

SAXLINGHAM MEADOWS



Welcome!

This pack is offered as a means of welcome to all visitors to Saxlingham Meadows. The project has involved the transformation of a seven-acre arable site into woodland and meadow areas, which we hope will be enjoyed by members of the local and more distant community.

Although practical work to transform the land is taking place during 2005, the project will take several years to accomplish. In time it will evolve and generate it's own distinct character.

As a result, what we set out this pack is simply our intentions – what you see on the ground may become somewhat different over time!

The practicalities – directions & amenities

The site can be found at grid ref TM 234967, which lies between the main village of Saxlingham Nethergate and Saxlingham Green.



The Meadow adjoins the existing Playing Field, where there is a public car park; children's play area and pavilion. The site lies on a bus route between Harleston and Norwich, whose times are displayed outside the Village Hall in the main street.

Public facilities within the village are limited, but there is a well-stocked general store in Hempnall, and pubs at Shotesham, Newton Flotman and Hempnall. If required, there is a payphone alongside the War Memorial at the centre of the village.

A description of the site:

The aims of the project have been:

- To create a safe, open access community space that encompasses the needs and wishes of local people of all ages, and allows for wildlife, recreation and education.
- To create a space that is naturally and locally distinct.

The meadow area you see is a seven-acre former arable plot, which had been in production for both cereal crops and fodder beet. Having fallen out of cultivation for a number of years, (during the acquisition of the land and the bidding for the project) it became invaded by annual & perennial weed species such as rosebay willowherb; ragwort; dock and spear thistle.

The soil is a heavy clay but quite dry, due partly to a land drain which crosses the site, and partly to its slightly domed contour. The pH is 8 (slightly alkaline), and although high in potassium and phosphates, the nitrogen level is low.

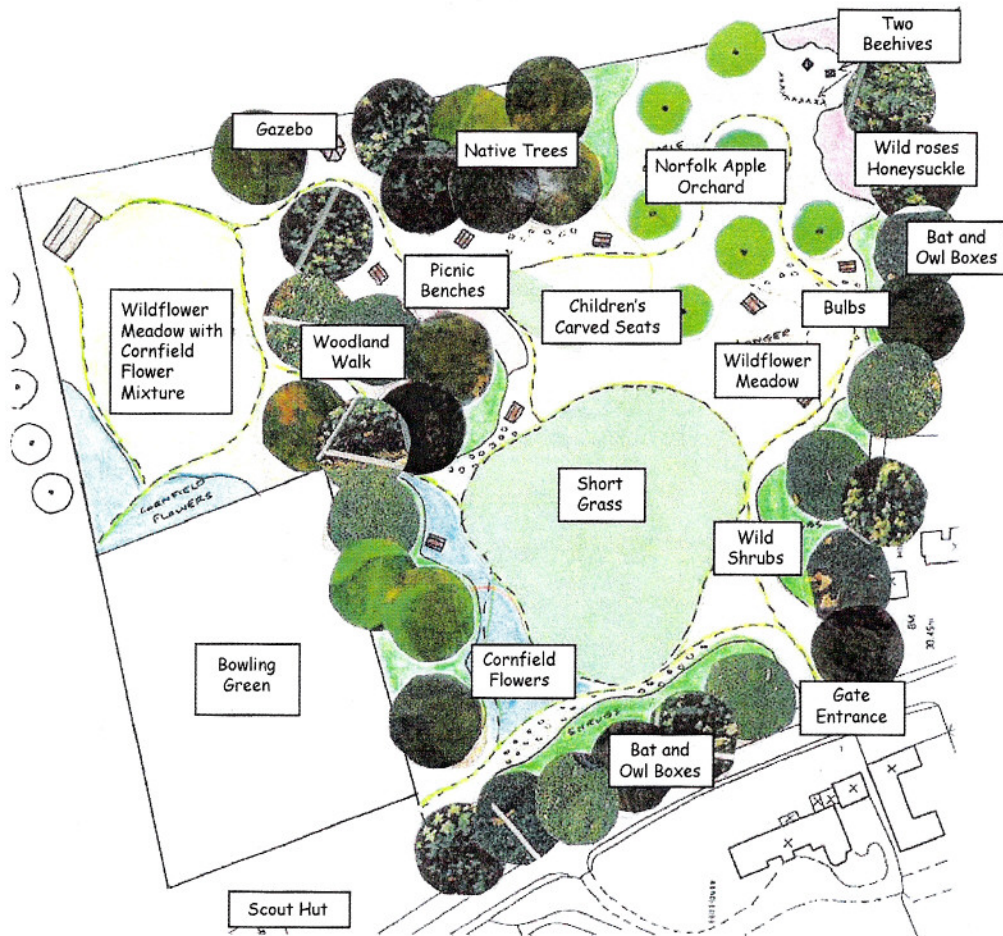
The plot is rectangular, enclosed by existing farmland field hedges & trees on two sides, a sparse hedge and trees to the side contained by the highway, and an open connection to the existing playing field area to the fourth. The existing boundary hedges comprise largely of hawthorn and blackthorn, with the occasional crab apple/spindle/field rose etc. Tree species along the boundary include birch, ash and oak. A team of volunteers carried out a project in 1997, to reinforce the hedge planting along the 2 existing sparse field boundaries. We planted a classic clay-land hedge mix of field maple; spindle; hawthorn; blackthorn; holly and hazel. This has developed so successfully that some maintenance and thinning has been required as part of the Saxlingham Meadows project.

In the same season, a short length of mature blackthorn that forms the boundary to the adjacent football field was managed by the traditional technique of hedge-laying. You can see that it has a slightly lower overall height, but is thicker than adjacent sections at a lower level and therefore provides both a better wildlife habitat and windbreak!

What we are hoping to create:

We want to achieve a practical community space, which can be used for a range of village events, within an open natural area that has conservation value for both plants and wildlife. In time it should support a range of locally

occurring species, which will hopefully provide interest to lots of different groups, at various levels.



As is clear from the plan, the intention has been to inject a more natural feel by concealing the regular boundaries through introducing curved features and habitat edges. The design also creates hidden areas, which will hopefully attract you to explore what cannot be seen from a distance.

All of the selected tree, shrub, wildflower and grass species are both typical of the locality, and have been sourced locally. Specific features that are being created include:

An apple orchard, connecting with the boundary on the southeast corner, is being planted to commemorate the life of Charlie English, a local farmer and sportsman, who cared so much about the village and the playing field. Many Norfolk apple varieties are being represented, with care being taken to ensure an overlap in flowering times to allow for cross-pollination. We will be labelling these trees so that you can identify your favourite apple! We may be able to

hold a village 'Apple Day' in the future, which could involve games; talks; the recording of fruit trees in the parish; competitions etc.

Woodland. A number of new copses connect the centre of the site with the edges, which allow for some short sections of shady walks beneath trees. All the trees that you can see were planted by a team of volunteers during the winter of 2004/5, and include the following native species: Oak, Ash, Hornbeam, Field maple, Hawthorn, Hazel, Elder, Guelder rose, Birch, Blackthorn, Holly, Crab apple, Spindle etc. The ground layer beneath the new trees will change with time, but is intended to include Dog's mercury, primrose, Bluebell, Dog violet, Wood sedge, Self-heal etc. These cannot be successfully introduced until the woodland microclimate has become established. We will be trying different planting methods such as bulbs, plug plants or pot-grown plants.

Central Grassed area, which we hope will be used for various activities or events. This has been sown with a hard-wearing seed mix, characteristic of Norfolk claylands, together with flowers such as speedwell, self heal and daisies. The Meadow will be uncut for a period when the daisies are in flower – giving lots of opportunities for daisy chains!

Cornflower meadows, sown alongside the main grassed area. These will be rotated annually to maintain a vivid summer display of poppies, corn cockles, corn marigolds, cornflowers and corn chamomile.

The remainder of the site has been sown as a **Wildflower meadow,** with the grasses including crested dog's tail, red fescue, meadow foxtail etc, and the flower mix based on cowslip, self heal, common knapweed, hedge bedstraw, field scabious, oxeye daisy, ragged robin, meadow buttercup etc. A particularly valuable plant that has been included is yellow-rattle which suppresses growth by the grassland species, hence preventing them from dominating the flowering species. These areas will be cut annually, around September, to allow the plants to flower, develop and set seed.

We are mowing clear pathways for you to follow, as the meadow itself is more vulnerable to damage than the grassland and will not develop to it's full if it receives heavy wear.

A key factor when determining the layout and content of these areas has been the potential benefit for bees, butterflies and insects. We are hoping to site beehives amongst the fruit trees once the flowering perennials and shrubs are sufficiently established. As well as being good pollinators, these should also become a good point of interest and learning.

For your rest and relaxation, we are hoping to locate picnic benches and a small gazebo.

You might also notice that a number of bat and barn owl boxes have been fixed to the mature trees to the perimeter of the new meadow, which we hope will be occupied fairly quickly. Many of these boxes were sponsored by individual parishioners.

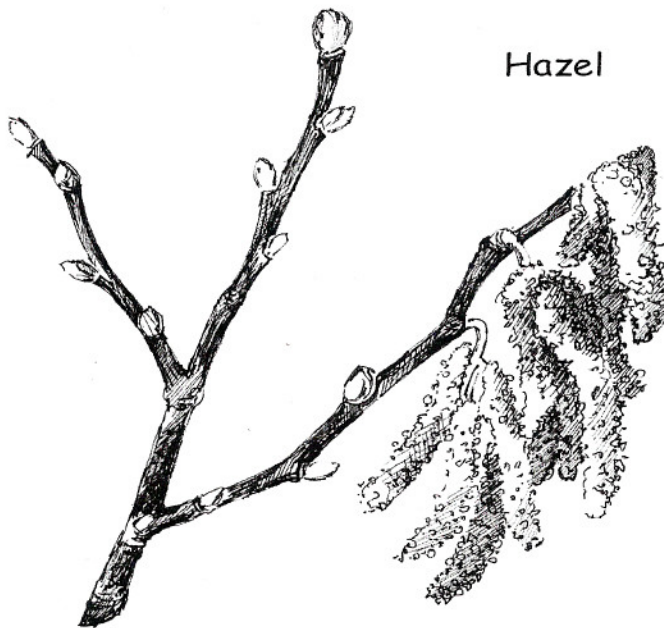
Most of the work dealing to accomplish the project will take place during 2005, such as clearing & cultivating the site; sowing the meadow flowers & grasses, planting the trees and an orchard.

Particular areas and species to look out for:

Wildflower meadows establish more readily on ground that has low nutrient levels. Our aim in creating the meadow has been to reduce the existing high nutrient levels, and to clear the abundant broadleaved weeds and grass. Our maintenance regime also tries to achieve this reduction, so you may notice that the meadow areas are frequently mown and the cuttings removed from the site.

Here are some of species that we have introduced to the meadow, with some information about them that we hope you might find interesting:

February – Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)



The yellow lamb's tails of these plants are one of the first signs of spring, as they waggle in the wind. The spring catkins are tassels of male flowers – the yellow being the pollen in the ripe stamens. As they rely on wind pollination (there are so few insects around this early in spring) each catkin produces around four million pollen grains! So where are the female flowers? You will see that some of the buds on the twigs are tipped with a little crimson tuft – these being the receptive female stigmas. It is hard to imagine that, after pollination, these will develop into the delicious autumn cob-nuts.

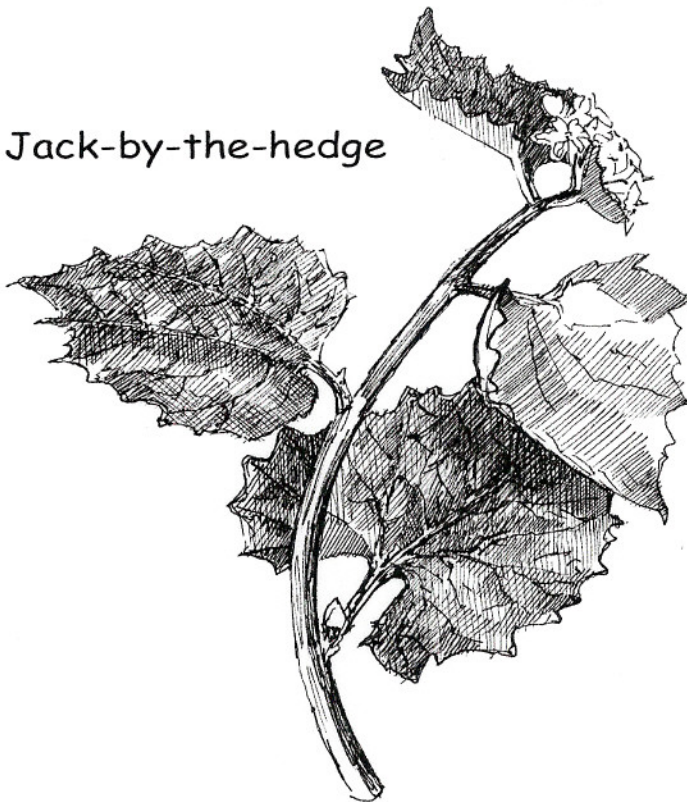
March – Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*)

As well as planting some primroses, a number already exist around the site boundaries that we hope will spread into the new meadow areas. You might try and spot the difference between the 'thrum-eyed' and 'pin-eyed' forms. On both, the 5 petals are united at their base into a long narrow tube. In the pin-eyed flowers, the stamens are inserted about halfway up the tube, with the stigma showing like a pinhead on a long style in the middle of the flower. In thrum-eyed flowers the 5 stamens are attached close to the top of the tube, with the style & stigma reaching only halfway up. The purpose of this variation is to reduce the chance of self-

pollination, or to prevent a flower being pollinated by pollen from another flower on the same plant! There are likely to be an equal number of each type amongst primroses growing in the wild. In folklore it is considered unlucky to bring fewer than 13 primroses into a house when picking the first posy – the tale goes that if you pick a smaller number, this would be the total of eggs that each hen in the household would hatch during the entire year! It is also commonly believed that bringing a single flower into the house signals a death in the family; that children who eat the flowers are given the power to see fairies; and that it has the power to open locks and reveal hidden treasure (it is called the 'key-flower' in Germany)! Finally, primrose tea is commonly taken for rheumatism, arthritis, migraine and insomnia, and the roots are used in modern medicine since they contain saponin. So it is a useful as well as beautiful little plant.

April - Jack-by-the-hedge (*Alliaria petiolata*)

Jack-by-the-hedge



This plant is also known as hedge garlic or garlic mustard – due to the strong garlic smell given off by the crushed leaves. It has been used in sauces for centuries – traditionally to go with fish or mutton – hence it's other name of 'sauce-alone'. Its small star-like white flowers are the first to appear in the ground layer beneath hedges and woodlands. It is a member of the wallflower family, and provides food for the caterpillar of the orange-tip butterfly. It also possesses medicinal and antiseptic qualities.

May – Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)

Nesting activity in and around the meadow should reach its peak during May. The meadow will provide an important habitat for a range of species, which we hope to record during its establishment. We also hope to attract hedgerow and woodland butterflies such as the orange-tip, green-veined white, and speckled wood. The predominant colour in the meadow will be white, as the white hawthorn blossom mixes with cow-parsley and stitchwort. Known as May since May Day always hinged around hawthorn, before the calendar changes of 1752, when May Day came to fall on 12th May, when it is in full flower. Early in the morning, people would go 'a-maying', returning laden with blossoms to decorate the churches and houses. It is reputed that if you bathe your face in hawthorn dew on May Day morning, beauty is forthcoming!

The hawthorn has more supernatural powers than most plants. According to ancient myth, the tree sprang from where lightning struck the earth, and has always been revered as a sacred tree. Stories suggest that Christ wore a crown of hawthorn. Cutting down or destroying a hawthorn is considered dangerous, and to this day woodmen may refuse to fell them. The wood is hard and durable – traditionally being used for tool handles and printing blocks. For

the Greeks it was a symbol of hope, marriage and fertility – being used to decorate altars, and forming part of bridal wreaths. It has medical as well as magical properties – providing a non-toxic remedy for various heart conditions, as well as being a remedy for hypertension.

June – Common poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*)

The scarlet poppy's association with death and new life, with corn and harvest, is as old as agriculture. It is one of the world's most attractive and successful weeds – following the spread of agriculture around the globe so that no-one is sure of its native home! They belong to a way of life rather than a particular home – that of the tilling and disturbance of the soil. The success of our cornfield meadow will rely on the presence of disturbed ground on which they can set seed. Poppy seeds have been found amongst barley in Egyptian tombs – where they presumably grew up as weeds in the crops, were cut down with the corn, and grew again in huge quantities the following spring. No wonder they became such symbols of growth, blood and new life!

It is one of the most transparent, delicate and transient flowers in the meadow, the mass of silky petals wrapped tightly within the green hairy bud. They were once popular flowers for making dolls from.

July – Self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*)

This is an aromatic perennial on a creeping rootstock, 50 cm high, with ovate leaves and spikes of violet, two lipped florets in the leaf axils throughout the summer. It featured in Chinese medical texts since the end of the last millennium – but was unknown to the Greeks & Romans. Its name indicates its valued use as an activator of your body's defences. The flowering stems are dried and used for their anti-bacterial properties. You should be able to spot it in the wildflower meadow where it will colonise rapidly.



Self-heal

August – Herb-Robert (*Geranium robertianum*)

We hope that you will see plenty of butterflies on the meadow at this time of year – fluttering around or feeding on the various blossoms. Species we hope to attract include many of the 'browns' such as the speckled-wood, meadow-brown and hedge brown, and hopefully brimstones.

Herb-Robert, a species of geranium or cranesbill, is identified by its finely cut foliage and starry 5-petalled pink flowers. It is likely to thrive in both the meadow areas, and the ground layer beneath hedges and trees. This plant is almost as familiar a plant to us as a robin is a familiar bird! Growing to about 40cm high, its hairy stems turn bright red in the sunlight. Hence its name could come from its colour – herba rubra or red plant? When the flowers hang downwards, it is reputed as a sign of impending bad weather. It is sometimes known as 'stinking bob' due to the unpleasant smell – but a useful insect repellent!

September – Guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*)

The spring flowers shown here are followed by these conspicuous berries, which are translucent and really glow in the sunshine. Make sure you cook them if you want to eat them! Their American name is European Cranberry, as they are used as a substitute for the cranberry. In spring, the outer flowers of the bunch open first – they are sterile and larger than the inner ones.



Guelder
rose

October – Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*)

With berries in abundance, we hope to attract bank-voles, field and wood mice to join the birds for an autumn feast. The bank vole prefers woodland edge and hedgerow, so we should have the ideal conditions. These in turn should attract owls to the boxes we have located.



Dog rose

It is a common experience that some years are better than others for either nuts or berries. A good year for the oak, with a heavy acorn crop, quite often coincides with a good year for the hazelnuts and hornbeam fruit. And hips, haws and holly berries are often particularly abundant or scarce in the same autumn. The differences are almost certainly due to variations in the spring and summer weather, different conditions favouring a 'nuts' year from those of a 'berries' year.

We have included spindle in our planting mix, since it is a characteristic clayland plant. As well as having poisonous berries, it is also known as an unlucky tree. The fruit are strikingly beautiful, with their pink and orange hues, and are harmless to birds. The hard white wood was traditionally used in making spindles, skewers and pegs, and the burnt twigs produce fantastic charcoal.

Contacts

If you have any queries before or after a visit to the meadow, please contact Sarah Long at sarah@eastgatehouse.freeserve.co.uk

We must thank:

DEFRA and 'Living Spaces', who have provided the funding for the project.

Parishioners who, both now and over the years, have given their time to maintain the existing facility, as well as act as volunteers to plan and plant the new meadow!

The Parish Council of Saxlingham Nethergate which owns this new meadow, for which the custodians and managing trustees are the Playing Field Committee, a charitable trust.

And...don't forget the Country Code!

- Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people

APPENDIX A

History of recreation in the village

Studies by local historians have shown that the Saxons who gave the name to this village were in fact only occupiers of land previously inhabited by the Romans, Iron Age people, and very probably other settlers before that. Nevertheless the Saxons and other Nordic tribes brought a form of village settlement that still exists in the present day, albeit with a shifting centre.

The Medieval and Tudor periods saw the abandonment of areas around the now ruined church of St Mary at (Saxlingham) Thorpe and the growing influence of wealthy yeoman farmers. This resulted in the building of substantial timber framed buildings in an area centred on the current War Memorial.

Population levels in the village have fluctuated over the centuries, from a particular low point following the Black Death in the mid 1300's, to high points in the mid 1500's and early 1800's and the present day. The growth in the early 1800's was a result of Bombazine weaving (a speciality of the Norwich area), which resulted in the building of a number of smaller houses, and sub-division of others.

The use of a specific area of land for recreation in the village seems to have been of fairly recent origin. During the 1800's the 2 schools in Church Hill are known to have used The Street as their playground.

Saxlingham Cricket Club seems to be the oldest sporting organisation, believed to have been in existence for around 100 years. Certainly in living memory, the club used an area of land known as The Kraft on the north side of the road between the present playing field and the Green until the mid 1950's. The onset of organised sport and the need for a dedicated playing field seems to have stirred the Steward family, local landowners to philanthropic effort.

On January 15th 1936 a meeting was held in Saxlingham Hall, the home of Elise Campbell-Steward, in order to bring together local interest groups to discuss and plan a new playing field. Groups represented were the cricket club, together with villagers who were proposing to create bowls, tennis and football clubs. Mrs Campbell-Steward was also championing the idea of a children's corner. The meeting confirmed that offers of grants of £135 had been obtained, and it was agreed to adopt a plan prepared by the Norfolk Playing Fields Association. Mrs Campbell-Steward gave a site on the "Hempnall straight" to the Trustees of the Playing Field in 1937.

It would seem that the plans stalled, and with the onset of war it was not until February 1951 that a committee reconvened. After 7 years of discussion, organisation, and in some cases dissention (reference is made to an "unruly" public meeting in 1952!) the new Playing Field, situated on the Hempnall straight (between the Green and Hempnall on the west side of the road) was finally opened by Lady Bacon on 14th June 1958. It is interesting to note that £40 was spent on providing a children's play area (swings, a seesaw and horizontal bars) when 40 years later £35,000 has been spent on creating the play area that you can see.

In 1977 the Playing Field was moved to it's present home, involving a land exchange between the parish Council and Mr Michael Steward who owned the present site. Volunteer effort by many, including some current members of the cricket and football clubs, saw the erection of the present pavilion and the laying out of a new cricket square and football pitch. The agreement with Mr Steward also included an option, for 21 years, to acquire an additional 7 acres of adjoining land. This option was exercised after considerable fund raising activities, and the land transferred to the Parish Council as custodian trustees of the Saxlingham Playing Field charity.

It has now become Saxlingham Meadows!