

COUNTY: BEDFORDSHIRE

SITE NAME: MAULDEN HEATH

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

Local Planning Authorities: Mid Bedfordshire District Council
Bedfordshire County Council

National Grid Reference: TL 070386
TL 068384

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 153 **1:10,000:** TI 03 NE

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

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

Area: 7.56 ha 18.68 ac

Other information: This site is owned by the Forestry Commission.

Description and Reasons for Notification

Maulden Heath is an example of lowland acidic grassland, situated on a gentle south-facing slope of the Lower Greensand ridge near Clophill, about 11 miles south of Bedford.

The site consists of two separate areas supporting characteristic plant communities with variations which reflect their distinctive topographies.

The grassland represents a habitat type uncommon nationally and restricted in its distribution in Bedfordshire where it is now one of the few remaining examples.

The eastern meadow has an undulating relief with two broad ridges running north-south. The ridges support a short herb-rich plant community characterised by acidic grassland species such as wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, common bent-grass *Agrostis capillaris*, creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis*, early hair-grass *Aria praecox* and sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella* which is locally dominant. The abundant herbs include cat's ear *Hypochoeris radicata* and birdsfoot *Ornithopus perpusillus* together with less frequent species such as heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, lesser stitchwort *Stellaria graminea* and field woodrush *Luzula campestris*.

Of particular interest is the moss layer which is often a dominant element of the short grassland. The common species *Dicranium scoparium* and *Polytrichum juniperum* are characteristic of acidic situations.

The depressions between each ridge support a more luxuriant sward with species of a neutral grassland type such as cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* and common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*.

Both broom *Cytisus scoparius* and gorse *Ulex europaeus* occur as scattered scrub within the meadow.

The western meadow consists of a small valley whose steep sides support a similar short acidic grassland community with moss carpets. There is some variation and additional species including brown bent-grass *Agrostis canina*, harebell *Campanula rotundifolia* and the hawkweed *Hieracium sabaudum*. Another moss is also found, *Pseudoscleropodium purum* growing in areas of slightly longer more neutral grassland.

Scrub is scattered within the site and parts of the western valley slope have invasive bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* where the grassland is not cut for hay as elsewhere.

