

File ref:

County: Hampshire
SSSI

Site Name: Lower Test Valley

Local Planning Authority: Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council, Southampton City Council, Test Valley Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SU 360153

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 185/196 **1:25,000:** SU 31

Area: 138.7 (ha) 342.7 (ac)

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1971 **Date of Last Revision:** -

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 2.12.1986 **Date of Last Revision:** -

Other Information:

110 ha is leased as a nature reserve by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Naturalists' Trust.

Reasons for Notification:

The site comprises the upper estuary of the River Test and exhibits a gradation from salt through brackish to freshwater conditions. It consists of one of the most extensive reed *Phragmites* beds on the south coast with flanking unimproved meadowland intersected by numerous tidal creeks: and flooded on high water spring tides.

The brackish grassland in the south of the site supports a varied flora with several species characteristic of salt marsh habitat, for example, sea arrow-grass *Triglochin maritima*, sea aster *Aster tripolium* and sea milkwort *Glaux maritima*. The rare bulbous foxtail *Alopecurus bulbosus*, a species whose distribution is rapidly contracting, occurs here, together with other uncommon species such as brookweed *Samolus valerandi*, spike-rush *Eleocharis uniglumis*, and the hybrid saltmarsh grass *Puccinellia 3 Krusemaniana*.

Above the termination of tidal influence are extensive unimproved neutral meadows containing a colourful and species-rich flora dominated by grasses such as Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, ryegrass *Lolium perenne* and meadow fescue *Festuca pratensis*, with abundant sedges *Carex* species and rushes *Juncus* species. Several plants now rather uncommonly found owing to modern intensive agricultural methods are common here, including ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, water avens *Geum rivale*, lesser valerian *Valeriana dioica*, green-winged orchid *Orchis morio*, flowering rush *Butomus umbellatus*, water whorl-grass *Catabrose aquatica* and large bitter-cress *Cardamine amara*. Groups of willows *Salix* species are widespread along drains and creeks and support notable populations of the nationally rare green-flowered helleborine *Epipactis Phyllanthes var Vectensis* in an atypical habitat, together with numbers of common helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*. Over 450 species of flowering plants have been recorded for the site as a whole.

The site is also important for wetland breeding birds and as a wader and duck feeding and roosting ground. The reed beds support large breeding populations of reed warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* and sedge warblers *A. schoenobaenus*. They also function as an autumn roost site for swallows and martins, and a pre-migratory feeding site for various passerine birds, notably reed and sedge warblers.

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