

FLOODING IN PEEBLES



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Storm Frank
2015 – Looking
east over
Tweed Green
from Tweed
Bridge

1.0 Introduction

The town of Peebles lies within the valley of the River Tweed and parts of the town are built upon the flood plain. This report is designed to assist elected representatives of the community, and local and central government agencies understand why the residents strongly support urgent and proactive measures to be taken that ameliorate the potential for flooding and consequential property damage or indeed loss of life.

2.0 Historic background

The River Tweed has been controlled in this vicinity by human development since before the arrival of the Romans. Fords, bridges and mill weirs along with natural changes in the riverbed have left a lasting legacy on the Tweed valley. Over time, the river has been straightened but it has also been constrained by the building of railway embankments and bridge abutments that once serviced the Caledonian railway to Symington in 1860.

Tweedside Mill, now the site of Peebles swimming pool was originally a corn mill and was converted into a woollen mill in 1856. It was demolished after a serious fire in 1965. The Peebles cauld is a low weir just below where the Eddleston Water joins the river Tweed. The cauld was built to improve the supply of water for the Tweedside Mill via a mill lade which ran down under the second arch of Tweed Bridge before re-entering the river.



Storm Frank 2015 – Looking west from Tweed Bridge

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3.0 Flooding

There has been a long history of major flooding in the Tweed Valley and in Peebles in particular. The Manor Water, Lyne Water, Eddleston Water and Cademuir Burn all coalesce with the River Tweed within or close to Peebles. One of the largest floods recorded was in October 1949 when levels of 4.115 meters above normal summer flows were recorded. The following list demonstrates that flooding events in Peebles are not a rare occurrence.

Month	Year	Comment
August	1948	River Tweed 5.1816m (17 feet) above normal. Significant flooding and property damage (record disputed)
January	1949	Highest river level ever recorded at Peebles 4.115m (record disputed)
August	1949	Again, reported as 17 feet above normal (record disputed)
October	1949	Another serious flood event
January	2005	Flooding at Tweed Green
October	2005	Flooding by Eddleston Water
November	2009	Storm Doris
December	2013	Tweed Green inundated property surrounded but not inundated. Gytes flooded
December	2015	Storm Frank (5/12 and 30/12) Event repetition of 55 to 70 years – 3.654m
January	2018	Gytes Leisure Centre and Tweed Green inundated but no property
October	2021	Badly affected Cuddyside (see photos)
December	2022	Serious flooding affecting Tweed Green (see photos)

The period between the 1948 floods and storm Frank is less than 70 years. The 1948 and 1949 floods were unprecedented and occurred before the issue of climate change was either known about or indeed strongly felt. Following Storm Frank Scottish Borders Council commissioned a flood appraisal by JBA Consulting, [AEM-JBAU-PB-00-RP-A-0020-Tweed Appraisal Report-S4-P02.pdf](#)

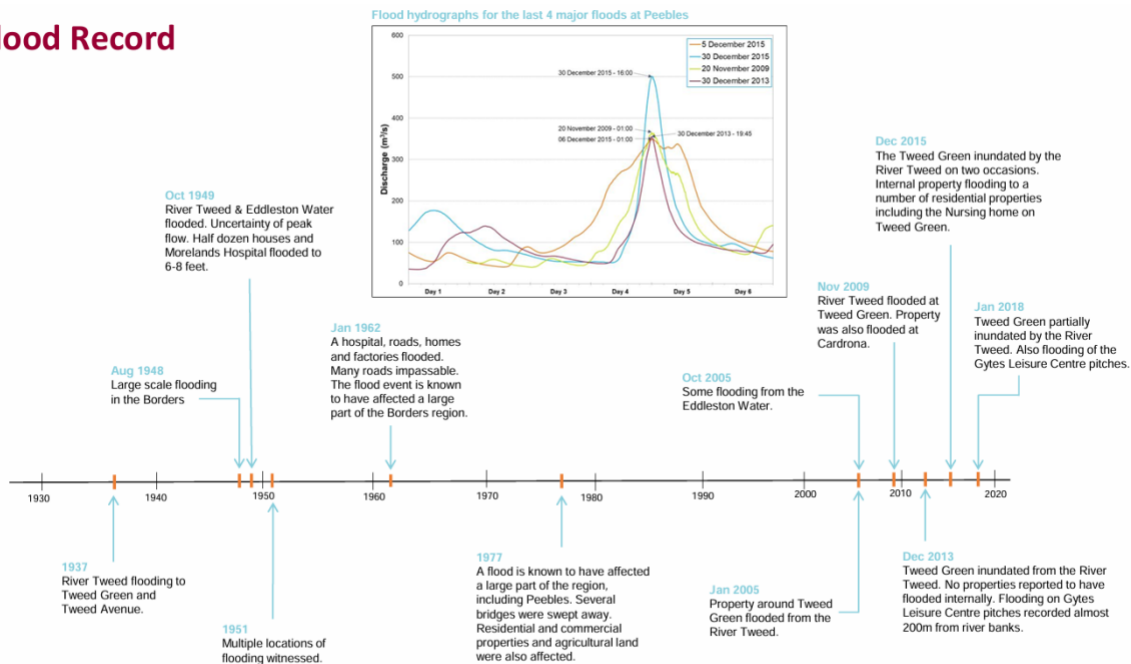


Understanding the damage caused by Storm Frank and considering future flood events that could see river levels of conceivably 2.5m or more above those already recorded, It is clear that in the future and because of climate change, we may see more catastrophic flood levels and repeated more often.

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Storm Frank 2015 - Tweed Green

Flood Record



Left Storm Frank 2015 – Note that the south bank is close to over-topping. **Right**, the inundated swimming pool

4.0 Lessons from the JBA consulting report

The report confirms the history of property flooding in Peebles and notes that floods such as the 1948 flood “**had a huge impact and would have a significant effect today with the increase in the number of properties built within the flood extents**”. A 200 year event exaggerated by climate change is forecast to effect all properties in the following areas to a greater or lesser extent, with many being inundated to substantially more than one metre: Dukehaugh, Caledonian Road (north side) from the east end as far as Edderston Road, South Parks West, South Parks Drive, Tweed Green, Greenside and the swimming pool, the Gytes, Walkershaugh and associated properties, and adjacent to the Eddleston Water. All in all, the worst-case scenario affects between 150 and 200 properties including important town infrastructure such as the Drill Hall, the Gytes

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leisure centre and the swimming pool. “Without mitigation measures, flood damage could exceed £22M” (£30M today with inflation).

Section 4.2 of the JBA report notes “Based on the fact that 0.2% AP floods (1 in 50 years) have been witnessed recently on the River Tweed..... It is not anticipated that a standard of protection less than this [1.33% AP (75 year)] is deemed to be appropriate”.

The report goes on to identify, explain and rationalise a number of flood mitigation options, virtually none of which has been acted upon at the time of writing. However, we should note that recent modelling by SEPA concludes that climate change will produce even more exaggerated river levels.

£280000 was allocated to SBC to create the Peebles Property Level Protection Scheme after storm Frank. This has now resulted in 37 homes affected by that storm receiving; flood doors or barriers, self-closing air bricks, sump pumps and non-return valves. Many flood studies have been completed as detailed within the Tweed Local Flood Risk Management Plan.

5.0 Lessons from the last 10 years

We all watch the news and compare our local weather with that being experienced in other parts of the country. Clearly the Scottish Borders has missed more than one bullet in the last 10 years.

Month	Year	Comment
December	2025	Storm Eva – Considerable flooding in Northumbria and Carlisle – circa 340mm in 24 hours
October	2023	Storm Babet – Serious flooding in Angus circa 150-200mm over three days
December	2015	Storm Desmond – Serious flooding in NW England – circa 340mm in 24 hours
		Note Storm Frank in 2015 was circa 350mm in 24 hours

Each of these events concentrates the mind. It could easily have been us.

6.0 Flood risk Management

The Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 changed the way in which flood risk is managed. The Act aims to prioritise national spending on flood mitigation on the basis of using technical analysis to assess flood risk across Scotland. Scottish Borders Council has identified Peebles as a Potential Vulnerable Area (02/13/03) for flooding.

Tweeddale Flood Advisory group (TFA) has engaged with Fire Scotland Swift Water Rescue Team, Police Scotland, SEPA, Scottish Water, Scottish Borders Council Flood Officer and Scottish Borders Council elected Councillors who have all given us their support in the endeavour to support affected householders. The many resilience groups within Tweeddale provide their services as volunteers. However, their ability to

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ameliorate flooding and provide support is restricted by their voluntary nature and a shortage of funding.

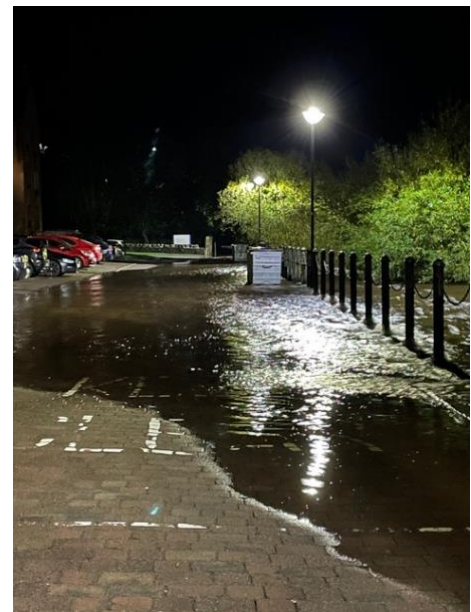
The TFA group was set up under the banner of the Tweeddale Area Partnership (now disbanded) to highlight flood risk, consider methods of flood management and to support the rescue services. The group has requested telemetric data be installed on the spillways of the four reservoirs in Upper Tweeddale (Talla, Fruid, West Water and Badingsgill). This data could be used as an early warning system for vulnerable communities further down the catchment. This request appears to be falling on deaf ears.

7.0 Growing Concern

It is only natural that residents and business owners within those areas prone to flooding are concerned, and whilst it is true that they have their own duty of care to defend their properties so far as practicable, there is only so much that they themselves can do. Further, it is not only these people who are negatively affected by a serious flood event, the town itself and the local authority also see adverse effects and increased costs. The local authority as a paid service provider to the community also has a much wider duty of care to the community and is the coordinating body. In this respect, Scottish Borders Council work with the community, the emergency services, SEPA and the Scottish Government.



Photo left & below – From the 2021 flood



We all have a clear understanding that climate change is increasing the prevalence of storm systems hitting the UK and that there is a tendency for these to be stronger, with higher winds and increased rainfall. In section 3.0, we have recorded 12 major events in nearly 80 years, 8 of these have been in the last 20 years and 3 in the last 8 years. We know that fortunately we have missed the worst effects of three major storms in the last 10 years. The photographs demonstrate the potential for damage to property in the lower lying areas. SEPA has calculated that future floods in the next 100 years could have a 59% higher flow those experienced to date. Floods of this magnitude would be catastrophic and create a serious potential for loss of life.

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The community has noted the JBA report which was produced several years ago but we have seen little tangible evidence that either local or central government are taking any effective action to reduce the risk in Peebles. We note meetings taking place with SBC, elected councillors and other agencies but where local resilience group have not been represented, e.g. flood defences being relocated to Peebles. We perceive that decision making proceeds at a snail pace, when we know that the weather will not wait for agencies to get their act together. Our resilience group makes the point that flood modelling is outstanding, but that with present day computer techniques this should take weeks, not months or years.



Photo left & above – From the 2022 flood

8.0 Conclusion

At the time of writing, some vulnerable communities further down the River Tweed such as Hawick (£140m), Selkirk (£31m) and Galashiels (£3.6m) have had their flood defences strengthened. However, Peebles has not. The JBA report commissioned on behalf of Scottish Borders Council identified the issues and made recommendations after Storm Frank, 10 years ago. Peebles is very vulnerable and urgent action is required, hopefully before the next serious weather event. Promises have been made regarding temporary flood barriers, but further flood flow assessments require to be conducted, these require to be done ASAP. The TFA Group, Peebles Resilience Group and Peebles Community Council calls upon our elected representatives to now take this issue up with SBC, Scottish Ministers and others. Communities are being proactive and doing everything possible with the resources provided. However, Peebles requests at least the same level of support already provided to communities further downstream.

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9.0 Postscript

Since the JBA report was produced a great deal of additional analysis and research has been done. This has resulted in upgraded forecasts and newly published guidance. Much of this being introduced in the last twelve months. This new guidance includes from SEPA “[Climate change allowances for flood risk assessment in land use planning](#)”. This is now version 6 dated 25 February 2025. Historically, SEPA recommended a universal 20% allowance in increased flow for climate change. However, in the light of the latest data and analysis, for the River Tweed this has now been increased to an uplift of 59% by 2100 (JBA report used 33%). The historical data shows that the January 1949 floods recorded a river height of 4.115m above normal with a flow of 721m³. This is considerably higher than Storm Frank in 2015 which was 3.654m above normal with a peak flow of 631.1m³. Even increasing the storm Frank flows potentially by 59% should give us all cause for concern.

Colin Kerr

Chairman of Walkerburn Community Council
Leader Tweeddale Flood Advisory Group

Paul Spence

Leader Peebles Flood Resilience Community Group
Member Tweeddale Flood Advisory Group

Peter Maudsley

Chairman of Peebles Community Council
Member Tweeddale Flood Advisory Group