

COUNTY: SHROPSHIRE

SITE NAME: FERNHILL PASTURES

DISTRICT: Oswestry

SITE REF: 15WZK

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

Local Planning Authority: SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Oswestry Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SJ 321328 Area: 11.80 (ha.) 29.14 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 126 1:10,000: SJ 33 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 Date of Last Revision: 1993

Other Information:

Site boundary alteration (extensions).

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Fernhill Pastures consists of a series of traditionally managed fen-meadows situated on gently sloping ground alongside the River Perry in north west Shropshire. The fen vegetation has developed on moderately acid to neutral peaty soils which are kept wet or moist for most of the year as a consequence of seepage from the adjacent higher ground and waterlogging occurring on the valley floor. Parts of the site support a type of fen-meadow which is characterised by an abundance of the rushes *Juncus effusus* and *J. acutiflorus*, whereas other areas are dominated by meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* or by lesser pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis*. Small differences in the water table and in management account for local variations in vegetation.

There has been widespread loss of unimproved wet grassland and fen meadow habitats in lowland Shropshire as a result of drainage and associated agricultural improvements. Fernhill Pastures is of special interest as the largest remaining example of these types of habitats which are now scarce in Shropshire.

At the south western end of the site tall herb communities occur, dominated by meadowsweet and lesser pond sedge with frequent sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre* and locally wood club-rush *Scirpus sylvaticus*. A varied herbaceous flora includes species characteristic of unimproved moist peaty soils, such as devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, ragged-robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* and water mint *Mentha aquatica*. The presence on this part of the site of blunt-flowered rush *Juncus subnodulosus*, an uncommon plant in Shropshire, is indicative of a calcareous influence on the peat.

To the north and east of the River Perry, shorter, more intensively grazed fen-meadow occurs in which the rushes *Juncus effusus* and *J. acutiflorus* and sedges, mainly lesser pond-sedge, form an important component as do the grasses such as creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus* and cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*. Where the land is slightly higher and drier, as on parts of the easternmost field, the grasses *Festuca rubra* and *Agrostis capillaris* become prevalent. Associated herbs include meadowsweet, devil's-bit scabious, lady's-mantle *Alchemilla filicaulis* ssp *vestita* and, locally, water avens *Geum rivale*. A number of species which are uncommon in Shropshire are also present including marsh arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris* and common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*.

The site is crossed by a number of redundant ditches and drains most of which support swamp communities dominated by either lesser pond-sedge or common reed *Phragmites australis*.