

COUNTY: SUFFOLK      SITE NAME: ARGER FEN

DISTRICT: BABERGH

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

Local Planning Authority: BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TL 933357      Area: 48.7 (ha.) 120.3 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 155      1:10,000: TL 93 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1956      Date of Last Revision: 1972

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

Other Information:

The boundary of this site has been reduced.

Reasons for Notification:

This site consists of two parts, both of which are sections of scarp slope on which sand and gravel overlie clay, with springs emerging at the junctions. Much of the site is woodland, with a wide range of stand types reflecting the range of soil conditions. Most of the woodland appears to be of ancient origin. The lower slopes contain areas of fen and wet grassland whilst the top of Tiger Hill supports dry, acidic grassland.

Parts of the lower slopes are occupied by alder wood, the ground flora of which reflects the fact that much of it has developed on very wet ground with many small streams and seepage areas. Great Horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* is very abundant whilst other species include Water Mint *Mentha aquatica* and Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*. Drier areas also occur and these support species such as Wood Avens *Geum urbanum* and Enchanter's Nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*.

On drier, sandy ground above the spring lines there are extensive areas of woodland. Hazel, Ash and Oak *Quercus robur* are all major components of the canopy along with Wild Cherry *Prunus avium* which occurs here in unusual abundance. Elm was dominant in two areas but much has now succumbed to disease. Small-leaved Lime *Tilia cordata* also occurs in one area and Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa* has become established in several stands. Bracken-dominated glades are found within the woodland and Birch occurs in abundance around their margins.

Much of this woodland shows evidence of coppicing and some at least appears to be of ancient origin. Two areas, Spouse's Grove and Arger Fen, are enclosed by well-defined wood-banks.

Arger Fen, the largest single block of woodland, has been partly replanted by conifers but the natural woodland vegetation was never completely suppressed. It is now re-establishing itself wherever the conifer canopy has failed to close.

The ground vegetation of this woodland is largely dominated by Bracken and Bramble. Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* are also found in abundance over wide areas. Other species include Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, Yellow Archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, Wood Spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*, and White Climbing Fumitory *Corydalis claviculata*.

The area of short, acidic grassland on Tiger Hill is dominated by Bent Grasses *Agrostis spp.* and Fescues *Festuca spp.* Other abundant species include Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella* and Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*. The sward also includes a number of mosses and lichens whilst old anthills provide additional interest.

In the valley bottom there are a series of neglected wet meadows and fens. The wet meadows are dominated by Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Great Hairy Willow Herb *Epilobium hirsutum* and patches of nettle, reflecting the lack of recent grazing or mowing. A range of wet meadow and fen margin species does however persist, including Purple Loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*, Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus*, Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Creeping Jenny *Lysimachia nummularium* and Lady's Smock *Cardamine pratensis*. Brown Sedge *Carex disticha* and Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus* also occur in the sward.

In the wettest areas tall fen has developed, dominated by Great Horsetail with comparatively few other species.

The juxtaposition of several different habitats increases the value of the site for birds and insects. The steep sandy banks attract Badgers and there are a number of active setts within the site boundary.