COUNTY: BERKSHIRE **SITE NAME:** WOOLHAMPTON REED BED

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

Local Planning Authorities: Newbury District Council, Berkshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU575667

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 174 **1:10,000:** SU56 NE

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

Area: 5.77 ha 14.25 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

This site, which consists of dense reed bed with smaller areas of tall fen vegetation and carr woodland, is notable for its nesting passerine bird populations and for the diversity of insects it supports, which include several uncommon species

The reed beds are situated on relatively level ground with a high water table. The site is underlain by London Clay and tertiary terrace gravels. The soils consist of chalky and gravelly river alluvium of the From series, with slow, permeable, seasonally-waterlogged stagnogleys of the Wickham 4 type to the north.

The reeds *Phragmites australis* are established on a former osier bed which was abandoned after the decline of the willow rod industry in Berkshire during the 1930s. Reed growth is more vigorous at Woolhampton than in the nearby, but generally drier, area of reed beds at Thatcham, and can reach 3 m in places. There are scattered clumps and denser areas of osier *Salix viminalis* and other willows, with groups of alder and a small secondary woodland of ash. Where the reeds are less dominant the flora includes many typical marshland plants such as hairy willow herb *Epilobium hirsutum*, marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*, purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, meadow sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, meadow rue *Thalictrum flavum*, hemp agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*, yellow loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris*, comfrey *Symphytum officinalis* and hemlock water dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*.

The site supports a large colony of reed warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, a species which in Britain nests almost exclusively in this habitat.

Over 300 species of moth have been recorded, many of which are rare or uncommon. The obscure wainscot *Mythinna obsoleta*, twin-spotted wainscot *Archanara geminipuncta* and brown-veined wainscot *A. dissoluta* are scarce species dependent on reed to complete their life cycles. Other uncommon species include the scarce burnished brass *Diachrysia chryson* the larvae of which feed on hemp agrimony, and the butterbur moth *Hydraecia petasitis* which feeds on the roots of butterbur *Petasites* spp.

Woolhampton Reed Bed is also an important wetland site for flies (Diptera). Over 160 species have been recorded. Uncommon or locally distributed species include two craneflies *Tipula couckei* and *T. montium* and three hoverflies *Platycheirus fulviventris*, *Neoascia dispar* and *N. obliqua*, the last of which is listed as rare in the British Red Data Book of insects. Other uncommon flies are *Prionocera turcica*, *Atherix ibix*, *Graphomya picta* and *Tropidia scita*.

Detailed studies have been conducted on several other insect groups found at the reed beds including bees, wasps, ants and sawflies (Hymenoptera), caddis flies (Trichoptera), mayflies (Ephemeroptera), stoneflies (Plecoptera), beetles (Coleoptera), dragonflies (Odonata) and plant-bugs (Hemiptera).