



Soham Town Council – Drayton Meadows

<https://www.soham-tc.gov.uk/>

July 2024

Project aim

The Council purchased this land in order to make a community wildflower meadow to encourage and improve biodiversity, and for a well-being area for residents to use.

Project actions

The Council has led and instigated this project, with Councillors taking an active role in setting up the wildflower meadow, providing grass cutting (for a pathway around the area), planting trees and flowers and setting up a wildlife camera. We have worked with the Community Payback team who have helped with planting a perimeter hedge within new fencing that we erected, and with a local contractor to clear rubbish from the land and replace the entrance gates to make the Meadows more accessible. With the help of Lady de Ramsey, Deputy Lieutenant for Cambridgeshire, we planted seven trees to mark the Platinum Jubilee of her late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II in 2022. We hope to install nest boxes in the autumn and an owl box which has been made by a local charity. We have also scarified and sown two specific areas with wildflower seeds and will purchase and plant wildflower plug plants in suitable areas to encourage more butterflies, pollinating insects and birds.

In order to encourage residents to visit the Meadows, we are organising an introductory guided walk around the circular track within the Meadows to explain to families what they can expect to see there. We hope to encourage visitors to observe and photograph the wildlife and send in records to the Council. Throughout the project, we have liaised with Natural England and FWAGS for their advice and input.

Costs and timescale

It is difficult to put a timeframe on this project but we bought the land in June 2022 and you will see from the attached photos that it is quite well established. The cost of the land was around £40,000 which was funded entirely by the Council. However, more recently we received a Pride of Place grant from our District Council of around £4,500 which has funded some fruiting trees, the wildflower seed, hedge plants, two recycled plastic benches, the wildlife camera and bug hotels. We will also be using the grant to fund information boards at the entrance of the Meadows which will inform residents about the wildlife present.

Outcomes

Drayton Meadows has been very well received by residents and it is used on a daily basis. The placing of two recycled plastic benches along the walk means that there are peaceful places to pause and enjoy the sights and sounds of the countryside, which we hope gives our residents space to rest and reflect.

Finding suitable land within the town, especially accessible and not too far from the centre, was probably the most difficult thing but once identified, the purchase of the land was quite straightforward. We are

very grateful that there are still landowners who wish to leave a legacy for the townsfolk, as much of the available and suitable land is sold off for development.

Working with Natural England and FWAGS has been a very positive experience and they have helped and guided us along the way; their insight has been invaluable. We have also had interest from nearby Wicken Fen (National Trust) with a possible connection between the Fen and the Meadows via the opening of the Soham to Wicken cycleway later this year.

Key learning

The first step is the hardest! You need a lot of determination to see a project like this through, particularly the way Councils work and how slowly things can be progressed sometimes. You need a good team of people who are passionate about the project and who have the time to dedicate to getting stuck in themselves. We have three Councillors and two members of the public working together on this. If we were to start again, there's not much we could do differently but we certainly have learnt that we need a good team, plenty of grit, and patience to see a project through to completion.

Next steps

We are just beginning to look for suitable information boards which can be updated through the seasons to reflect the wildlife that could be seen at different times of years. We are also hoping to purchase a sculpture for the area engaging a local artist and involving local school children in its design. We will continue to maintain the Meadows and enhance it with further planting. We hope to be able to purchase other land parcels in the future for similar projects.

