COUNTY: BERKSHIRE SITE NAME: ALDERMASTON GRAVEL PITS

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

1981

**Local Planning Authorities:** Newbury District Council, Berkshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU596668

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 174 1:10,000: SU56 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1955 Date of Last Revision: 1975

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1983 Date of Last Revision:

**Area:** 23.41 ha 57.75 ac

Other information: Boundary amended in 1983.

## **Description and Reasons for Notification**

This site consists of mature flooded gravel workings surrounded by dense fringing vegetation, trees and scrub, affording a variety of habitats for breeding birds and a refuge for wildfowl.

Access to the shoreline is restricted to a few places as the margins of the open water areas are extensively overgrown with dense wet woodland, dominated by willows *Salix* spp and alder carr. Swamp vegetation, dominated locally by reedmace *Typha latifolia*, reed *Phragmites australis* and pond sedge *Carex riparia* and containing water mint *Mentha aquatica*, purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria* and many other marshland and wet ground species, has established in places on the lake margins, particularly in sheltered bays and inlets. On drier ground surrounding the pits there is a greater variety of trees and shrubs including oak, ash, cherry *Prunus avium* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* with a dense ground flora including much stinging nettle *Urtica dioica* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. The outer margin of the site is partly occupied by a plantation of poplars *Populus* sp. The irregular shoreline, with islands, promontories, sheltered eutrophic pools and narrow lagoons provides undisturbed habitat for many water birds including surface feeding ducks such as teal *Anas crecca* and shoveler *A. clypeata*. The surrounding marsh and scrub are important for numerous birds including nine breeding species of warblers, water rails *Rallus aquaticus*, kingfishers *Alcedoa atthis* and an important breeding colony of nightingales *Luscinia megarhynchos*. During the period 1997-1981 some 64 species of birds were recorded breeding at this site including some of local distribution in the county. The area is regarded as being of regional importance on passage and during the winter months.