

News from the Kent and Leven Catchment from Catchment Director Celia McNally

During Storm Desmond last December, South Cumbria experienced some of the heaviest rainfall since records began. The rugged landscape of the Lake District with its steep sided fell sides and relatively thin layer of soil covering solid or broken rock means rainfall tends to run straight off fells into the valleys below. The rainfall quickly accumulated in the streams and rivers and flowed overland to cause some of the worst flooding ever experienced in Kendal, Staveley, Backbarrow, Windermere, Ambleside, and Grasmere.

Almost immediately the Cumbria Floods Partnership was established to rethink the management of floods across Cumbria and consider what actions would build stronger links between communities and flood defence planning. The Partnership was also tasked to look at upstream options for slowing key rivers to reduce the intensity of water flows at peak times and consider flood risk management on a catchment scale.

In my role as Catchment Director for the Kent and Leven I will be updating you on the activities taking place across this area bound by these catchments; following the rivers from their source to the sea.

The three Cumbrian catchments most severely affecting in the December floods have been the focus in developing the Action Plan. I am working with my fellow Catchment Directors: Jim Ratcliff on the River Eden and Amy Heys on the River Derwent.

Since December colleagues in the Environment Agency's Asset Performance team for Cumbria and Lancashire, based in Penrith have been working flat out to repair defences to ensure they are back to the strength pre-storm Desmond. Their programme of work is unprecedented, and they continue to carry out the work, on top of the regular maintenance programme that the Environment Agency carries out. However we are confident that the recovery work will be completed in time for winter.

An update on what work is taking place where each week is now being produced by the Environment Agency and is shared via Cumbria Community Messaging, <https://www.cumbriacommunitymessaging.co.uk/> as well as through the local media.

In parallel we have been re-examining our river catchments from source to the sea to improve our flood risk management in the long-term. The Partnership is looking at the management of water levels and land use at a catchment scale, which means that, working with farmers, landowners, local organisations and communities, together we can integrate land management, development and resilience in areas at flood risk.

The effect of bridges on flooding in Kendal, Ambleside and Backbarrow is also being reviewed.

Planning how best to use the £24.3 million government investment to reduce flood risk in Staveley, Burneside, Carrus Green and Kendal is a complex engineering task. Having good information on when and where the floodwater flowed really helps to ensure that the right solutions are identified. This is why the Flood Investigation

Reports are been so important. Before these reports were introduced five years ago, engineers would have had trawl through ad hoc reports, old newspaper cuttings and photographs to try to work out what the issues were. Thanks to these report and the information that local communities have contributed, particularly photos and videos captured on mobile phones we have much more accurate and comprehensive data to hand to inform the assessment and design of these scheme.

Work is also continuing to develop and revise proposals for a new Lyth Valley Water Level Management Board (WLMB). WLMB are Risk Management Authorities who work alongside the Council, EA and LLFA. They are run by locally elected people from the community and council are responsible for managing water levels in areas of specific drainage need.

The consultation held last year gave really useful feedback. While there is support for the proposal from landowners and farmers, not enough information was provided about how the WLMB would address environmental needs and those of the wider residents and community. The group have taken this feedback on board and revised proposals will give more emphasis to these issues. We have been asked how the next consultation will be run, which we expect to be next year when revisions are complete.

This summer the NFU and ourselves met with South Lakeland District Council (SLDC) and the Parish Councils' to seek their advice on how to run the next consultation. We have agreed that the main consultation will be held much like last time; directly consulting landowners affected by water level management in the valley; the 5 Parish Councils representing residents in the area and organisations who sit on the project Advisory Group which includes organisations with an environmental interest. The documents will also be placed on the project website for anyone to respond directly with their comments.

In addition, following feedback from SLDC and Parish Councils, public drop-in sessions will be arranged and advertised locally, supported by the Parish Councils. These sessions will enable local residents to view and ask questions about the proposals before a response is requested from the Parish Council.

The final stage, once public consultation is complete, is to seek a decision from SLDC. SLDC will be publishing the proposals on their website before taking this decision and will invite members of the public to submit comments that officers should consider in preparing the submission to cabinet.

The Cumbria Floods Partnership brought together organisations and communities to work together to identify the actions that needed to be taken to manage the flood risk in Cumbria. You can read or download the full list of actions or the Summary report from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cumbria-flood-action-plan>

The partnership approach: 'strengthening Cumbria together', places communities at the centre of decision making. If you have local knowledge, suggestions and ideas to share for catchment management, or are a landowner or farmer who would like to know more about how to be involved in the partnership contact me at

CumbriaFloodsPartner@environment-agency.gov.uk or write to Kent and Leven Catchment Director, Ghyll Mount, Penrith 40 Business Park, Penrith, CA11 9BP.

Remember that you can sign up to flood warnings, and find the latest flood information by visiting www.gov.uk/flood or ring Floodline 0345 988 1188.