

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: Wells Chalk Pit

DISTRICT: North Norfolk

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

Local Planning Authority: North Norfolk District Council

National Grid Reference: TF 929 429 Area: 3.78 ha (9.34 ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 132 1:10,000: TF 94 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 Date of Last Revision: N/A

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

Wells Chalk Pit is an occasionally worked quarry with areas of well-established chalk grassland and scrub. A diverse flora, with exceptionally large populations of orchids, is developing in those parts of the pit that have remained undisturbed for several years. Chalk grassland is very scarce in Norfolk and the site is an excellent example of a type that naturally colonises old chalk pits.

The most diverse areas of chalk grassland are dominated by Red Fescue [*Festuca rubra*] and Mouse-ear Hawkweed [*Hieracium pilosella*]. The sward is lightly grazed by rabbits and species associated with the chalky soils include Stemless Thistle [*Cirsium acaule*], Musk Thistle [*Carduus nutans*], Salad Burnet [*Sanguisorba minor*], Purging Flax [*Linum catharticum*], Bird's-foot Trefoil [*Lotus corniculatus*], Bee Orchid [*Ophrys apifera*], Common Spotted Orchid [*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*] and a large colony of Pyramidal Orchids [*Anacamptis pyramidalis*].

Recently disturbed areas have scattered vegetation that includes Coltsfoot [*Tussilago farfara*], Weld [*Reseda luteola*], Wild Mignonette [*R. lutea*] and Ploughman's Spikenard [*Inula conyza*]. Damp depressions in the bottom of the pit are characterised by Southern Marsh Orchid [*D. praetermissa*], Hard Rush [*Juncus inflexus*] and Fleabane [*Pulicaria dysenterica*]. Scrub is becoming established in several places and includes Buddleia [*Buddleja davidii*], a favoured food plant of several species of butterfly.

Breeding birds in the pit include Lapwing, Sand Martin and Lesser Whitethroat.

The site also has a geological interest as it shows an important exposure of the Marly Drift. The Marly Drift varies in mineralogical composition with affinities to the Cromer Till in the east and to the Lowestoft Till in the west. Wells is one of the best exposures of the latter variant. The upper layers of the till exhibit well developed involutions. The tills of East Anglia are currently under review and there is a particular debate over the age of the Marly Drift, whether it is Anglian or Wolstonian and its relation to the Anglian tills. The re-evaluation will focus on sites such as Wells Chalk Pit.