

CITATION AS NOTIFIED ON 18 FEBRUARY 1991

COUNTY: SUFFOLK SITE NAME: DEBEN ESTUARY

DISTRICT: SUFFOLK COASTAL

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

Local Planning Authority: SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL, Suffolk Coastal District Council

National Grid Reference: TM 295504–TM 330378 Area: 976.0 (ha.) 2411.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 169 & 156 1:10,000: TM 24 NE/SE, 255E,
33NW, 34SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): – Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 18.2.91 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The boundary of this site partially overlaps the boundaries of two geological SSSIs, Ferry Cliff, Sutton and Ramsholt Cliff.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The Deben Estuary is important for its populations of overwintering waders and wildfowl and also for its extensive and diverse saltmarsh communities. Several estuarine plants and invertebrates with a nationally restricted distribution are also present.

The Estuary extends for over 12km in a generally south-easterly direction. It is sinuous, relatively sheltered and narrow, particularly at its mouth which is protected by shifting sand banks. Much of the intertidal area is occupied by mudflats with more sandy deposits occurring where exposed Red Crag erodes from cliffs.

The numbers of Redshank *Tringa totanus* overwintering on the Estuary are of international importance and the summer breeding population of this species is of county significance. The site is of national importance for its winter populations of Dark-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*, Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* with the numbers of Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Pintail *Anas acuta* and Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* approaching this level in some years. The Estuary supports many other species including high numbers of Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*.

The Deben Estuary supports approximately 40% of Suffolk's area of saltmarsh which also displays the most complete range of the vegetation's community types in the county. These occur in a highly complex mosaic with the variation in the proportions

of species being dependent upon several factors including substrate type, frequency of tidal inundation, exposure, position within the Estuary and past management practices.

Low-marsh communities, which are mainly situated towards the head of the Estuary, are characterised by a vegetation dominated by Sea Aster *Aster tripolium*, Annual Seablite *Suaeda maritima*, Glasswort *Salicornia europea*, Sea Poa *Puccinellia maritima* and Sea Purslane *Halimione portulacoides*. In places, particularly where steep cliffs abut the mudflats, virtually pure stands of Common Cord-grass *Spartina anglica* occur. Where the old seawalls have been breached a saltmarsh community that is typical of formerly disturbed sites has established. This is characterised by a mosaic of Sea Poa, Sea-milkwort *Glaux maritima*, Common Sea-lavender *Limonium vulgare*, Sea Arrow-grass *Triglochin maritima* and Sea Plantain *Plantago maritima*. Varying proportions of these species are also to be found in the more typical mid-marsh communities which became prevalent towards the lower end of the Estuary. There are several areas where upper-marsh occurs, characterised by the presence of Sea Rush *Juncus maritimus*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Saltmarsh Rush *J. gerardii* and Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera*.

Sea couch *Elymus pycnanthus* is mainly confined to sea walls but at the northern-most end of the site it forms extensive stands which show a natural transition to Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* scrub on the higher ground. In addition, swamp communities occur in several places along the Estuary, usually as relatively narrow fringes but occasionally forming large stands. Such areas may be dominated by Sea Club-rush *Scirpus maritimus*, Greater Pond sedge *Carex riparia* or, most frequently, Common Reed *Phragmites australis*.

The Estuary supports three nationally scarce plant species, namely Marsh Mallow *Althaea officinalis*, Shrubby Seablite *Suaeda fruticosa* and Small Cord-grass *Spartina maritima*. The nationally rare Mollusc *Vertigo augustior* and nationally scarce *V. pusilla* have also been recorded.