

**COUNTY:** LINCOLNSHIRE

**SITE NAME:** LAUGHTON COMMON

**DISTRICT:** WEST LINDSEY

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

**Local Planning Authority:** West Lindsey District Council

**National Grid Reference:** SK 834968

**Area:** 55.75 (ha.) 137.76 (ac.)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 112

**1:10,000:** SK 89 NW

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 8 December 1999

**Reasons for Notification:**

Laughton Common supports an extensive and diverse range of vegetation communities characteristic of the north Lincolnshire Coversands, including nationally notable areas of lowland acid grassland, inland dune grassland and lowland heath which are scarce in the county and restricted in their distribution across England.

**Description:**

Located on nutrient-poor, wind-blown sands overlying Triassic Mercia Mudstones, the two blocks of land comprising Laughton Common represent one of the largest areas of semi-natural vegetation remaining within the Coversands of north-west Lincolnshire. The site consists of a wide variety of vegetation types, ranging from bare open sand and shallow pools to open areas of unimproved grassland and heath, fen, swamp, wet carr and dry oak-birch woodland.

Central areas of the common contain areas of parched acid grassland, which are subject to varying intensities of grazing by rabbits resulting in a diverse grassland flora. Generally the short closely-cropped turf is dominated by sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, early hair-grass *Aira praecox*, sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella* and the moss *Dicranum scoparium* with less frequent amounts of sand sedge *Carex arenaria*, field wood-rush *Luzula campestris*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, common stork's-bill *Erodium cicutarium* and, more locally, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and shepherd's cress *Teesdalia nudicularis*. On the margins of poorly drained areas, velvet bent *Agrostis canina* and common sedge *Carex nigra* form an unusual element of the turf. Where rabbit activity becomes increasingly heavy and ground disturbance greater, most notably in the north-east of the site, the vegetation becomes much more open and is characterised by large areas of mobile sand exposed to active wind-blows. Colonising the more stable margins of this blow-out are a range of plants including field mouse-ear *Cerastium arvense*, changing forget-me-not *Myosotis discolor*, ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* and the moss *Ceratodon purpureus*.

Within the open expanses of acid grassland on less stable sands, *Carex arenaria* dominates and forms distinctive stands, whilst to the west of the common, vegetation becomes characterised by an unusual assemblage of bell heather *Erica cinerea*, *Carex arenaria* and heather *Calluna vulgaris* all in great abundances. This type of heath has a diverse age structure and a rich associated flora which includes bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*, *Galium saxatile*, parsley piert *Aphanes arvensis* and pill sedge *Carex pilulifera*.

Both acid grassland and heath communities also have a consistently rich assemblage of lower plants where turf is more open, most notably a diverse range of *Cladonia* lichens including *Cladonia squamosa*, *C. pyxidata*, *C. uncialis*, *C. impexa*, *C. furcata*, *C. gracilis* and *C. arbuscula*, together with the liverwort *Ptilidium ciliare* and mosses such as *Dicranum scoparium*, *Pleurozium schreberi* and *Polytrichum piliferum*. A notable

component of this flora is *Cornicularia aculeata*, a lichen of limited occurrence in the county.

Wetland plant communities typify lower-lying areas where impeded or channelled drainage leads to a prominence of shallow standing water. Open peaty pools of water or 'holes' dominated by bulbous rush *Juncus bulbosus* grade into stands of willow carr and locally species-rich areas of mire with abundant soft rush *Juncus effusus*, sharp-flowered rush *J. acutiflorus*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and *Carex nigra*. Areas of damp woodland, characterised by downy birch *Betula pubescens*, pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* and sallow *Salix cinerea* with *Molinia caerulea* abundant within the ground flora, complete the transition onto drier grounds. Diverse stands of fen and swamp on more permanently waterlogged soils, dominated by bottle sedge *Carex rostrata*, reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*, greater pond sedge *Carex riparia*, reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* and purple small-reed *Calamagrostis canaescens*, are found amongst open stands of coarse grassland dominated by false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. A number of plants associated with these wetter conditions, such as marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, white sedge *Carex curta*, marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, common cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium* and several species of bog-moss *Sphagna*, are scarce in the county.

Woodland dominated by both young and mature stands of *Quercus robur* and silver birch *Betula pendula*, with a characteristic ground flora of *Deschampsia flexuosa*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, occupies extensive areas of the site, contributing a well-structured woodland edge where it encroaches onto open areas of grassland and heath.

The fauna of the site has yet to be fully investigated, although a number of species notably scarce in Lincolnshire have been recorded recently, including *Phytobius comari*, a nationally uncommon weevil associated with *Potentilla palustris* and *Pristonychus terricola*, a ground beetle associated with mammal burrows. The moth fauna is known to be rich and includes the nationally notable angle-striped sallow *Enargia paleacea*.

**Other Information:**

This is a new site.