

Regional England's Katrina?

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Has the British media and government ignored the effects of the current period of [flooding](#) in the same way that the US administration and media missed the real impact on New Orleans of [Hurricane Katrina](#)? First there was the example of [Hull](#), stuck out on the edge of East Yorkshire. Its local MPs are cabinet ministers but people there still [felt](#) that the rest of the country didn't care. Now whole swathes of the West of Central England are under water. This is Conservative heartland, so perhaps it's not surprising that the Tories are [claiming](#) that the government should have acted earlier to protect householders. But surely this was an act of God? One incidentally, which the Bishop of Carlisle [thought](#) was God's punishment for our wickedness – which gives you an indication of the relevance of the Church of England in modern society.

There have been lots of mistakes made such as building homes in flood plains, failing to have mobile flood defences in the right place, and a slowness in putting the military in to action. But overall, this was a catastrophic but barely fatal disaster. There will not be thousands of homeless people, just millions of pounds worth of soggy carpets. This weekend my trip to see friends in Oxfordshire was abandoned as their village was cut off by the flooded roads. But they are not going to starve to death and their elderly relative is being looked after by neighbours. So why should Gordon Brown worry?

I think he has looked rather befuddled by the whole episode. He was slow to get out to visit the flood areas and keeps talking about money when what is really shocking people is the unexpected nature of this event. Brown will rightly claim he was distracted by the little matter of the attempted bombings of London and Glasgow. But in an age of global uncertainty, one of the first tasks of our leaders is to both empathise with our anxiety and provide plenty of reassurance.

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