

Cumbria - Cockermouth, Lake District

Overview

Cockermouth is located on the natural floodplains of the Rivers Derwent and Cocker in Cumbria. In November 2009 Cockermouth and its surrounding communities suffered extensive flooding. 31.4cm of rain fell in 24hours, the highest recorded amount in the UK. This fell on already heavily saturated ground and the rivers could not cope with the sheer volume of water flowing into them. One person died and over 900 properties were flooded.

The community got together to create a Flood Action Group and they worked in partnership with flood risk management authorities in the area such as the Environment Agency to aid the recovery of the community and to look at ways of reducing flood risk to the community in the future.

Key Objectives / Outcomes

Successful partnership working was a key objective in reducing flood risk in Cockermouth. A scheme was designed to protect 361 homes and 55 businesses against a flood that has a 1% chance of occurring in any given year.

The scheme cost £4.45 million and it would not have been possible without contributions from other sources and the community who needed to raise £2 million to successfully allow the project to go ahead. The community through the flood action group, helped raise £215,000 towards the scheme. The scheme consisted of building an innovative 1.65km flood defence consisting of embankments, flood gates, flood warning systems and a self closing flood barrier - the first of its kind in the UK.

Key Stakeholders

The Flood Action Group, local council and the Environment Agency worked together as the main project team to take forward the scheme to build the new defences in Cockermouth to reduce the flood risk in the area.

Challenges

Securing funding was challenging as the government had recently changed the way it funds flood defence schemes. External contributions needed to be sourced to allow the scheme to go ahead which required commitment and support from the local community.

Another challenge was designing the flood barrier as a key part of the historic identity of the market town is the river views. Therefore glass panels were installed to maintain these views.

Benefits

The Flood Action Group was at first seen as a pressure group but was soon recognised for the essential role it could play as part of the project team. The group raised funds, supported and represented the community and enabled a scheme to be completed in Cockermouth to reduce the flood risk in the community in June 2013.

The chair of the Flood Action Group Sue Cashmore was awarded a British Empire Medal for hard work, commitment and the instrumental role she played in getting the flood defences built in Cockermouth to protect her community. Cockermouth has now re established itself as a vibrant, historic and independent market town.

Lessons Learned

Working in partnership is key to gaining a positive outcome for the environment, social and economic growth of the area. Without partnership funding contributions the scheme would not have been able to progress. The Flood Action Group supported the Environment Agency in facilitating discussions and helped gain community and business support for the scheme.

Contacts

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