

COUNTY: EAST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: WILLINGFORD MEADOWS

DISTRICT: ROTHER

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

Local Planning Authority: Rother District Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 655 223

Area: 11.4 ha (28.2 acres)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 199

1:10,000: TQ 62 SE

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990

Date of last Revision: 1992

Other Information: This site lies within the High Weald Natural Area. Part of this site was notified in 1990 and has now been extended.

Description of Site and Reasons for Notification:

Willingford Meadows lie in a secluded part of the Central Weald on the sides of the River Dudwell valley. They are a series of species rich, agriculturally unimproved, meadows and pastures which are traditionally managed by grazing and mowing. Although once common in the county, meadows and pastures such as these are now very rare due to changes in management and neglect. The meadows overlie the clay loams of the Ashdown Beds, but the dominant influence is from the locally occurring outcrops of Jurassic limestone of the Purbeck Beds. These give rise to calcareous soil conditions in parts of the site, supporting lime-loving species (calcicoles) not usually found in the more typical slightly acidic grasslands of the Weald.

These meadows have a mosaic of different grassland types ranging from calcareous through neutral to acid. The meadows are the only example in East Sussex of unimproved pasture on Jurassic limestone. Four species of orchid are present; green-winged *Orchis morio*, early purple *Orchis mascula*, common spotted *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and twayblade *Listera ovata*. Other species found on the site include: adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, spring sedge *Carex caryophyllea*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, heath grass *Danthonia decumbens*, betony *Stachys officinalis* and burnet saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*. Places enriched by flushing with mineral-rich water have plant species that include quaking grass *Briza media*, milkwort *Polygala* spp., eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis* agg, glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* and hairy hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*.

The outcrops of limestone support a range of calcicoles some of which are not found elsewhere in Sussex away from the chalk of the South Downs. These include dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule* and common restharrow *Ononis repens*.

A marshy area in the southwestern field is dominated by meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. Other species found in this area include ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica* and marsh trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*. The latter field also has some large ant-hills.

The site includes a small area of overgrown hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* coppice and a mature hazel

Corylus avellana and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* hedge that forms, with a stream, the boundary to parts of the site.