

**County:** Hertfordshire **Site Name:** Therfield Heath

**District:** North Hertfordshire

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

**Local Planning Authority:** North Hertfordshire District Council

**National Grid Reference:** TL 335400 **Area:** 143.33 (ha) 354.14 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1: 50 000:** 153, 154 **1: 10 000:** TL 33 NW, 33 NE, 34 SW, 34 SE.

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1953 **Date of Last Revision:** 1969

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1984 **Date of Last Revision:** -

**Other Information:**

The majority of the site is also a Local Nature Reserve declared under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

**Reasons for Notification:**

Therfield Heath is a very good example of the East Anglian type of chalk grassland. This plant community has suffered severe losses throughout its range during the post-war period, mainly as a result of agricultural intensification or the cessation of sheep grazing, so the remaining examples are of high conservation value. The site contains some of the richest chalk grassland in England.

Since the turn of the century the traditional use of the Heath for sheep grazing has gradually given way to a variety of recreational uses, of which golfing has had the greatest impact. Parts of the site were ploughed during the Second World War but have since reverted to grassland.

The remaining unimproved pasture is dominated by upright brome *Bromus erectus* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*. There is a rich assemblage of herbs including such rarities as pasque flower *Pulsatilla vulgaris* which occurs in abundance at Church Hill, spotted cat's ear *Hypochoeris maculata*, wild candytuft *Iberis amara*, bastard toadflax *Thesium humifusum*, and lesser meadow-rue *Thalictrum minus*.

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### **Therfield Heath (cont...)**

The plant communities of the partially improved areas have a lesser, though increasing, diversity of species, including purple milk-vetch *Astragalus danicus* and horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*.

The site also includes mixed scrub communities at various stages of development, and two areas of mature beech woodland. The latter is best developed at Fox Covert, where the ground flora includes abundant white helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*.

The grassland supports a diverse insect fauna, including the chalk hill blue butterfly *Lysandra coridon*.