

**County:** Cheshire **Site Name:** Inner Marsh Farm

**Unitary Authorities:** Flintshire

**District:** Ellesmere Port & Neston

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Cheshire County Council  
Ellesmere Port & Neston Borough Council  
Flintshire County Council

**National Grid Reference:** SJ 307735 **Area:** 22.44 (ha) 55.43 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000** 117 **1:10 000** SJ 37 SW

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

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1998 **Date of Last Revision:** –

**Other Information:**

This is a new site which is owned and managed by the RSPB. It lies in close proximity to the Dee Estuary SSSI, SPA and Ramsar site.

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**

Inner Marsh Farm is situated 3 km south of the town of Neston and straddles the England/Wales border at the head of the Dee Estuary. The site is notified for the ornithological interest it supports, particularly its wintering and summering bird populations. It lies on former estuarine flats which were reclaimed from the Dee Estuary in the late nineteenth century by the construction of the Bidston to Wrexham railway. Freshwater marsh developed and subsequently provided safe grazing and a commercial duck shoot. Eventually, this gave way to arable farming, but in recent times this has been abandoned as the land has, once again, reverted to marshland.

The site now consists of a complex of open water and wetland habitats. Specifically, it comprises three shallow, but permanent, water bodies which were excavated in the late 1980s. These are bordered by fringing swamp vegetation typically comprising sea club-rush *Bolboschoenus maritimus*, reedmace *Typha latifolia*, grey club-rush *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*, soft rush *Juncus effusus* and hard rush *J. inflexus*. The pools lie within a complex of damp grassland, which floods in winter, dominated by marsh foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*, floating sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans*, creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera* and soft rush. Sheep grazing maintains a tussocky sward which resembles a much modified grazing marsh, a characteristic, but increasingly uncommon habitat in the area. The site is of great importance for wintering and summering wildfowl. Its seclusion and position close to the Dee Estuary ensures that Inner Marsh Farm provides a valuable roosting and feeding area

for large populations of birds displaced from the estuary by high tides. The site is also of major importance, especially as a feeding and roosting site, for large numbers of waders and wildfowl irrespective of the tide on the nearby estuary.

Wintering pintail *Anas acuta* occur in internationally important numbers, whilst wintering teal *Anas crecca* and black-tailed godwit *Limosa limosa* occur in nationally important numbers. Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* and spotted redshank *Tringa erythropus* regularly winter in significant, if relatively small, numbers, whilst Bewick's swans *Cygnus bewickii*, wigeon *Anas penelope* and shoveler *Anas clypeata* have reached nationally important levels in recent winters.

The site also provides an important staging post for a variety of uncommon species during passage; spotted redshank, greenshank *Tringa nebularia* and black-tailed godwit all regularly occur, the latter in considerable numbers. In addition, the nationally important, non-breeding summering flock of the Icelandic spp. of black-tailed godwits appear to be one of the largest in the United Kingdom.

Additional interest is provided by the presence of small numbers of breeding waders including lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and redshank *Tringa totanus*.