

COUNTY: WEST SUFFOLK      SITE NAME: WESTON FEN

DISTRICT: ST EDMUNDSBURY

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Local Planning Authority: ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TL 981787      Area: 48.6 (ha.) 120.1 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 144      1:10,000: TL 97 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1958      Date of Last Revision: 1972

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Most of the site is a nature reserve owned by The Suffolk Trust for Nature Conservation.

Reasons for Notification:

This site contains a very valuable example of a species-rich, spring-fed valley fen, with areas of fen grassland and relict heath. These are fringed by a wide variety of grassland scrub and woodland communities. Of all the fens in the Waveney/Ouse valley it has been least affected by drainage or water abstraction. The water-table remains high and stable throughout the year and this is reflected in the rich and varied flora of the site.

The species-rich fen community which occupies the central area is dominated by Saw Sedge *Cladium mariscus* and Reed *Phragmites australis* with abundant Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus*. Other species include Black Bog Rush *Schoenus nigricans*, Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*, Grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*, Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*, Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* and the locally rare Narrow-leaved Marsh orchid *D. traunsteineri*. The Greater Tussock Sedge *Carex paniculata* is prominent in parts of this area and there are also scattered patches of *Sphagnum* moss with Common Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* associated with them. The locally rare Cowbane *Cicuta virosa* also occurs in these areas. The chalk springs feed into the fen on its western side and these seepage areas are very wet.

A smaller area of less species-rich, eutrophic fen occurs in the north eastern part of the site and the wetter parts of this are characterised by Great Reedmace *Typha latifolia*, Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus* and Marsh Horsetail *Equisetum palustre*.

Tall fen grasslands dominated by a variety of grasses, rushes and sedges cover low-lying ground in several of the surrounding meadows. Much of this is currently ungrazed and is often tall and rank. Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*, Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*, Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta* and Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* are the most

abundant and widespread species. Reed Sweet Grass *Glyceria maxima* and Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus* are locally dominant. Other frequent species include Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus uliginosus*, Valerian *Valeriana officinalis* and Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*.

Towards the edges of the site this type of vegetation merges into damp neutral grasslands. The drier parts, especially those that are under-grazed, are dominated by False Oat Grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*. The wetter areas in the south eastern parts of the site are dominated by Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Yorkshire Fog and Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*. This area is grazed and is very species-rich. Species recorded include Large Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*.

Relict heath communities to the north-west and south-east of the site have been heavily invaded by bracken along with gorse and hawthorn scrub. Some areas of bracken are now being cleared and acidic grassland is re-developing. Older established areas of acidic grassland contain Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Petty Whin *Genista anglica* and Mouse-ear Hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella*. Where chalk comes close to the surface the grassland is covered by anthills and contains frequent Wild Thyme *Thymus drucei* and Cowslip *Primula veris*.

A small stream with good marginal and aquatic vegetation passes through the site. This stream is the main outlet for water from the site and the water level in it is close to that of the surrounding land surface.

Additional diversity is provided by a series of small wet hollows along the southern margin of the site, many of which contain standing water. These support a rich flora including Gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, Greater Tussock Sedge and two locally uncommon species, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*.

Secondary woodland and scrub have developed on several marginal areas. On drier parts this consists mainly of Oak, Sycamore and Birch and is species-poor. Wetter parts support Willow and Alder Carr. These areas are floristically much more diverse. The understorey contains a mixture of Wild Privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, Alder Buckthorn *Frangula alnus*, Buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus* and Guelder Rose *Viburnum opulus*. The ground flora includes many characteristic wet woodland fen species.

The whole of the notified area is a hydrological unit. The marginal habitats ensure that the water-table in the centre of the site remains fairly constant and that the water which supplies it is relatively unpolluted. The diversity of habitats on the site also means that it has a rich bird and invertebrate fauna. The fen is particularly noted as a breeding place for Water Rail and Reed Warblers, and supports large numbers of Dragon and Damselflies.