COUNTY: NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

SITE NAME: HARDWICK LODGE MEADOW

District: Wellingborough

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

Local Planning Authority: Wellingborough Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SP 834703

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 141 1:10,000: SP 87 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 Date of Last Revision:

Area: 10.2 ha 25.2 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

An extensive, species-rich and agriculturally-unimproved permanent pasture occupying an almost level site on boulder clay. The grassland is a fine example of the crested dog’s-tail-common knapweed community developed on soils ranging from poorly-drained and lime deficient to freely-drained and calcareous. There is also an unusually rich example of the Yorkshire fog-tufted hair-grass type.

Such grasslands are the result of a long continuity of traditional management and this site’s existence is documented as far back as 1587. Though of widespread distribution nationally, they have been greatly reduced due to changes in farming practice. In the East Midlands the remaining sites are now very few and rapidly declining.

Hardwick Lodge Meadow has particular importance in a county context as the largest site of its kind and in demonstrating the full range of floristic variation in the major grassland community. An exceptionally large number of plants rare in Northamptonshire occur.

The vegetation shows four variants. Typically there is a very diverse mixture of grasses and herbs such as red fescue Festuca rubra, sweet vernal-grass Anthoxanthum odoratum, crested dog’s-tail Cynosurus cristatus, meadow oat-grass Avenula pratensis, common bird’s-foot-trefoil Lotus corniculatus, clovers Trifolium species, meadow vetchling Lathyrus pratensis, glaucous sedge Carex flacca and field wood-rush Luzula campestris. Dryer, more lime-enriched parts are broadly similar with additional species including crested hair-grass Koeleria macrantha, salad burnet Sanguisorba minor, dwarf thistle Cirsium acaule, hoary plantain Plantago media and cowslip Primula veris.

Over much of the site these communities are modified by the presence of abundant tufted hair-grass Deschampsia cespitosa - indicating a seasonally waterlogged soil layer. Here, more locally, there is an acidic influence which favours plants such as betony Stachys officinalis, tormentil Potentilla erecta, heath-grass Danthonia decumbens and devil’s bit scabious Succisa pratensis.

In the north-west corner and alongside a bisecting stream permanently moist soil conditions support marshy grassland. Common spike-rush Eleocharis palustris, hard rush Juncus inflexus, sneezewort Achillea ptarmica, marsh-marigold Caltha palustris, meadowsweet Filipendula ulmaria and saw-wort Serratula tinctoria are characteristic of these areas. Also occurring here are large populations of heath spotted-orchid and common spotted-orchid Dactylorhiza maculata and D. fuchsii - the former in its only county locality.

The mosaic structure of tussocks and shorter grass is attractive to invertebrates and locally uncommon beetles and heteropteran bugs are recorded.

Additional habitats are provided by the old and mature bordering hedgerows, ditches and a pond.