

Wasdale Project Summary

OWNERSHIP

The National Trust owns approximately a third of the registered village green at Wasdale Head and the remaining area is owned by Wasdale Parish Meeting and held in Trust by Copeland Borough Council on the Parish Meeting's behalf.

The registered village green at Nether Wasdale and much of the common land in and around the village is owned by The National Trust.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

An Our Green Space Steering Group was set up involving representatives from all the different organisations in the valley together with the National Park Ranger, National Trust Warden and Our Green Space Project Officer.

An Our Green Space Bank Account was set up exclusively for the project with the Chair and Secretary of the Steering Group acting as signatories.

A total of 605 days were worked voluntarily during the course of Our Green Space.

AIMS

To restore the character and amenity of local green spaces in Wasdale including work to enhance them, simple measures to protect them from future damage and activities, interpretation and events to learn about and celebrate their cultural, historical and environment value.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Community empowerment** - an opportunity for people to get to know each other, enjoy working together, achieve greater ambitions and feel strong and proud to be part of an active community making things happen to benefit everyone.



Wasdale



- **Improving the local environment** - involving considerable hard work from many volunteers to clear scrub, remove rhododendrons and plant bulbs. Survey work has been undertaken and a management plan developed for the grassland areas.
- **Achievements built open** - equipment purchased and the historic maypole restored and re-located to its original position on the Nether Wasdale village green.
- **Involving Local Children** - through celebratory activities, artwork including an impressive ceramic mural, history walks, research, interviews and activities including the production of a film.
- **New artwork and interpretation** - including a Parish map, stone interpretation panel and pew runners for the church. Historical Research: that led to talks, walks and the development of an exhibition and six information panels as well as the production of a historical booklet.
- **Improved partnership working** - engaging many community members and the NT and LDNPA.
- **Addressing the problem of car parking** - a new discreet car park has been approved, other options have been explored and work progressed to establish realistic solutions.

TRAINING

- Dry stone walling.
- Developing a Management Plan.
- Felt making.
- Website editing.
- Walk leadership.
- Maypole dancing.
- Ceramics work.
- Producing batiks.
- Film making.
- Wildlife workshops.

KEY LESSONS AND FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Work with existing groups: Meet aims already locally identified ensuring a strong commitment to project activities and allowing work to continue in the future.

Provide opportunities for everyone: Different opportunities such as work parties or workshops can be a good way of engaging many members of a community, providing a social occasion that reinforces a sense of ownership and pride in the local community and environment.

Avoid assumptions: Be wary of making assumptions about what a community would like to happen or that people will be grateful for work aimed to benefit a locality unless they have been involved and listened to.

Share out the work: Involving new people or groups such as the local school can provide an opportunity for a project to have a much wider impact with greater success whilst sharing the load makes these achievements less onerous for everyone to deliver.

Consult the whole community: It is essential that all of the community is consulted during the development of a project and that every opportunity is provided to encourage people to become involved or have their say right from the planning stage.

Be ambitious: Even a very small community can achieve ambitious aims and once a project is underway interest and momentum may grow. Support from external organisations can help things to run smoothly and provide confidence within the community when tackling difficult issues.

Keep within agreed boundaries: To avoid 'breach of contract' keep within the agreed scheme of work or seek approval from the funding organisation to undertake additional or alternative activities.

Catalyst for further work: A project may identify problems or focus attention on issues that need addressing in the future or as part of the bigger picture.



Wasdale

When you hear Wasdale mentioned, what first comes to your mind? Wastwater, perhaps - England's deepest lake? Or maybe the classic view of Wasdale Head - the symbol of the National Park - with Yewbarrow on the left, Great Gable in the middle and Lingmell plus the Scafells on the right? Just a few years ago this was voted "Britain's Favourite View" in an ITV poll.

But there is another Wasdale - the Wasdale of the valley floor, where a small community lives in scattered farms, inns and cottages and in the hamlet of Nether Wasdale. This community cherishes the surrounding fells of course, but it also has concerns about its more immediate surroundings - the stone walls, commons and village greens which most visitors simply take for granted (just as they do the sheep). But, like the herdicks, the green spaces don't look after themselves all the time. They need managing, and that takes time and money".

Community member

Our Green Space focused activities on two very distinct but separate areas within the valley of Wasdale: Nether Wasdale, where several local green areas including a registered village green provide character and an attractive landscape for the small, rural village and Wasdale Head registered village green, a popular site for visitors at the heart of a spectacular amphitheatre of rugged fells.



EVIDENCE OF NEED

The green spaces in both areas had suffered damage over many years and repair work was badly needed.

The area is heavily used by visitors and in peak times many of the verges and greens have become lost under a sea of cars.

There were several groups and individuals working separately within the valley. A focused project would bring the community together to work to improve and enjoy their local environment.

There was a need for better management of the local green spaces including drainage, boundary repairs and restoration work.

The community was keen to undertake research, educational activities, interpretation of the areas and community events to enjoy and celebrate the place where they live.



Aims & objectives

“Our community scheme aims to restore, celebrate, enhance and sustain the heritage, cultural, environmental and community value of Nether Wasdale and Wasdale Head open green spaces for all to enjoy”.

Restore: physical and social restoration

- Repair the damage and restore the spaces as green, vibrant areas that are robust and resilient enough to cope with future demands.
- Restore social ownership of these spaces to the local community as well as improving their visual and recreational value.

Enhance: physical and social enhancement

- Physically enhance the spaces by better management, planting, and provision of resources to encourage local people and visitors to interact with and appreciate them and their surroundings.
- Nurture respect for the sites by improving their visual appearance so that they look cared for and valued and so encourage visitors to take care and lessen their negative impact on them.
- Improve social, emotional, intellectual and physical access to the sites through enhancement work and activities that develop a sense of place and stronger community.

Celebrate

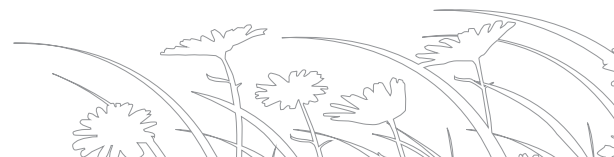
- Celebrate and set a precedent for celebrating the uniqueness of these greens, positioned as they are in an iconic landscape of powerful and evocative wildness.
- Through interpretation, creative work, exhibitions and displays as well as festivals and learning celebrate the historical, cultural, landscape and community value of the spaces.
- Involve local people of all ages in the celebration as well as visitors from further afield.

Sustain

- Set in place management practices, systems and resources for the ongoing protection, enhancement and celebration of the spaces' cultural, heritage, environmental and community values.

How did the project get started?

“When the Wasdale Parish Meeting heard that the Friends of the Lake District were offering to put in a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project called “Our Green Space”, we jumped at the chance to put a few things right. It wasn't just a question of drainage



schemes, repairing walls and managing the vexed question of parked cars, though these have certainly figured in our plans, particularly for Wasdale Head. We also wanted to involve as many people as possible in celebrating our community's heritage”.

Community member

Wasdale is a Civil Parish in the Copeland District of West Cumbria, the boundaries being essentially those of the valley of Wasdale in the extreme west of the Lake District National Park. The village of Nether Wasdale and the more scattered community of Wasdale Head together contain fewer than 100 voters, so the parish has no council, but instead practices 'direct democracy' through a Parish Meeting held twice a year. The Parish Meeting is well attended and felt to be an important part of the community and a way for local people to take an active part in local affairs.

It was through this meeting that Our Green Space was pursued as it was agreed that the project would complement the Parish Plan written in 2005 and provide a fantastic focus as well as necessary funds.

How did they do it?

Wasdale Parish Meeting convenes only twice a year as a rule, and so it entrusted the management of the OGS project to a steering group on which all the various organisations within the valley had a voice. For a small community, it's surprising how many different organisations exist in Wasdale”.

Community member

The Our Green Space Steering Group managed the wide range of capital and activity work that was undertaken in Wasdale as part of Our Green Space. The committee members used their own expertise as well as gaining help and advice from partner organisations or from external consultants for specific advice or training. All individual representatives on the committee remained involved throughout the four year project and gave considerable time and effort to carry work forward, often getting directly involved in a range of tasks from digging holes to developing management plans.





Finance & administration

The Steering Group had a joint Secretary/Treasurer who was responsible for writing minutes, paying all bills and liaising with Friends of the Lake District (FLD) to claim funding and report progress on a quarterly basis.

An Our Green Space Bank Account was set up exclusively for the project with the Chair and Secretary of the Steering Group acting as signatories. All invoices or expenses could only be paid once a cheque was received from FLD and paid into the account, as the group had no funds of its own. The Treasurer kept a clear record of all project expenses claimed and cheques received, which was a useful tool for tracking all payments and keeping everyone informed.

Partnership working - Who was involved?

The Steering Group was formed from representatives of the following different organisations, and all members took responsibility for specific elements of the project.

The Parish Meeting provided an opportunity for a wider network of people within the community to be kept updated on the progress of the scheme. The Parish Clerk acted as both the Secretary and Treasurer of the Steering Group and remained a key figure throughout the whole project keeping everyone informed.

The May Festival Committee organise an annual event that provides an opportunity for the whole community, both young and old, to come together to enjoy and celebrate the place where they live.

The Nether Wasdale in Bloom Group, formed in October 2006, comprises a small committee and the voluntary participation of the wider community. The group aim to encourage the community to take pride in their local area through involvement in the enhancement of the natural surroundings of the village.

The Wasdale History Group stemmed from the Parish Plan in 2005 that suggested a local history group should be formed. It originally met just twice a year and was open to anyone interested.

The Wasdale Head community is made up of a small number of residents who live on the farms or run the local bed and breakfasts, shop or Inn. This scattered community was represented on the Our Green Space Steering Group by the Warden of St. Olaf's Church at Wasdale Head. The Church



Warden has considerable local knowledge and a keen interest in the history of the area having previously written a small book "The Vikings, Wasdale Head and their church".

Gosforth Primary School: With less than 100 people living in Wasdale and very few children a local school is no longer open in the valley. However, Gosforth Primary School, just 4 miles from Nether Wasdale, with approximately 100 pupils from the surrounding area, became very involved in the activities of Our Green Space from 2009. A member of the community acted as a liaison person with the school offering support when needed and reporting to the OGS Steering Group.

The Lake District National Park Authority is an independent local authority and part of local government in the Lake District. It has the vision of "a place where its prosperous economy, world class visitor experiences and vibrant communities come together to sustain the spectacular landscape, its wildlife and cultural heritage".

In Wasdale the local National Park Ranger took an active role on the Steering Group.

The National Trust is a registered charity, founded in 1895 to ensure "the permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation of places of historic interest or natural beauty". The National Trust is the landowner of the registered green in Nether Wasdale and also owns many of the areas of common land in or near to village. The Trust also owns approximately a third of the Wasdale Head registered village green and many of the surrounding farms. The remaining area of Wasdale Head village green is owned by the Wasdale Parish Meeting and held in Trust by Copeland Borough Council on the Parish Meeting's behalf.

Friends of the Lake District (FLD) managed the Our Green Space project in partnership with Action with Communities in Cumbria (ACT) with support from the Heritage Lottery 'Your Heritage' grant scheme.

The Friends of the Lake District appointed a part-time project officer who gave advice to the steering group and channelled Heritage Lottery funds to it as and when required to pay the bills. It goes without saying that the Parish is most grateful to the Friends and to the Heritage Lottery Fund for giving us such a great opportunity to make Wasdale an even better place to live, work or spend a holiday".

Community member



Key achievements

Community empowerment

Our Green Space has brought together several individuals from groups within the community to work together with partner organisations to improve and enjoy their local environment. This included organising work parties, overseeing drainage work, administration and accounting, developing interpretation, construction and engineering, local knowledge and walk leadership, teaching, dance instruction and creative skills. The individuals involved have shown a great deal of enthusiasm, commitment and resilience throughout the project and it was said that Our Green Space “had really brought the community together”.

The focus of Our Green Space has provided an opportunity for people to get to know each other, enjoy working together, achieve greater ambitions and feel strong and proud to be part of an active community making things happen to benefit everyone.

WORK WITH EXISTING LOCAL GROUPS

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Partnership working with existing groups to meet aims already locally identified ensures a strong commitment to project activities and may make it easier to overcome difficulties, get more people involved and help to ensure that work continues in the future.

Improving the local environment:

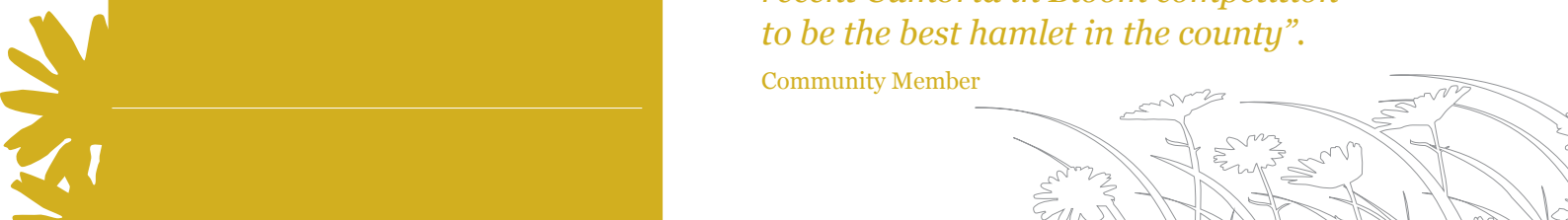
Nether Wasdale village green drainage work was undertaken, turf laid on the eroded edges and planting troughs constructed and situated together with part buried boulders to try to prevent vehicle damage in the future.

Other green spaces in or near to Nether Wasdale village including Berry Howe and the large roadside verges have been improved. This has involved considerable hard work from many volunteers in helping to clear scrub, remove rhododendrons and plant bulbs. Survey work has been undertaken and a management plan developed for the grassland areas.

15 bird boxes have been installed around Nether Wasdale including two for tawny owls and one for barn owls. Community volunteers have also undertaken training in dry stone walling and helped to repair some of the local boundaries.

“Nether Wasdale in Bloom organises frequent working parties of local residents (often assisted by National Trust and National Park volunteers) to manage and improve the appearance of the village, and the “Our Green Space” project has enabled them to be much more ambitious over the last few years. This is no doubt one of the reasons why Nether Wasdale was judged in the recent Cumbria in Bloom competition to be the best hamlet in the county”.

Community Member



PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERYONE

Community involvement can happen in many different ways. Often people are happy to help with specific tasks or events but do not have the time to commit to being involved in managing a project. Work parties to enhance or improve local green spaces are a good way of engaging different members of a community, providing a social occasion that reinforces a sense of ownership and pride in the local environment.

One of the principle objectives of Nether Wasdale in Bloom is to encourage local children and young people to become involved in the 'in bloom' process, ensuring that the work carried out by the group is sustained in years to come. Another aim of the group was to work towards a Royal Horticultural Society Standard Gold Award. This was achieved in 2010 through the work completed as part of Our Green Space.

The telephone and postbox were relocated from the outskirts of Nether Wasdale to the centre of the village next to a new parish notice board displaying an artistic map of the area. New seating has also been installed for local people and visitors to enjoy and appreciate the natural and cultural heritage of the village.

Cultural Celebrations for years to come:

“The May Festival Committee has benefited from the project and without the generous funding from HLF would never have been able to make our historic cast-iron maypole safe. As it is, we were able to take it to the Midlands for professional restoration before re-siting it in the middle of the Nether Wasdale Village Green, with its original plaque noting its construction in 1897 to mark the 60th year of the reign of Queen Victoria. (It’s a Grade 2 Listed Building, by the way, and the authorities were a bit bemused when we asked permission for this work. It seems they are not used to Listed Buildings being moved about.)

Community member

A focal point for the scheme has been the May Festival that is held annually at Nether Wasdale where maypole dancing has been enjoyed on the village green for centuries. The annual celebration begins with a procession through the village led by the band. There is a fancy dress competition, maypole dancing on the green accompanied by the band and Morris dancers. Local groups and craftspeople also hold stalls while refreshments are served in the Old School Community Hall. Later in the afternoon games and races are held for children and their families.

Cultural celebration for years to come

Our Green Space has allowed the May Festival committee to build upon its achievements, purchase equipment and of course restore the centre-piece, the maypole, to its original position on the Nether Wasdale village green. The community treasures its historic maypole that is one of only two listed maypoles in the country.

“Each October Wasdale Head hosts a major Show and Shepherds’ Meet, which attracts a huge number of visitors. The Show Committee is another organisation which has benefited from Our Green Space. This will help it carry forward a long tradition of introducing visitors to the work of fell-farming, and of enabling the fell farmers themselves to have a good crack once a year (whoever goes off with the prize for the best herdwick)”.

Community member

The Wasdale Head Show committee purchased new equipment that will be used at the annual event, a family occasion with sheep on show, shepherd’s crooks, Cumberland wrestling, fell running, hound trailing etc. This event, originally a shepherds meeting where farmers would come together to return sheep that had strayed on the fell to their owner, or to exchange tups, has continued as an important social gathering as the community has changed gradually throughout the years.

The Old School next to the Wasdale Head village green has been surveyed in the hope that it may be better utilised in the future.



Involving local children

Children at the local primary school in Gosforth have been involved in producing art work centred on the history of the valley including an impressive mural displayed in the Old School Community Hall in Nether Wasdale”.

Community member

The creation of a mural has included every pupil taking part in work with a ceramics artist to produce a stunning mural depicting Wasdale including its landscapes, buildings and people. The mural will be a visual legacy to the Our Green Space project being permanently displayed in the Nether Wasdale Community Hall for locals and visitors to admire. The children have also produced batiks of the nature in the valley now displayed in the school, together with a large painted mural in the school hall.

Other activities have included photojournalism, whereby pupils interview, video and photograph Wasdale residents for a documentary report stored on DVD. The pupils have used this material to produce an 'Our Green Space' video of which clips can be viewed on the website at www.ourgreenspace.org.uk

The local school children have also had days out to Nether Wasdale to take part in history walks around the village and treasure hunt activities. Cumbria Wildlife Trust led workshops with the pupils collecting natural materials for sculptures back at school, studying trees and insects, and building shelters.

Preparations for the May Festival each year have included working with pupils to research the history of the festival, looking at old photos and documents, producing collages and 3-D models of maypoles and practicing dance routines with a portable maypole. The May Festival committee is keen to continue to work with the school again in the future. Maypole dancing on the village green has been part of the culture of the community for hundreds of years and thanks to Our Green Space can now continue to be enjoyed by generations to come.





New artwork & interpretation

Community members have been able to take part in felt making workshops to produce new pew runners for the church using inspiration from the local green spaces.

After several years of planning involving considerable community consultation, a stone interpretation panel is ready to be installed at Wasdale Head village green. It is hoped that the new panel will encourage local people and visitors alike to stop, look up and out, and appreciate the larger picture of the landscape location.

NEVER MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

Projects like Our Green Space should be wary of making assumptions about what a community would like to happen or that people will be grateful for work aimed to benefit a locality unless they have been involved and listened to.

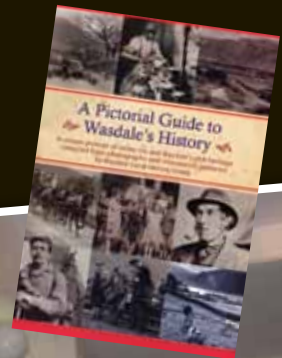
SHARE THE WORK OUT

Additional community engagement can be achieved by directly meeting with individuals and delegating roles or specific tasks. Involving new people or groups such as the local school can provide an opportunity for a project to have a much wider impact with greater success whilst sharing the load makes these achievements less onerous for everyone to deliver.

Historical research

The Local History Society has been able to realise a long-held ambition to commission a permanent display about the everyday life of Wasdale families over the years - a display now open for public view in the Parish Churches and have also produced a booklet based on this work”.

Community member



Our Green Space funded equipment for recording interviews and a computer and printer to help transcribe material as well as a projector and screen to use for presentations. The historical research that was undertaken led to talks, walks and the development of an exhibition and six information panels that are on display in the village church.

A booklet has also been produced giving a pictorial history of the valley and events have been held in the Old School Community Hall attracting people from Gosforth, Whitehaven, Egremont and as far afield as London. Anyone who has had contacts with the valley has been keen to come and hear more about the history of the area.

A number of historical or educational walks have taken place either as part of the community workshops or history group activities or for school children or the general public. One member said it *"has been an enormous help to the history group and now so many people are coming to the meetings with*

great enthusiasm and interest". The group is now looking to fund themselves by charging for membership and providing more regular events that will in turn generate greater interest.

Copies of the Wasdale History Booklet are available from Friends of the Lake District.

ONE THING MAY LEAD TO ANOTHER

Even a very small community can achieve ambitious aims. Once a project is underway interest and momentum may grow. What may have initially started out as a few people coming together with a common interest may lead to the involvement of many others with new ideas and ambitions.



Improved partnership working

National Park and National Trust staff have been active members of the Steering Group throughout the project. They have been involved in surveys of all sites, approved necessary works and undertaken specific tasks including leading walks, supporting the planning process and helping to organise community meetings.

The National Trust, the major landowner in the area, has contributed time and money towards the project and the local Warden, a committed participant of the Steering Group, undertook activities both in work time and his own. This included leading walks, supervising contract and volunteer work, helping with school groups and preparing and participating in May Festival activities.

Having played an integrated role throughout the whole Our Green Space project, relationships have developed and partnership working for the future put in place.

The Steering Group has worked hard to engage other community members, particularly residents from Wasdale Head where some opposition to project proposals was felt. Initially meetings were held at Wasdale Head to try to encourage local people to attend. As the project progressed special meetings were arranged and community consultation undertaken to ensure that all views could be heard. The minutes of all meetings have been widely circulated and updates given through the Parish Meeting so that all the community were kept informed.

GET PEOPLE INVOLVED RIGHT FROM THE START

Often, a small population may feel a great sense of ownership of the land and individual feelings or opinions can be very strong. It is essential that all of the community is consulted during the development of a project and that every opportunity is provided to encourage people to become involved or have their say right from the planning stage.

Once the project has begun it is much harder to get people directly involved or to take ownership for activities. Considerable conflict or negativity may have to be overcome if the whole community is not aware of and signed up to the aims and objectives of a scheme.



Addressing the problem of car parking

The village green at Wasdale Head and the village green at Nether Wasdale were both suffering damage from too many vehicles driving or parking on them. Both village greens are registered under the Commons Act 2006 and therefore protected by laws that make it a criminal offence to damage them or interrupt people's use or enjoyment of them. For more information on Town and Village Green Law please see the "Open Green Spaces Guide: An Introduction to their Legal Status and Protection" referenced on page 102.

In Nether Wasdale, to prevent cars causing further damage on the green in the future, planning permission was applied for and granted to develop a small parking area on the edge of Nether Wasdale amongst the trees at Mill Howe Common, owned by the National Trust. Secretary of State permission was also secured for this small development. The Trust supported the application as it would provide a discreet and appropriate place for visitors to park and therefore help protect the newly repaired village green and other roadside verges. Small signs are to be installed to direct visitors to the parking and additional repair work and boulders put in place to protect other green areas.

At Wasdale Head several meetings were held with partner organisations and local residents to try to establish the best way to undertake repair and enhancement work on the registered village green. A large drainage channel was installed to help prevent further damage from large amounts of water running across the green. Due to high visitor pressure, lack of toilet and parking facilities in the valley and a conflict of interests, additional work on the village green required wider issues to be given consideration and wider consultation.

Our Green Space therefore acted as a catalyst for a Core Wasdale Head Group to be established involving local residents, the National Park and National Trust. There are

no easy, quick solutions to the problems in the valley head and because of this and due to new proposals being given consideration, the work planned as part of Our Green Space to enhance the green was not completed.



YOU CAN THINK BIG WITH HELP

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A project may identify problems or focus attention on issues that need addressing as part of the bigger picture. To progress smoothly and allow for good communication it is important that all stakeholders are fully engaged. Having the permission of the landowner is essential and support provided by external organisations can allow community members to feel more confident in trying to tackle difficult issues.

KEEP WITHIN AGREED BOUNDARIES

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Ultimately it is the funding organisation that pays the bills and can decide whether work should go ahead or not. To avoid 'breach of contract' keep within the agreed scheme of work or seek approval to undertake additional or alternative activities.

Ongoing objectives and legacy

Wasdale Head Village Green: A whole valley approach is being taken to try to address the difficulties associated with too many cars, narrow lanes, large events, working farms and thousands of visitors each year. However, it is hoped that the community, who are now fully engaged in the process of finding solutions, will eventually complete the surface drainage and repair work to restore fully the registered village green.

The work to develop the new car park at Mill Howe will be funded by the National Trust and the signs installed and landscaping completed.

The history group have gone from strength to strength and now have many members and plan on holding regular meetings, walks and talks to meet the growing interest.

The May Festival Committee have plans for a extra special celebration in 2012 to mark the Queens Diamond Jubilee.

The Wasdale in Bloom group held a successful fundraising event on the green during the summer of 2011 and will continue to organise work parties to maintain the landscape and keep the area looking attractive.

The Grassland management plan has been distributed to all concerned and will continue to be followed in the years to come.

Our Green Space has given encouragement to all the existing groups within Wasdale. Some of the groups have flourished through the work of the project and all have been strengthened and will continue to exist and work together to ensure the green spaces in the area are looked after and enjoyed in the future.

