

COUNTY: BERKSHIRE/WILTSHIRE

SITE NAME: RIVER KENNET

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

Local Planning Authorities: Berkshire County Council, Wiltshire County Council,
Newbury District Council, Kennet District Council

National Grid Reference: SU203692 to SU572667

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 174 **1:10,000:** SU26 NW, SU27 SW, SU27 SE, SU37 SW, SU36
NW, SU36 NE, SU47 NW, SU46 NE, SU56 NW,
SU56 NE

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1 November 1995 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 112.72 ha

Other information: The River Lambourn, which is a tributary of the River Kennet, is also an SSSI. There are two existing SSSIs along the River Kennet: Freemans Marsh and Chilton Foliat Meadows. The site boundary is the bank top or, where this is indistinct, the first break of slope.

Description and Reasons for Notification

The River Kennet has a catchment dominated by chalk with the majority of the river bed being lined by gravels. The Kennet below Newbury traverses Tertiary sands and gravels, London Clay and silt, thus showing a downstream transition from the chalk to a lowland clay river. As well as having a long history of being managed as a chalk stream predominantly for trout, the Kennet has been further modified by the construction of the Kennet and Avon Canal. In some places the canal joins with the river to form a single channel. There are also many carriers and channels formerly associated with water meadow systems. The river flows through substantial undisturbed areas of marshy grassland, wet woodland and reed beds.

The flora of the River Kennet is species-rich and diverse, having the highest average number of species per site surveyed of any other lowland river in Britain. The Kennet shows a clear downstream succession in plant communities reflecting variations in geology and flow rate as well as the influence of the canal. The flora is considered to be intermediate in character between the classic chalk rivers of the south and the oolitic rivers to the north. Stream water-crowfoot *Ranunculus pencillatus*, starwort *Callitriche obtusangula* and watercress *Nasturtium officinale* dominate the upper half of the river where shallow water and gravel are typical. In the slower, deeper water found downstream a much wider range of species occurs. This includes four species of pondweed (*Potamogeton* spp.) and horned pondweed *Zannichellia palustris*. Other plants occurring here include spiked water-milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*, yellow water-lily *Nuphar lutea*, common club-rush *Scirpus lacustris* and bur-reed species *Sparganium*. Below Newbury there is a larger volume of water and less chalk influence and river water-crowfoot *Ranunculus fluitans* occurs for the first time. River water-dropwort *Oenanthe fluviatilis*, a nationally scarce species of larger chalk streams, has been recorded from the mid to lower Kennet.

Aquatic invertebrates are abundant and the Kennet is especially noted for its large hatches of mayflies (Ephemeroptera), including *Ecdyonorus insignis* and *Ephemerella notata* which have a very local distribution. These are associated with moderately flowing water in calcareous areas. Also worthy of mention are the beautiful and banded demoiselle damselflies, *Calopteryx virgo* and *C. splendens* respectively. The nationally scarce crane fly *Molophilus niger* (the larvae of which live in vegetated stream and riverside) has been recorded from the Kennet. The caddis fly *Ylodes conspersus*, also ranked as nationally scarce, has also been found along the river.

The Kennet supports good populations of kingfisher, grey wagtail, mute swan and little grebe, as well as sedge and reed warblers. Common sandpiper and redshank frequently use this river on passage. The Kennet has a varied and mixed

fishery including healthy, self-sustaining populations of wild brown trout, grayling, perch, chub, dace, roach, pike, gudgeon and bullhead.