

Dedham Vale Society

Article: The Nayland Meadow Project

Background

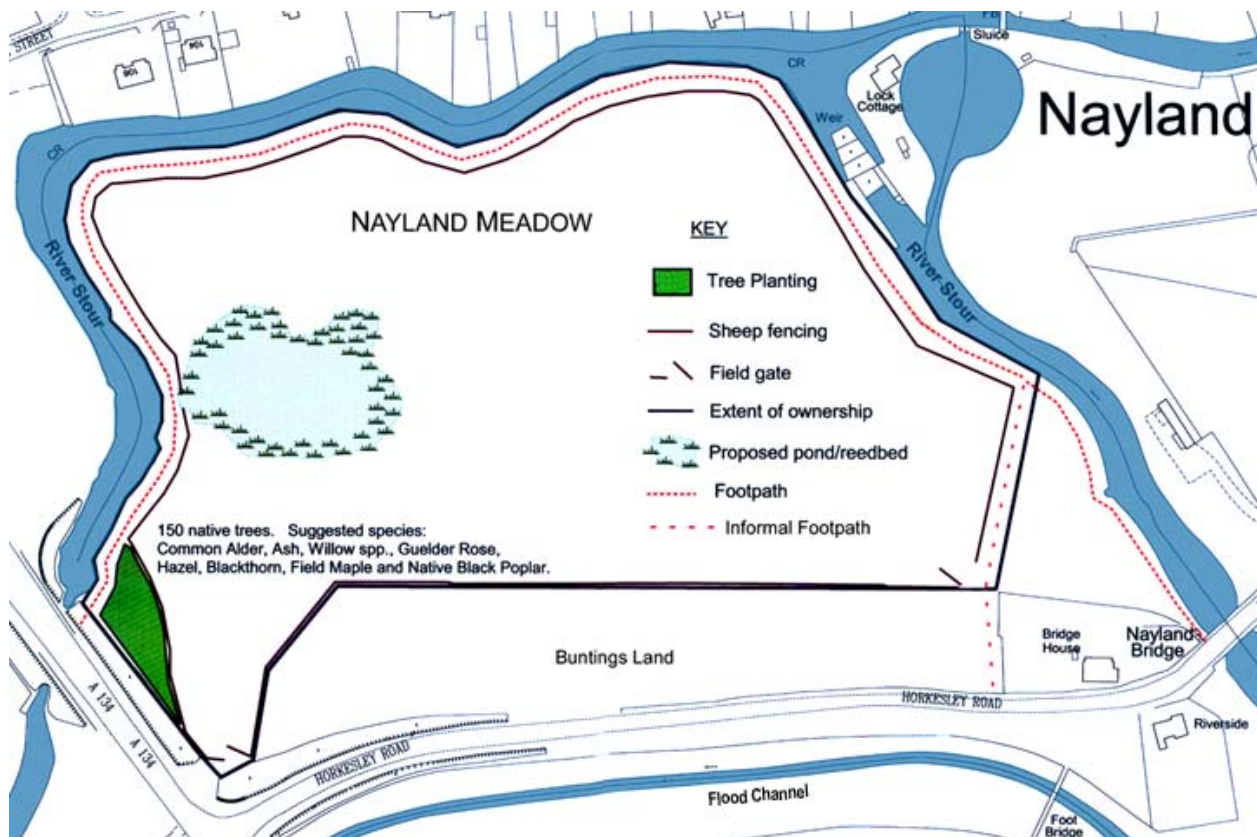
In March 2004, following an appeal for contributions, the Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society purchased 16.98 acres of land bordered to the north by the River Stour and to the south by a strip of land owned by Bunting & Sons adjacent to Horkesley Road. The Nayland with Wissington Land Company Limited, now a registered charity, was formed to own and manage this water meadow in perpetuity. The sum of £65,000 was raised (in under five months) to purchase this land and grateful thanks are due to the more than ninety individuals and organisations who supported the appeal.

Fishing

The fishing, which now belongs to the Land Company, has been made exclusively available to all residents of the parish of Nayland and Wiston. An earlier agreement with the Colchester Angling Preservation society and previous owners of the land was not continued. Notices were installed in early June 2004 to this effect.

The Plan

After discussion it was decided to apply for an Arable Reversion Grant under the Defra Suffolk River Valleys Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme. This would involve seeding with a suitable grass/conservation mix, a single hay cut followed by sheep grazing annually. Grants for fencing the land, on the inside of the public footpath, were obtained from Defra and the Suffolk Environmental Trust who have also funded a small area of planting as shown on the plan. (See below.)



Fencing

It was necessary to fence the meadow to protect the sheep and any grassland nesting birds from the users of the public footpath which borders the land on the west, north and eastern boundaries. Grants were applied for to fund the provision of gates and fencing and a small area of planting. The sum of £3,400 was obtained from the Suffolk Environmental Trust, with Babergh District Council (as a third party) contributing 10% funding to the Landfill Operator. Fencing took place in March/April 2005.



Work commenced in early February 2004

The Pond

The Environment Agency approached us with a view to creating a permanent wetland habitat and pond. This "back water" habitat is identified by the Environment Agency as important for maintaining fish stocks. After planning permission was granted work commenced in early February 2004. The shallow pond is linked to the River Stour by a short channel (culvert beneath the footpath) and will gradually be surrounded by reedbeds. (Plants sourced locally.) The Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Project are helping us with habitat improvement work. By early summer 2006 some reed growth was taking place and damsel flies and dragonflies were abundant.

To compensate for the loss of flood plain capacity a shallow scrape was created on the opposite side of the meadow (beside the weir). The total cost of the pond scheme was about £25,000 and was jointly funded by Defra and the Environment Agency at no cost to us. Maintenance is carried out by the EA assisted by the Dedham Vale Project with local volunteers when required.

The Wildflower Belt

The area between the fence and the public footpath along the riverbank was hand sown with a wildflower and grass mixture in late April 2005, to create yet another habitat. This was slow to germinate initially but after an autumn cut last year this species rich strip is now growing well, adding to the environmental diversity of the land and to the enjoyment of walkers along the public footpath. Inevitably there are thistles, hemlock and burdock which need regular cutting back and pulling. Labour for this job is not easily found and so we rely on volunteers to lend a hand.



By Autumn 2005 sheep were grazing in the meadow

Planting

The final phase of the project took place in late November 2005 when two classes from Nayland Primary school helped plant 150 native species of trees and shrubs in the south west corner of the field. 15 volunteers dug the holes one day and the children came the next day to plant the trees. The weather was perfect and a good time was had by all. A £200 grant from Suffolk Environment Trust, together with other donations, was used to fund this.

The future

The purchase of the land by the Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society and its management under the auspices of the Land Company has created a unique opportunity for an area of water meadow within the Dedham Vale AONB and Nayland Conservation Area to be reinstated and enhanced for the benefit not only of the local environment, but also for the people of the parish and visitors to the Stour Valley. We look forward to many new species of birds, insects and amphibians being attracted to these newly created habitats.

July 2006