

COUNTY: KENT SITE NAME: MEDWAY ESTUARY AND MARSHES

BOROUGH: ROCHESTER UPON MEDWAY/SWALE/GILLINGHAM

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

Local Planning Authority: ROCHESTER UPON MEDWAY CITY COUNCIL, Swale Borough Council, Gillingham Borough Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 850 720 Area: 6,840.14 (ha.) 16,895.14 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 178 1:10,000: TQ 76 NE, TQ 77 SE, TQ 86 NW/NE, TQ 87, TQ 96 NW, TQ 97 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1968 Date of Last Revision: 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 Date of Last Revision: 1992

Other Information:

Previously known as the Medway Marshes SSSI, a former part of this site, north of the A228 to the Isle of Grain, is included with other SSSIs in the new South Thames Estuary and Marshes SSSI. Parts of the site are listed in *A Nature Conservation Review*, D A Ratcliffe (ed) Cambridge University Press 1977. The site has been extended to include adjacent areas of grazing marsh and estuarine habitats. The notification only extends to land above the Mean Low Water Mark (MLWM). The site is a candidate for designation under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), and as a Special Protection Area under European Commission Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds.

Reasons for Notification:

The Medway Estuary and Marshes form the largest area of intertidal habitats which have been identified as of value for nature conservation in Kent and are representative of the estuarine habitats found on the North Kent coast. A complex of mudflats and saltmarsh is present with in places grazing marsh behind the sea walls which is intersected by dykes and fleets. The area holds internationally important populations of wintering and passage birds and is also of importance for its breeding birds. An outstanding assemblage of plant species also occurs on the site.

The Medway Estuary is now believed to be the most important area in North Kent for wintering wildfowl with shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, brent goose *Branta bernicla*, grey plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, ringed plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, pintail *Anas acuta*, dunlin *Calidris alpina*, and redshank *Tringa totanus* occurring in numbers of international significance. Also present in numbers of national significance are turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, black-tailed godwit *Limosa limosa*, curlew *Numenius arquata*, great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, shoveler *Anas*

clypeata, teal *Anas crecca*, wigeon *Anas penelope* and white-fronted goose *Anser albifrons*. Passage migrants include ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*.

The Chetney Peninsula is among the most important wildfowl breeding areas in Kent. Breeding species include avocet, shelduck, shoveler, pochard *Aythya ferina*, mute swan *Cygnus olor*, tufted duck *Aythya fuligula*, teal *Anas crecca* and gadwall *Anas strepera*.

The saltmarsh, in addition to serving as a roosting area for waders at high tide, and supporting breeding birds such as redshank *Tringa totanus*, blackheaded gull *Larus ridibundus* and common tern *Sterna hirundo*, also has an interesting flora. The most abundant plants include sea aster *Aster tripolium*, sea lavender *Limonium vulgare*, cord-grass *Spartina anglica* and saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia maritima*, but among the many others are several scarce species such as golden samphire *Inula crithmoides**, perennial glasswort *Salicornia perennis** and one-flowered glasswort *Salicornia pusilla**. The estuary is one of the best places in Britain for the study of glassworts.

The grazing marsh is a complex habitat of pasture, seawalls and counterwalls, and numerous dykes and fleets. Each of these has its own characteristic assemblage of plants and animals. Both breeding and wintering birds are of interest; the former include lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, redshank, pochard, mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* and gadwall, while in winter large flocks of many wildfowl and wader species are present. The vegetation is primarily a mixture of several species of grass, but with a considerable variety of other plants, some uncommon, for example sea barley *Hordeum marinum**, slender hare's-ear *Bupleurum tenuissimum**, oak-leaved goose-foot *Chenopodium glaucum*** and sea clover *Trifolium squamosum**. The dykes and their margins usually have sea club-rush *Scirpus maritimus* as the most abundant plant, but here too rarities can be found, sometimes in quite large amounts: annual beard-grass *Polypogon monspeliensis**, small goose foot *Chenopodium botryodes**, golden dock *Rumex maritimus** and brackish water-crowfoot *Ranunculus baudotii** are examples of these.

In addition to the habitats already described, the site includes smaller areas of scrub, reedbeds and sand dune which add to the variety of interest. The shell sand beaches of the Isle of Grain are of particular interest in that they are the only examples of such habitat remaining so far up the Thames estuary. They have a distinctive flora including sand couch *Elymus farctus*, sea holly *Eryngium maritimum*, sea sandwort *Honkenya peploides*, sea rocket *Cakile maritima* and prickly saltwort *Salsola kali*.

+*Wildfowl and Wader Counts 1988–89*, D G Salmon et al, Wildfowl Trust, 1989.

*Nationally scarce species: recorded from 16–100 10 × 10km squares.

**Nationally rare species: recorded from 1–15 10 × 10 km squares in Britain, and listed in *British Red Data Books: 1 Vascular Plants*, F H Perring and L Farrell, RSNL 1983.