent of lava.

As the sun rose and the fog cleared there was post-apocalyptic eeriness reminiscent of many disaster movies. The town centre was already the focus of much activity so I decided to travel around the constituency and report on any issues further afield needing extra attention, liaising with Alison Broome and her team at Maidstone Borough Council.

The Allington Marina area was a particular worry with fears of boats losing their moorings and breaching the lock further downstream.

The consequences could have been disastrous.

Yalding was another location bad-

ly affected as was widely reported on national TV.

Across the three days, from Boxing Day to Saturday, I spoke with many individuals in some of the worst affected areas.

There were tears and sadness, but at the same time communities pulled together in true British bulldog spirit. Local people were valiantly evacuating people, pets and belongings.

Others were keeping an eye out and supplying hot tea and a warm meal to those who chose to remain in their homes.

Meanwhile, the agencies continued working seamlessly towards their common goal.

Once the waters had receded the clean-up operation rapidly commenced and electricity was restored as soon as it was safe to do so.

There have been questions raised about the timing and severity of the warnings given, communication between agencies and affected individuals, the decision to release water from the Leigh Barrier (and the effect this had upon Yalding) and whether



FLOOD: Helen Grant on Boxing Day

or not the flood management plan was adequate and effective generally.

These were severe conditions, however, and at a time of year when many key personnel were not in position.

In my opinion, seeing the operation unfold first-hand, I believe everyone involved did a very good job.

I met a small number of people affected who were not satisfied with the response, particularly regarding communication.

Certainly lessons can be learned

from these floods and I would personally like to see much better messaging and communication from the energy companies (and some other agencies) in the future.

Creating a database of direct primary contact methods for individuals is an achievable task, especially in these days of mobile messaging and social networking media independent of constant mains power.

Going forward, I am calling a round-table meeting of all relevant stakeholders to see how we can improve reactions to emergencies such as the Christmas floods.

That process must include looking at what can be done to improve the flood defence systems in the area.

We will consider the recommendations of the Environment Agency's 2009 Medway flood management report (<http://tinyurl.com/plciyoe>) and I welcome all constructive input from residents of Maidstone & the Weald. Please write to me at Link House, Knightbridge Court, Knightbridge Street, Maidstone, ME15 6LU or email helen.grant.mp@parliament.uk.

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Computer Generated Image depicts The Waterbury interior.

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