

CASE STUDY: WILLOWBANK, CARLISLE

BACKGROUND

In December 2015, Carlisle flooded as a result of storm Desmond. Record rainfall across Cumbria's catchments resulted in the rivers Eden, Caldew and Petteril; all of which surround the heart of Carlisle, overtopping their banks causing 2,228 homes and businesses to flood.

As a response to storms Desmond and Eva in December 2015, the UK Government put a recovery and resilience package in place for affected communities to help homeowners and businesses better protect their properties. Flood resilience grants to the value of £5,000 inclusive of VAT were made available through Local Authorities, with those residents living in Cumbria being able to access a further £2,000 if required, via the Cumbria Community Foundation.

Willowbank Apartments are located within 70 yards of the River Caldew and contains 29 apartments; 9 of which are located on the ground floor. On 6th December 2015 the building flooded to a depth of approximately 4 feet, resulting in substantial damage to communal entrance areas, utilities and residences alike. The freeholder of the site arranged for the repair of the building with apartment refurbishment completed first for the leaseholders and residents to return.

In agreement with the freeholder, residents utilised available grant funding from Carlisle City Council and the Cumbria Community Foundation to install a package of flood defence solutions at Willowbank Apartments and approached Newground for some support and assistance in developing a communal flood plan.



CHALLENGES

As Willowbank Apartments backs onto a small watercourse, the installation of flood barriers to the rear windows from the outside of the building would have been awkward and unsafe, especially if the watercourse were to be in near flood conditions at the time. In order to ensure the barriers can be deployed safely from the inside of the building whether the ground floor residents were at home or not, the development of a secure system for the holding and storage of apartment keys was required.

NEWGROUND'S APPROACH

After meeting with the freeholder to discuss the planning process and the flood defence measures installed at the building, Newground began a door-to-door engagement process to help build a picture of the community and gauge interest in the development of a communal flood plan. As part of the initial engagement process, Newground ensured residents were signed up to receive flood alerts and warnings and began to gather contact details for the communal plan before the first group residents' meeting took place.

The first meeting saw many residents attend to ask further questions and contribute to discussions surrounding the formation of their flood plan and a handful of residents volunteered to take on practical roles; such as the co-ordination of the group and the physical installation of the defences.

The final draft of their communal flood plan identified suitable trigger points for action as well as a site plan of the building and installation procedures for the flood barriers. An inventory list of equipment was also included together with details of roles and responsibilities, as well as a resident contact list and a register for evacuation.

