



Wildflower Meadow Reversion from Arable

Lilstock Farm, Kilve

QH1001 17/09/2021- 31/03/2024 £4596.30

The applicant is an arable farmer on the coastal fringes of the Quantock Hills AONB. The holding comprises of 375ha of good quality agricultural ground which is used primarily for cereal production. The applicant wished to revert a 4.5ha field to a wildflower meadow from an intensively managed arable cropping rotation. The field is steeply sloping with a stream and the main throughfare, the A39, is at the bottom of the field. The field is in the parish of Kilve and the village can suffer from flash flooding events. It was hoped the reversion from cropping to a wildflower meadow would help reduce the severity of those events, by improving soil structure and water infiltration, slowing the flow of water in severe weather. The project was awarded £4,596.30 over the lifetime of FiPL to establish and maintain this wildflower meadow. The rates paid were Countryside Stewardship revenue rates.



This project meets the 'Climate' and 'Nature' themes of FiPL. The removal of this land from an intensive arable rotation reduces carbon loss through soil cultivations and allows the annual and perennial grassland species to put down deeper roots and sequester carbon through photosynthesis. There will be an increase in biodiversity and nature rich habitat for invertebrates and associated birds and mammals. This project also enhances the landscape character of the locality, a 'Place' outcome for FiPL.

The field has been in a forage ley for 3 years and minimal artificial fertiliser has been applied. Soil testing carried out by the applicant suggests the field has a low phosphorus index, making it ideal for wildflower meadow creation. The applicant ploughed and then sowed 1.62Ha with a wild flora mix-classed as species rich under countryside stewardship, with the remaining 2.88Ha a legume and herb rich sward. The applicant will mow once per year, removing and composting the cuttings to ensure the field does not gain in nutrient content. This is because an increase in soil fertility (for example by



cutting and leaving the organic material behind) would favour more aggressive weeds and grasses outcompeting native wildflowers. Maintaining low soil nutrient levels allows the wildflowers to compete with those more aggressive plants and to establish a more successful and diverse wildflower meadow.

Although there was some concern about the establishment of the wildflowers due to heavy rain directly after sowing, the flowers have established well this summer. The project will continue to be monitored during the FiPL programme, and the applicant intends to produce a case study for other arable farmers considering wildflower projects.