COUNTY: BERKSHIRE **SITE NAME:** WEST'S MEADOW, ALDERMASTON

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

Local Planning Authorities: Newbury District Council, Berkshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU597626

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 174 **1:10,000:** SU56 SE

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

Area: 1.2 ha 2.96 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

West's Meadow comprises two small fields of unimproved pasture bounded by hedgerows and a small stream. The meadows consist of neutral to acidic herb-rich grassland including both well-drained areas and wetter areas of base-poor marsh. Compared with improved grasslands, unimproved meadows contain particularly diverse plant and invertebrate communities and are rare and rapidly declining in Great Britain.

The meadow is situated on Plateau Gravels, the overlying soils consisting of paleo-argillic podsols. Typically, these are well-drained sandy soils which are often very acidic, but at West's Meadow much of the site is moderately damp, probably due to underlying clay, with wetter areas occurring locally.

The flora of the meadow reflects the variation in soil-water regime. In the driest (and more acidic) areas heath grass *Danthonia decumbens*, squirrel-tail fescue *Vulpia bromoides*, eyebright *Euphrasia nemorosa*, heath milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*, spiny rest-harrow *Ononis spinosa*, betony *Stachys officinalis* and bitter vetch *Lathyrus montanus* grow, whilst in the damper parts heath spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, creeping-Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia*, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis* and meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum* are found.

Two species of rush *Juncus* are found, four sedges *Carex* spp. and the uncommon bristle club-rush *Isolepis setacea* also occur in the damper areas and in the base-poor marsh where other species include marsh speedwell *Veronica scutellata*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis*. Bent grass *Agrostis* spp., red fescue *Festuca rubra*, meadow grasses *Poa* spp. and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* are widely distributed and creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens* is abundant in places. An uncommon moss *Dicranum bonjeanii* has also been recorded.

Overall, West's Meadow contains over 80 species of grassland plants, which is a high figure for such a small area. Many of those mentioned are now largely confined to 'ancient' meadows which have had a long history of freedom from improvement and disturbance. West's Meadow has been managed by grazing for at least 30 years.

Added interest is provided by the ditch-and-bank hedge boundaries composed mainly of mature oak, hawthorn, holly, rowan, hazel and a wide variety of other trees and shrubs including willows *Salix* spp., English elm *Ulmus procera*, wild cherry *Prunus avium*, crab apple *Malus sylvestris*, gorse and broom. The small stream supports aquatic species such as water starwort *Callitriche* sp. and celery-leaved buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus*.