



## *Hankerton*

COUNTY: WILTSHIRE

SITE NAME: CLOATLEY MANOR FARM MEADOWS

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

Local Planning Authorities: NORTH WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL, Wiltshire County Council

National Grid Reference: ST 981910

Area: 12.1 (ha.) 29.90 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 173

1:10,000: ST 99 SE

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 17 July 1997

Date of Last Revision: –

### **Other Information:**

Lies within the Thames and Avon Vales Natural Area, within the Braydon Forest Prime Biodiversity Area.

### **Description and Reasons for Notification:**

Cloatley Manor Farm Meadows comprises three adjacent fields supporting floristically rich, unimproved and lowland neutral grassland, along with an area of largely semi-improved grassland, all managed as hay meadows. The site provides an example of a habitat that has largely been lost throughout England, as a result of recent intensive agricultural management.

The site is situated near the village of Hankerton, north east of Malmesbury, and lies within the Thames and Avon Vales Natural Area. It represents one of the largest expanses of this type of unimproved grassland within the Wiltshire section of the Natural Area.

The meadows, which lie on Upper Greensand and Gault Clay, are bounded by a number of thick hedges, some of which run along ditches, and two small copses. Past agricultural management has resulted in the creation of extensive ridges and furrows over the meadows. These features create a pattern of differing soil drainage across the mostly level fields.

The drier ridges support a wide variety of grasses and herbs indicative of a long period of extensive management. Red fescue *Festuca rubra*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* and sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* are all frequent, and are joined by several other grasses, including meadow fox-tail *Alopecurus pratensis* and quaking-grass *Briza media*. Typical meadow herb species are abundant throughout the grassland, particularly black knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, cowslip *Primula veris* and red clover *Trifolium pratense*, along with many other species of interest including saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, betony *Stachys officinalis*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* and pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus* and a small colony of great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*.

Many of the furrows are considerably damper and support a rush pasture like sward. They are characterised by additional species such as ragged-robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, meadow sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, greater bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, common marsh-bedstraw *Galium palustre*, hairy sedge *Carex hirta*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia caespitosa* and several rush species including soft-rush *Juncus effusus*, sharp-flowered rush *J. acutiflorus*, compact rush *J. conglomeratus*, hard rush *J. inflexus* and jointed rush *J. articulatus*.

Typical meadow butterflies, such as the common blues and meadow browns, can be found over the fields, as can be the five-spot burnet moth. The hedges, which form substantial barriers to stock in many places, are made up of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* with numerous standard trees of pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, field maple *Acer campestre* along with English elm *Ulmus procera* and pollarded crack willows *Salix fragilis*. Where the fields are bounded by woodland, hazel *Corylus avellana* is the dominant shrub.

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