

CASE STUDY: CUMBRIA - AMBLESIDE, LAKE DISTRICT

OVERVIEW

Ambleside is a small town located on the eastern bank of the River Rothay upstream of Lake Windermere in the heart of the Lake District National Park. The town comprises of a mixture of commercial and residential properties and also attracts a high number of tourists which has led to a large number of hotels, guesthouses, restaurants and shops in the centre of the town.



A river runs through it (Ambleside)
cc-by-sa/2.0 - © Peter S - geograph.org.uk/p/2573440

The River Rothay runs to the west of Ambleside and there are two main tributaries which join the Rothay in Ambleside; Stock Ghyll and Fisher Beck. Ambleside is classified as being at very high risk of flash flooding (from all three separate rivers/tributaries) on the Rapid Response Catchment (RRC) register.

In the 2009 floods, 16 residential and commercial properties were flooded along with Rothay Park. Ambleside also experienced flooding in 1999, 2005 and 2008. Due to its location, Ambleside can easily be cut off from the rest of the county during both flooding and severe snow events. In 2010 approximately 600 properties were without gas and electricity for many days due to the harsh winter weather.

The town needed to be engaged to raise awareness of the risks they face and to try to get them to develop an emergency plan for the community to make them more resilient in the event of an emergency.

KEY OBJECTIVES / OUTCOMES

Raising awareness:

- Flash Flood flyers were sent to all properties at risk (Nov 2012).
- Flash flooding and emergency planning presentation to Lakes Neighbourhood Forum (Oct 2013).
- Presentation on emergency planning to Central Lakes Parish Council (Dec 2013).
- Door knocking local businesses at risk (Jan 2014). Distributed business flooding information packs and invited them to the emergency planning drop-in event.
- Various adverts and articles (including social media) advertising the emergency planning drop-in event.

Preparing the community:

- Emergency planning drop-in event (Feb 2014). Representatives from Environment Agency, Cumbria County Council, Police and Mountain Rescue attended. Approximately 15 people came forward as being interested in taking a community emergency plan forward. A follow-up meeting is being planned.
- Not just focusing on flooding. Utilising '10 step guide to community emergency planning' to look at all types of emergency.

Helping the community respond:

- Due to no definitive group being formed by project end, a local trigger has yet to be identified. To be explored once an emergency planning group is formed.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- The Environment Agency.
- Cumbria County Council's Area Support Team to organise meetings, assist with door knocking and awareness activities and develop contact lists.
- Cumbria County Council Lead Local Flood Authority kept informed.

CHALLENGES

Ambleside is reliant on its tourism industry. Engagement and awareness-raising had to be handled sensitively so as not to put people off visiting the area and not upset business owners. Business owners were approached directly to encourage them to plan for flooding/emergencies 'behind the scenes'.

Although one councillor was very keen to push emergency planning, initially there was a general apathy from the rest of the council and some residents. Perseverance was key to engagement in Ambleside.

BENEFITS

Momentum has been developed following the initial engagement which needs to be built upon to take forward the development of an emergency plan.

The process of engaging with a community that has previously had limited engagement on the risk they face has enabled the Environment Agency and partners to develop a 10 step toolkit to help anyone else wishing to undertake engagement activities within a community about key risks they may face. This can be shared and used by anyone throughout the country who wishes to undertake a similar process.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Work closely with Council Area Support teams as they are the link to elected members and the community. They know the key players and can arrange meetings.
- Don't give up. If certain avenues or groups of people don't work try something else. It took a while to get things moving in Ambleside; the Neighbourhood Forum and Council presentations hadn't yielded results so direct door knocking and targeted invites were employed to get people to come to the drop-in event.

SOURCE

Environment Agency - enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk