

Letter to Daily Telegraph 21-02-2020 10:01 Lynne

Not all flood prevention measures need to cost a fortune. Some that could have a dramatic effect in reducing flood risk (and the associated physical, economic and mental devastation) could cost little or even nothing at all. By creating legislation requiring water companies to have a duty to utilise their reservoirs for flood prevention (rather than simply just for the supply of water) some of the recent flood damage might just have been reduced, possibly even avoided.

Reservoirs already exist. They have the potential to offer the greatest protection to many communities by providing storm space and management of peak flows, working alongside Natural Flood Management measures. The opportunity is being ignored. Water companies should have a duty of care to those who live below their assets. The only way to ensure that the practical use of reservoirs for flood mitigation can be speedily deployed is for the Government to provide the Environment Agency (EA) with the necessary powers.

At present water supply reservoir owners are legislated to provide water. There is no framework to guarantee storm space in reservoirs for flood mitigation purposes. Water companies get penalised for disruptions to water supplies in times of drought but suffer no consequences if they fail to take appropriate actions that could have helped prevent communities flooding downstream.

In the case of Keswick, in the Lake District, our flood risk is very closely connected to the water level in Thirlmere reservoir. The town has been devastated by flooding from the River Greta three times in eleven years, but it never floods when Thirlmere is not overflowing. The current farcical situation was highlighted days before Storm Ciara when we were told by United Utilities, the reservoir owners, that they would not be prepared to make further water releases to create storage space for holding back floodwater without permission being given by the EA and Natural England. The response by EA was that it was not in a position to give that consent. This buck passing and resultant inaction cannot be allowed to continue.

Keswick has been incredibly fortunate this winter to have avoided the worst of the recent storms. If not, the town would have been flooded for a fourth time. There was some available storage space in Thirlmere before the arrival of Storm Ciara but it still over-topped and has continued to overflow ever since then. There is no safety margin if a major storm hits us. That is why Keswick residents are so nervous.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Lynne Jones MBE