

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: OLD BUCKENHAM FEN

DISTRICT: Breckland

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

Local Planning Authority: Breckland District Council

National Grid Reference: TM 048920 Area: 34.8 (ha) 86.0 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 144 1:10,000: TM 09 SW & SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1968 Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site is a valley fen which is underlain by the impermeable clays of a buried channel. The central part of the site consists of a species-rich, managed reedbed surrounding a small, natural mere. Around the margins of the fen basin are areas of species-rich scrub, drier fen and cattle-grazed meadows containing wet hollows and calcareous flushes. The meadows are divided by a network of dykes and are used by wading birds.

The Reedbeds are managed for the production of thatching Reed *Phragmites australis* and there is a wide range of associated species including Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, Yellow Loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris*, Fen Bedstraw *Galium uliginosum*, Parsley Water Dropwort *Oenanthe lachenalii*, Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*, large-flowered Hemp Nettle *Galeopsis speciosa*, Gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, Tubular Water Dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa* and Greater Water Parsnip *Sium latifolium*. The vegetation is similar to that found in the Broadland Fens and includes Milk Parsley *Peucedanum palustre*.

In the wettest part of the site is an area of open water not yet colonised by reed which forms a fairly deep, natural lake. This lake was formerly more extensive, and the sediments on the lake bed have preserved pollen grains that have yielded important information about the vegetation of this part of East Anglia in prehistoric times.

The drier margins of the site contain areas dominated by Reed-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* and Reed Sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*. Some areas are kept open by mowing but much has been invaded by species-rich scrub dominated by Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*. This scrub contains many other tree and shrub species including Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus* and Guelder Rose *Viburnum opulus*.

Much of the southern part of the site is occupied by cattle-grazed pasture which is drained by a network of ditches to a pump, which can be used to supply water to the reedbeds. Much of the pasture is well drained and has been improved so that the sward contains few species. However, in the wetter areas a wider range of plants survive. Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Ladies Smock *Cardamine pratensis* and Marsh Thistles *Cirsium palustre* are comparatively widespread, whilst in the wettest hollows Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Great Spearwort *Ranunculus lingua*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, Celery-leaved Crowfoot *Ranunculus sceleratus* and Fool's Watercress *Apium nodiflorum* are amongst the species found.

In a few places a spring flush vegetation persists with Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, Black Bog Rush *Schoenus nigricans*, Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica* and Grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris* amongst the plants that survive alongside the agricultural grasses.