

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: WHITWELL COMMON

DISTRICT: Broadland

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

Local Planning Authority: Broadland District Council

National Grid Reference: TG 088206 Area: 19.17 (ha) 47.36 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 133 1:10,560: TG 02 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954 Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Established as a Local Nature Reserve in 1984.

Reasons for Notification:

Whitwell Common lies in the valley of a tributary of the R Wensum and supports a wide range of wetland plant communities characteristic of peat-based soils. Calcareous flushes are present in low-lying hollows created by past peat cutting and a variety of interesting plants are associated with this uncommon habitat type. Wet valley alder wood, fen communities and unimproved neutral grassland are also represented on the site.

The calcareous flushes are of the type dominated by Black Bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans*, Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus*, bryophytes and other low-growing species. The water-table is high throughout the year and plants of interest include Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Southern Marsh Orchid *D. praetermissa*, Twayblade *Listera ovata*, Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* and Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*.

The flushes grade into areas of fen grassland that are characterised by Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* and Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina* with some Blunt-flowered Rush. This community is also found on sloping ground around the fen and notable species include Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Adder's Tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca* and Hairy Sedge *C. hirta*.

Dry fen, dominated by Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* occupies a substantial area. This includes such characteristic species as Angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus*, Great Hairy Willow-herb *Epilobium hirsutum* and Great Reedmace *Typha latifolia*. There are several permanently wet hollows with standing water and abundant Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris* and Water Dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa* occur. The fen grades into an area dominated by Reed *Phragmites australis* on wetter ground.

Damp grassland and tall herb communities occur on surrounding higher ground. Brown Bent-grass *Agrostis canina* is dominant with Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and an unusual abundance of Giant Horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*.

Wet valley alder carr on neutral soils occupies the northern part of the site. Alder *Alnus glutinosa* is dominant with some Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. The ground flora includes Yellow Flag, Lesser Pond Sedge *Carex acutiformis* and Meadowseet with Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and Yellow Archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* on drier ground.