

File ref:

**County:** Dorset    **Site Name:** Wootton Fitzpaine

**District:** West Dorset

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

**Local Planning Authority:** West Dorset District Council, Dorset County Council

**National Grid Reference:** SY 357954    **Area:** 30.2 (ha) 74.7 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 193    **1:10,000:** SY 39 NE

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

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1987    **Date of Last Revision:** –

**Other Information:**

New site. Within Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**

These unimproved meadows lie over clays and shales of the Lower Lias on the north bank of a small tributary of the River Char. As a result of a long history of traditional management, partly for hay, there are extremely rich communities of grassland plants. Dry and damp neutral grassland occurs on the slopes with wetter plant communities in hollows and on lower ground.

The meadows support a number of grasses. Common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* are abundant and other species include quaking grass *Briza media*, heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* and yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*. Glaucous and spring sedges *Carex flacca* and *C. caryophyllea* are also frequent components of the dry and damp grassland.

There are also many different herbs present. The early spring flowering of wild daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* is followed later in the spring by green-winged orchid *Orchis morio* and this is now an extremely uncommon feature in Dorset. Summer flowering plants include pignut *Conopodium majus*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, spotted orchids *Dactylorhiza* spp., yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, betony *Stachys officinalis* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*. The local corky-fruited water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides* occurs and there are other plants which are characteristic of old grassland such as pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria* and adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgare*.

In flushed hollows and lower-lying areas, frequent components of the plant community are hard and jointed rushes *Juncus inflexus* and *J. articulatus*. Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, marsh marigold *Caltha palustre*, lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre* and ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, carnation sedge *Carex panicea* is frequent and smooth-stalked sedge *Carex laevigata*, which is rare in Dorset, also occurs.

Close to the stream is hazel *Corylus avellana* with common willow *Salix cinerea* and there is a small amount of wet pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* woodland with abundant pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*. These features, together with hedgerows with mature trees and marginal areas of scrub, add considerably to the value of this site for wildlife.