

COUNTY: SHROPSHIRE

SITE NAME: MINSTERLEY MEADOWS

DISTRICT: SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM

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, Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SJ 379047

Area: 5.35 (ha.) 13.21 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 126

1:10,000: SJ 30 SE

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 28 November 2000 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

A new site. Within the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Reasons for Notification:

The meadows are of special interest for a type of herb-rich neutral grassland, characterised by crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* which is now very scarce in Shropshire and which is nationally restricted and declining. There has been considerable loss of unimproved grassland in this part of Shropshire and especially in and on the fringes of the South Shropshire Hills where herb-rich grasslands have almost all been destroyed. Minsterley Meadows is one of the largest of the few remaining neutral grasslands in this part of Shropshire and furthermore, is one of the largest contiguous areas of the meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* sub-community for this type of neutral grassland within Shropshire.

Description:

Minsterley Meadows consists of two traditionally managed herb-rich meadows situated on the eastern edge of the village of Minsterley and lying on the northern margin of the South Shropshire Hills. The meadows lie on gently sloping ground facing west and are bounded by a small stream, which emerges from a spring located on the site. The underlying soils, derived from glacial boulder clay, are predominantly neutral and free draining, although the site also includes a number of small damp areas where the drainage is impeded.

The meadows contain a wide variety of grasses, the most abundant being crested dog's-tail, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, quaking-grass *Briza media* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*. A varied herbaceous flora includes species which are characteristic of traditionally managed meadows such as common knapweed, autumn hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis*, cat's-ear *Hypochoeris radicata* and pignut *Conopodium majus* with, more locally, meadow vetchling, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and cowslip *Primula veris*.

The flora of both meadows is typical of the meadow vetchling sub-community for this type of neutral grassland which is characterised by the occurrence of frequent bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* and common knapweed with oxeye daisy and meadow vetchling.

The presence of a number of small wet areas associated with the stream margins, and locally within the fields where drainage is poor, add to the overall diversity of the flora. In these areas the sward is characterised by the rushes *Juncus effusus* and *J. articulatus* the sedges *Carex panicea*, *C. flacca* and *C. hirta* and lady's-smock *Cardamine pratensis*.

The meadows support a number of species which are either uncommon or rare in Shropshire, such as adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum* and green-winged orchid *Orchis morio* for which this site maintains one of the two largest populations that are known to occur within Shropshire.

Large mature species-rich hedgerows surround the meadows. These hedgerows are composed of a mixture of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and hazel *Corylus avellana* with ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and oak *Quercus spp* and provide additional habitats of importance for invertebrates and birds.