

Topic

Historic Environment

Incident / Exercise

Incident: Cumbria Floods November 2009

Background and Context

Between Wednesday 18 November and Friday 20 November 2009, up to 372mm of rain fell on Cumbria. In the 24 hours ending 00:45 on Friday the 20th, 314mm of rain fell on Seathwaite. This is a record daily rainfall for the UK. The rainfall earlier in the week ensured that the ground was saturated in many areas. Flooding occurred in five out of the six Boroughs, the only one escaping being Barrow. The effect on properties was concentrated in Allerdale and South Lakeland with the most significant infrastructure damage occurring in Allerdale.

- One person lost their life
- 2,239 properties affected.
- 250 farms affected
- 25 bridges closed (for over 6 weeks)
- Significant highway road infrastructure damage
- Port of Workington closed (entrance to port obstructed by debris washed downstream)
- 40 out of 300 waste water treatment works affected Economic impact on surrounding areas caused by infrastructure issues
- 3,057 businesses affected
- 80% of businesses in Cockermouth affected by flooding
- Estimated costs of £2m per week to public and private sectors and the Communities caused by increased travel time
- 461 additional pupils requiring school transport
- Lake District National Park had 319 separate reports of damage to the rights of way network.

How the Topic was Handled

Recovery planning began early whilst the response was still on going. This allowed key partners to get together and set up sub working groups on Welfare, Business, Environment, Communications, Finance and Infrastructure, in line with the Recovery Plan, to prepare for the recovery phase and quickly respond once the emergency was over. Community recovery groups were also established. The following case study relates to one year on after the floods to place in context the size; scale and duration of the recovery work.

Natural environment

There was work from agencies including Natural England, Defra and the Environment Agency to help repair the natural environment and restore SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest). Camerton churchyard has been saved from further erosion thanks to work undertaken by Castle Fisheries which blocked off the flood channel. The flood-damaged land is being turned into an 11-acre nature reserve. There has also been collaboration between the Environment Agency and Natural England to restore pearl mussel beds.

A local PC led the redevelopment of the flooded allotments at Hall Brow, Workington alongside the probation service, Rotary Club, Town Council and residents of Hall Brow.

Listed buildings and archaeological sites

In terms of the historic environment, there has been continuing work from English Heritage on repairing scheduled monuments in the Lake District. There was close collaboration between Allerdale Borough Council and English Heritage on advising on appropriate repair for the more than 100 listed buildings that suffered flood damage in Cockermouth. Later Cumbria County Council archaeological service helped to ensure that there were no planning hold ups for the listed structures that required building works. The floods have also had an unexpected positive flipside in terms of revealing finds of archaeological interest: at Broomfields just west of Cockermouth a Roman water mill has been discovered as part of the civilian settlement to the Roman fort of Papcastle (excavation there has been funded through the Bassenthwaite Reflections project – the remains have now been re-covered and the field will be returned to agriculture under a Higher Level Stewardship agreement); and the remains of a medieval church were uncovered in the river bank at Addingham in the Eden Valley (English Heritage are funding a limited investigation there co-ordinated by the County archaeological service).

All public buildings damaged in the floods are now back in use and 446 different building control applications for flood restoration work have been received and dealt with.

Road Bridges

The Grade Two Listed Workington (Calva) bridge was badly damaged in the floods and required detailed structural analysis before it was determined that it could be repaired. Repair work got underway in June 2010 and is being carried out by Connect Roads, the Balfour Beatty concession company responsible for managing the bridge on behalf of Cumbria County Council. The bridge is expected to be open to both traffic and pedestrians by Easter 2011, meaning Workington will once again have two working road bridges (including the temporary road bridge opened in April 2010).

Bouthray Bridge South Lakeland requires significant repairs as the central pier of the bridge was destroyed. The required planning and listed buildings consents have been approved and the design is complete. Work is now expected to take place in the summer of 2011 during the Environment Agency approved window that allows working in the river.

Lessons Identified

Key lessons were the need to resource the recovery group with project management and administration support. The first Recovery Coordination meeting was held on 21 November and it was clear more time in recovery training is required. The transition from day to day business mode into immediate action and response was challenging for some of the Senior Managers. This could have been made easier by more focus on training and exercising in recovery.

One lesson learned from the event was how crucial it was to work with other agencies, particularly Environment Agency (EA), Planning Authorities and Natural England ahead of the reconstruction phase. Repairs to the bridges and structures needs approvals from EA for work within and around watercourses, and a considerable number of bridges are listed structures / ancient monuments. It is therefore crucial to get these bodies on board at an early stage, and they were incorporated within the Infrastructure Recovery Group, playing an active part in advising on the reconstruction process as well as working within their own organisations to assist with the accelerated delivery which these projects needed

Contacts for Further Information

emergency.planning@cumbriacc.gov.uk

Mike Smyth
Assistant Director Public Protection
Email: Mike.smyth@cumbriacc.gov.uk