COUNTY: Devon SITE NAME: BRAUNTON BURROWS

DISTRICT: North Devon

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). National Nature Reserve (NNR) declared under Section 19 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949

Local Planning Authority: Devon County Council, North Devon District Council

National Grid Reference: SS 430350 Area: 1356.7 (ha) 3352.4 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 180 1:10,000: SS 43 NE, NW, SE, SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): NNR designated 1964 Previously SSSI notified 1952. Rest of SSSI 1969 Date of Last Revision: 1976

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

Other Information:
The SSSI includes the Braunton Burrows NNR. The whole is a Nature Conservation Review listed site and a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. It lies within the North Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, also within a County Structure Plan Nature Conservation Zone and, in part, in a Mineral Consultation Area. The NNR was extended in 1972, and the SSSI in 1974.

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**
Braunton Burrows is one of the largest dune systems in Britain, about 5 km long north-south and 1½ km wide, with lime-rich dune sup to 30 m high, and an extensive system of variably-flooded slacks, grassland and scrub, inland of a wide sandy foreshore. There is thus a variety of habitats for many flowering and lower plants, and for many birds and invertebrates. Several species are nationally rare or vulnerable. There are also important features of geological interest.

The foreshore consists mainly of sandy flats, rich in lime from broken seashells, with some intertidal shingle grading to silt in the estuary, in a tidal range of 7 m. Rock Sea-lavender *Limonium binervosum* occurs on the strand line. The fore and mid dunes are classic "yellow" dunes, colonised and stabilised mainly by Marram Grass *Ammophila arenaria*. Several notable species occur in this habitat: Sea Stock *Matthiola sinuate*, Sea Stork's-bill *Erodium maritimum*, Sea Clover *Trifolium aquamosum*, Portland and Sea Spurges *Euphorbia portlandica* and *E. paralias* and White Horehound *Marrubium vulgare*. Inland of these are most stable "grey" dunes, on which the Marram tends to be replaced by other grasses, including the Dune Fescue *Vulpia membranacea*. Between the dunes are slacks which flood according to rainfall. Other notable plants occur here, including the Round-headed Club-Rush *Scirpus holoschoenus*, discovered in the 17th century at about its present location, Sharp rush *Juncus acutus*, Round-leaved Wintergreen *Pyrola rotundifolia ssp maritima*, Early Gentian *Gentianella anglica* and orchids. Grassland, or "dune pasture" although it is not generally grazed by livestock, carries a rich mixture of grasses, sedges and herbs such as Rough Poppy *Papaver hybridum* and Toothed Medick *Medicago lupinula*. It tends to be invaded by scrub of native Willows *Salix spp*, Privet *Ligustrum vulgare* and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus agg*, and introduced Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*. For the whole site, some 400 flowering plants, and many fungi, lichens and bryophytes (mosses, liverworts) and ferns have been recorded. An area on the landward side of the dunes is particularly important for lichens, some 60 species having been recorded from the compacted soils of that area alone.

This SSSI, with the adjacent Taw-Torridge Estuary (also SSSI), is a focal point of bird migration routes down the west coast of Britain. The shores of sea and estuary provide important wintering grounds for waterfowl, while the landward parts support a variety of breeding species in scrub, eg Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and Magpie *Pica pica*; on grassland eg skylark *Alaunda arvensis* and Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*; and in holes or burrows, eg Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* and Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*. Invertebrates are numerous over the whole system, for instance 30 species of terrestrial or freshwater molluscs, including the Sand-bowl Amber Snail *Catinella arenaria*.

Braunton Burrows is a key site for coastal geomorphology. It is one of the three largest sand dune systems on the west coast of Britain and the one least affected by underlying geology and afforestation. It is also important for its diversity of form and has the greatest height range of any west coast dune system. In the central part of the Burrows where the highest dunes occur (up to 30 m OD) there are three main parallel ridges, separated by slacks and fronted by a line of foredunes. To the north and south the structure of the dunes is influenced by Saunton Down and the Taw-Torridge Estuary respectively, while to the east there is an extensive area of low dunes and slacks. The legacy of major blowouts is also apparent. There is a good documentation of post-war changes in dune form, and cartographic records extend back to the beginning of the 19th century.

This is one of the best documented dune systems in Europe. Academic research is undertaken on the physiography of the system, and on the ecology of several groups of plants and animals. Applied research is carried out on various methods of maintaining and enhancing the value of the site.