

COUNTY: KENT            SITE NAME: COWDEN MEADOW

DISTRICT: SEVENOAKS

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

Local Planning Authority: SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 481414    Area: 1.2 (ha.) 2.9 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 188    1:10,000: TQ 44 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1981    Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984    Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

This small meadow is one of the best remaining areas of unimproved neutral grassland in Kent. Numerous plant species indicative of a long history of lack of cultivation are present. The grassland sward shows variation between the wetter central part, and the drier remainder. The surrounding hedgerows are large, and contain a variety of shrub and tree species.

The grassland is composed of a variety of grass species, including creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* and several others, in contrast to the generally reduced diversity of more recently reseeded and fertilised swards. Among the other plants are some which are very poor at recolonising cultivated grasslands; these tend to be restricted to meadows which have remained unploughed for very many years. The old meadow species found here include quaking grass *Briza media*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, and several orchids including southern marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and early marsh orchid *D. incarnata*. The last species is now very scarce in Kent.

The central part of the meadow is very wet, and has vegetation dominated by hard rush *Juncus inflexus*. Three other species of rush, and seven species of sedge *Carex* species are found within the site, and most of these occur mainly in the wetter areas.

Hedgerows mainly of hawthorn and hazel surround the meadow except along the railway where it is wetter and alder predominates. Among the variety of other shrubs and trees present in these hedges are guelder rose *Viburnum opulus*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, elder *Sambucus nigra* and dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, as well as much dog rose and brambles. A small stream, shaded by the hedgerow, flows through the eastern end of the site.