COUNTY: NORFOLK SITE NAME: SHERINGHAM AND BEESTON REGIS COMMONS

DISTRICT: NORTH NORFOLK

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

Local Planning Authority: North Norfolk District Council

National Grid Reference: TG 164424 Area: 23.99 (ha.) 59.28 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 133 1:10 000: TG 14 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1961 Date of Last Revision: –

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

Other Information:
The site is proposed as a Local Nature Reserve.

Reasons for Notification:
This site is an area of acidic heathland containing areas of species-rich calcareous spring fen on sloping ground within 1km of the coast. 'Mixed mire' vegetation has developed in seepage zones due to the juxtaposition of both acidic and calcareous plant communities. These spring fen areas contain many wetland plants that are now locally uncommon because of the drainage of similar areas. Dry heathland surrounds the fens and supports several species of breeding birds and reptiles.

Calcareous mire communities have developed along the drainage lines of springs that emerge from the underlying chalk. Here, blunt-flowered rush *Juncus subnodulosus* and bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans* are dominant but a variety of other sedges including long-stalked yellow sedge *Carex lepidocarpa*, flea sedge *C. pulicaris* and glaucous sedge (*C. flacca*) also occur. These diverse areas of low-growing vegetation on a moss carpet are notable for many uncommon species such as butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, great sundew *Drosera anglica*, grass of parnassus *Parnassia palustris*, southern marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, marsh helleborine *Epipactis palustris* and fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*.

Wet acidic heathland surrounds the calcareous mires and is characterised by soft rush *Juncus effusus*, jointed rush *J. articulatus*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, quaking grass *Briza media* and bog mosses *Sphagnum spp*. Also present are areas of tall fen vegetation on very wet ground with impeded drainage where common reed *Phragmites australis* is dominant but common sallow *Salix cinerea* is invasive in many places.

The dry heathland is now dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and gorse *Ulex europaeus* but small pockets of heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea* and cross-leaved heath *E. tetralix* still survive. Acidic grassland also occurs locally and is characterised by wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*. Bushes of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* are encroaching on many of the open areas of heath.

Other habitats present on the site include deciduous woodland, neutral grassland and small ponds. This wide range of wet and dry habitats supports several reptiles and amphibians such as adder, common lizard, slow worm, great crested newt and smooth newt. Among the more interesting species of breeding bird are snipe, grasshopper warbler, garden warbler, lesser whitethroat and redpoll.