

COUNTY: CAMBRIDGESHIRE **SITE NAME:** GREAT STUKELEY RAILWAY
CUTTING

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

Local Planning Authorities: Huntingdonshire District Council

National Grid Reference: TL 235735
TL 232764

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 153, 142 **1:10,000:** TL 27 NW, TL 27 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 35.6 ha 88 ac

Other information: Owned by British Rail, this site is a railway cutting and associated land which is
situated either side of an operational line.

Description and Reasons for Notification

This site is an extensive railway cutting which holds plant communities typical of calcareous clay
grassland. This is a habitat type which was widespread on the claylands of Huntingdonshire at the turn
of the Century, but which is now scarce as a result of reclamation for agriculture. This habitat type is also
scarce throughout its normal range in Britain.

Two distinct communities are represented and these reflect the degree of past and present management.
The most herb-rich areas are present on the steep cutting which runs the length of the site. Dominant
grasses on the cutting are tor grass *Brachypodium pinnatum*, false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*,
red fescue *Festuca rubra*, with glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*. A wide variety of herbs are present
including spiny retharrow *Ononis spinosa*, dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, Dyer's greenweed *Genista
tinctoria*, sulphur clover *Trifolium ochroleucon*, zigzag clover *T. medium* and pyramidal orchid
Anacamptis pyramidalis.

Away from the steep cutting the grassland is less herb-rich and is dominated by coarse grass, particularly
false oat-grass.

The intermittent burning and rabbit grazing that the site receives has allowed the maintenance of this
valuable wildlife habitat in an otherwise intensively farmed area.

Additional habitats of general wildlife value on the site include ponds and scrub. Low scrub supports a
breeding colony of the great green bush-cricket *Tettigonia viridissima*, a predominantly southern species
present here at the edge of its British range.