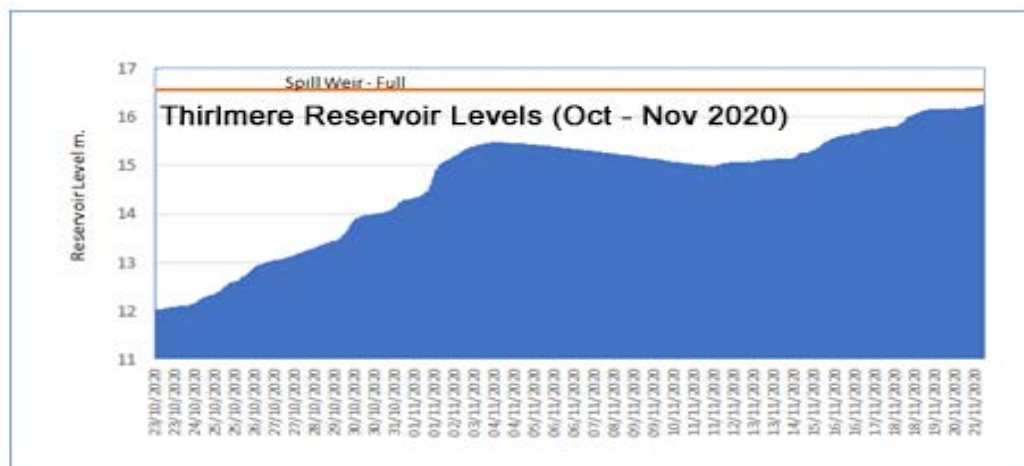


Thirlmere: Just to recap before Storm Desmond the spillway was already overflowing by 30cm. At this time of year in 2015 there was about 1.7m of space, which all disappeared by 30 Nov 2015. UU are supposed to be trying to give us 3m of storm space for November. I think we can safely say that they clearly are failing - as are all those whom we have looked to over the last 15 years to support the community and get a realistic management regime at the reservoir. With the Covid-19 crisis, we would have thought that, now, above all other times, everyone should be doing their utmost to avoid flood risk for our community.



Mists of Procrastination and Delay.

It was with a heavy heart that yesterday I had to inform our fragile and widowed neighbour that Thirlmere reservoir was more than likely to be full by next Wednesday evening, the news was not greeted lightly and we fear for his situation; he has been flooded from St Johns Beck in 2005, 2009 and devastatingly in 2015.

This note then is written with the benefit of hindsight of the devastation caused during storm events when Thirlmere reservoir is full and overflowing prior to the storm’s arrival and on the ineptitude of the reservoir operator United Utilities to do anything meaningful to avoid the situation.

This morning the mists of procrastination have started to roll back and I see slightly more clearly the actual intent and commitment (or lack of it) of United Utilities to meaningful flood mitigation for the population and communities downstream of the reservoir.

Following the floods in 2009 United Utilities were shamed, by the havoc wreaked from the overflowing reservoir, to offer a new operation regime for the reservoir based on measured releases when the reservoir was above a series of monthly levels – called trigger levels. The rashness of the decision, in terms of water stocks, was quickly railed back when trials of release volumes allowed the operator to fix the release rate at a modest 100MI/day (an initial estimate was up to 700MI/day). Modifications to allow any greater releases were deferred.

Come 2015 and Storm Desmond the same situation was played out again, despite the trigger releases being operated as previously revealed, and the reservoir was full and over spilling by 250mm prior to

the arrival of the storm. On further in-depth investigation by the local Keswick Flood Action Group, K FAG, the inadequacy of the release rate as a measure to offer flood risk management/mitigation was exposed and shared with United Utilities, the Environment Agency and others.

Time to roll in the next mist of delay and procrastination, the West Cumbria water supply scheme. With this new scheme, albeit on the back of preserving freshwater mussels in the river below Ennerdale, there would be opportunity to “re-valve” the reservoir release valves (scour valves), thereby offering potentially greater managed releases from the reservoir, which might be used to mitigate flooding from the reservoir. The scheme of course comes with the caveat of planning approval, construction programmes and then a requirement to re-appraise the operational regime of Thirlmere Reservoir for the supply to West Cumbria. All through this process, and post Storm Desmond, the prospect/carrot of future greater releases was held in front of K FAG as a potential to offer greater flood mitigation at the reservoir. Indeed, other parties were enrolled to advance the concept with Natural England and the Environment Agency looking at the habitat of St Johns Beck (the river below the reservoir) and the potential for greater reservoir releases to aid the Natural Capital condition of the river, spare no expense here.

Slowly but surely progress is made, the re-valving is a year late in completion – hey ho – and the EA St Johns Beck Study fails to materialise on time – hey ho – but, in the end, United Utilities have the valves ready and they notify the residents of St Johns Vale that trials will be conducted in “late October or early November” (2020); Subject of course to Environment Agency conditions reference NPSWIA003903 (n.b. not available under open Govt data?). Time for the wet westerly winds to blow away this mist of delay and procrastination, the reservoir has risen 4.2m in the last month and no action has been implemented by United Utilities, no final notice of intention to do trial releases (as promised would be the case) has happened, no engagement with K FAG as to current progress has taken place. As this mist clears, we start to question the true intention of United Utilities to frustrate and delay the process or progress. Are United Utilities not simply engaged in kicking the ball further and further down the road? Knowing, full well, that their real intention is to give little but lip service to the notion of flood risk mitigation at Thirlmere; **by their actions will you know them.**

Looking further ahead on this misty and wet morning, it is clear as Lake District fog, what further obstacles will roll into place to delay and reduce the prospective promises of flood mitigation at Thirlmere for the benefit of the catchment below the reservoir and the town of Keswick with 550 properties at risk of flooding. The West Cumbria Water Supply Scheme isn’t due to come on stream until 2022 and this will include the re-writing of the Thirlmere operational management for water supply and drought risk management, flood risk management should be part of this framework however, with nil engagement with K FAG, this is unlikely to be well represented. Doubtless United Utilities will say that the new operational regime will be subject to review over time and that they need new historical data to educate their new operations.

Below all this is the ineptitude of all the Risk Management Authorities to engage with the whole concept of flood risk mitigation at reservoir sites despite other studies, besides Thirlmere, being carried out. Have no illusion that there will be real inertia from all the Water Companies for any progress towards the aim of flood risk mitigation at reservoirs their shareholders and pension funds will not like it. Until the Risk Management Authorities fully engage with this concept and drive legislative change, we will continue to see series mists of deception, procrastination and delay. It will be the next, Climate Change induced, severe storm that costs actual lives before those charged with the safeguarding of our communities are brought kicking and screaming to the table and are called to account.

In the meantime, we have to prepare our fragile and venerable neighbour for the next winter storms knowing full well that there will be little or no assistance from our mighty rich neighbour United

Utilities and all their complicit allies. Sorry Alan we continue to do all we can but, even with headlights on, the glare of the mists of delay and procrastination continue to frustrate our progress.

21st November 2020, Alistair Cook of Keswick Flood Action Group