

Stoke Holy Cross Jubilee Meadow

Hay-making time on the Meadow

Summer 2023



We've now reached the busiest period of the Meadow year - haymaking time. Wildflower meadows were traditionally the result of farming practices that involved a late summer cut to make hay that would then be used to feed animals through the winter. This traditional cycle was largely abandoned after the war in favour of new intensive farming methods and as a result it's estimated that we lost 95% of wildflower meadows from our landscape. What we are trying to do here on Jubilee Meadow is to use some traditional practices and some short-cuts to try and create a unique habitat that would have taken centuries to develop.



Changing the Meadow which is dominated by vigorous grasses that will outcompete wildflowers and a high nitrate soil (wildflowers thrive best on poor and infertile soils) was always going to be a challenging and lengthy process and we are now only in our second year. Early in planning the wildflower areas of the Meadow we decided against the use of a weedkiller to give us a 'clean slate' - instead we decided to try using Yellow Rattle, which parasitises grasses, to try and suppress the dominant grasses naturally. Apart from avoiding the use of chemicals we haven't killed off plants or seeds that may have already been present in the soil. The other significant decision was to approach the work in phases beginning with the section at the far end and also to try and establish as many different habitats as possible in the space.

The main work this year will revolve around the late summer cut of the Meadow. Although we will be cutting nearly all of the area apart from a 'forage' strip, we will be treating sections in different ways in a plan worked out with the help of Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) who are continuing to provide us with invaluable advice and resources even though the original Claylands project in which we were included has now ended. How the different areas will be dealt with is detailed below (see Figure 2 for a map of the areas)

Meadow areas 1a, 1b and 2a - these areas were sown last year using green hay provided by NWT from Saxlingham Nethergate along with Yellow Rattle seed sourced from High Ash

Farm and a section (1b) was also sown with a wildflower mix. Apart from a good crop of Yellow Rattle these areas have some interesting plants coming through including Sulphur Clover (a nationally scarce plant that almost certainly came in with the green hay) and Dwarf Spurge (which may have come in or may already have been present) This year we will cut and then, after leaving the cuttings ("arisings") to rest and release seeds, we will rake it. Raking is important to prevent nutrients being returned to the ground. This will include a section (2a) that lies between the weed membrane and Harrold Place where last year's seeding appears to have been successful and grasses are not dominant.

Meadow area 1c - although this area was also sown with green hay last year, grass still dominates so after cutting and raking, we will harrow the ground to create more areas of bare ground and then apply more green hay that NWT will generously provide from an established local meadow. This will be left down, turned and then raked off a few weeks later. For more information on using green hay to establish a wildflower meadow see the leaflet on the NWT website

<https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-in-norfolk/wildlife-information-service/leaflets>

Meadow area 2 - this area was not worked on last year. In an experiment to try and remove the dominant grasses and create an area suitable for wildflowers, we covered it with a weed suppressant membrane in April. We intend to leave this down for another year to hopefully give us bare ground where we can apply green hay and selected grass seeds next year.

Meadow area 3 - this area hasn't been tackled yet and is mainly vigorous grass. Our original plan was to gradually extend the wildflower areas and finally develop this area. However we are now considering keeping this as an area of grass but to add to the flowers that are already naturally appearing such as Meadow Buttercup and Yarrow by adding seeds in patches.

Wildflower "mini meadows" - We have experimented with a small area sown with colourful annual wildflowers beside the soakaway. We will retain this but also create a new **"wildflower strip"** that will run between the weed membrane (area 2) and the grass area (area 3). We intend to lift one strip of the weed membrane, harrow and then sow with a wildflower mix. These areas will not necessarily be representative of the larger meadow wildflower areas we are creating but will add colour and be a valuable resource for pollinators. The two ends of the Harrold Place bank have already been planted with some wildflower plant plugs and we will be adding to these.

Forage strip - this is the section alongside the playing field hedge. We will keep this as an overgrown area for mammals and other wildlife. We will cut sections each year but will always keep at least half uncut and allow a dense thatch to develop as cover.

The Harrold Place fenceline and the back hedgeline - the Harrold Place hedgeline that has been planted over the last two years will be allowed to develop and we may need to fill any gaps. The grass on the bank and along the back will be cut as part of the annual cut. We have planted wildflowers at both ends of the Harold Place hedgeline and we may cut these areas by hand.

The Tree areas - as with the forage area these will be cut on rotation.

The Soakaway - this is a unique area. Probably as a result of construction work, the soils are sandy and infertile. Although we have added some wildflower plant plugs, we have found some interesting naturally occurring plants here (including a Bee Orchid). We will not be cutting here (at least not this year).

In addition to the planting and sowing above, we have 500 wildflower plant plugs that were provided by NWT. In Autumn we will be planting these out in various areas according to their habitat preferences. We are also intending to source bulbs and specific species seeds and/or plug plants including cowslip seeds and bluebell bulbs.

Depending on the weather conditions it is probable that we will cut again late autumn and potentially again in late winter to try and keep grass growth in check.

As with everything on the Meadow, there are no guarantees and it will take years in some cases to see what has taken or not but that is part of the excitement as well as the challenge of what we're attempting to do. Some of the steps we are taking are experimental, the use of green hay is a tested method of establishing wildflower meadows from existing sites but even here timing, weather and local conditions will have an impact. Our use of a weed membrane is an approach that not even the NWT have seen used before in establishing wildflower meadows. This year we have been pleased to have a good crop of Yellow Rattle, which we were warned can be difficult to establish, however it appears to have been a good year for it generally and next year it might fail if it doesn't get the cold snap the seeds need. Whatever comes up it should help to meet our aim of gradually increasing biodiversity on the Meadow as well as providing an increasingly interesting experience for visitors.

So a lot of work ahead and then it's a long wait to see what we get next year!

Figure 1 - the work plan

| Meadow Autumn 2023 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|---------------|----------------------|------|--------|---------------|---------------|------|------|----------------|-------|------------|
| Area | Collect seed | Summer cut | Cut by hand | Let seed drop | Remove weed membrane | Rake | Harrow | NWT green hay | Let seed drop | Rake | Seed | NWT plug plant | Bulbs | Winter cut |
| Meadow area 1a, 1b and 2a | y | y | | y | | y | | | | | | y | | y |
| Meadow area 1c | y | y | | y | | y | y | y | y | y | | y | | y |
| Meadow area 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Meadow area 3 | | y | | | | y | | | | | y | | | y |
| Wildflower "mini meadows" | y | | y | y | | y | | | | | y | | | |
| New "Wildflower strip" | | | | | y | | y | | | | y | | | ? |
| Forage area | | (y) | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Copse areas | | (y) | | | | | | | | | | y | y | |
| Soakaway | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Figure 2 - the areas referred to above

| Jubilee Meadow planting areas | | last update; 6th June 2023 | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--|-------------|-----------------|
| Map ref | Name | Notes | Measure (m) | sq m |
| 1 | Wildflower area Phase 1 | First phase of Wildflower meadow. Lightly harrowed August 2022 | 32X20 | 640 |
| 1a | | Green hay from Saxlingham Nethergate NWT roadside verge reserve Aug 2022 & Yellow rattle seed Oct 2022 | | |
| 1b | | as 1a with Wildflower seed mix Oct 2022 | | |
| 1c | | Green hay from Saxlingham Nethergate Meadow Aug 2022 & Yellow rattle seed Oct 2022 | | |
| 2 | Wildflower area Phase 2 | Original grassland. Covered with weed membrane Apr 2023 | 25X20 | 500 |
| 2a | | seeded with Yellow rattle Oct 2022 | 21x8.5 | 178.5 inc above |
| 3 | Wildflower area Phase 3 | Original grassland. No seeds or planting | 25X20 | 500 |
| 4 | Soakaway | Wildflower planting and seeds mainly on north and west edges. Sandy bare areas | | |
| 5 | Wildflower mini meadow | Test area seeded with Wildflower seed mix Mar 2023 | | |
| 6 | Tree areas | Saplings planted Dec 2022 to Jan 2023 | | |
| 7 | Forage strip | Uncut wild area | | |
| 8 | Wildflower banks | Planted with wildflower plugs Spring 2023 | | |
| 9 | Hedge | Saplings planted Nov 2021. Extended and infill Mar 2023 | 105m | |
| 10 | Hedge | Hawthorn hedge contemporary with housing estate | 65m | |
| 11 | Hedge | Original hedge with mature trees | 122m | |

