

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: THETFORD GOLF COURSE & MARSH

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: TL 845838 Area: 119.6 (ha) 295.5 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:144 1:10,000: TL 88 SE, SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1968 Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This site is listed in “A Nature Conservation Review”.

Reasons for Notification:

This site contains the only surviving area of a once extensive track of Breckland heath known as Thetford Warren. A wide range of heathland plant communities still occur in the occasionally mown “roughs” on the golf course and on other parts of the site. Dry grass heath on both acidic and calcareous glacial drifts covers much of the area but there are also good examples of open lichen heath and heather heath. The diverse flora includes two locally rare plants. Horse Meadows, an area of low-lying ground by the River Little Ouse forms a marked contrast to the dry heathland. The wet peaty soils support a range of fenland plant communities and a fine example of valley alder woodland.

Calcareous grassland occurs where there are chalk fragments in the overlying drift. Areas of “semi-rough” are lightly mown and the grass sward contains an abundance of Sheep’s Fescue *Festuca ovina*, Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and Crested Hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha*. Associated herb species include Lady’s Bedstraw *Galium verum*, Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, Common Broomrape *Orobancha minor* and the nationally rare Spanish Catchfly *Silene otites*. Taller growing calcareous grassland is present on the unmown rough and is dominated by Cock’sfoot *Dactylis glomerata* and Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*.

Acidic grassland, Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and dry heathland dominated by Heather *Calluna vulgaris* are present on free-draining sands and gravels. Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Wavy Hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and Sheep’s Fescue dominate the areas of acidic grassland with Sheep’s Sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia*, Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia* and a small population of the uncommon Maiden Pink *Dianthus deltoides*. In places there are alternating stripes of Heather and acidic grassland which reflect differential sorting of the drift material by frost during a periglacial period. Lichen heath has developed on the lightest sands and gravels in an area of abandoned gravel workings. This is a rare habitat confined to Breckland and is dominated by low-growing lichens *Cladonia spp.* and mosses (mostly *Polytrichum piliferum*). An uncommon fern, Moonwort *Botrychium lunaria* occurs in one pit.

Horse Meadows support a series of fen and wet grassland communities under scattered plantings of Poplar. Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, Purple Small-reed *Calamagrostis canescens*, Reed Sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*, Common Reed *Phragmites australis*, Greater Pond Sedge *Carex riparia* and Tufted Sedge *C. elata* provide the dominant or co-dominant species on the wet fen. Much of the variation in the vegetation is due to the differing degrees of wetness and depth of standing water on the site.

The valley carr woodland is dominated by large coppiced stools of Alder *Alnus glutinosa* with occasional Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Birch *Betula pubescens* and Common Sallow *Salix cinerea*. The ground flora is typically diverse and includes Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus*, Greater Tussock Sedge *Carex paniculata*, Wood Small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos*, Gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus* and Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*.