

I am concerned about the degree of division within the village around what should be a very laudable, cohesive, and worthwhile project – Risby as a Wildlife Friendly Village - more specifically the areas on the upper and lower greens. There appears to be something of a perception that if one is not fully supportive of these areas of long grass then one is opposed to the whole concept of ‘a wildlife friendly village’ and something of a luddite.

Taking pride in a village which is clean, tidy and visually attractive is something to be praised, not criticised. It is understandable to want the village to be presented in its best possible aspect to visitors and passers-by. There are a large number of people who on a daily basis nurture and protect local flora and fauna, and yet are also opposed to the central more public areas of the village looking scruffy.

It is interesting that The Risby Rangers Report submitted to the council in August 2021 includes the comment ‘*My concern is that the wilding of verges at village boundaries may be misinterpreted as neglect rather than management, and that this might encourage littering*’

Alternative proposal for the wildlife areas in the village

Background

Compared with only 10 years ago (without including the two centre greens) we today have a village which is much more wildlife friendly and environmentally diverse.

- The area to the South and West of the Rec. which borders arable fields hosts a variety of wildlife and performs a valuable function as a beetle bank, bird nesting sites and highway for small mammals
- Behind Welham Lane and Woodland Close there used to be a large arable field. This has now been replaced with permanent pasture.
- The orchard along there has been left to grow wild and although visually unappealing being closed to human and domestic animal access is probably host to a wide range of wildlife.

A general definition of ‘wildlife friendly’ could be ‘*an environment which will attract pollinators (bees, butterflies and moths) and wildlife (hedgehogs, reptiles, birds and insects)*’ In my opinion these aims cannot be achieved if we rely solely on ‘natural regeneration’ which produces almost a monoculture. I would suggest that maximum diversity also requires active management.

I found this quotation on **The Wildlife Trust** website “*Long grass, peppered with flowers, is one of the rarest habitats in our well-tended gardens, yet it is incredibly beneficial for wildlife*”.

Note that this does not just advocate an area of grass which has been left to grow wild – it specifically includes the caveat ‘*peppered with flowers*’

It goes on to warn against ‘*encouraging excessive vigour in the grasses which then swamp the wildflowers. This is the most important principle in establishing a wildflower meadow*’

The website also gives advice on Maintaining your wild space *'It is essential to get the mowing regime right. Cut to 5 – 7 cm whenever the height reaches 10 – 20 cm. The number of mows required can range from one to four. Control assertive weeds like thistles, nettle and docks by hand-weeding.*

My suggestion would be that this could be a template for the areas on the two greens, and opposite Lackford Lane and Welham Lane pond where a basic programme might be:

- The spiral, the logs, benches etc be left in place.
- The outflow to the 'sump' on the lower green be cut relatively short, although this probably provides some attraction to specific invertebrates and wild flowers there is a greater potential obstruction to the free flow of drainage water and mitigation of flooding from the roadway outside The Manor.
- The current long grass areas be restricted to under the tree canopy. These areas to be 'managed' to attract and maintain a much more diverse range of flora and fauna.
- Up to 50% of the areas, should be cultivated and sown with a variety of wild flowers, either by using plugs or seed. This ensures they will not be choked out by the grasses
- Management to include hand weeding of aggressive thistles, docks, nettles etc.
- Allow the grass to grow to a maximum of say 20 cm and then cut back to a minimum of say 10 cm.
- After mid August, the whole of the areas to be subject to the normal mowing regime
- Construct and situate wildlife friendly boxes (similar to those in The Abbey Gardens, in East Harling Community Garden and near The Waterfront in Ely) in or adjacent to the wildlife areas – children could be involved with the building and maintaining of these 'houses'.
- Encourage land owners along Welham Lane to manage the verges so they do not become too overgrown

The aim is to create areas which attract and house a wide variety of birds, pollinators, insects and small mammals whilst still being visually attractive and which the whole village can support, be involved in and proud of.

I believe this might form the basis of a compromise which combines the aims of the wildlife group whilst also addressing the very real concerns about the current adverse effect on the visual aspects of the village