

Caton-with-Littledale Parish Council

Response to Rory Stewart MP – request for information from parish councils affected by Storm Desmond.

Caton-with-Littledale Parish Council sits alongside the River Lune close to the much-loved Crook O'Lune beauty spot. Most of the homes and businesses in the village are above the flood plain of the River Lune. Others are protected by bunds.

During Storm Desmond, farms and businesses close to the Lune were badly affected. Flooded farms lost animals, fodder, fences and equipment. An important local plant hire and light "land engineering" firm was inundated and vehicles flooded, which has meant that equipment and staff were not available to help other businesses and farms "clear up" in addition to the damage caused to this firm and property directly. Some properties further away from the river were affected by flood water coming up through sewage and drainage pipes (eg: the Low Mill complex). Some homes and businesses were affected by surface water washing off hills, fields and roads throughout the village. On many roads, especially minor roads, the drains were overwhelmed by the volume of rain (possibly made worse by inadequate maintenance). Although the main focus for the damage was the River Lune, streams and becks feeding into the river were swollen and have caused damage to gardens and fields alongside.

Fortunately, Caton-with-Littledale was not affected by the lengthy power cut which affected Lancaster and many neighbouring communities, as it does not depend on the substation close to the Lune that was flooded. Roads and bridges in this parish appear to have escaped major damage and can be used now water levels have receded.

A huge amount of voluntary work has been done in the immediate aftermath of the floods to help neighbours and start tidying up. Farms were helped by other farmers, both with the immediate clean-up and with long-term assistance. The County Council worked with local volunteers to clear Low Road on the Monday morning after the storm, re-establishing access to the Crook-o-Lune bridge. It will be some time before the full extent of the damage is clear. Fields are still sodden or under water, and damage to gardens and woodland may take a while to become apparent. However, there it is clear there is much to be done.

Regarding farming, in addition to the direct flood damage on farm buildings and equipment:

- Sheep and cattle farming is an important part of the Parish. Some stock has been lost, reducing potential income for the year
- A lot of silage, hay and fodder has been lost. Neighbouring farms have been supportive and schemes such as Forage Aid have helped - though this is money lost from the industry.
- In addition, the effects will persist as the fields are too wet to get on to at present and - when they dry out - large amounts of fencing and walls have been destroyed or

breeched. The fields cannot be used till this is repaired (which will be costly and take time), yet meanwhile additional costs finding alternative grazing will be incurred sometimes at a distance from the home base.

Regarding Tourism and local amenities:

- Many hours of volunteering have removed some of the debris eg: plastics and light materials near river footpaths. However, much heavier work remains such as moving hay bales and clearing plastics and string from high in tree branches.
- A lot of damage was done to woodland at the Crook O'Lune and to the Memorial Wood there.
- It is not clear who will clear this up, where the money for this will come from and where responsibilities lie in all areas. Yet these areas are a strong attraction for visitors to the area and this will affect businesses. The Parish Council may use some of its reserves for the clear-up.
- The financial cost of the flooding to the Parish and wider area will reduce the local economy (and also tourist income) for months to come.

Regarding homes and businesses, issues of particular concern to the Parish Council and local people include:

- Reports that insurance companies are not living up to the public undertakings made immediately after the storm hit – delays in sending assessors, excessive paperwork, reluctance to make full payments.
- Lack of support from the local authorities, for instance over free access to the tips for people to get rid of flood-damaged goods
- Sense that most efforts during and after the storm were focused on urban areas (although our MP Cat Smith did visit to see the damage and the clear-up operations)
- Shortages of skilled people to carry out repairs, and of building materials, equipment.
- Costs of repairs and flood-proofing for the future, as a cost for individuals, businesses and public bodies
- Need for regular maintenance of drains on minor and major roads

Closer to home, the Parish Council is aware that it has no emergency plan in place and intends to work on this over the coming months.

Broader issues we wish to raise with you include:

- Central government must ensure that local authorities and the emergency services are given the funds they need to purchase equipment and have trained staff available to deal with emergencies and the clean-up afterwards.

- Central government must fund DEFRA at a level which enables it to carry out long-term catchment-wide flood management programmes. They should be based on evidence of what is effective rather than short-term solutions.
- Planning must take more account of flooding, not just in the location of new developments but also in provision of drainage, more resilient building methods.
- Need for central government assistance to help people make their homes more flood-proof for the future
- Local knowledge of the river and its tributaries must be valued and preserved
- The balance between voluntary efforts and statutory bodies.
- Importance of support for voluntary bodies and charities working in the local area. Many have seen years of hard work washed away or damaged. In our area this includes organisations such as the local Tennis Club, Lune Rivers Trust, angling groups and canoeists.

Jenny Walmsley

Chair, Caton-with-Littledale Parish Council

15 January 2016