

**County:** Dorset **Site Name:** Whetley Meadows

**District:** West Dorset

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

**Local Planning Authority:** West Dorset District Council, Dorset County Council

**National Grid Reference:** SY 530964 **Area:** 8.5 (ha) 21.0 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 194 **1:10,000:** SY 59 NW

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

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

**Other Information:**

New site. Within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**

These fields, lying on the Lower Fullers Earth Clay and Corallian Beds, support an exceptionally diverse flora reflecting a long history of traditional management for hay. A stretch of disused railway line with a rich bank flora is also included in this site.

Sixteen species of grasses are present including frequent meadow fescue *Festuca pratensis*, downy oat *Avenula pubescens* and quaking grass *Briza media*. Several sedges occur, with glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* the most widespread. Adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, an indicator of old grassland is locally abundant, particularly in the most eastern field.

Among the numerous flowering plants of these meadows are cowslip *Primula veris*, knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, hoary ragwort *Senecio erucifolius* and pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus*. Several orchids occur: green-winged orchid *Orchis morio* flowers in the early summer and is followed by common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*. Hedges containing a variety of trees and shrubs add diversity to the site with ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, maple *Acer campestre*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, hazel *Corylus avellana* and dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*.

The railway bank supports scrub and drier calcareous swards dominated by red fescue *Festuca rubra* and false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum* with the local dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria* particularly abundant. Other herbs of the railway bank include hoary plantain *Plantago media*,

hairy violet *Viola hirta*, marjoram *Origanum vulgare* and yellow rattle  
*Rhinanthus minor*.