

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: HOOKS WELL MEADOWS,
GREAT CRESSINGHAM

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: TF 838011

Area: 16.06 (ha) 39.7 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 144

1:10,000: TF 80 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1991

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site consists of a complex of semi-natural river valley habitats which have developed in the upper reaches of the River Wissey as a result of a long period of stable, traditional management. Herb-rich wet neutral grassland, base-rich fen meadow and acidic flushes are all represented together with dry calcareous grassland and an area of wet alder woodland.

Base-rich peat areas support Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus* fen, a vegetation type largely restricted to East Anglia and decreasing. Associated with this is a large population of Southern Marsh Orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, and a variety of other typical fen species such as Tufted Sedge *Carex elata*, Brown Sedge *Carex disticha* and Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*. On drier peat Lesser Pond Sedge *Carex acutiformis* dominates.

Around the edges of low-lying flushes these base-rich conditions persist, but towards the bottom of hollows where water collects over peat, acid fen vegetation has developed and locally uncommon species such as Cotton Grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* and Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* are abundant.

On mineral based soils large areas are dominated by Jointed and Soft Rush *Juncus articulatus* and *Juncus effusus*. There is a good diversity of associated species including Southern Marsh and Early Marsh Orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and *Dactylorhiza incarnata*, Common Spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*, Marsh Ragwort *Senecio aquaticus* and Marsh Birdsfoot Trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*. Around the drier margins where slightly calcareous conditions prevail, Hairy Oat-grass *Avenula pubescens*, Water Avens *Geum rivale* and Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata* are frequent.

Dry calcareous grassland on higher ground is dominated by Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*. Characteristic calcicole plants are present with Quaking Grass *Briza media*, Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Purging Flax *Linum catharticum* and Hoary Plantain *Plantago media* all occurring.

The woodland is Alder *Alnus glutinosa* carr notable for its rich ground flora of both woodland and shade-tolerant fen plants, including Greater Tussock Sedge *Carex paniculata*, Creeping Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia*, Meadow Rue *Thalictrum flavum* and Bugle *Ajuga reptans*. In one area carpets of *Sphagnum* mosses have become established. This is an unusual feature in East Anglia and indicates an exceptionally stable water table.

Additional interest is provided by Birch *Betula pendula* woodland, dry pasture characterised by Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* and Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus*, a small area of Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* scrub, Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* swamp and a small pond containing a number of springs.