COUNTY: CAMBRIDGESHIRE **SITE NAME:** PORTHOLME

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 238708

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

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1965 **Date of Last Revision:** 1972

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

Area: 104 ha 257 ac

Other information: This is a grade 2 site in the 'Nature Conservation Review' (Cambridge University Press, 1977 ed. D A Ratcliffe). The banks of the adjacent water courses are included within the site boundary.

Description and Reasons for Notification

This area holds grassland communities of the alluvial flood meadow type. Portholme represents one of the largest areas of this grassland type in the country which continues to be managed on traditional lines as a 'lammas' meadow. Watercourses on the periphery of the site have populations of some uncommon invertebrates, including one dragonfly which is of a nationally restricted distribution.

The grassland communities are characterised by the presence of such grasses as Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*, meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*,and meadow fescue *Festuca pratensis.* The range of herbs present, typical of such meadows, includes lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus* and great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*. A number of locally rare and one nationally rare plant are also present.

The meadow is surrounded by channels of the River Ouse, and the Alconbury Brook is close by. These water bodies are important for dragonflies *(Odonata*) in particular the restricted dragonfly *Libellula fulva.*

The traditional management of this site, which still continues, is by cutting for hay followed by grazing of the aftermath in later summer until the autumn.

In winter and early spring Portholme is inundated by floodwaters. This provides natural fertilising of the soil and it is this seasonal flooding coupled with the traditional management that maintains the diversity of the natural plant communities.