COUNTY: BERKSHIRE **SITE NAME:** WESTFIELD FARM CHALK BANK

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

Local Planning Authorities: Newbury District Council, Berkshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU355764

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 174 **1:10,000:** SU37

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 14.26 ha 35.25 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

Westfield Farm is a chalk grassland bank on the north facing scarp of the Berkshire Downs. There has been a drastic decline in chalk grassland since the 1940s due to changing agricultural practices and nowhere has this been more apparent than in West Berkshire. The site supports rich communities of native plants including several species which have become scarce in Berkshire and the southern counties.

The site is maintained by summer grazing with cattle. It overlies the upper chalk with a range of soil depths, reflected by the diverse flora. Most of the site is dominated by upright brome *Bromus erectus*, but locally tor grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* forms an unbroken sward. Small areas of improved grassland with perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne* and crested dog's tail *Cynosurus cristatus* are included in the site.

Areas of shorter turf support quite diverse communities with small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, wild thyme *Thymus praecox*, glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* and autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella*, whilst the longer vegetation includes field scabious *Knautia arvensis*, cowslip *Primula veris*, kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, lady's bed-straw *Galium verum*, quaking grass *Briza media*, common restharrow *Ononis repens*, salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor* and hoary plantain *Plantago media*.

Of particular interest is the locally distributed clustered bellflower *Campanula glomerata* and crested hair grass *Koeleria macrantha*. Zigzag clover *Trifolium medium*, another uncommon species unusual on chalk, is also present on the deeper soils.

The bank supports five orchid species. Common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuschsii* is present together with twayblade and pyramidal orchid *Listera ovata* and *Anacamptis pyramidalis* which have a restricted distribution in Berkshire, whilst frog orchid and greater butterfly orchid *Coeloglossum viride* and *Platanthera chlorantha* are scarce in southern England.

Few invertebrates have been recorded, but the variety of soil type and diverse vegetation structure provided by the *Bromus erectus*-dominated sward is likely to support an interesting invertebrate community.