

COUNTY: BERKSHIRE

SITE NAME: BRAY MEADOWS

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

Local Planning Authority: Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead

National Grid Reference: SU888801

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 175 **1:10,000:** SU87NE, SU88SE, SU97NW, SU98NE

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 22 June 1998

Area: 6.53 ha 16.14 ac

Other information:

Within the London Basin Natural Area.

Description and Reasons for Notification

This is a series of species-rich, agriculturally unimproved meadows adjacent to a side channel of the River Thames near Maidenhead. The meadows support a very uncommon type of grassland with a distinctive flora which is particularly characteristic of the calcareous alluvium of the lower Thames floodplain. The site represents one of a very small number of remaining examples of this grassland type which has been largely lost through urban development and agricultural improvement.

The meadows have a particularly high diversity of plants including both calcicoles and damp meadow species, and several locally uncommon species are present. Ant hills are frequent in one of the fields.

Typical meadow plants such as yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, black knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, bird's foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* are common throughout the fields. There are also patches of yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, adder's tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, meadow saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata* and the locally uncommon restharrow *Ononis repens*. The calcareous nature of the soil is indicated by the occurrence of salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, hoary plantain *Plantago media*, burnet saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*, downy oat grass *Avenula pubescens*, rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, quaking grass *Briza media*, bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus* and yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*. The presence of calcicoles such as these in alluvial meadows is an extremely rare feature in Berkshire. There are also some typical damp meadow plants such as meadow barley *Hordeum secalinum*, lesser stitchwort *Stellaria graminea* and meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*.

The riverside vegetation along the western margin of the fields includes the nationally scarce greater dodder *Cuscuta europaea*, a parasitic plant which is particularly characteristic of the lower Thames.