COUNTY: OXFORDSHIRE SITE NAME: ARNCOTT BRIDGE MEADOWS

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

1981

**Local Planning Authorities:** Cherwell District Council, Oxfordshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SP608185

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 164 1:10,000: SP61 NW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 Date of Last Revision: 1992

Area: 8.66 ha 21.39 ac

## **Description and Reasons for Notification**

Arncott Bridge Meadows lie on the floodplain of the River Ray. The meadows exhibit medieval ridge-and-furrow features indicating that parts, at least, have remained unploughed for many centuries. They are managed as hay meadow and pasture and accordingly support a wide range of plant species which are largely confined to such old, unimproved, neutral grassland.

The meadows are situated on fine loamy clay drift soils of the Wickham 2 Series. Parts of the site are seasonally waterlogged which reflects the position of the site adjacent to the River Ray and the underlying geology of impermeable Oxford Clay with Kellaway Beds.

The rich flora is, in part, attributable to the variation in the soil wetness caused by the ridge-and-furrow together with field ditches and localised depressions. The wettest areas which hold standing water in winter are characterised by species such as false fox-sedge *Carex otrubae*, brown sedge *C. disticha* and soft rush *Juncus effusus*, together with the grasses creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera* and tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*. Abundant herbs present include tubular water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*, ragged-robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*.

On the tops of the ridges and other drier soils, the meadow sward contains a high proportion of herbs including many species indicative of ancient, unimproved grassland. This sward is characterised by grasses such as crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris* with an abundance of great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*. Other species indicative of old meadowland include saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, green-winged orchid *Orchis morio*, carnation sedge *Carex panicea* and dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*.

The vegetation in and along the banks of the adjacent River Ray contains species which are becoming increasingly rare, both regionally and nationally. The bank grassland contains the nationally uncommon narrow-leaved water-dropwort *Oenanthe silaifolia*, a species now confined to a few sites in Britain. Other locally uncommon species along the river bank include flowering-rush *Butomus umbellatus* and bladder-sedge *Carex vesicaria*.