

COUNTY: NORTHAMPTONSHIRE **SITE NAME:** KING'S CLIFFE BANKS

District: East Northamptonshire

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

Local Planning Authority: East Northamptonshire District Council

National Grid Reference: TL 015972

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 141 **1:10,000:** TL 09 NW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1992 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 7.74 ha 19.12 ac

Other Information: This is a new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification

King's Cliffe Banks support a fine example of oolitic limestone grassland. This is predominantly found in the Cotswolds and East Midlands. Unimproved oolitic limestone grasslands are now greatly reduced in area and have become highly fragmented.

This site is a small, disused quarry with a 'hills and holes' topography. A high quality, species-rich closed calcareous grassland sward has developed on the thinner soils. Neutral grassland and scrub communities are associated with deeper soils.

The limestone grassland is a floristically-rich example of the upright brome *Bromus erectus*-tor grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* grassland typical sub-community. The full complement of species characteristic of this community are present. Of these, sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina*, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, common rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella*, salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor* and wild thyme *Thymus praecox* are particularly frequent.

There is a good range of other calcicoles including meadow oat-grass *Avenula pratensis*, crested hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha*, clustered bellflower *Campanula glomerata*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria* and hairy violet *Viola hirta*.

Bryophytes form an important component of the sward, especially *Ctenidium molluscum* and *Homalothecium lutescens*. Lichens occur on the extruding limestone rocks.

The grassland is closely grazed by cattle and rabbits. The management unit includes some areas of semi-improved grassland.

Re-presentation of details approved by Council. Re-typed August 1999.