

File ref:

County: Hampshire
SSSI

Site Name: East Aston Common

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

Local Planning Authority: Hampshire County Council, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, Test Valley Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SU 444449

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 185 **1:10,000:** SU 44 SW, NW

Area: 18.77 (ha) 46.4 (ac)

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 18 August 1987 **Date of Last Revision:** -

Confirmed: 11 March 1988

Other Information:

Part registered and confirmed as common land.

Reasons for Notification:

The Site of Special Scientific Interest lies within the flood plain of the upper reaches of the Test Valley, and is of special interest for its extensive tall sedge-rich fen communities and riparian habitats associated with this classic southern chalk stream. It also embraces areas of herb-rich alluvial meadows, including East Aston Common, an area of common land no longer grazed, though common rights of grazing survive.

The tall sedge-rich fen communities are unusual as they continue to be managed by annual burning, one of the few extensive areas in the valley where this traditional form of management is still practised. Common reed *Phragmites australis*, reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* and reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*, as well as the sedges *Carex acutiformis*, *C. riparia* and *C. paniculata* dominate the community. Such areas, in close proximity to the river, are of great importance to the populations of invertebrates and birds present.

The unimproved alluvial grassland comprises a mosaic of grassland types including relatively dry sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*/red fescue *Festuca rubra* dominated grassland, species-rich grass/dwarf sedge swards, and tall false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* communities. Collectively these grasslands are rich in species including a variety of sedges (for example, the local long-stalked yellow-sedge *Carex lepidocarpa* and brown sedge *Carex disticha*), flat sedge *Blysmus compressus*, meadow rue *Thalictrum flavum*, adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, and both southern and early-marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and *D. incarnata*.

The site includes a particularly wide and shallow (less than 1m deep) stretch of the River Test in which the submergent vegetation locally covers 80% of the river bed. The flora is characteristic of a chalk stream, with abundant water crowfoot *Ranunculus penicillatus* var. *calcareous*, starwort *Callitriche platycarpa* and

mare's-tail *Hippuris vulgaris*, as well as, more locally, horned pondweed *Zannichellia palustris* and lesser water parsnip *Berula erecta*.

The emergent riverside vegetation is abundant, and dominated by the sedge *Carex acutiformis*, branched burr-reed *Sparganium erectum*, great reedmace *Typha latifolia*, and in trampled areas, water mint *Mentha aquatica*. More local species present include great water dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, and bedstraw *Galium elongatum* and blue water speedwell *Veronica anagallis-aquatica*.

The site supports many of the organisms characteristic of, and in some cases restricted to, chalk streams and their related habitats. A variety of wetland birds are well represented and include reed, sedge and grasshopper warblers, reed bunting, grey wagtail, water rail and redshank. The invertebrate interest is correspondingly diverse, and is particularly rich in mayfly and caddisfly species.

East Aston Common represents one of a series of sites selected to represent the full range of habitats and management regimes present in the Test Valley. The overall system is regarded as one of the finest chalk stream systems in Britain.