

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: FRITTON COMMON, MORNINGTHORPE

DISTRICT: South Norfolk

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

Local Planning Authority: South Norfolk District Council

National Grid Reference: TM 224921 Area: 19.8 (ha) 48.9 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 134 1:10,000: TM 29 SW

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

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

Other Information:
A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Fritton Common is one of only a few large grassy commons remaining in south Norfolk still under traditional management by light cattle grazing. The site forms an excellent example of the locally uncommon damp acidic grassland habitat developed over loess soils. Several natural ponds are present and these support well developed marginal and aquatic vegetation. The management of the surrounding grassland has ensured that there is no excess nutrient enrichment and the waters support a rich invertebrate fauna. Ancient isolated oak and ash trees carry a wide range of epiphytic lichens including some locally scarce species.

Damp acidic grassland covers much of the site and is dominated by Common Bent-grass *Agrostis capillaris*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*. Other frequent species include Mat-grass *Nardus stricta*, Heath Grass *Danthonia decumbens*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*. Wetter areas, on low-lying ground with impeded drainage, are characterised by abundant Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*, Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica* and Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta*.

Neutral grassland occurs where the soils contain chalk fragments and here the sward is dominated by Creeping Bent-grass *Agrostis stolonifera*, Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* and Sweet Vernal-grass with associated herbs including Green-winged Orchid *Orchis morio*, Cowslip *Primula veris* and Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*.

The ponds are shallow and show great diversity with some being only seasonally wet. The marginal vegetation is generally well developed and is distinctly zoned with the innermost fringe consisting of Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, Common Spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*, Tubular Water Dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa* and Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*. This grades into an outer zone of Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Tufted Forget-me-not *Myosotis caespitosa*, Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* and Cuckoo Flower *Cardamine pratensis*. The marginal vegetation of a few ponds is dominated by Soft Rush *J. effusus*. The deeper ponds, with permanent water, contains a variety of water plants. Broad-leaved Pondweed *Potamogeton natans* is generally dominant with Common Water-crowfoot *Ranunculus peltatus*, Stonewort *Chara sp.* and Water-plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica*.

The abundance of water plants supports a diverse assemblage of invertebrate species including the locally rare water-beetle *Ilybius subaeneus*. The ponds are also breeding sites for the Warty Newt *Triturus cristatus*.