

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: LEZIATE, SUGAR & DERBY FENS

DISTRICT: West Norfolk

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

Local Planning Authority: Kings Lynn and West Norfolk District Council

National Grid Reference: TF 703201  
TF 693207  
TF 702208

Area: 86.3 (ha) 213.2 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 132

1:10,000: TF 61 NE, TF 62 SE, TF71 NW,  
TF 72 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1955

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of Last Revision: N/A

Other Information:

The boundary has been revised.

### **Reasons for Notification:**

These three fens are the remnants of a once extensive valley fen system along the Gaywood River. The site has dried out considerably in recent years due to the drainage of surrounding agricultural land but a wide range of habitats, from dry calcareous grassland to wet boggy heath, is still present. These diverse plant communities reflect variations in the underlying soils. Much of the site is on the greensand belt and here, extensive areas of damp acidic grassland and heath have developed. The Gaywood River is fed by chalk springs and locally there is species-rich calcareous grassland on chalky soils.

### **Leziate Fen**

Much of this area consists of seasonally wet, rough grassland on thin acidic peats. The sward includes Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina*, Common Bent *Agrostis capillaries*, Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella* and Soft Rush *Juncus effuses* is dominant or co-dominant species with Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Devil's bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata*. Heather *Calluna vulgaris* and Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* are locally frequent around an area of young, secondary Birch woodland and other notable species include Common Cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, Creeping Willow *Salix repens* and Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*.

An unusual area of ridges and furrows occurs on part of the fen. The calcareous ridges support a diverse rabbit-grazed sward that includes Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Quaking Grass *Briza media*, Stemless Thistle *Cirsium acaule*, Purging Flax *Linum catharticum* and Autumn Felwort *Gentianella amarella*. The damp furrows are dominated by Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens* with Lesser Spearwort *R. flammula*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica* and Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*.

### **Sugar Fen**

Damp Birch woodland with frequent Alder *Alnus glutinosa* on the wettest soils covers much of this fen. Small areas of fen grassland occur on the edges of the woodland and are dominated by Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera* with Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Water Mint, Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*.

There are extensive areas of dry, grassy heath with scattered Gorse bushes but the most interesting parts of the site occur in areas of Heather heath. Here wet boggy hollows are dominated by Cross-leaved Heath and notable plants include Cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccos*, Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* and Bog Mosses *Sphagnum* spp.

### **Derby Fen**

This is the most diverse of the three fens. Large areas support dry acidic grassland and heath dominated by Sheep's Fescue, Purple Moor-grass, Heather and Gorse. Other interesting species include Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and Petty Whin *Genista anglica*.

Damp grassland on both acidic and neutral soils occurs on low-lying ground with Creeping Bent, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* as the dominant grasses. Lesser Butterfly Orchid *Platanthera bifolia*, Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* and Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor* are also present in these areas. The wettest hollows are characterised by Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*.

Species-rich calcareous grassland with frequent ant-hills is particularly well-developed on Derby Fen. The herb-rich sward includes Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*, Hoary Plantain *Plantago media*, Spiny Restharrow *Ononis spinosa*, Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, Larger Wild Thyme *Thymus pulegioides* and Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*.