

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: SWANGHEY FEN

DISTRICT: Breckland

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

Local Planning Authority: Breckland District Council

National Grid Reference: TM 015932 Area: 82.3 (ha) 203.3 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 144 1:10,000: TM 09 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1964 Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The area of this site has been reduced. Part of the site is owned by the Otter Trust.

Reasons for Notification:

The site contains an area of species-rich, spring-fed fen of a type that is otherwise largely restricted to the Norfolk Broads. Wet woodland and grassland surround the fen, increasing the interest of the site and helping to maintain a high water-table. The River Thet passes through the site.

The fen itself contains sizeable areas of Saw Sedge *Cladium mariscus* interspersed with areas of mixed Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus* and Black Bog Rush *Schoenus nigricans*. These contain a good range of associated plants, many of them of a very localised distribution. Some of the more noticeable are plants such as Grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*, Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*, Milk Parsley *Peucedanum palustre*, Marsh Lousewort *Pedicularis palustris*, Marsh Helleborine *Epipactis palustris*, Early Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata* and Marsh Pea *Lathyrus palustris*. In addition there are several less spectacular plants, small sedges such as Slender Sedge *Carex lasiocarpa* and a number of rare mosses. Tussocks of *Sphagnum* moss have also developed in these areas.

Around the Southern and Eastern sides of the fen the vegetation changes. Reed *Phragmites australis*, Sweet Grass *Glyceria* sp. and Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* are dominant and there is much less variety of plant life. This vegetational change reflects the seasonal lowering of the water-table in these areas during the summer, which appears to have been caused by drainage channels on the margins of the fen.

Scrub, mostly Sallow and Alder has invaded parts of the fen and around the margins grades into established wet woodland. Substantial blocks of wet woodland are also found to the south of the River Thet. Alder dominates the tree layer of this woodland whilst the ground vegetation consists of a mixture of wood and fen species, plants such as Enchanter's Nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*, Hedge Woundwort *Stachys sylvatica*, Gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, Hemp Agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum* and Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus*.

On the higher margins of the site, this type of woodland grades into mixed Alder, Oak, Ash woodland with some Sycamore and Willow. In places there is a well-developed understorey of Hazel, Redcurrant and regenerating tree saplings. The ground vegetation contains more woodland species, including plants such as Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* that are not tolerant of flooding.

The grasslands within the site divide into two classes. On the south side of the river there is an area of unimproved grassland of considerable interest. It contains a variety of vegetation types ranging from dry acidic Bent Grass/Fescue *Agrostis/Festuca* grassland to wetter areas in which Meadowsweet, Blunt-flowered Rush and Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* are abundant. The range of flowering plants includes Lesser Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Ladies Bedstraw *Galium verum*, Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*. This area has been ungrazed for some time and patches of thistles and nettles have established themselves.

On the north side of the river there is a substantial area of cattle-grazed meadowland. This is less species-rich but is important in maintaining the water-table within Swangey Fen itself. The dykes that divide the meadows contain a range of common water plants.

The section of the River Thet that runs through the site has been extensively modified and deepened and is of little intrinsic interest. It does however determine the summer water level over a considerable proportion of the site.