

COUNTY: SUFFOLK SITE NAME: BARNHAM HEATH

DISTRICT: ST EDMUNDSBURY

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

Local Planning Authority: ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TL 882800 Area: 76.5 (ha.) 189.03 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 144 1:10,000: TL 87 NE
TL 88 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1970 Date of Last Revision: –

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

Other Information:

The boundary of this site has been amended.

Reasons for Notification:

Barnham Heath is an example of Breckland Heath. It possesses a range of the more acidic types of grass-heath which grade into damp, neutral grassland towards the valleys of the Little Chase and Black Bourn rivers. Gravel workings and scrub invasion have further diversified parts of the heath forming a rich mosaic of habitats of particular value to birds.

The grass-heath occupies the free-draining, grazed, sandy regions of the site and consists of areas that are dominated by lichens and mosses and areas that are largely dominated by fine-leaved grasses such as Bent Grass *Agrostis capillaris* and Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*. Both form short, open swards that are characterized by the presence of small herbs such as Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia* and Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and drought-avoiding winter annuals such as Shepherd's Cress *Teesdalia nudicaulis* and Early Hair Grass *Aira praecox*. At least six species of lichen and eight species of moss are known from these areas.

In parts of the heath where grazing is light, especially where stock do not have access, the heath has become overgrown and bracken and scrub have invaded. Conversely in parts where grazing is present grass-heath communities have become well established on the former gravel workings.

The damp meadow grasslands of the river valley form a series, with the drier parts dominated by False Oat Grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and Red Fescue and the wetter parts by False Oat Grass and Reed Grass *Glyceria maxima*. At the wetter end of the series associated plants include Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus*, Large Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, Gipsy-wort *Lycopus europaeus* and Meadow-sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. At the drier end plants such as Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta*,

Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys* and Lesser Stitchwort *Stellaria graminea* are found. The ditches that run through these areas and the more open pits left by gravel working provide additional diversity and support waterside and aquatic plants such as Purple Loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, Water Forget-me-Not *Myosotis scorpioides*, Water Plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica* and Fool's Water Cress *Apium nodiflorum*.

On the drier areas the scrub and developing woodland consists mainly of Birch *Betula pubescens*, Oak *Quercus robur* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. In the wetter areas Willows *Salix spp.* are also found, whilst in some areas Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* and other conifers appear to have established by seeding from nearby plantations.

The birdlife of the site is rich. The open heaths support Stone curlew (a species given special protection under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981), Common Curlew and Wheatear. The areas with scrub, pools and heath support a wide variety of smaller birds including good populations of Nightingales, Whitethroats, Lesser Whitethroats, Willow Warblers and Garden Warblers. The pools and the adjacent stretches of river support a variety of waterfowl whilst the damp grassland areas, particularly the ditches within them, are favoured by Snipe. These damp grasslands are also thought to provide additional feeding areas for Stone Curlews in the vicinity.