

# Newbiggin Springs Project Summary

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## OWNERSHIP

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- Prospect Well and the registered village green owned and managed by Dacre Parish Council.
  - Sunbeam Well stands on a piece of registered common land managed under a Scheme of Management agreed during the course of the project with Eden District Council, after the Parish's application to the Land Registry for an adverse possession order was turned down.
  - Acreage: .42 acres (Prospect village green and Sunbeam common combined)
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## PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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- Project managed by the Newbiggin Springs Steering Group a sub committee of Dacre Parish Council. Project funds held within the Dacre Parish Council account.
  - Volunteer days 230
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## AIMS

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Restore the historic built environment of two ancient wells providing safe access to the sites. Develop the rare wetland habitats surrounding the wells for the benefit of native flora and fauna. Involve local school children and volunteers in creative interpretive activities and planting days.

Enhance the quality of the village green for the benefit of all. Develop a seasonal programme of celebrations and festivals based at the wells and on the green with the aim of creating a heart to the village and better community cohesion.



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## ACHIEVEMENTS

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- Two wells restored.
- Safe access created.
- Coppice and replanting of surrounding wetland habitat.
- Seating and interpretation panels provided at both sites.
- Field drainage on the village green completed.
- Exhibition space in village hall developed.
- Annual seasonal May , Harvest and Christmas festivals and celebrations held.
- Creative involvement by local schools and volunteers.
- Excellent community cohesion, committed, active and dynamic partnerships forged.

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## TRAINING

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- Onsite training in the built heritage restoration of the wells
- Environmental surveying
- Management plan development of wetland areas
- Development of traditional craft skills used in woodland management
- Specialist herbicide training
- Fundraising skills
- Event management
- Basic health and safety and risk assessment
- Emergency first aid
- Website management
- PR and media communication skills
- Food hygiene certification
- Creative writing and felt making for local schools and volunteers
- Project management

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## KEY LESSONS AND FACTORS FOR SUCCESS GAINED FROM THE PROJECT

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- Get as much guidance as possible on the ownership and legal status of your green space. Organisations like the Open Spaces Society, Friends of the Lake District or the National Park Authority can help.
- Bring in the skills of local craftspeople and contractors. They can bring a whole host of benefits including a sustainable stake in the project. Show that your project is supporting the local economy and traditional skills and that it is community owned.
- Don't underestimate the asset of hidden resources within your community. To some the renovation of two inaccessible village wells might have seemed insignificant, but when the restoration, research and interpretation of the project involved the whole community it delivered on both a physical and cultural level. The smallest project can be a powerful tool for community empowerment and development.
- Celebrate your work and all that you've achieved, share it with as wide an audience as possible. Gather people together for a festival, engage with people who didn't know about the project or hadn't yet got involved. Weekend, holiday and evening events allow for greater community participation. Make your events fun – you deserve it and it will make it a more attractive proposition for people to be involved in, in the future.
- Tailor training to your site specific or community needs wherever possible.
- Contact schools and youth organisations directly. Set up a meeting with the head or specialist teacher. Teachers are all busy, but if they can see a way to involve the children in a local project, which involves curriculum activities they will be really glad to be involved. Often transport and other costs can be shared between the school and the project benefiting both.

## Newbiggin Village Springs, Penrith

Newbiggin is an ancient farming village situated in the rural parish of Dacre. It is one of the smaller villages within the parish and lies on a limestone ridge along a line of springs.

These springs would once have been a vital water supply and have been channelled into wells and troughs along the length of the village. Two of these wells are situated in the heart of the village “Prospect” on a registered village green and “Sunbeam” on an adjacent registered common.

The wells had been neglected for the past sixty years and had returned to an unmanaged natural habitat area with the potential to sustain high biodiversity value and a sanctuary for rare species. The community aimed to restore the wells historic built environment, provide access and manage the surrounding wetland habitats.



## EVIDENCE OF NEED

- The built environment of the springs had deteriorated over the last sixty years and without restoration would not survive a further twenty.
- Unlike many local communities the village of Newbiggin has been expanding, with new families settling, three mobile home parks within a one mile distance and a popular network of footpaths, cycle ways and bridleways crossing the village. The restoration of the wells would form a focal point in the village for community activity and a chance to research and explore the village history.
- Newbiggin is a linear structured village which had lost its local pub. At the start of the project the village hall was in disrepair (it is now a beautiful new building). The nearest school is in the village of Stainton, which is separated from Newbiggin by the busy A66. The village had lost its focus and heart. Improved access to the springs and the village green would help to create a focus for informal recreation and the revival of traditional events.
- There was no readily accessible environmental heritage education resource for local schools and for the many pupils who live in the village. The restoration of the wells and research into their cultural history and usage would provide this.
- Wetland habitats are in decline and are a priority biodiversity area in Cumbria. Enlarging and enhancing the wetlands around the springs would provide wildlife corridors for the colonisation of new habitats.
- Sunbeam Common is registered but had no known owner, the community wanted to establish ownership and management of the common.



## Aims

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- Renovate the village springs and provide an attractive feature at the village entrance.
- Enhance the village green so that informal recreation could take place and seasonal events and celebrations could be held.
- Provide a place for quiet contemplation, restore a wetland meadow area for nature observation and provide a reservoir for biodiversity.
- Involve the local community and children from the local schools in historical research and planting. Create an educational resource for formal and informal learning.
- Carry out cross generational historical research and oral history interviews.
- Revive the ancient traditions of well dressing and well blessing, maypole dancing and seasonal fairs.
- Provide skills training and learning opportunities.
- Restore and protect the village's past physical and cultural heritage while sympathetically representing the needs of the present day community.
- Provide an economic asset in the form of accessible natural spaces which reflect the cultural and environmental wealth of the village.
- Strengthen the community; preserve community spirit and sense of place.



## Project management

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### How did they do it?

The project was led by the Newbiggin Springs Group, which is a committee of the Parish Council. All financial management was undertaken through the parish council's bank account and the Clerk to the Council kindly took on this work.

The group was made up of local residents and expanded all the time but at the start the group was very small with just a handful of key players, who combined their experience and skills together to plan and manage the project. As with all five Our Green Space communities they managed their own project, briefing and employing local contractors themselves.

The group was aware that there were disadvantages in being such a small committee – the added burden of time and commitment, the need to show wider community support and inclusion etc but they were also keen to point out that their small numbers made decision making easier and they preferred this management structure.

Once the springs were visible and accessible many other community members got behind the project. Without their support the bigger May Fair and Christmas events would not have been possible.

*A questionnaire was circulated asking what people thought about the proposed project and if they had any other suggestions. There was also an exhibition in the village hall. It was particularly pleasing that quite a few families with young children had got involved. When*



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*events were arranged and help needed, often a lot of people came forward. The group became a sub committee of the Parish Council, which has helped to keep them involved, as well as being able to use their knowledge. The parish newsletter has also been used to let others know what has been going on.”*

Community steering group member



## UTILISE LOCAL SKILLS AND BUSINESS

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Using the skills of local craftspeople and contractors brings a whole host of benefits. The community appreciates that you are supporting the local economy and that creates more support for the project. Local contractors will have a higher stake in doing a good job and will most likely take a greater personal interest in the project, they will feel proud of the work they have done and are more likely to return and tend to the area in the future so adding to the sustainability of the project.

In turn if they have children in the village they too can feel proud of the work their parents have done and this gives an added sense of ownership, belonging and enjoyment.

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## Consultants and support

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The project was carried out with the support of Dacre Parish Council and reciprocal support was given by the other communities involved in the Our Green Space project – specifically information on well dressing from Asby and maypole dancing from Wasdale. The community was supported by the project officer and team. Specific help from the Friends of the Lake District Policy Officer was required when the community’s application for adverse possession of Sunbeam Common was turned down. It was then necessary to negotiate with Eden District Council’s Legal Services Manager to create a management agreement (see details below). The community worked closely with a local ecologist who helped them draw up a management plan for the sites which included detailed clearance, planting and ongoing management schemes.

The community has also worked closely with a local volunteer historian and school.

Due to the nature of the site the community worked with a hydrologist and local stone masons who did a fantastic job identifying how the trough slabs fitted together and cut new slabs using the old ones as patterns. It really was a labour of love.

The community chose to use as many local craftspeople as possible on the project.

Local residents who had documents relating to the usage of the wells came forward and provided vital clues as to how things would have looked and worked and the best possible course for restoration. Every detail was researched and thought through – this was a combined effort requiring the skills of many heritage craft workers and builders each of whom can now claim credit for the restoration of the Newbiggin springs.

## Finance

For some of the groups the initial start up and sorting out the finances was really hard. Because the Heritage Lottery Fund pay in arrears on a quarterly basis, Friends of the Lake District were in effect bankrolling the project as a whole and taking a lot of financial risk which would otherwise have been placed on the communities – but the knock-on effect of this meant that communities had to invoice the project before any funds could be released.

Some of the communities, including Newbiggin, found that local contractors employed by the community were having to wait to be paid longer than they would have liked and this was frustrating.

## BE CLEAR ABOUT HOW FUNDS CAN BE CLAIMED

Communities need to be aware that different funders operate in very different ways. Some will give a lump sum up front, while others pay either on the receipt of invoice or on a quarterly basis in arrears. An upfront float or cash flow could be an issue for small community groups so it's essential that this financial aspect of the project and how upfront purchases can be made is clear and understood right at the start. Sometimes the Parish Council can help with this – or if more than one fund is being accessed some juggling of accessible funds can be made.

But more often than not volunteers have to make purchases from their resources and claim back their expenses.



# Key achievements

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## Restoration of the wells

The two wells - Prospect which stands on an area of registered village green and Sunbeam, which is on a close piece of common land, both needed hydrology surveys to determine what drainage and feeder problems needed repair. This is specialist work and needed to be carried out in order to determine the average expected water flow and whether any field drainage would be required to improve the area of village green, which had become rather boggy.

The wells are ancient, records suggest they existed well before 1794, when they underwent their first restoration and since their installation many things had changed in the village, including construction of the through road which raised the level of the land. This in turn meant that the field drainage on the green had no real outlet and would need replacing. The community worked with the hydrologist to study old plans of the area to determine the site of hidden pipe work.

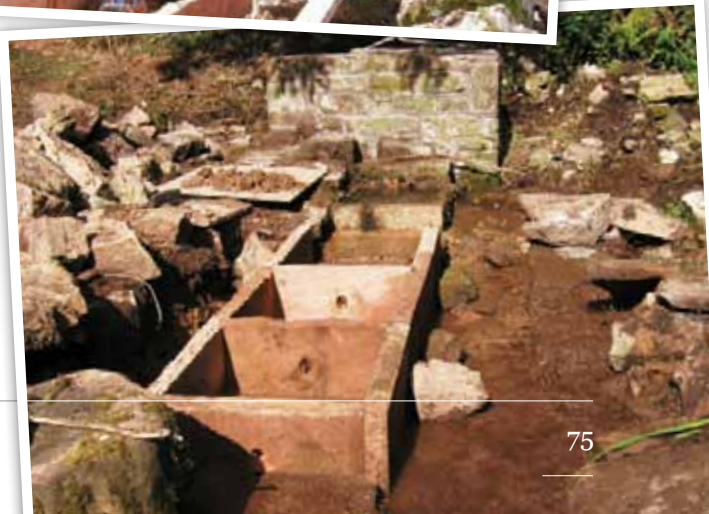
*The weather had then been an issue, when it was either too wet to survey or too dry. Not getting this done meant other parts of the project had to be put back. One person said “people didn’t see anything happening, but once planting started, people got curious”.*

Community steering group member

The wells are made up of two areas, one a cobbled area which was used to water livestock. These areas housed sandstone troughs each beautifully crafted which work on a flow system with each trough filling the next in succession until the final trough overflows and water is carried away via pipes – probably to a system of animal field troughs in the surrounding land.

Artefacts found onsite during the excavation of the original cobbles included a small clay ceremonial smoking pipe of the Masonic Honorable Order of Buffalos dating back over a century. Artefacts such as these have been catalogued and housed at the Tullie House Museum in Carlisle.

A clear view of partly renovated sandstone troughs at Sunbeam well – you can see the flow holes bored through the centre of the divider stones which allow the water to travel from one trough to another. The angle at which the ground was laid was all important to get the correct rate of flow, otherwise flooding of the troughs and surrounding areas would follow.



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The covered wells were for human use. The springs run the whole length of the village and the community is aware of other wells. Records show that both Prospect and Sunbeam were well used by the local community who would have relied on them for drinking and washing water.

Each covered well has its own chamber which fills with crystal clear spring water. The chamber is protected by a wooden door and the community wanted to replicate the woodwork and iron work.

The wetland meadows around the wells were surveyed. The areas have the potential to provide rich habitats for flora and fauna.

Advice was sought to determine the best possible planting scheme and management plan for the areas.

The community consulted the Cumbrian Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), published by the Cumbria Biodiversity Partnership. This local BAP is the means by which national biodiversity targets will be met locally. The document also includes locally important species and habitats that are characteristic to Cumbria but not covered by the national targets.

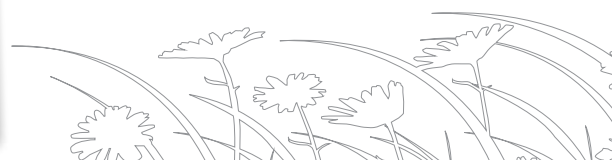
To find out which plants and fungi are native to your postcode go to the Natural History Museum website and key in the first section of your postcode into the Postcode Plant Database ([www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/life/plants-fungi/postcode-plants/](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/life/plants-fungi/postcode-plants/))

The project funded access pathways and gates to the wells which allowed wider community participation in planting days. Planning permission was required from Eden District Council to allow this access work to go ahead.

The community organised volunteer clearance days, which attracted families with young children eager to be involved in the project. Old dead trees needed digging out or coppicing and new saplings were planted. The community said that the tree planting day had been one of the highlights of the project and had a lovely tale about one little boy who at first had been very reluctant to help with tree planting, but once inspired came back to plant five trees and said it was "the best day of his life!" Local children have their names written on plaques attached to the trees so they can watch their tree grow.

Similar community bulb planting days were held and volunteers set up a tea tent with home made cakes and hot drinks to keep everyone happy.

*Heavy machinery was required when replacing the chamber roof at Sunbeam*



# Applying for adverse possession

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In 2008 the Land Registry – the government department responsible for registering land ownership in England and Wales launched an initiative in Cumbria to encourage landowners (including parish councils) to register what they own.

More than 50 per cent of land in Cumbria is unregistered - some 362,816 hectares. Each hectare is the equivalent size of an average football pitch.

Many local councils decided to go ahead and try to register their land, which often included registered town and village greens or registered common land.

In Newbiggin's case it was the registered common on which Sunbeam well stands. The land had no known recorded owner and this meant that the parish would need to claim adverse possession of the land in order to register their ownership. In order to do this the parish had to fill out a Land Registry application and employ legal support to make their claim. The difficulty is that the legal definition of adverse possession requires the claimant:

*... to seek to claim the single and sole possession of the land” evidenced by their “factual possession of the land (e.g. fencing the land so as to exclude others)”*

*But this is in direct conflict with the statutes for the protection of common land under the 2006 Act (part 3) which makes it “unlawful to construct any*

*works which would restrict or prevent access to the land.” (So if you can't put a fence around it and restrict peoples' use of it you can't prove single and sole possession.)*

DEFRA guidance says that “it follows that it will always be very difficult for the squatter to show factual possession of the land”.

Newbiggin's application was turned down for lack of evidence of sole management and usage over a 12 year period. However it seems that the legal definition takes priority over evidence of use and management and that even after gathering further evidence or being able to show 12 years of management and usage, that the community may not be able to make a claim of adverse possession under the current law. This was a real blow to the community who had spent a lot of time and money on the application.

When public land has no known owner the District Council may take management control over it under a Scheme of Management, it was decided that it would benefit the parish and community if the District, in this case Eden, would agree to a Scheme of Management under the 1899 Commons Act and delegate the management of the land to the Parish Council. The process required that the District Council draft a Scheme of Management. They would then be required to advertise for 3 months to see if there were any objections (i.e. if anyone came forward and said they owned the land) and then devolve management down to the Parish Council. The cost of the advertisement could be high and the Parish would have to cover the cost.

For further information please refer to the Open Green Spaces Guide – An Introduction to their Legal Status and Protection produced by the project which is available for download free at [www.ourgreenspace.org.uk](http://www.ourgreenspace.org.uk)

# Working with schools and young people

## School visit to the wells

Around 50 Key Stage 2 children from Stainton Primary School visited the Newbiggin wells by coach in 2009. During the afternoon visit the pupils learned more about both the built and natural environment of the wells.

The pupils drew maps to remind themselves how to get to the Newbiggin wells from Stainton Primary School in the future. Some Year 5 pupils from Newbiggin village commented that: "the wells were really interesting", it was "the first time that they had been to the springs" and that the restored wells and managed habitats "made Newbiggin look better."

In 2011, the community arranged another visit to the wells so that the children could see established wildlife habitats including the young saplings that families had planted in autumn 2009.



## CREATE RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS

Transport costs may limit how often local schools will be able to visit the wells in the future. The Our Green Space group in Newbiggin have overcome this potential problem by developing a tool box for teachers, which will enable schools to pay self-guided visits to the wells and also to learn about them at school.

The box file of reference books (on water and geology for example) and background information cards will be cross-curricula, for primary and secondary pupils and will be available on loan like a library book. Information cards will cover: the water cycle, mini beasts, flowers and trees, holy wells and local customs and the importance of water to village life.



## Creating a new community event

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The community wanted to celebrate their village green and the newly restored and accessible wells. In 2010 they held their first May Fair, which they wanted to be a traditional country fair with all the activities and festivities one would expect.

A portable maypole was purchased as part of the project. This maypole was then used by Stainton Primary School for practising maypole dancing weekly. Year 5 pupils said "it was fun" and that "they had not really done dancing before." This fitted the PE National Curriculum. As a result of the practice sessions, the pupils did two demonstration dances around the maypole at the first May Fair in Newbiggin and spectators joined in.

The pupils had enjoyed the dancing so much, and the school clearly felt it was worthwhile, that in June 2010 there was an After School Club of maypole and country dancing for a month which about 20 or so pupils decided to attend.

This May Fair proved a great success, with around 250 people attending. One mother from the village said that the May Fair was a "really lovely village event which reminded her of her childhood".



## Creating a new community event

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*“It was a fabulously sunny day, the small tree on the green was covered in blossom and the fiddlers and musicians gathered under it. It was wonderful to see all the children running down to the green, with mums and dads pushing buggies and lots of excited dogs barking. There were bales of straw to sit on and the tea tent could hardly cope with the demand – just as well that the ice cream van came when it did! It was a lovely event even down to the prizes the children won at the games – small handmade sheep, wooden model kits and bubbles. It really gave the feeling of being a proper old fashioned fair. The clown involved the audience in juggling tricks and silly acrobatics it was great fun – the village came alive that day. There was a real sense of ownership and belonging.”*

Project Officer

The Our Green Space group hopes that there will be well dressing in the future which the children can get involved in. One mother from the village said that she hoped they “do the May Fair again” as it was such a “community event”, and the school feels that “links with Newbiggin village have been enhanced through the Our Green Space wells project.”

Celebratory events like the May Fair and Christmas carol events are cross- generational, it’s lovely to see grandparents and grandchildren all enjoying the activities on the green. The communities have been careful to create tranquil areas around the wells where elderly people can sit and relax and enjoy a shady seat.

The community also wanted to inform both the local residents and visitors about the history of the wells and two interpretation panels have been installed to do this. They wanted the panels to be accessible to both old and young, so they are illustrative as well as written.



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Interpretation can really bring a site to life – it can describe the age of the wells / their usage through history and their importance to the community. The wells at Newbiggin were so much more than a water supply – they were a gathering place, an exchange, a place of spiritual power and magic they were also the reason why people settled in the area in the first place and their presence makes sense of the whole village lay out both residential and agricultural.

For many people the project has been a catalyst to find out more about their own house history, for others to develop an interest in local crafts and native plant species, wetland environments and habitats.

## Training and learning opportunities

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Throughout the project the community has had to access to site specific training and other useful training sessions including wetland management, surveying, coppicing, publicity and promotion, website design, how to write successful funding bids and food hygiene. These will support them in future funding bids, publicity drives and practical events management. The project's aim was always to embed relevant skills and knowledge within the five participating communities.

Newbiggin has already achieved so much – they now have a fantastic new village hall facility, which has already become the hub of the community, with a weekly café and an exhibition space funded by the project with displays about the wells project and the various archaeological findings.

There are two meeting rooms which will benefit from hand-made wall hangings and furnishings developed by the local embroiderer's guild, which is producing quilted hangings of embroidered signatures.

Children have worked with a professional author in creative writing workshops to produce accounts of village life in both poetry and prose.

All of this forms part of the community's interpretation of the wells and village heritage. There is now a wider recognition of the role of community green spaces within the village and how they are linked. The area of green space behind the village hall will be developed as a community orchard and space for events and recreation. The skills and knowledge developed over the course of the wells project will be applied here too



# DECIDE WHAT TRAINING YOU NEED

It doesn't hurt to be specific about the training you want and need – many of the 'generic' training courses available countywide can be useful in offering general training on many issues, but they do not necessarily cover the site or community specific advice you need. For this a bespoke training session geared to your site by a consultant or training provider would be more beneficial. Training is both time consuming and can be expensive so it's better to be clear about what you are looking for – write a quick brief and either make sure that these issues will be covered or get a course tailored to your needs. Cumbria has a wealth of environmental charities and organisations so there shouldn't be an issue finding the appropriate provider.

## Strengthening the community

It is rare to see such a dynamic and integral change to a community come about over such a short length of time. It has been an inspiration to see what the community has achieved in Newbiggin and the knock on effect this has had in terms of further community ventures and developments within the village. Not only has the project succeeded in a physical transformation of the wells and the green but it has rekindled community spirit and a real sense of belonging, ownership and empowerment. It is hard to believe that this is the same village – seeing the massive amount of support for the May Festival and the involvement of schools and local volunteers, it is hard to imagine that it all started as a meeting of four or five key people.

The community fully intend to take the project further. Current plans include creating a walkway between the two wells which will allow for safe access along the main road, and they would also like to create access to and renovate "Kells Well" further along the village. There is no doubt that via the project the community have breathed life into and firmly put the heart back in the village.



## Ongoing objectives and legacy - future challenges

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- Secure a Scheme of Management with Eden District Council for Sunbeam common, whereby Dacre Parish Council take over management rights of the space.
- Continue to hold annual village green festivities with a heritage theme.
- Utilise the space as an outdoor classroom for Stainton Primary School and youth groups.
- Sustain the management and development of native flora and fauna in the wetland meadow areas around the wells.
- Restore and create access to other wells within the village, with the involvement of volunteers.
- Develop the interpretation and exhibition space at the village hall to show the restoration and development of the wells project.

