

COUNTY: BEDFORDSHIRE **SITE NAME:** FELMERSHAM GRAVEL PITS

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

Local Planning Authorities: Bedford Borough Council
Bedfordshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SP 991584

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 153 **1:10,000:** SP 95 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1969 **Date of Last Revision:**

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

Area: 21.64 ha 53.47 ac

Other information: This is a nature reserve of The Wildlife Trust.

Description and Reasons for Notification

Located on River Gravels between Sharnbrook and Felmersham, this site consists of a series of flooded pits which were active until about 1945. Many habitats have developed, with tall fen communities surrounding open water, neutral grassland, scrub and broadleaved woodland. This variety of habitat supports a very diverse flora, including several species rare and declining in the county and an exceptionally high number of dragonfly *Odonata* species.

The shallower margins of the pits are largely dominated by common reed *Phragmites australis* with common bulrush *Schoenoplectus lacustris*, clubrush *Typha latifolia* and occasional flowering rush *Butomus umbellatus*, lesser bulrush *Typha angustifolia* and water dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*. Several small ponds support branched bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*.

The locally rare water-plants, whorled water-milfoil *Myriophyllum verticillatum* and bladderwort *Utricularia australis* are recorded for this site.

The drier banks and islands support alders *Alnus glutinosa*, with a ground flora including yellow loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris*, purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, and orange balsam *Impatiens capensis*.

The neutral unimproved grassland is dominated by grasses such as Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* and meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, with a good variety of herbs including tufted vetch *Vicia cracca*, rough chervil *Chaerophyllum temulentum* and common fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*. There is also evidence of a more calcareous influence with species such as wild carrot *Daucus carota*, black knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and fescues *Festuca* spp.

Additional habitats are provided by the recent development of scrub and broadleaved woodland. These habitats are dominated by willows *Salix* sp., alder and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, with occasional species such as field maple *Acer campestre*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and wild cherry *Prunus avium*. Common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and broadleaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* are included in the ground flora.

The site provides a very important habitat for insects, and all the common amphibians are present. Among the reptiles grass snakes *Natrix natrix* are common. The wide variety of habitats also supports a very diverse bird community.