

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 11 MARCH 1987

COUNTY: SOMERSET SITE NAME: STOWELL MEADOW

DISTRICT: SOUTH SOMERSET

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

Local Planning Authority: SOUTH SOMERSET DISTRICT COUNCIL, Somerset County Council

National Grid Reference: ST 333062 Area: 2.8 (ha.) 6.9 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 193 1:10,000: ST 30 NW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Stowell Meadow supports a nationally rare type of traditionally managed wet neutral grassland. Alder woodland and plant communities typical of marshy grassland are also present. 90 species of plant have been recorded to date, several of which have a local distribution in Somerset. A number of nationally scarce species of beetle have already been recorded.

The site is located on a gentle south east facing slope at approximately 76m ODN, and is close to the source of a spring-fed stream that flows into the River Axe. The meadow is near a point at which the Upper Greensand meets Lower Lias Shales. As the Greensand is an aquifer that provides a flow of water which does not appear to be influenced by seasonal variations in precipitation, the water table is always high, and gleyed brown earths with a humose topsoil have developed throughout the site.

The wettest soils adjoin the stream running through the middle of the field. These areas support a species-rich community of the Crested Dog's-tail–Marsh Marigold type of neutral grassland. Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* are the most common grasses. Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus*, Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus*, Common Sedge *Carex nigra*, Tawny Sedge *C. hostiana*, Star Sedge *C. echinata* and Carnation Sedge *C. panicea* are frequent. Herbs of interest include Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*, Marsh Lousewort *Pedicularis palustris*, Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*. 3 species of Orchid have been recorded: Early Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata*, Southern Marsh-orchid *D. praetermissa* and Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*. An unusual feature of the sward is the

abundance of the local Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*. Marsh Arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, another plant with a local distribution in Somerset, also occurs.

Drier parts of the meadow are dominated by Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. Other species associated with this tall vegetation include Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, Meadow Foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, Fen Bedstraw *Galium uliginosum*, Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, Great Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, Southern Marsh-orchid, Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus* and Soft Rush *J. effusus*. Further diversity is provided by small areas of woodland dominated by Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and Goat Willow *Salix caprea*. The stream supports Lesser Water Parsnip *Berula erecta* and Fool's Water-cress *Apium nodiflorum*, while dense stands of Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* occur along the sides of the banks.

The damp and sheltered conditions provide ideal conditions for a number of invertebrate species. The beetles *Cassida murraea* and *Pilemostoma fastuosa* are nationally scarce.