

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: RINGSTEAD DOWNS

DISTRICT: West Norfolk

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

Local Planning Authority: West Norfolk District Council

National Grid Reference: TF 691401

Area: 7.0 (ha) 17.3 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 132

1:10,000: TF 63 NE, TF 64 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: N/A

Other Information:

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Ringstead Downs is a dry valley that has been cut through chalk strata by glacial meltwaters. The site has never been ploughed and as a result the valley-sides support an excellent example of species-rich chalk grassland. Such areas of unimproved chalk grassland are now extremely rare in East Anglia and the site is the largest example of chalk downland now remaining in Norfolk.

The short, rabbit-grazed chalk grassland is dominated by Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Sheep's Fescue *F. ovina* with abundant Common Rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium* and Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*. The most diverse grassland occurs on warm, sunny, south-facing slopes and a wide variety of characteristic herbs is present including Squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica*, Dwarf Thistle *Cirsium acaule*, Wild Thyme *Thymus praecox*, Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, Burnet Saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*, Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria* and Eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis*. An old chalk-pit contains small areas of chalk grassland with Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*. Scrub and mature secondary woodland occurs on the upper slopes of the valley.

The abundant herb species are attractive to a wide range of butterflies, but a local race of the uncommon Chalkhill Blue, which used to occur, has not been seen in recent years.