COUNTY: BERKSHIRE SITE NAME: COCK MARSH

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

1981

Local Planning Authorities: Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Berkshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU883867

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 175 1:10,000: SU88 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1970 Date of Last Revision: 1975

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

Area: 18.55 ha 45.84 ac

Other information: The site is owned by the National Trust.

Description and Reasons for Notification

A site exhibiting a transition in a relatively small area from wet alluvial grassland, through calcareous grassland on a steep north-facing slope to more acidic grassland on clay at the top of the slope.

The whole area is grazed by cattle and horses and locally by rabbits, producing a short sward interspersed with patches of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* scrub and mature deciduous trees on the hillside.

The chalk grassland consists of a *Festuca* sward with a good mixture of characteristic chalk herbs, but the outstanding feature of the site is the marshy grassland at the foot of the slope containing a series of four silted pools and supporting a rich plant community including water violet *Hottonia palustris*, marsh arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, marsh stitchwort *Stellaria palustris*, lesser persicaria *Polygonum minus*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, water hemlock *Oenanthe aquatica* and many other species including one specially protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

The ponds are surrounded by emergent vegetation and each is different in character, the plant communities ranging from those characteristic of bare mud to willow *Salix* scrub. The whole low-lying area is subject to periodic flooding and occasional drying out. This fluctuation in water levels is an important factor in maintaining the botanical richness. The site is locally important for breeding and wintering birds.