

County: Humberside

Site Name: River Hull Headwaters

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

Local Planning Authority: East Yorkshire Borough Council

National Grid Reference: TA 079511 to TA 081619
SE 998581
SE 978551

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 107, 106, 101

Area: 140.6 (ha) 347.4 (ac)

First Notified⁺:

Kelleythorpe Marsh	1962*
Driffield to Wansford Marshes	1968*
River Hull	1980*

Date of Revision: 1988

Description:

The headwaters of the River Hull are nationally important as the most northerly chalk stream system in Britain. Also of interest within the site are areas of riverside grassland, woodland and fen; remnants of habitats formerly more widespread but now limited in distribution due to agricultural and urban development.

The upper tributaries of the River Hull originate on the edge of the chalk Wolds and enter an alluvial flood plain with drift deposits of boulder clay and occasional pockets of sand and gravel within a few miles of their source. This surface geology influences the character of the river with gravel, sand and silt sediments deposited on the riverbed in varying proportions. This variation in the riverbed sediments is reflected in the species composition of the aquatic vegetation which is abundant throughout the headwaters during the summer.

Driffield Trout Stream and the upper section of West Beck, the fastest flowing streams in this catchment, are shallow and dominated by stream water-crowfoot *Ranunculus penicillatus* var *calcareous*. The slower flowing Kelk Beck, by contrast, is characterised by lesser water-parsnip *Berula erecta* and mare's-tail *Hippuris vulgaris*. Frodington Beck, and the West Beck south of Copper Hall, although canalised are structurally diverse with deposited sediments creating a complex of shallows and deeper pools. These riverbed conditions, associated with a slow flow rate, support a more varied aquatic flora with species such as Canadian waterweed *Elodea canadensis*, spiked water-milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*, fennel pondweed *Potamogeton pectinatus*, curled pondweed *P. crispus*, shining pondweed *P. lucens* and more rarely, flat-stalked pondweed *Potamogeton friesii* growing in the deeper pools. The frequent association of shing pondweed with stream water-crowfoot as dominants is a characteristic feature of chalk streams. In the shallow water over sand spits and along the river edge water-cress *Nasturtium officinale*, fool's water-cress *Apium nodiflorum*, branched bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, common reed *Phragmites australis*, reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* and reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima* are common. River water-dropwort *Oenanthe fluviatilis* is also found here at the northern limit of its distribution.

Areas of species-rich wet grassland and fen occur notably between Driffield and Wansford, at Kelleythorpe, The Keld and near Harpham. Rushes and sedges are often dominant in these areas with blunt-flowered rush *Juncus subnodulosus*, jointed rush *J. articulatus*, lesser pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis*, brown sedge *C. disticha* and greater tussock-sedge *C. paniculata* being particularly characteristic. Other typical species include marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, common valerian *Valeriana officinalis*, bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, marsh marigold *Caltha palustris* and large stands of great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*. Kelleythorpe Marsh is particularly rich floristically and several uncommon species have been recorded here such as lesser tussock sedge *Carex diandra*, early marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata* and marsh fern *Thelypteris palustris* have been recorded.

Among several areas of wet woodland within the site are extensive areas of alder and willow carr associated with the fen systems at Kelleythorpe Marsh, on the island at Bell Mills and on the Kelk Beck at Harpham.

The invertebrate fauna of the river appears to be typical of a northern chalk stream, and includes locally uncommon species of mayfly *Heptagenia fuscogrisea* and *Caenis robusta* and snail *Planorbis vorticulus*.

The river valley supports a diverse breeding bird community, including several waders such as lapwing, snipe and redshank, wildfowl, particularly mallard and mute swan, together with yellow wagtail, sedge warbler, reed warbler, reed bunting and many more widely occurring species.

Other Information:

1. The importance of this site is such that although not included in ‘A Nature Conservation Review’ at the time of its publication, it has nevertheless since been recognised as an integral part of the nationally important open water series listed in that publication.
2. ⁺ This site includes two previously notified* SSSI; Kelleythorpe Marsh SSSI and the River Hull SSSI, part of which was initially notified as Driffield to Wansford Marshes SSSI. During the 1988 revision the boundary has been amended by both extensions and deletions to the site as previously notified*.

*Under Section 23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949.