COUNTY: NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SITE NAME: RIVER ISE AND MEADOWS

District: Kettering

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

Local Planning Authority: Kettering District Council

National Grid Reference: SP 860831/891

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 141 1:10,000: SP 88 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): Date of Last Revision: Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1988 Date of Last Revision:

Area: 14.00 ha 34.6 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

Flowing through a catchment of Oolite Limestone, the River Ise is the best example in the county of a lowland river on clay, fed by base-rich water. The channel displays a variety of semi-natural features increasingly uncommon in areas of intensive agriculture. Between Barford Bridge railway viaduct and the village of Geddington, the river channel is narrow and meandering with numerous sharp bends and loops; the alternating series of pools, slacks, riffles and runs modify the water flow. The substrate is equally varied with silty pools, gravel shoals and beds and bare clay. Areas of tall fen, woodland and semi-improved grassland along the main banks, together with an area of species-rich flood meadow, provide additional habitats which complement the interest of the site.

The eastern section of the river is lined with mature trees represented by alder Alnus glutinosa, ash Fraxinus excelsior, pedunculate oak Quercus robur and pollards of white willow Salix alba. Hawthorn Crataegus monogyna, Midland hawthorn C. laevigata and blackthorn Prunus spinosa are well represented, with occasional buckthorn Rhamnus catharticus and guelder rose Viburnum opulus. Where gaps in the tree cover allow, there are stands of aquatic plants dominated by unbranched bur-reed Sparganium emersum, spiked water-milfoil Myriophyllum spicatum, yellow water-lily Nuphar lutea, arrowhead Sagittaria sagittifolia, and on silt deposits swards of branched bur-reed Sparganium erectum.

Aquatic plant growth is more luxuriant and diverse in the western section where there are fewer trees and shrubs. Additional species occur here such as common club-rush Schoenoplectus lacustris, broad-leaved pondweed Potamogeton natans, greater pond sedge Carex riparia and rigid hornwort Ceratophyllum demersum, a species uncommon in the county of Northamptonshire.

The bank vegetation is rich and varied showing a typical zonation from nettle Urtica dioica, great willowherb Epilobium hirsutum and purple-loosestrife Lythrum salicaria to water forget-me-not Myosotis scorpooides at the water’s edge. Less common is skullcap Scutellaria galericulata.

The structural diversity of the river channel is reflected in the rich invertebrate record. Most orders of aquatic invertebrates are represented with a notably high number of beetle Coleoptera species and caddis-fly Trichoptera and mayfly Ephemeroptera larvae. The presence of stonefly Plecoptera larvae so far downstream is a further indication of the relatively undisturbed nature of the river bed.

There is a small self-supporting population of grayling Thyllamus thyllamus, the only example in Northamptonshire. Of increasing importance is the population of freshwater crayfish Austropotamobius pallipes, a species undergoing a decline in numbers nationally due to disease. A number of birds use the river corridor including reed bunting, sedge warbler, marsh tit, kingfisher and whitethroat.

The species-rich flood meadow is characterised by meadow foxtail Alopecurus pratensis, yellow oat-grass Trisetum flavescens and great burnet Sanguisorba officinalis, with drier slopes supporting lady’s bedstraw Galium verum and crested dog’s-tail Cynosurus cristatus.