

COUNTY: NORFOLK/SUFFOLK SITE NAME: REDGRAVE AND LOPHAM FENS

DISTRICT: MID-SUFFOLK AND BRECKLAND, NORFOLK

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

Local Planning Authority: MID-SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL, Breckland District Council

National Grid Reference: TM 050797 Area: 124.92 (ha.) 308.68 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 144 1:10,000: TM 07 NW, NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954 Date of Last Revision: N/A

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This site is of international importance and has been recommended for inclusion in the list of wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. This site is a Suffolk Trust for Nature Conservation reserve and is listed in the Nature Conservation Review.

Reasons for Notification:

This site consists of an extensive area of spring-fed valley fen at the headwaters of the River Waveney. It supports several distinct fen vegetation types, ranging from *Molinia*-based grasslands, mixed Sedge fen to Reed-dominated fen. There are small areas of wet heath, Sallow carr and Birch woodland. The invertebrate fauna is extensive and well studied and the site is the only British locality for the Fen Raft Spider *Dolomedes plantarius*.

Part of the site exhibits a classic zonation of vegetation types. Dry marginal birch woodland gives way to a band of fen grassland dominated by Purple Moor grass *Molinia caerulea*. This can be species-rich with Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*, Butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*, Black Bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans* and Marsh Helleborine *Epipactis palustris*. This grades into a mixed fen community dominated by the Fen Rush *Juncus subnodulosus* with Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, Saw Sedge *Cladium mariscus* and Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica* as frequent associates. Sand ridges protrude into these two zones and they support a damp heathy vegetation with Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and Ling *Calluna vulgaris* which adds considerably to the diversity of the site.

Towards the centre of the valley the Fen Rush and Saw Sedge communities give way to more eutrophic tall fen. This is dominated by Reed with herbs such as Yellow and Purple Loosestrifes *Lysimachia vulgaris* and *Lythrum salicaria*, Meadowsweet and Hemp Agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*. Most of the fen communities are prone to

invasion by Sallow *Salix cinerea* and locally this has developed into dense scrub and carr.

The River Waveney and its feeder drains are sluggish eutrophic waters supporting a rather narrow range of aquatic plants. Starwort *Callitriche sp.*, Floating Pondweed *Potamogeton natans*, Curled Pondweed *P. crispus* and Fennel-like Pondweed *P. pectinatus* are the dominant species. In addition there are a number of small pools in the fen areas, some of which are the flooded relics of former peat cuts. They form the habitat for the nationally rare Fen Raft Spider *Dolomedes plantarius* which is listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Aquatic plants include Bladderwort *Utricularia vulgaris*, Fen Pondweed *P. coloratus* and Charophytes, all indicators of unpolluted, low fertility spring water.