

Community Green Spaces: Essential Green Infrastructure



INTRODUCTION

The wealth of open green space or green infrastructure in Cumbria is used and enjoyed by thousands of visitors and locals and recognised as a valuable national asset. Green infrastructure (GI) refers to the network of living green spaces that play a fundamental role in helping us address climate change, public health, biodiversity and community cohesion. However, despite this recognition and the protection provided to many designated green areas in the county, limited resources and external pressures mean that many of our local green spaces are under threat.



Our Green Space (OGS) a Cumbria-wide, partnership project, is working to address the issues that much of our local green infrastructure faces. It deals with those green spaces that are within or near to a town, village or hamlet and provide, or have the potential to provide accessible, attractive green areas for all who live near by. This includes registered town and village greens of which Cumbria has the highest number of any county in England (205), other designated accessible areas and informal green spaces such as roadside verges, playing fields, footpaths, community woodland etc. that may be public or private land.

These community green spaces are often overlooked, taken for granted or seem insignificant yet they help to shape the character and make a place what it is, as well as providing immeasurable benefits that would only be fully identified if the space were lost.

Our green infrastructure remains under constant threat. There is ever increasing pressure on land use to meet requirements such as local housing needs, car parking and business development. However, the benefits that our green infrastructure or local green spaces provide are far-reaching and long lasting. There is a countywide need to protect, better manage, conserve and enhance our local green infrastructure and to raise awareness about the multiple benefits it can provide for all.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

We believe that you are in a position to help shape the future of Cumbria's green spaces.

Share the message – use this pamphlet to make colleagues and partner organisations aware of all the benefits that our local green infrastructure can provide (available to download from www.ourgreenspace.org.uk or phone Friends of the Lake District (FLD) to request further hard copies: 01539 720788).

Understand the importance of Green Infrastructure – if you are a parish, town, district or county Councillor or officer, or work in a related field, then you should at least be aware of the legal and management issues around green spaces, – know the laws and designations that protect green space and ensure these are complied with.

See 'An Introduction to their Legal Status and Protection' an OGS guide that explains simply the laws that protect registered village greens and common land and gives suggestions of where to go for more information.

Copies of this legalities guide are available from the OGS website www.ourgreenspace.org.uk or phone Friends of the Lake District for a hard copy: (01539 720788)

Resist development that will erode valuable community green space and seek protection through designation, eg. Register the land as a Town or Village Green or protected in the Local Development Framework.

Support communities – support policies, work and training which helps communities to protect, enhance and celebrate their open green spaces. Ensure strong policies are included in your Parish Plans, Local Development Frameworks and emerging Neighbourhood Plans

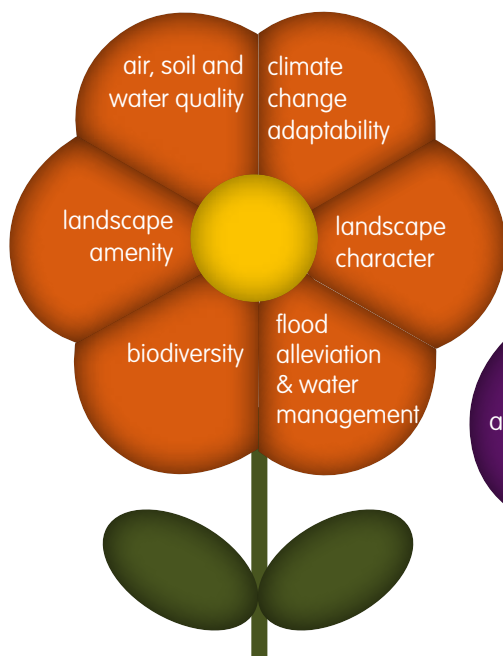
Lobby for action – if you are a parish councillor write to your District and County Council to make them aware of these issues and give GI high priority as a multi-functional resource. If you work at a District or County level take forward actions to address green space issues.

YOUR SUPPORT IS VITAL! PLEASE TAKE A LITTLE TIME TO READ FURTHER TO FULLY APPRECIATE WHY

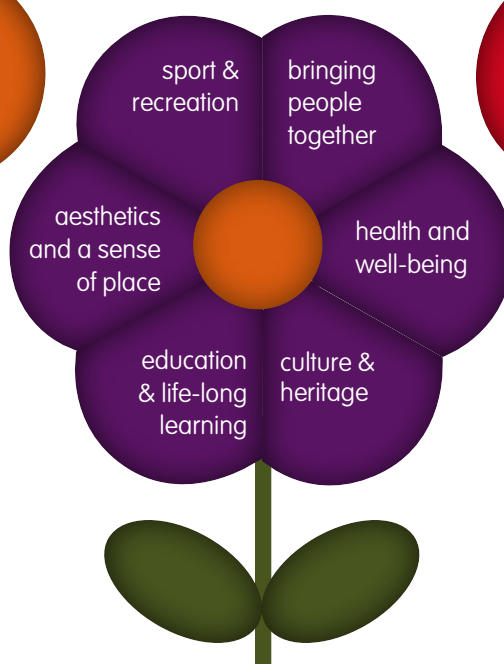
THE MULTIPLE BENEFITS OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

It is imperative that all stakeholders acknowledge the range of social and economic, as well as environmental functions and benefits that green infrastructure in communities can deliver. The Coalition Government is now giving recognition to the value of these spaces to communities and their well-being by proposing a new designation to protect local green space.

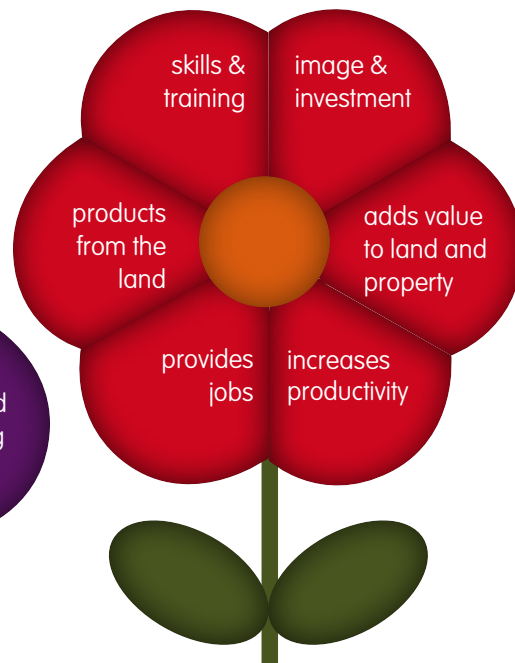
Environmental Benefits



Social & Community Benefits

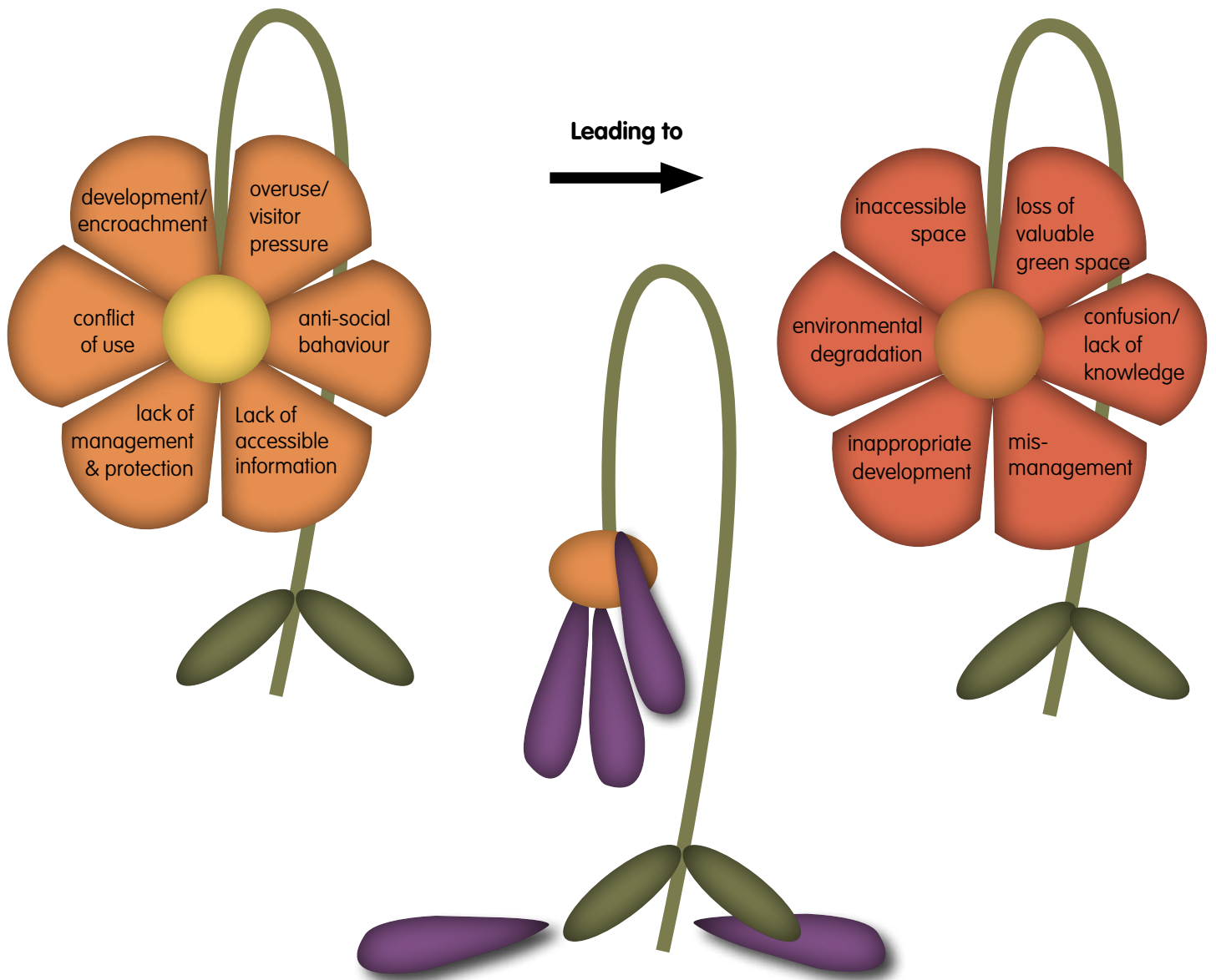


Economic Benefits



GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE UNDER THREAT!!

The Our Green Space project stemmed from research into village greens resulting in a 'Significance and Threats' report 2004. This explained the many and varied benefits that the open, green spaces of Cumbria provide and set out the case for them being one of the county's most important and precious assets. However, considerable evidence was also found to show how these unique spaces and their inherent landscape and cultural character are under significant threat. It detailed the problems that local communities were facing and the degradation and loss of historic green spaces across the county. Issues identified in the report include those set out in the diagram below.



The threats to community green spaces remain ever present. Our Green Space has further highlighted the need to support communities so they are able to take positive action to look after their green spaces and to preserve their local traditions, to capture their sense of place and to work together to ensure these important aspects are not lost.

OUR GREEN SPACE – EVIDENCE FOR ACTION

Communities care about their green space and want to protect it.

Communities often feel a sense of ownership of or responsibility to a piece of land however small or insignificant it may seem. The value placed on a green space may not always be apparent until that space comes under threat.



Community training – Threlkeld

Our Green Space has provided training sessions to 54 parish councils and other community groups and organisations on Green Space Protection and legalities. There is an obvious need for this often confusing and daunting area of information to be accessible for communities in the future. As suggested through the evaluation of these sessions it “should be a must to all parish and town councils and Local Authority councillors as training and awareness”.

www.ourgreenspace.org.uk has fact sheets, guide: “Introduction to their Legal Status and Protection” and links to further information covering this topic.

Community green spaces are unique and require specific management.

With confusion about ownership, responsibilities and not knowing where to go for help there is often a lack of confidence in many communities to actively manage their green space and a lack of readily available information to help them.

Our Green Space has provided the necessary information or training to enable some communities to take a pro-active approach in the management of their local green space. Individuals from 24 different communities participated in outdoor themed management training sessions that enabled them to go forward in developing a management plan for their own local spaces. OGS has also sent all parish councils in Cumbria a set of 3 Open Space Guides. Many more communities and the green spaces within them would benefit from continued advice and support.

Visit www.ourgreenspace.org.uk to download a management plan template or a copy of the 3 Open Green Space guides:

- An introduction to their legal status and protection
- A guide to common management issues
- An introduction to managing for wildlife.

Communities in Cumbria want and need support.

It is evident that communities are keen for support and have a variety of needs and differing requirements. There is however, no point of contact for advice or help on green space issues.

21 communities applied to take part in Our Green Space and 5 communities were chosen to receive direct support to enable their plans to become a reality. Many other communities across the county and beyond have benefited from training, information or advice given by the project.

OUR GREEN SPACE

The Our Green Space project has worked to resolve many of the three
achieved long lasting and significant change



Survey work and management plans



Historical research



Festivals and celebrations



Repair and restoration work



Sharing skills and experience

– ACHIEVEMENTS

...eats and issues that surround community green spaces and has
...es in many communities across Cumbria.



Create habitats for wildlife



Access and enhancement



Education and enjoyment



Involvement and new opportunities



Interpretation and creativity

Our Green Space has provided a temporary service to help communities or signpost them to other information. Who will communities contact when the project ends in 2011?

www.ourgreenspace.org.uk will remain available after 2011 for resources and links to other organisations.

Communities need representation.

There is very little, if any, contact between those making decisions on green space issues at a strategic level and communities trying to manage their local spaces on the ground. There is also little funding available to support better management, enhancement or protection of green spaces despite the recognition they are being given in many national and local policies and strategies.

Our Green Space has helped to bridge the gap between communities and policy makers by influencing and giving recognition to work taking place on the ground and providing evidence and results that meet with policy aims. At a strategic stakeholder workshop held by OGS in 2009 it was identified that 'Key partners like the National Trust, FLD and Action with Communities in Cumbria (ACT) will work with OGS officers to identify how best to influence strategy at district, county and regional levels'.

There is the need for communities to have a voice on green space issues to ensure that policies reflect the needs on the ground and to promote aims that are realistic, achievable and help to support those in our communities striving for positive action

Community empowerment enables positive action.

With appropriate support community volunteers can achieve truly inspirational results. It often only takes the commitment of 1 or 2 individuals within a community to encourage and motivate others to get involved to enable very ambitious plans to come to fruition.



Our Green Space has provided the necessary support to enable committed community champions and volunteers to take forward ambitious plans and motivate others to turn their ideas into reality. Graham Bromley from the Marsh Street Arches and Garden Project CIC in Barrow-in-Furness received the Cumbria Volunteer of the Year Award in 2008 and continues to play a key role within the Our Green Space Project.

Many more community volunteers would welcome the opportunity to receive similar support to that given through OGS.

Community engagement and partnership working leads to better results.

It is important to give the opportunity for everyone's views to be heard and for individuals and groups to work together to achieve the best possible results. Open communication and partnership working allows all relevant issues to be discussed, problems addressed, conflict avoided and the best solutions found.

Our Green Space has encouraged community engagement and promoted partnership working at all levels. Community individuals and different community groups have been brought together, some for the first time, to address issues, resolve conflicts, share experience and work together, bringing the community to life and providing a strong base for future community work.

In Wasdale this has included Wasdale in Bloom, The History Group, The Parish Meeting, Gosforth Primary School and individuals from Nether Wasdale and Wasdale Head working together with support from the National Trust and Lake District National Park to improve and enjoy their local environment.



Pupils making well dressing tablets

The Our Green Space project greatly benefited from the latent potential within its communities. However, the project also provided bespoke training for each of the five communities receiving direct support. This covered a wide range of topics including traditional land management skills such as dry stone walling and grassland management, bat monitoring, historical research, felt making, fundraising, strategic planning and support with development work. Many more communities would benefit from access to further training and skills development to help them care for and make best use of their local environment.

Community work is for everyone.

Caring for community green space can bring together different members or sections of a community whatever age, gender or ability. It is essential that young people are encouraged to understand the benefits and care for their local environment, so that in turn they will want to manage and protect it in future.



Community volunteers, Burgh-by-Sands

Communities benefit from sharing skills or additional training.

There will be a variety of professional or vocational skills within any community that may be applied to address green space issues. Bringing people together to tackle green space issues allows these skills to be recognized and utilised, experience shared and any need for training to meet specific project requirements to be identified.



Asby well dressing festival



Pupils creating a mural

Our Green Space has encouraged community groups to work closely with local schools, colleges, youth groups and informally through family events to encourage young people to be directly involved in the work on their local green spaces. In Asby the pupils of the primary school have been involved with planting of wildflowers and producing decorative wooden tiles as part of the well dressing festival. In Barrow students have been involved in design competitions, helping to produce the winning designs and seeing them incorporated into their community garden. In Burgh by Sands and the other OGS communities, pupils have been involved in oral research, talking to older residents to find out more about their community in the past and in both Newbiggin and Wasdale pupils have been enjoying learning to maypole dance and take part in the May Festivals held on their village greens.

Visit www.ourgreenspace.org.uk to download an Education Resource pack produced by OGS. This provides many activities for schools to undertake using their local green spaces based on themes such as: Green space mapping; landscape; wildlife, environment and habitats; geology; understanding the past, health and well-being; local sustainability and climate change and culture and celebration.

Community work can be a catalyst for further action.

The results of a project can inspire others to take action or give increased confidence to those involved so that one activity leads to another. For example, management of a green space may promote better enjoyment and use of the space that may lead to increased activities such as events, celebrations, educational activities, research, etc. This in turn may lead to new developments such as further planting, habitat creation, seating, pathways, etc or new projects within that community.



May festival at Newbiggin

The five communities involved in Our Green Space have all developed plans for more work in their communities. These include development of a new growing scheme at Barrow, a community orchard at Burgh by Sands, managing their greens for wildlife at Asby, tackling issues relating to visitor facilities such as toilets and parking at Wasdale, and an annual May festival on their restored village green at Newbiggin.

Communities are best placed to manage local green space. No-one is better placed to address the issues relating to a community green space than those who use, value and benefit from that space. Strong local communities can be the most effective and powerful guardians of the land.

Our Green Space has shown how effective community empowerment can be. The project was a stimulus to action in many communities, especially the five receiving direct support. OGS provided a powerful focus, invaluable support and, of course, some funding that unlocked the potential of the communities involved. The community participants were clear that most of the projects would not have happened at all without OGS, and those that would might have been very much scaled down.

The community participants overwhelmingly stated that OGS has been a positive experience that they would do again given the choice, and that they would encourage other communities to undertake similar projects. It has resulted in improved community cohesion, pride and sense of place. It has also led to new inter-community relationships, and new partnerships with statutory and third sector organisations.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AS A PRIORITY.

Our Green Space has shown that strong local communities can be very effective and powerful guardians of the land. The project has demonstrated the Coalition Government idea of 'Big Society',

empowering local communities to control their own destiny. There has not been space in this pamphlet to list all the achievements made by the communities involved in Our Green Space but we hope you have been given an insight into the type of work that is possible if communities are given the support they need.

There is currently no existing organisation that supports communities in developing the potential of their green spaces or providing much needed information and advice. We hope that you will join with us as we strive to ensure that communities receive the support they require to enable them to undertake the important role of caretakers of our green space into the future.



Before: Burgh-by-Sands



After: newly created wildlife area

Community Green Spaces: Essential Green Infrastructure



Our Green Space is funded by the Heritage Lottery and Friends of the Lake District.

The project aims to celebrate and enhance the heritage, cultural, environmental and community value of open green spaces in Cumbria for all to enjoy. The project is run in partnership by Friends of the Lake District and Action with Communities in Cumbria with support from many organisations including the Cumbria Association of Local Councils, The National Trust, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, The Lake District National Park and Cumbria County Council.

Our Green Space is working to provide training, support and guidance to communities so that local people around the county are empowered to better manage and protect the green spaces that they value. It is hoped that the information in this pamphlet will help highlight the need for provision to be made to enable work in this area to continue so that the benefits of our green space may be fully realised in the future.

To find out more about the project visit www.ourgreenspace.org.uk or contact: 01539 720788

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