

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX/HAMPSHIRE

SITE NAME: CHICHESTER HARBOUR

DISTRICT: CHICHESTER/HAVANT

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

Local Planning Authority: CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL; HAVANT BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Ref: SU 760 000

Area: 2657 ha 6566.7 acres W Sussex
3695 ha 9130.3 acres Total

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:197

1:10,000: SU 70 NW,NE,SW,SE, SU 80 NW, SW,SE, SZ 79
NW,NE, SZ 89 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1970

Date of Last Revision: 1980

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 (Hants) 1985 (W Sussex)

Other Information: This site lies within the South Coast Plain. It includes Nutbourne Marshes Local Nature Reserve. The site is listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review' and is a Geological Conservation Review site.

Reasons for Notification:

Chichester Harbour is a large estuarine basin in which at low water extensive mud and sandflats are exposed, drained by channels which unite to make a common exit to the sea. The site is of particular significance for wintering wildfowl and waders and also breeding birds both within the Harbour and in the surrounding permanent pasture fields and woodlands. There is a wide range of habitats which have important plant communities.

The intertidal area is fragmented in the upper reaches of the harbour by intruding tongues of land giving a very long and varied coastline. The harbour exhibits a wide range of intertidal and associated terrestrial habitats and with the neighbouring Langstone and Portsmouth Harbours is unusual in providing a large volume of sheltered saline water fed by a few streams of only low volume. The extensive intertidal mudflats are the feeding grounds, at the relevant times of year for internationally important numbers of ringed plover, grey plover, redshank, black-tailed godwit, dunlin, sanderling, curlew and greenshank (the latter two in autumn particularly). Bar-tailed godwit numbers are of European importance. Amongst the wildfowl, shelduck, teal and dark-bellied brent goose numbers are of international importance with 5% of the world population of the latter. The unimproved permanent pasture behind the sea wall provides alternative feeding sites for the geese and major high tide wader roosts. Some of this pasture is floristically rich being a red fescue *Festuca rubra* sward with scarce species such as green-winged orchid *Orchis morio* and adder's tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*.

The lower saltmarsh habitat fringing the mud flats is dominated by cord grass *Spartina anglica* and in most places the upper saltmarsh is rather restricted by the sea wall but there are some pure stands of sea purslane *Halimione portulacoides* while in some areas there is also sea lavender *Limonium vulgare*, sea aster *Aster tripolium* and other saltmarsh species.

Shingle occurs as spits and islands and most are rather unstable permitting little vegetation to become established. This habitat forms the main breeding grounds in the harbour for ringed plover, blackheaded gull and three species of terns. The extensive sand dunes at East Head are dominated by marram grass *Ammophila arenaria* although the degree of ground cover varies from 90% to 10% on the more recently established dunes.

At the head of Fishbourne Channel saltmarsh grades through a reed *Phragmites australis* bed into fresh marsh

influenced by a chalk spring. Most of the other fresh marshes behind the sea wall are small but at Thorney Deeps reclaimed saltmarsh has given way to extensive fresh water marsh vegetation influenced by salt water intrusion; here the reed is fringed by extensive areas of rushes *Juncus* species and invasive willow *Salix* scrub. A number of small ponds occur one of which contains the rare annual beard grass *Polypogon monspeliensis*. Significant blocks of scrub, mainly hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* occur which are important for breeding and roosting birds. Hedgerows of oak *Quercus robur* are common and in some places the oak roots are strongly influenced by salt water. Semi-natural broadleaved woodland associated with the Harbour is important for breeding birds and supports two heronries. Oak is the major tree species usually with hazel *Corylus avellana* coppice, as at Old Park Wood, although Tournerbury Wood has well spaced oaks with the occasional beech *Fagus sylvatica*, holly *Ilex aquifolium* and yew *Taxus baccata* with a fairly dense ground flora of bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*.

Notable invertebrates include the long-winged conehead *Conocephalus discolor* and the moths, starwort shark *Cucullia asteris*, the sand dart *Agrotis ripae*, shore wainscot *Mythimna litoralis* and lunar hornet *Sphecia bemeciformis*.

Geology and Physiography

East of Langstone, at SU 725053, a low cliff line at high water mark exhibits a complex of Brickearth and Coombe Rock deposits and at East Head, SZ 769991 there is a sizeable sand dune and shingle system both of which are of geomorphological importance.