

**COUNTY:** CAMBRIDGESHIRE **SITE NAME:** WHITEWATER VALLEY

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Peterborough City Council

**National Grid Reference:** TF 044036

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 142                      **1:10,000:** TF 00 SW

**Date Notified (under 1949 Act):** 1955                      **Date of last revision:** 1972

**Date Notified (under 1981 Act):** 1987                      **Date of last revision:**

**Area:** 4.4 ha 10.9 ac

**Other information:** The boundary of this site has been modified by partial deletion at re-notification.

### **Description and Reasons for Notification**

Whitewater Valley is situated approximately 15 kilometres north-west of Peterborough. It comprises part of a stream running through Lower Lincolnshire Limestone, and the associated habitats of base poor marsh, tall fen and willow carr. The marsh community is of an unusual type with some similarities to more northern communities and it supports many plant species which are rare in Cambridgeshire. Areas of willow carr have a very diverse ground flora, with the presence of bryophyte dominated springs being particularly noteworthy. Similar wetland habitats have become very scarce, largely due to improvements in land drainage.

At the eastern end of the site there is a spring fed limestone flush with water at or near the surface. The vegetation here is characterised by the dominance of blunt-flowered rush *Juncus subnodulosus* and a rich variety of sedges including greater tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata*, tufted-sedge *C. elata*, lesser pond-sedge *C. acutiformis*, long-stalked yellow-sedge *C. lepidocarpa* and common sedge *C. nigra*. Of particular interest is the presence of a number of poor fen species which occur on moderately acid soils, and which are generally uncommon in Cambridgeshire. These include bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, black bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica* and marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*.

Other parts of the valley support willow carr of a type largely restricted to lowland Britain. The vegetation is dominated by a dense growth of grey willow *Salix cinerea* and white willow *S. alba*. However, a number of other characteristic shrubs occur including buckthorn *Rhamnus cartharticus* and guelder rose *Viburnum opulus*. Over much of this area the water table is very high due to springs on the valley sides. A diverse carr ground flora is found here, characterised by the presence of species such as ragged Robin *Lynchis flos-cuculi*, marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica*, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, square-stemmed St John's wort *Hypericum tetrapterum*, cuckoo flower *Cardamine pratensis*, marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*, fen bedstraw *Galium uliginosum* and common meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum*. In drier areas male fern *Dryopteris filix-mas* and broad buckler-fern *D. austriaca* grow particularly abundantly.

Some of the springs support a luxuriant growth of mosses including *Rhizomnium punctatum*, *Plagiomnium* spp. and the rather uncommon *Cratoneuron commutatum*, which is here encrusted with tufa. This type of bryophyte community is rare in Cambridgeshire.