

COUNTY: SHROPSHIRE

SITE NAME: MELVERLEY FARM

DISTRICT: North Shropshire

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, North Shropshire District Council

National Grid Reference: SJ 584407

Area: 23.78 (ha.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 117

1:10,000: SJ 54 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 28 April 1995

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Melverley Farm is situated in the north-east corner of Shropshire, about 3 kilometres to the east of Whitchurch. This area of the county is covered by glacial deposits, underlain with Lias clay. The farm covers more than 60 acres and comprises 13 fields of varying size and shape on an undulating topography.

These fields have a long history of traditional management. Four are managed for pasture with grazing by cattle and the remainder for hay with aftermath grazing by either sheep or cattle. The fields are bounded by large and diverse hedgerows, which in many places extend out in scrubby banks into the fields. Many of the field corners have small ponds or areas of damp grassland from where sand has been dug at some time in the past.

The varied topography over the farm gives rise to a wide variety of habitat conditions; some fields are quite dry, and others are marshy as a result of impeded drainage. In several there is still a very distinctive ridge and furrow pattern. The predominant vegetation on the farm is species rich mesotrophic (neutral) grassland, characterised by common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*. The hay meadows tend to be of the meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* sub-community, whereas the pastures, which are slightly more acidic, have the heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* sub-community. Where the drainage is impeded the vegetation is more similar to the type of community associated with rushy pastures.

The species composition of the sward varies considerably across the farm. The most abundant grasses are sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, crested dog's-tail, common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*. A diverse mixture of sedges and rushes is present; of particular note for this part of the county are spring sedge *Carex caryophyllea*, false fox sedge *Carex otrubae* and bristle club-rush *Isolepis setacea*.

There is a wide range of herbs in the sward; again these vary in abundance and variety across the farm. In the pastures the typical species include wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, pignut *Conopodium majus*, cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* and ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*. The hay meadows are characterised by the presence of yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, common knapweed, ribwort plantain, red clover *Trifolium pratense* and common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*. In the damper areas the sward contains species such as ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* meadow-sweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*.

A variety of uncommon species are present, including spiny rest-harrow *Ononis spinosa* at one of only two sites in Shropshire, bristle club-rush *Isolepis setacea* and great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*. Yellow-rattle is abundant in the hay meadows and in some places dominates the sward. There are many species present which have not been recorded elsewhere in this part of the county.

The grassland communities are rich and diverse but the value of the site to wildlife is considerably enhanced by the network of trees, hedges and scrubby patches and by the wet hollows and ponds. This diversity of habitat types has resulted in a good range of breeding birds and a diverse invertebrate population, with a number of uncommon species being present, including the ringlet butterfly which is on the edge of its range.