

COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

SITE NAME: POKERS POND MEADOW

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

Local Planning Authorities: Aylesbury Vale District Council, Buckinghamshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SP879280

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 165 **1:10,000:** SP82 NE

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 6 Feb 1992 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 1.89 ha 4.67 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Pokers Pond Meadow is one of the last remaining fragments of ancient hay meadow to be found in the Vale of Aylesbury. The herb-rich dry grassland community which covers the majority of the field is of a type that is now rare in lowland Britain. It has only been maintained by continuous traditional management usually involving a late annual hay cut, followed by stock grazing, with no fertiliser or herbicide applications. Along the north-western edge of the meadow beside the stream there is a small area of marshy grassland that has evolved from the original site of the pond, in combination with impeded drainage.

The soils are derived from the glacial drift that covers a major part of the Ouse basin. These slowly permeable, calcareous clayey soils were once extensively cultivated during medieval times. This is demonstrated by the widespread occurrence of ridge and furrow upon these soils; the western-most corner of Pokers Pond Meadow displays this distinctive pattern, further confirming its long history as meadowland, free from the disturbance of ploughing or other cultivation in recent decades.

The dry grassland community is unusual for the large number of common species which occur, several of which are closely associated with unimproved meadows. Over 100 species of grasses, sedges, rushes and herbs have been recorded from this field. The dominant grass species include sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*. Frequent throughout the meadow are crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and red fescue *Festuca rubra* with quaking grass *Briza media* on the drier areas. Meadow brome *Bromus commutatus* is found throughout this sward, a species uncommon elsewhere in Buckinghamshire. The herb species constitute a major part of this type of community and include several that are associated with ancient grasslands. These include locally uncommon species such as dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, green winged orchid *Orchis morio*, carnation sedge *Carex panicea* and adder's tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. Devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, cowslip *Primula veris* and hoary ragwort *Senecio erucifolius* are ancient indicators that occur here but are also more widespread in the rest of the County. Other meadow species that are found throughout the sward include bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, rough and autumn hawkbits *Leontodon hispidus* and *L. autumnalis*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* and yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*.

Tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* dominates the marshy grassland in the wetter area along the stream edge where marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*, plicate sweet-grass *Glyceria plicata*, great willow-herb *Epilobium hirsutum*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, soft and hard rushes *Juncus effusus* and *J. inflexus* and ragged-robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* also occur.

Tall ancient boundary hedgerows contain a good mixture of species including field maple, hawthorn, pedunculate oak, ash, elder and blackthorn, together with field and dog roses.