

Open Letter to The Statutory and related consultative Authorities and United Utilities. 19-01-2021

Ladies and Gentlemen, members of several divergent authorities and businesses I write to you in all sincerity in these grave and unprecedented times, seeking immediate action with reference to flood risk management for Keswick and the upper Derwent Catchment. This is a one-off plea, to be treated without prejudice, to any decisions that may need to be taken at any time in the future save that, in this exceptional situation, you were able to come together and make the difference required.

Put quite simply, an enormous amount of work has been done to date by several contributory parties looking at the potential for, and the limitations of, providing a degree of storm water storage at Thirlmere Reservoir upstream of Keswick in Cumbria. As things stand at present all the requisite mechanical tools are on the table to achieve this, and a great deal of the intellectual studies are at, or near, completion BUT what is absent at this moment is the consensual framework, across the regulatory bodies, to allow this to happen.

So why the emergency and what is the urgency that brings Keswick to make this crucial call now?

- We have before us a perfect storm (forgive the pun) of imminent realities. John Curtin (Environment Agency Executive Director for Local Operations) circulated to us just this last week the Met Office projection for a substantially wetter than average beginning to 2021.
- Our catchment areas are saturated with a soil moisture deficit of zero to 10mm.
- As I write (20th December 2020), both Thirlmere reservoir and Haweswater Reservoirs are full and spilling; as of 13th December, United Utilities Stock average for Thirlmere and Haweswater is stated at 83.4% therefore the current combined stock is a far greater 100% and spilling.
- The Government has informed the nation of the increasing severity of the Covid19 virus pandemic and laid before the population as a whole the necessity to **Act Now**, to save lives and our NHS.

From our personal experiences of severe flooding (2005, 2009, 2015) we fully understand the implications of flooding to Keswick and the Upper Derwent Catchment. A flooding event to the town means:

- Dislocation of flooded households into temporary or shared accommodation in both the short and medium term; these would likely include the displacement of people already self-isolating with suspected or confirmed cases of Covid-19
- Influx of significant numbers of emergency external manpower to interact and contact the at-risk and flooded population.
- Disruption of the food supply chain and networks – something that is severely distorted in the current Covid19 situation.
- Large influx of external contractors requiring accommodation and feeding.
- Year-long (at best) devastation of the local economy.
- Potential for further infrastructure damage – roads, bridges, footpaths etc.

All of the above would fly completely in the face of all the Government's Covid19 preventative and preservative measures.

In order to provide a degree of protection THIS WINTER this letter is a request for Storm Storage Space in Thirlmere Reservoir. The current situation that needs addressing is set out below:-

1. At present United Utilities (UU) are engaged with the commissioning of new infrastructure scour valves at the Thirlmere Reservoir. The valves are currently operable but the full set of commissioning tests have not been completed. Going through normal protocol UU anticipate another three months to complete the commissioning and associated documentation.
2. The newly installed scour valves discharge into a settling channel before discharging into the main settling basin below the reservoir spillway - and hence into St Johns Beck. Because the Beck is a Special Area of Conservation (S.A.C.) the scour valve trials require consensual agreement from the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England (NE). This consent is not as yet complete or finalised although much work has already been commissioned by all parties – UU, EA and NE. The need for consent has been known for many years and the obstacles could have been overcome long ago, there is sufficient known understanding for consents, even if only on a temporary basis to be agreed.

3. A review of the operational management for Thirlmere is underway as part of the £300m West Cumbria Water Supply Scheme and is not due to be finalised until 2021/2022. As part of that review there is consideration of a flood risk management regime by virtue of having some storm storage space at the Thirlmere Reservoir. Again, much work has been commissioned on this subject and consideration is ongoing, it is an area that requires engagement by several stakeholders. It is fair to describe it as a complex issue and yet one that has been known about for many years whilst the communities downstream have remained at unnecessary risk of flooding.

Therefore, the current reality is that a lot of work has been achieved with many, if not most of the relevant studies completed but there are all the obstacles of consensual approvals outstanding.

In order to achieve a degree of storm storage at Thirlmere it would be necessary to be able to discharge greater volumes from the newly installed scour valves than the current "consented" limit of 140Ml/day to gain a modicum of storage space in the reservoir, say somewhere south of 1m of storage space. From previous experience Keswick does not flood when there is storage space at the reservoir. Further, Keswick is at extreme flood risk when the reservoir is significantly overflowing, spilling before the arrival of a storm or storm sequence.

It is a request for the community within Keswick therefore, that in this exceptional situation of Covid19 and a predicted seasonally wetter than average winter, ALL **PARTIES come together with an emergency summit** to enable, as a one-off without prejudice arrangement, a degree of storm storage space to be provided at Thirlmere THIS WINTER without any compromise to the supply duties of United Utilities (but bearing in mind the current more than adequate storage stocks).

It is an incumbent duty of all the statutory authorities and UU, in this exceptional circumstance, to scrap all previous entrenched positions and protocols and adopt a CAN-DO approach to avoid the potential calamitous situation of having a major Keswick flood in the midst of this Covid19 emergency. In the end what is required is a small additional release – up to 700Ml/day – into the upper reach of St Johns Beck where natural capital is at its poorest - and most artificial - next to the reservoir. Yes, there will need to be safeguards but these are achievable. There is sufficient shared evidence, known to all parties, that flows of this magnitude and greater are within safe operational limits for St Johns Vale; further the Valley farmers and householders are willing to engage in solutions.

If we can close down the whole nation to manage severe risk, we can achieve a degree of flood protection for Keswick.

Al Cook ...