

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: MIDDLE HARLING FEN

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 989582

Area: 12.7 (ha) 31.3 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 144

1:10,000: TL 98 NE, TL 98 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: N/A

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site.

### **Reasons for Notification:**

Middle Harling Fen is a small calcareous valley fen situated at the head of a tributary of the River Thet. The site lies in a shallow valley and a number of springs, bearing water from the underlying chalk, emerge on the sloping ground. A wide range of grassland types is present including both wet and dry communities. The species-rich fen vegetation includes several plants that are now uncommon in East Anglia due to the drainage of many similar areas. An unusual feature is the unimproved calcareous grassland that occurs on dry ground surrounding the fen.

Tall calcareous grassland dominated by Cock'sfoot *Dactylis glomerata* and Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* occurs on the driest soils. The herb-rich sward includes several species that are indicators of calcareous soils, notably Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaris*, Hairy Rockcress *Arabis hirsuta*, Hoary Plantain *Plantago media*, Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata* and Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*.

Unimproved neutral grassland is present further down the valley slope on damp soils and is dominated by Fiorin *Agrostis stolonifera* and Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*. Several uncommon species occur in this diverse community including Cowslip *Primula veris*, Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Twayblade *Listera ovata*, Green-winged Orchid *Orchis morio* and Adder's Tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*.

The majority of the calcareous fen in the valley bottom is dominated by Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus* with frequent Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Quaking Grass *Briza media* and Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea*. This community is again very rich with many notable species including Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Marsh Lousewort *Pedicularis palustris*, Marsh Arrow-grass *Triglochin palustris* and Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*. The wettest part of the fen is dominated by large tussocks of Tufted Sedge *Carex elata* which grades into tall fen vegetation on the lowest-lying ground. Here Reed *Phragmites australis* and Reed-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* are dominant and there are scattered bushes of Common Sallow *Salix cinerea*.

An area of carr woodland and improved grassland is included within the site boundary because any changes in water level in this area would also affect the fen.

There is a good range of breeding bird species on the site, including Snipe, Cuckoo, Reed Warbler and Sedge Warbler.