

2015 Storm Desmond | Impacts On Cumbria, UK ^[HIC]

Luke Pearson |
geographyportal.co.uk
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Topic: Case study at a local scale of a specified place in a hazardous setting to illustrate the physical nature of the hazard and analyse how the economic, social and political character of its community reflects the presence and impacts of the hazard and the community's response to the risk.

Background Information:

None of the hazards we've studied so far, such as tropical storms or volcanic events, appear in the UK. Here, the greatest threat is posed by seasonal storm events, and their consequences – notably **flooding, which costs the United Kingdom £1.1 B per year**. The 2015 winter storm season was particularly severe, with **extratropical cyclone 'Desmond' with small scale flood events and sustained winds of up to 81mph** wreaking havoc across much of Scotland and the North of England between the **3rd and 8th of December 2015**. Keswick, a town of 5,000 in the lake District, Cumbria, was particularly vulnerable, constructed on the **floodplain between the confluence of the Rivers Derwent and Greta**.

Short-Term Responses:

The **Cumbria Flood Recovery Fund 2015**, a local state/community partnership, **contributed £500,000** to clear-up costs, emergency repairs, clothing, food, and drink etc... to those displaced.

Ullswater Environmental Recovery Fund and Fix The Fells – allowed people to donate to support the immediate repairs to the natural environment. In addition, numerous **NGOs and charities** provided **evacuation and rehabilitation support**.

Locally, the Keswick flood action group, founded 2005, pledged to pressure local authorities to comprehensively mitigate flood risk, and successfully won over a **£2 M upgrade fund**.

Long-Term Responses:

Local authorities had to perform **service cuts** whilst spending more money on renewing hundreds of ailing flood defense systems in Cumbria.

A new **Cumbrian Floods Partnership Group** was commissioned to publish an action plan to *"consider what improvements to flood defenses in the region may be needed, look at upstream options for slowing key rivers to reduce the intensity of water flows at peak times and build stronger links between local residents, community groups and flood defense planning."*

Local Impacts:

A majority of Keswick was left underwater, with **515 properties flooded** and **transport connections** such as the West Coast Mainline **destroyed / damaged**.

As a result of the heavy rainfall, new river courses were created, including a waterfall emerging at Malham Cove for the first time in living memory.

Local community fragmentation as residents had to cope with changes to daily life for up to 6 months.

Wider-Scale Impacts:

One man drowned in the River Kent in Kendall.

Across Cumbria **over 1,000 people were evacuated, whilst 50,000 were left without power**.

The 2015 Winter Storms **cost the UK a total of £3 B**, with flooding accounting for around 1/3 of this.

Insured losses hit £900 M – 1.2 B

Footpaths and walls across the Lake District National Park were **washed away**, with **vegetation destroyed and ground severely eroded**.

Significant **disruption to local economy** – primarily tourism oriented.



'SEEP' Tracker:

● Social
 ● Economic
 ● Environmental
 ● Political



Understanding Community and Hazards

A question on Keswick will most likely involve an analysis of the role of community groups or associations in hazard response (as below.) Especially given that climate change has placed up to 2 Million people at risk of dangerous flooding events. Consider their prominent role here in responding to Desmond and how these structures can be replicated possibly in other countries as here.

As an example, for many years the government have been criticized for unjustly funding flood mitigation schemes in the South of England, so numerous community pressure groups (cpgs) pressured successfully for changes to be made. Since then, David Cameron pledged an extra £50 M to flood defences in Cumbria, with the goal of protecting thousands of properties.

This showcases the power of local groups, not only in the disaster response phase for example through helping fundraisers and aid work, but also as a force for good in promoting the goals of a community on a wider scale, as well as a way of developing community cohesion. Public-private and state partnerships are also possible to further this.

Extended Reading:

Cumbria Floods Partnership Group Flood Investigation (useful for future strategies, but very long)

<https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/eLibrary/Content/Internet/544/3887/6729/6730/4271394526.pdf>

<https://www.itv.com/news/update/2015-12-05/storm-desmond-floods-breach-defences-in-keswick/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/07/at-least-one-person-killed-in-floods-as-45000-homes-remain-without-power>

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/regionnorthwest/news/lake-district-floods>

<https://www.cwherald.com/a/archive/report-of-facts-figures-and-resident-s-impressions-of-december-s-disaster.457964.html>

Which Topics Can This Be Linked To?

****Synopticity** – A key skill which geographers can implement within longer answer questions. Defined as the ability to link between numerous geographical concepts and ideas within a question. For example, a synoptic 20 marker on Keswick, for example, could draw on knowledge from **W&CC** or **Changing Places** (provided you have studied these) to demonstrate wider geographical understanding.**

Have A Go At A Practice Exam Question:

[20 MARKER \(AO1 & 2\) QUESTION #5](#)

Using your local case study, evaluate the importance of a localised, community-oriented response in reflecting the outcomes of a named hazard.



Many questions will have exemplar answers and mark schemes available on the geographyportal.co.uk, feel free to look at them for more information.