

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: GELDESTON MEADOWS

DISTRICT: South Norfolk

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

Local Planning Authority: South Norfolk District Council

National Grid Reference: TM 396916 Area: 13.43 (ha) 33.2 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 134 1:10,000: TM 39 SE

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

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

Other Information:
A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The site lies in the flood plain of the River Waveney and forms an exceptionally diverse example of the traditionally managed grazing meadows of the area. A high water-table is maintained throughout the year with light summer grazing by cattle with some areas mown for hay. Gradation of the water-table and variations in soil type which range from peats to clays have provided conditions for the development of a number of plant communities and as a result a very diverse flora has developed. In addition, an area of Alder carr and a series of drainage dykes are included within the site.

The major part of the site is wet meadow grassland dominated by Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Common Quaking Grass *Briza media* and Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*. A floristically diverse short-sward grassland has developed in some fields on peaty soils, with mosses and sedges well-represented including Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea*, Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca* and Flea Sedge *Carex pulicaris*. Associated herbs characteristic of calcareous conditions include Marsh Arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus*. Within this turf a number of plants associated with less calcareous conditions are present, the most distinctive of which are Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Common Sedge *Carex nigra* and the uncommon Marsh Fern *Thelypteris thelypteroides*.

A particularly interesting feature of the grasslands is the close association of typically drier hay-meadow species such as Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* agg., Autumn Hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis* and Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra* with the fen grassland flora. On the higher valley slope where conditions become drier these species replace the damper grassland species.

The influence of periodic winter flooding over more mineral soils adjacent to the river has resulted in the establishment of a taller ranker vegetation with abundant Reed Canary Grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, Marsh Valerian *Valeriana officinalis*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*.

The system of drainage dykes supports a number of aquatic plants including Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, Lesser Water-parsnip *Berula erecta*, Tubular Water Dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*, Water Milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*, Cyperus Sedge *Carex pseudocyperus* and Floating Sweet Grass *Glyceria fluitans*. An area of Alder *Alnus glutinosa* Carr is present within the site.

Typical grazing-marsh birds are well represented including breeding snipe, lapwing, reed warbler and reed bunting.