Date notified: 14th November 1986

COUNTY: SUFFOLK SITE NAME: LAKENHEATH WARREN

DISTRICT: FOREST HEATH

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Local Planning Authority: FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TL 767805 Area: 570.6 (ha.) 1410.0 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 143/144 1:10,000: TL 77 NE/NW, TL 78 SW

TL 87 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954 Date of Last Revision: 1975

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

Other Information:

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Lakenheath Warren is the largest heathland site remaining in the Suffolk Breckland. It is the only area containing the full range of Breck grass-heath types, which reflects the wide range of soil pH and is the type locality for Dr Watt's classic studies on these habitats. The site has a well documented history of use as a rabbit warren and an area of sheep grazing from the mid 13th century until the second World War. The Warren supports an assemblage of rare, notable and uncommon plants as well as a variety of breeding birds typical of lowland heath.

The grassland types range from calcareous through to acidic. All are unimproved and have had little grazing pressure in recent years. Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, Sand Sedge *Carex arenaria* and invasive trees such as Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* all dominate substantial parts of the site. Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina*, with some Bent grasses *Agrostis* spp. are abundant across the full range of grasslands. The different grassland types are distinguished by the occurrence and abundance of the various associated species.

Calcareous grassland is the least widespread and is the location of many of the rare and uncommon plants. South-west of Warren Lodge is situated a small but floristically rich area that has highly calcareous shallow soil where some bare chalk is exposed. Moonwort *Botrychium lunaria*, Spanish Catchfly *Silene otites*, Wall Bedstraw *Galium parisiense* and *Carex ericetorum* are found here as well as an unusual range of lichens (over a dozen species including several rare ones) and mosses. The remaining calcareous grassland has a continuous vegetation cover. Species diversity is highest here (80 vascular plants) and many calcicolous species such as Purging Flax *Linum catharticum*, Purple Milk-vetch *Astragalus danicus*, Hairy Rock-cress *Arabis hirsuta*, Stemless Thistle *Cirsium acaulon* and Quaking Grass *Briza media* are evident.

The neutral and acidic grasslands constitute the main grassy components of the Warren. Grasses grow more vigorously here. There is a reduction in the species diversity and abundance of herbs in the neutral grassland and this area is characterised by the abundance of Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*, *Carex praecox* and the moss *Pleurozium schieberi*. Wavy Hair Grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* is dominant over wide areas of acidic grassland and Sand Sedge is abundant here. Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, Shepherd's Cress *Teesdalia nudicaulis*, Field Woodrush *Luzula campestris* and lichens *Cladonia impexa*, *C. arbuscula* and *Cetraria aculeata* are amongst the other species frequently found.

At the north and western edges of the Warren, and at other small localised sites, a mosaic of lichen bryophyte and Agrostis/Fescue grassland is found. The lichen *Cladonia sylvatica* is dominant here and few vascular plants occur although large patches of Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile* are typical. Patches of Heather *Calluna vulgaris* dominated vegetation occur around the edge of the Warren particularly prominent at the north-west corner.

Of the 50 species of breeding birds, the most important include Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, Nightjar, Curlew, Wheatear, Stonechat, Whinchat and Grasshopper Warbler. Lakenheath Warren is also a regular winter roost for six to eleven Hen Harriers. The rare and notable plant species occurring on the Warren, other than those already mentioned include Field Southernwort *Artemisia campestris*, Perennial Knawel *Schleranthus perennis*, Spring Speedwell *Veronica vernal*, *V. praecox*, *Thymus serpyllum*, Small Medick *Medicago minimal*, fine-leaved Sandwort *Minuartia hybrida*, *Crassula tillaea*, Striated Catchfly *Silene conical*, Suffocated Clover *Trifolium suffocatum*, Sickle Medick *Medicago falcata* and Böhmers Cat's-tail *Phleum phleoides*.