

File ref:

**County:** Durham **Site Name:** Butterby Oxbow

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Durham City District Council

**National Grid Reference:** NZ 275390 **Area:** 7.29 (ha) 18.02 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000** 93 **1:10 000** NZ 23 NW

**First Notified:** 1957\* **Date of Revision:** 7/6/83

**Other Information:**

The site was formerly scheduled as 'Butterby and Croxdale'. Its boundary has been reduced to omit Shincliffe Wood.

\* Under Section 23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949.

**Description:**

Butterby Oxbow consists of a former meander of the River Wear, cut off artificially from the main river in 1811. The natural process of succession which has ensued has led to the development of swamp, fen and fen-carr communities in areas formerly of open water, and this is one of the few sites in County Durham where this sequence can be observed.

Open water is now confined to a number of separate pools which support a restricted range of aquatic plants, although the yellow water-lily *Nuphar lutea* forms extensive floating rafts in two of them and water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* and water plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica* occur in areas of shallow water. The water's edge is fringed with extensive stands of common reed *Phragmites australis*, whilst elsewhere the lesser-pond sedge *Carex acutiformis* is dominant, and greater reedmace *Typha latifolia* and greater water-dock *Rumex hydrolopathum* also occur.

Species-rich stands of tall-fen vegetation, open to grazing, include sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, marsh ragwort *Senecio aquatica*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and greater tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata*.

Approximately one third of the site now supports fen-carr which is gradually invading areas of swamp and fen. Crack willow *Salix fragilis* is dominant, but alder *Alnus glutinosa* and grey willow *Salix cinerea* are locally abundant. The ground flora is made up of fen and swamp species including common reed, lesser pond-sedge, remote sedge *Carex remota*, wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris* and meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*.

On a steep slope at the northern end of the site is a woodland dominated by ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, elm *Ulmus glabra* and oak *Quercus petraea*. The ground is heavily grazed and lacks characteristic woodland species.

The Oxbow is of local importance as a roost for waterfowl and in winter holds populations of mallard and teal. Significant numbers of heron have also been recorded (up to 30).