

23 October 2023 - Guided tour of Wild Aldhurst



Wild Aldhurst is a wildlife habitat scheme led by Sizewell C, at a former onion farm of some 67 ha approximately 2 km inland from the power station and 1 km north of the centre of Leiston.

This visit was arranged for us to see how impacts of the major National Infrastructure Project that is Sizewell C on local biodiversity are being.

20 of us attended the tour, which was led by Dr Steven Mannings, alongside Richard Knight and Graham Hinton, from Sizewell C's Environment Team.

Aldhurst Farm, formerly an onion farm, was acquired by Sizewell C in 2014, with the potential having been shown by studies to re-establish 6 ha of wetland habitat in the bottom of the valley, and the work undertaken since was described to us a project of habitat restoration, or arable reversion, as opposed to one of habitat creation, for example presenting an opportunity to compensate for the loss of reedbeds resulting from the construction of the power station to a compensatory ratio of 2:1.

The new reeds were sourced in East Anglia, with slubbings brought in from Sizewell Marshes and Minsmere to inoculate the earthworks with local biodiversity; for example, the well-established stands of willow in the picture opposite was not planted, but had in fact arrived with the slubbings.



The point was made that Wild Aldhurst does not seek to compensate for everything lost, as the habitats that the new reserve can accommodate need to be those for which the underlying geography is suitable. For example, it does not compensate for the loss of <0.5 ha of fen meadow, which is needing to be addressed by other more suitable sites.

In the course of recreating the wetland on the site, the approach was taken of working with the existing level of the groundwater.

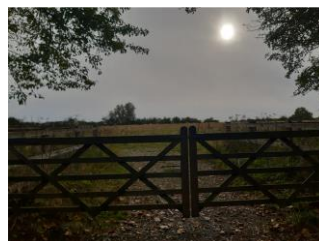


With undulating topography, Wild Aldhurst provides for a mosaic of other habitats besides wetlands, with the higher, dryer ground providing opportunities for a varied vista of some 60 ha of scrub, grasses and lowland heath to take root. An approach of proactive rewilding is being followed, with some areas left for nature to follow its own course, and other areas having seed banks introduced. The objective is for the reserve to include habitat of Sandlings character to help interconnect other remnants of Sandlings at Minsmere, Sizewell Marshes, Aldringham Walks and the Heritage Coast – what would be a landscape scale wildlife corridor.



Grazing may be introduced in the future, with plans to team up with other conservation organisations to explore how to make conservation grazing more economically deliverable. The restoration of these dryer habitats will take longer than that of the wetlands, which following some 7 or 8 years of development, are now ready to enter their first year of wetland management.

We were told that the plan is for those construction sites related to Sizewell C that are temporary, to revert to rewilding and not farmland or any other human use once their purposes as construction sites has been completed.



The site includes 5 receptor sites for reptiles from the construction sites, with relocation being reinforced by plenty of natural recruitment occurring. Camera traps on site have recorded water voles and otters; the reed beds contain eels (no fish have been introduced artificially to the site); and water scorpion are present in the community of aquatic invertebrates. Marsh harriers breed at Wild Aldhurst, whilst grayling butterfly (a UK Priority Species) are also present on site.

In terms of access, we heard that the intention is for a balance to be found between access to the land, opportunities for appreciation of nature, and the need to care for nature through conservation work. As such, the inner areas of the reserve are closed to public access, whilst other areas are provided for access for educational purposes for example visits by school pupils, with the site having provided an opportunity for a group of pupils to experience, some for the first time in their lives, the throngs of grasshoppers and crickets that thrive in the grasslands.

Whilst there is a footpath through the site to enable access for the more mobile, access for those with restricted mobility is more limited and the intention is to improve this. Opportunities for enjoyment of the reserve are to be explored as well, such as connecting the bridleway to the Heritage Coast, providing a bird watching hide with public access, viewpoints with benches, and even a visitors centre.

Wild Aldhurst is open to the public all year round. For more information about the site, visit:

[Wild Aldhurst - Sizewell C](#)

