

File ref:

**County:** Hampshire      **Site Name:** Chilbolton Common SSSI

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Hampshire County Council, Test Valley Borough Council

**National Grid Reference:** SU 388400      **Area:** 36.1 (ha) 89.45 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 185      **1:10,000:** SU 34 SE, SU 33 NE

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

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 8 October 1987      **Date of Last Revision:** –

**Confirmed:** 6 July 1988

**Other Information:**

Chilbolton Common is registered and confirmed as common land.

**Reasons for Notification:**

The Site of Special Scientific Interest embraces the ancient common of Chilbolton on the upper reaches of the River Test flood plain, together with surrounding fen, sallow carr and an unimproved marshy meadow. It also includes a length of the River Test, a classic fast-flowing, eutrophic southern chalk stream which forms a fine linking feature between the major habitats. The site supports a species-rich and ecologically diverse flora, the communities of the flood plain marsh being particularly important, with many exacting species now rare or scarce through habitat loss.

Chilbolton Common comprises a wide range of meadow types with considerable variation in plant association in relation to small-scale changes in topography, soil-type, drainage, chemistry and management history. Much of the low-lying land consists of a species-rich river flood plain marsh, with distinctive dwarf sedge swards of *Carex nigra*, *C. panicea*, *C. demissa*, *C. pulicaris*, *C. echinata* and a host of short herbs such as bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, common milkwort *Polygala vulgaris* and locally marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, in a matrix of taller rush *Juncus*-dominated vegetation with abundant water avens *Geum rivale*, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*, bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*. The occurrence of plants characteristic of both base-poor and base-rich marshes is of particular interest. Where peat has been deposited, the sward grades into incipient mixed fen dominated by greater tussock sedge *Carex paniculata*, with yellow loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris*, hemp agrimony *Eupatoria cannabinum*, meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum*, bog stitchwort *Stellaria alsine* and common reed *Phragmites australis*. Further diversity is added to the Common by the presence of two areas of higher and more freely draining calcareous loam soils, dominated by grasses, particularly bents *Agrostis* species and fescues *Festuca* species, and containing several typical chalk species, for example, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaulon*, cowslip *Primula veris* and squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica*. Of particular note within these areas are two parallel dry bank and ditch hollow-ways which support a closely rabbit-cropped species-rich sward that bears close affinities with typical chalk downland, containing, for example, such species as thyme *Thymus drucei*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* and locally horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*.

To date (1986), over 265 species of flowering plant have been recorded on the Common, including large populations of such local species as marsh arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, both southern and early marsh orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and *D. incarnata*, abundant flat sedge *Blysmus compressus*, slender spike-rush *Eleocharis uniglumis*, whorl grass *Catabrosa aquatica* and strawberry clover *Trifolium fragiferum* in a highly atypical, inland location. There are also 14 species of sedge, including the uncommon *Carex hostiana*, *C. disticha* and *C. pulicaris*.

The close proximity to the Common of a herb-rich marshy meadow which has had a different management history affords interesting ecological comparisons. Though the meadow exhibits certain affinities with the Common, most noticeably in the presence of patches of dwarf sedge associations in a matrix of taller marsh vegetation, much of it differs in being dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, a plant not hitherto recorded on the Common. Other species occurring here, but absent from the Common, include pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, long-stalked yellow-sedge *Carex lepidocarpa* and the marsh variety of the fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* var. *densiflora*.

The Site of Special Scientific Interest supports a number of breeding wetland birds, including snipe, redshank and lapwing on Chilbolton Common, and grasshopper, reed and sedge warblers in the surrounding fen/riparian habitats.