

Warwickshire Sites Of Importance for Nature Conservation: Wildlife Site Evaluation Form

(Refer to guidelines for completion)

Site Name: Berkswell Marsh Meadow	Site Ref: SP28 F4	Grid Ref: SP 225801
Local Authority Area: Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council		Date Selected:
<p>Summary:</p> <p>Berkswell Marsh Meadow is a single large field of about 8ha approximately half of which is damp, largely unimproved grassland. Three locally rare vegetation communities are present: Yorkshire fog-Soft Rush pasture, Yorkshire Fog-Tussock Grass grassland and Lesser Pond-sedge swamp. Fifty eight species of vascular plant have been recorded from the sward including several species indicative of unimproved or species rich semi-improved grassland and marsh, these are: Angelica, Cuckooflower, Lesser Pond-sedge, Oval Sedge, Lesser Knapweed, Marsh Thistle, Great Willowherb, Meadowsweet, Common Marsh-bedstraw, Square-stalked St Johns-wort, Yellow Flag, Meadow Vetchling, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil, Water Mint, Water Forget-me-not, Tormentil, Lesser Spearwort, Great Burnet, Skullcap, Devil's-bit Scabious and Lady's Mantle. The SINC is adjacent to Berkswell Marsh SSSI, together these sites make an important habitat unit.</p>		
Site description:		Area: 8ha approx
<p>Berkswell Marsh Meadow SINC is a rather large, approximately 8ha, field situated on the Berkswell Estate in Solihull. The field is bisected by a small tributary of the River Blythe SSSI and contains a series of habitats including various wet and dry grassland types, swamp, scrub and tall herb. Most of the adjacent land use is improved grassland and arable, although there are areas of conifer plantations to the east and large areas of quarries to the north and west. The Berkswell Marsh SSSI, which contains similar vegetation, is adjacent to the south and east. There are also areas of wet grassland approximately 1km to the west along the River Blythe.</p> <p>For description purposes the field has been split roughly into two halves along the course of the stream.</p> <p>The boundary of the field remains the same as shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map except the western edge was open into the neighbouring field. The land may have then been part of the Mercote Hall Estate.</p> <p><u>North and East of the stream.</u></p> <p><u>Improved grassland</u> Approximately two thirds of this area has been classified as Improved grassland, although it is on the borderline with poor semi-improved neutral grassland. This area is currently sheep grazed, permanent pasture. Grasses here include frequent Common Bent (<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>), Sweet Vernal-grass (<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>), Crested Dog's-tail (<i>Cynosurus cristatus</i>), Red Fescue (<i>Festuca rubra</i>) and Yorkshire-fog (<i>Holcus lanatus</i>) with rare Meadow Foxtail (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>) and Cat's-tail (<i>Phleum pratense</i>). Herbs are generally infrequent with locally abundant Creeping Thistle (<i>Cirsium arvense</i>), frequent Creeping Buttercup (<i>Ranunculus repens</i>) and locally frequent White Clover (<i>Trifolium repens</i>). There were occasional records of Yarrow (<i>Achillea millefolium</i>), Cat's-ear (<i>Hypochoeris radicata</i>), Common Sorrel (<i>Rumex acetosa</i>) with rare records of Autumn Hawkbit (<i>Leontodon autumnalis</i>), Selfheal (<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>), Common Ragwort (<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>), Sow-thistle (<i>Sonchus</i>), Dandelion (<i>Taraxacum</i>), Nettle (<i>Urtica dioica</i>) and Germander Speedwell (<i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>). Common Mole (<i>Talpa europaea</i>) hills are present.</p> <p>There are also two areas of wet, largely unimproved, neutral grassland with:</p> <p><u>MG10 <i>Holcus lanatus</i>-<i>Juncus effusus</i> rush-pasture</u> vegetation. Here there is abundant Soft-rush</p>		

(*Juncus effusus*) with frequent Yorkshire-fog and locally abundant Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*). locally frequent Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Hard Rush (*Juncus inflexus*) and Hairy Sedge (*Carex hirta*) plus rare Oval Sedge (*Carex ovalis*) and Lesser Pond-sedge (*Carex acutiformis*). Herbs include locally frequent Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus uliginosus*), Lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla vestita*) with frequent to occasional Marsh Thistle (*Cirsium palustre*). Occasional frequency species noted were Cuckooflower (*Cardamine pratensis*), Common Marsh-bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), Creeping Cinquifol (*Potentilla reptans*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Lesser Stitchwort (*Stellaria graminea*) plus rare frequency Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), Common Mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*), Great Willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*), Square-stalked St John's-Wort (*Hypericum tetrapterum*), Yellow Flag (*Iris pseudacorus*), Water Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*) and Great Burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*). Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) saplings have invaded one area creating a scrub habitat. Butterflies observed were several Green-veined White (*Pieris napi*), and one each of Small Skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*), Gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonius*) and Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*). A previous survey on 20/08/1998 recorded the additional species Flote Grass (*Glyceria fluitans*), Toad Rush (*Juncus bufonius*), Bristle Club-rush (*Isolepis setacea*) and Water-plantain (*Alisma plantago-aquatica*).

South and West of the stream

Here the vegetation of the majority of the area is MG9 *Holcus lanatus-Deschampsia cespitosa* grassland. This is generally dominated by Tussock Grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) with locally frequent Soft-rush, Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*), Lesser Pond-sedge, Hairy Sedge, Creeping Bent and Creeping Soft-grass (*Holcus mollis*). Occasional frequency Sweet Vernal-grass, Red Fescue, Yorkshire-fog plus rare Common Bent, Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), Compact Rush (*Juncus conglomeratus*) and Oval Sedge. Herbs include locally frequent Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*), Marsh Thistle, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil, Meadowsweet with occasional Lesser Stitchwort, Yarrow, Great Willowherb, Common Marsh-bedstraw, Ribwort Plantain, Common Sorrel, Creeping Buttercup, Creeping Cinquifol, Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and rare frequency Square-stalked St John's-Wort, Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) and Common Cat's-ear. A blood-vein (*Timandra griseata*) moth was seen here.

In this part of the site there are also two areas of S7 *Carex acutiformis* swamp. Additional species recorded from the southernmost swamp and surrounding grassland are: locally frequent Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) with occasional Lesser Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Lesser Spearwort, Skullcap (*Scutellaria galericulata*), Great Burnet plus rare frequency Betony (*Stachys officinalis*), Water Mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and Tufted Vetch (*Vicia cracca*).

Phase 1 Habitats present:

Unimproved neutral grassland
Semi-improved neutral grassland
Improved grassland
Scrub
Swamp
Tall herb
Running Water

Evaluation against the criteria: Habitat criteria applied: Grassland and Marsh												
SCIENTIFIC CRITERIA	Elements of the criteria applying to the site						COMMUNITY CRITERIA	Elements of the criteria applying to the site				
	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5
Diversity	✓	✓	✓	SR			Physical & Visual Access	✓			✓	
Rarity	✓						Educational Value		✓	✓		
Size	✓						Community & Amenity Value	✓	✓			
Naturalness	✓						Aesthetic Appeal & Landscape	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Fragility	✓		✓				Geographical Position					
Typicalness	✓	✓					Recorded History					
Ecological Position	✓	✓	✓				Continuity of Landuse	✓		✓		
Significant Populations												
Potential Value	✓											

Why this site qualifies as a Wildlife Site: Summary of assessment

Berkswell Marsh Meadow SINC qualifies for 14 scientific criteria and 12 community criteria from the grassland and marsh criteria set. The most important aspects of the sites importance are naturalness, diversity, size, ecological position, typicalness, physical access and aesthetic appeal.

In terms of naturalness there are substantial areas which have been little affected by drainage, cultivation or chemical treatments. These have therefore retained species and vegetation types indicative of semi-natural vegetation. There is a good range of species characteristic of largely unimproved or species rich semi-improved grassland and marsh such as: Angelica, Cuckooflower, Lesser Pond-sedge, Oval Sedge, Lesser Knapweed, Marsh Thistle, Great Willowherb, Meadowsweet, Common Marsh-bedstraw, Square-stalked St Johns-wort, Yellow Flag, Meadow Vetchling, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil, Water Mint, Water Forget-me-not, Tormentil, Lesser Spearwort, Great Burnet, Skullcap, Devil's-bit Scabious and Lady's Mantle. The semi-natural vegetation types S7, MG9 and MG10 are present on the site, all of which are local in the county and in decline due to agricultural intensification. In terms of diversity fifty eight species of vascular plants were recorded from the sward in one visit. There is a good range of hydrological types from dry grassland ranging through marsh into swamp. Structural types are also diverse including closely grazed grassland, tussocky grassland, tall sedge swamp, tall herb and young scrub. The site is therefore likely to have importance for invertebrates. The SINC is large at approximately 8 ha, although this refers to the management unit and the area of semi-natural grassland, marsh and swamp is only about half of this. The ecological position of the site is also an important consideration as the SINC is contiguous with the Berkswell Marsh SSSI and a tributary of the River Blythe SSSI runs through both of these sites. Other marshy grassland sites are present nearby along the River Blythe floodplain. Community value is less important. A Public Right of Way runs through the middle of the SINC which appears to be little used. An area of improved grassland has been included in the SINC because it is part of the same management unit.

Sources of Information :

Recorder Site No:

Ecosite No:

