

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: WINTERTON-HORSEY DUNES

DISTRICT: North Norfolk, Great Yarmouth

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

Local Planning Authority: North Norfolk District Council, Gt Yarmouth Borough Council

National Grid Reference: TG 490210

Area: 427.2 (ha) 1055.6 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 134

1:10,000: TG 14 NE, TG 51 NW,
TG 42 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1989

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This is a composite site made up of the NNR at Winterton Dunes and the former separate SSSIs at Horsey Warren, Winterton Dunes and Winterton Great Valley. The whole area is a Grade 1 NCR site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site consists of an extensive dune system situated on the east coast of Norfolk between Hemsby and Horsey. The site is unusual in that it shows greater ecological similarities to the dune system of the west coast, supporting acidic plant communities, than the geographically closer dunes within the North Norfolk Coast SSSI, where the sand is calcareous. The site supports well developed areas of dune heath, 'slacks' and dune grassland verging into grazing marsh and birch woodland. A wide range of both breeding and overwintering birds occur, including Little Terns on the foreshore, while the areas of scrub attract passage migrants. A rare amphibian breeds in shallow pools behind the main dune ridge, and the site is the only Norfolk locality for a rare butterfly. Part of the site embraces an earlier coastline and this feature together with the dunes which have developed in front of it are of outstanding physiographical interest.

The seaward edge of the dunes is well vegetated with Marram Grass *Ammophila arenaria* and Lyme-grass *Leymus arenarius*. The older, grey dunes support a more diverse flora with frequent Sand Sedge *Carex arenaria*, Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina*, Common Polypody *Polypodium vulgare* and Narrow Buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana*. Three rare grasses are present in abundance, Grey Hair-grass *Corynephorus canescens*, Rush-leaved Fescue *Festuca juncifolia* and Purple Marram x *Ammocalamagrostis baltica*. A notable assemblage of the bryophytes and lichens occur on these acidic dunes. Dune heath has developed on the landward side with Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*, Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and Bog Moss *Sphagnum* spp in the damper hollows. The dune slacks contain an interesting plant community that includes Common Sedge *Carex nigra*, Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*, Cross-leaved Heath and Creeping Willow *Salix repens*. The rare Round-leaved Wintergreen *Pyrola rotundifolia* has also been recorded from the slacks.

Damp, fern rich meadows form a large area of rough, tussocky grassland behind the main dunes. Sand Sedge is dominant with abundant Purple Marram and Narrow Buckler-fern, Broad Buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*, Common Polypody, Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis* and the nationally rare Crested Buckler-fern *Dryopteris cristata*. Other species include Soft Rush, Compact Rush *Juncus conglomeratus*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* and Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*. Marshy areas in damp hollows have a distinctive flora with Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and Adder's-

tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. There are smaller areas dominated by Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* which locally occurs as a virtually pure, ungrazed sward.

The grassland communities grade into stunted birch woodland. Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* is dominant with some Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and invasive Rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum*. The ground flora is dominated by Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg, Honeysuckle and Broad Buckler-fern with *Sphagnum* abundant in wetter areas.

Small populations of Ringed Plover and the uncommon Little Tern nest on the beach. The areas of heath, grassland and scrub are notable for breeding Nightjar, Grasshopper Warbler, Corn Bunting and the locally scarce Stonechat. Raptors frequently hunt over the dunes in the winter months and Hen Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Barn Owl and Rough-legged Buzzard are all regularly recorded.

The site is also of physiographic significance in being one of a number of 'ness' features which are characteristic of the East Anglian coast. It is significant both for the well-formed dunes which are its most characteristic landform, and the processes which affect its continuing development. At Winterton there appears to be a slight sediment budget surplus and some growth in the volume of sediment retained within the 'ness'. There is both erosion and deposition within the site and an important aspect of the interest is the dynamism of the features present.