

File ref: SD 60/4

County: Greater Manchester **Site Name:** Abram Flashes

District: Wigan

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

Local Planning Authority: Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SD 610003 **Area:** 39.62 (ha) 97.9 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 109 **1:10,000:** SD 60 SW, SJ 69 NW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990

Other Information:

This is a new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The Abram Flashes are situated 6 km south-east of Wigan and 3 kilometres east of Ashton-in-Makerfield. The site lies adjacent to the Leeds and Liverpool canal along the Hey Brook, and forms part of a series of wetlands stretching for some 10 km between Wigan and Leigh, known as the Wigan Flashes. It is underlain by tills and Late-glacial flood gravels overlying Triassic sandstones of the Sherwood Sandstones Group. The site is important in supporting the most outstanding assemblage of breeding birds associated with lowland open waters and wet grassland in Greater Manchester and Merseyside.

The Flashes themselves are shallow open water-bodies originally formed through the flooding of land which has subsided through deep-mining activities. Their gradual colonisation has resulted in a mosaic of different habitats including open water, swamp, tall herb fen and wet marshy grassland. Parts of the site and most of the surrounding land is farmed.

Of particular interest is the breeding waterfowl community which includes mute swan, mallard, tufted duck, pochard, garganey, shoveler, gadwall and ruddy duck. Yellow wagtails and waders such as lapwing, snipe and redshank breed in the wet grassland, itself a nationally declining habitat, whilst characteristic birds of swamp and fen such as reed bunting, reed warbler and sedge warbler are well represented. The Hey Brook provides suitable conditions for species such as kingfisher and grey wagtail.

The site is also locally important for wintering waterfowl which use the whole Wigan Flashes complex, and lower water levels, particularly in autumn, can provide valuable feeding and roosting habitat for migrant waders such as greenshank, ruff and dunlin.

The swamp communities are dominated by bulrush *Typha latifolia*, reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima* and reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*. The wet grassland is dominated by soft rush *Juncus effusus* with grasses such as Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* and tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, and the tall herb fen by species such as great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* and meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. There are a variety of other wetland plants such as water mint *Mentha aquatica*, hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and water

forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides* which occur throughout these communities and the transitions between them.

Hedgerows and scrub comprised mainly of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, grey willow *Salix cinerea* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., and small areas of herb rich neutral grassland add to the diversity of the site and provide additional habitat for breeding and migrant birds such as little owl, warblers and finches.