



**Cowslip Meadow SSSI  
Luton**

***Notification under Section 28 of the Wildlife  
and Countryside Act 1981***

Issued by Natural England's West Anglia Area Team on **13 October 2020**

## Contact points and further information

This notification document is issued by Natural England's West Anglia Area Team. The address for correspondence is:

During the current coronavirus situation, Natural England staff are working remotely and a limited number of our offices are open. Please send any correspondence relating to this notification by email or contact us by phone using the information below. Alternatively, you can send a response online using the Citizenspace link below.

Natural England  
West Anglia Area Team

Telephone: 0208 0265947

Email: [westanglia@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:westanglia@naturalengland.org.uk)

Online: <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/natural-england/cowslip-meadow>

Your contact point for specific enquiries relating to this notification is Sarah Clarkson.

A second document (Cowslip Meadow SSSI - supporting information) is available on request from the address above. This contains information and extracts from relevant documents that have been used in the decision to notify this SSSI.

The date of notification of Cowslip Meadow SSSI is **13 October 2020**

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## 1. Summary

- 1.1 This document explains why Cowslip Meadow SSSI is notified by Natural England as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 1.2 Cowslip Meadow SSSI, covering an area of 6.36 ha, is a nationally important site for its species-rich lowland meadow and population of the Nationally Rare plant great pignut *Bunium bulbocastanum*.
- 1.3 Cowslip Meadow SSSI is a County Wildlife Site located within Luton. Although surrounded by housing, it plays an important role as a stepping stone between Blow's Down SSSI, Dallow Downs and Winsdon Hill SSSI and Galley and Warden Hills SSSI. The site provides opportunities for the surrounding community and local school to engage with the natural environment. Aside from species-rich lowland meadow the site supports an interesting mosaic of other wetland and grassland habitats. Of particular interest is the presence of a large population of the Nationally Rare great pignut *Bunium bulbocastanum* associated with areas of grassland showing a calcareous influence.
- 1.4 The annexes to this document comprise the legal papers that detail the interest and the management required to maintain that interest. You have a right to make representations or objections to this notification. Part 3 of this document explains how to do this.
- 1.5 Natural England's consent is required by owners and occupiers before any of the operations listed in *Annex 3* can be carried out. We will work closely with owners and managers, as well as other bodies, to ensure that existing operations and new works that are not considered likely to damage the special features of the SSSI can be carried out.

## 2. The legal background

- 2.1 Cowslip Meadow SSSI is notified under section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- 2.2 Part 8 of this notification document contains the following legal documents required by section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981:
  - a citation detailing the reasons for notification (*Annex 1*);
  - a statement of Natural England's views on the management of the SSSI (*Annex 2*);
  - a list of operations requiring Natural England's consent (*Annex 3*); and
  - a map identifying the land subject to this notification (*Annex 4*).
- 2.3 This notification has several effects. The key ones can be summarised as follows:
  - owners and occupiers must give Natural England notice before carrying out, causing or permitting to be carried out any of the activities in the list of operations at *Annex 3*;
  - owners of land included in the SSSI have a legal obligation to notify Natural England within 28 days if the ownership or occupancy of the land changes;
  - it is an offence for any person intentionally or recklessly to destroy or damage the special features of the SSSI or to disturb any of the fauna; and
  - other public bodies must consult Natural England before carrying out or authorising any works that may damage the SSSI.

- 2.4 If you require any further information or advice on how this notification affects you, please do not hesitate to contact Natural England at the address shown at the beginning of this notification document.

### 3. Making representations

- 3.1 You have a legal right to make objections and representations about this notification. Any representations, including those supporting the notification, or objections should be made in writing to Natural England's West Anglia Area Team by **15 February 2021**. Representations can be sent by e-mail or online to the addresses shown on page 2. You may wish to seek legal or independent advice and your representative may wish to write to us on your behalf.
- 3.2 Natural England's West Anglia Area Team will consider your objections or representations and will try to resolve them. If there are no unresolved objections, approval to confirm the notification will be considered by an appropriate Natural England Director within nine months of this notification.
- 3.3 Any unresolved objections or representations will be considered by the Board of Natural England within nine months of this notification. If there are unresolved objections, confirmation of this notification is likely to be considered at the Board meeting provisionally scheduled for May 2021. Please note the desirability of the notification (for instance, for socio-economic reasons) will not form part of the Board's decision. Following consideration of objections and representations, the Board of Natural England may confirm or withdraw all or part of this notification. In reaching its decision the Board will consider whether, in light of the objections and representations received, Natural England remains of the opinion that the site is of special scientific interest. If you wish to emphasise any of your objections or representations to the Board in person, you should tell us when you write to us. You will then be advised of the date and location of the Board meeting. Following consideration of objections and representations, the Board of Natural England may confirm or withdraw all or part of this notification.
- 3.4 Natural England will accept correspondence relating to unresolved objections up to seven days prior to the Board meeting at which the confirmation is due to be considered. Correspondence received after this date will only be presented to the Board in very exceptional circumstances and you will be expected to provide justification as to why there has been a delay in providing the information. The decision whether this information will be submitted to the Board is entirely at Natural England's discretion. The reason that there is a seven day cut off is to allow Board members sufficient opportunity to consider all of the issues and read all the relevant paperwork before they meet to take their decision.
- 3.5 Natural England has a policy of openness, which reflects our obligations under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This legislation provides a legal right of access to information held by public bodies. This means that we will provide information on how we make our decisions on SSSIs to any person on request. This includes details of objections and representations received. We will assume, therefore, that your representation or objection can be made publicly available unless you indicate with clear and valid reasons which (if any) part(s) of these you wish to be excluded from this arrangement. However, you should be aware that the requirements of the legislation may mean that we cannot comply with your request that this information be withheld. We do, however, respect people's privacy and will take all reasonable steps to consult you before reaching a decision on disclosure of the information.
- 3.6 As an individual with an interest in Cowslip Meadow SSSI, your information will be stored and processed on a computer database that will be operated within the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. For the purposes of the Data Protection Act, the data controller is Natural England, Foss House, Kings Pool, 1-2 Peasholme Green, York YO1 7PX. For more information, please see the *SSSI notifications privacy notice* at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-england-privacy->

[notices/site-of-special-scientific-interest-notification-privacy-notice](#) or request a copy from the address on page 2 of this document.

## 4. Reasons for notification

4.1 Cowslip Meadow SSSI is of special interest for its nationally important:

- **Species-rich lowland meadow**

The site supports species-rich lowland meadow, dominated by finer grasses such as red fescue *Festuca rubra* and a variety of herbs such as yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, cowslip *Primula veris*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria* and meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. The species-rich community forms a mosaic with other neutral grassland communities and tall-herb fen. The grasslands show calcareous influences locally.

Lowland meadow is included on the list of habitats which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England, as required under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

- **Great pignut *Bunium bulbocastanum***

Cowslip Meadow SSSI supports a large population of the Nationally Rare<sup>1</sup> great pignut *Bunium bulbocastanum*. Great pignut is an umbelliferous plant of limey soils that has a limited distribution in Great Britain, being mainly confined to the chalk hills between Tring and Cambridge. At Cowslip it is particularly associated with a small area of grassland showing a more calcareous influence.

## 5. Site boundaries and relationships with other SSSIs

5.1 Cowslip Meadow SSSI is situated in north Luton, within a built-up urban area. To the north and west the site is bounded by housing, to the east by the A6 road, and to the south by school grounds. The boundary has been drawn to include all the land supporting the features of special interest and those areas required to ensure the long-term sustainability of these features. Further details of the boundary are given in the Supporting Information document.

5.2 The nearest SSSI to Cowslip Meadow SSSI is Galley and Warden Hills SSSI (notified for calcareous and neutral grassland and its population of great pignut *Bunium bulbocastanum*) which lies approximately 750m to the north-east.

## 6. Management of the SSSI

6.1 Landowners and managers are critical to the ongoing management of the SSSI. Natural England aims to foster the best possible relationship with those managing the land so that its biodiversity can be conserved whilst also securing wider benefits. This notification includes a statement (*Annex 2*) of the management that Natural England considers is needed to conserve and enhance the features of special interest. Different management may be appropriate in different parts of the site and this statement is not intended to detail the exact requirements at specific locations. It provides a guide for discussions with owners and managers on action to achieve positive management of the SSSI.

6.2 Owners and occupiers will require consent before undertaking some operations in the SSSI. This notification includes a list of operations requiring Natural England's consent in *Annex 3*. The basis for the selection of these operations is set out in the Supporting Information document. Some operations may already be taking place and where they do not cause any damage they will be given consent. We will work with landowners and managers to agree lists of such existing and planned operations which can be approved.

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<sup>1</sup> Nationally Rare species are those with a distribution in Great Britain confined to 1-15 hectads (10km x 10km squares).

- 6.3 Where an operation has been granted a consent, licence or permission from another public body a separate consent will not generally be required from Natural England. However, other public bodies are required to consult Natural England before such consents, licences or permissions are issued.
- 6.4 In particular, we recognise the important roles of the owners and managers of the land in managing this site. We will continue to work with them to develop means to secure the sustainable management of Cowslip Meadow SSSI.

## **7. Supporting information**

- 7.1 The detailed information, which has been used to assess the importance of this SSSI (*Cowslip Meadow SSSI – Supporting Information*), is available on request from the address on page 2 of this document.

## **8. Legal documents**

- 8.1 Attached at *Annexes 1 - 4* are the legal documents, which are required by section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

## ***Annex 1***

### **Citation**

This is a legal document on which you have a right to make objections or representations, as explained in part 3 of this notification document



**Site name:** Cowslip Meadow

**Unitary Authority/County:** Luton

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Luton Borough Council

**National Grid reference:** TL082247

**Area:** 6.36 ha

**Ordnance Survey Sheets:** 1:50,000: 166

**Notification date:** 13 October 2020

### Reasons for notification:

Cowslip Meadow is of special interest for its nationally important species-rich lowland meadow and population of great pignut *Bunium bulbocastanum*.

### General description:

Cowslip Meadow is a floristically-diverse lowland meadow supporting unimproved neutral grassland on river alluvium soils. Unimproved neutral grasslands have suffered substantial declines nationally due to agricultural intensification and Cowslip Meadow represents a rare surviving example.

The species-rich lowland meadow communities form a mosaic with other neutral grassland communities and tall-herb fen. The precise distribution and juxtaposition of the communities is determined by a range of factors, including land management practices, topography, underlying soil conditions, drainage, nutrient enrichment, and the pattern and frequency of flooding.

Much of the grassland is characterised by a diverse range of grasses and flowering plants. Fine leaved grasses such as red fescue *Festuca rubra* are found amongst meadow species including yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, cowslip *Primula veris*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. Additional interest is found through presence of lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, eyebright *Euphrasia nemorosa*, field scabious *Knautia arvensis*, goat's-beard *Tragopogon pratensis*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*, common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*.

In one small area of the site the grassland exhibits more of a calcareous influence, with abundant upright brome, *Bromus erectus*, and a range of more calcicolous species including wild carrot *Daucus carota*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, and small scabious, *Scabiosa columaria*. It is in this area that the Nationally Rare great pignut *Bunium bulbocastanum* is most common. Great pignut is an umbelliferous plant of base-rich soils that has declined in Great Britain but has a stronghold in the Luton area with a particularly large population at Cowslip Meadow. Additional diversity is found within wetter fen and swamp habitats where a mosaic of communities can be found. The wetter grassland/fen is dominated by glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* with lesser amounts of carnation sedge *C. panicea*, brown sedge *C. disticha*, common yellow-sedge *C. demissa* and hairy sedge *C. hirta*. Fen species are frequent, including marsh horsetail *Equisetum palustre* and yellow iris *Iris pseudacorus*. The reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* swamp bordering the water course contains patches of great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, yellow iris, bulrush *Typha latifolia* and rough meadow-grass *Poa trivialis*.

Less varied communities, especially around the peripheries of the site, are characterised by false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*.

Cowslip Meadow also benefits from the presence of ponds, scattered willow *Salix* spp., hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and elder *Sambucus nigra* stands, and scrubby, predominantly hawthorn, hedgerows. The site contains a spring, forming a small well-vegetated pool, which feeds a stream that flows into the River Lea.

## ***Annex 2***

### **Views about Management**

This is a legal document on which you have a right to make objections or representations, as explained in part 3 of this notification document.



## Views About Management

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Section 28(4) (as amended)

### **A statement of Natural England's views about the management of Cowslip Meadow SSSI Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**

This statement represents Natural England's views about the management of the SSSI for nature conservation. This statement sets out, in principle, our views on how the site's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. Natural England has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of SSSI of its views about the management of the land.

Not all of the management principles will be equally appropriate to all parts of the SSSI. Also, there may be other management activities, additional to our current views, which can be beneficial to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest.

This Statement does not constitute consent for any of the 'operations requiring Natural England's consent'. The written consent of Natural England is required before carrying out any of those operations. Natural England welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the SSSI to ensure that the management of this site conserves and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

#### **Management Principles**

Lowland meadows require active management if they are to retain their conservation interest. In order to maintain a species-rich sward, each year's growth of vegetation must be removed. Without such management the sward becomes progressively dominated by tall and vigorous grasses which, together with an associated build-up of dead plant matter, suppress less vigorous species and reduce the botanical diversity of the site.

In lowland meadows, this is traditionally achieved by closing the fields to stock in the autumn and cutting the resultant growth as hay, usually in early July. The precise timing of the cut depends on local factors, including past management and the prevailing weather conditions, but should be after ground-nesting birds have fledged their young and any short-lived, characteristic plants have set seed. The aftermath is then grazed in late summer/autumn. Aftermath grazing is important for maintaining a species-rich sward, both through controlling competitive grasses and through hoof-prints providing suitable sites for seedlings to establish. Heavy poaching must, however, be avoided.

Whilst recognising that the optimal management regime includes grazing, in some instances it may not be a practical management option. Where this is the case, an appropriate cutting regime should be used to reduce the dominance of the more vigorous plant species. Care should be taken to ensure that the timing, frequency, height and extent of any cut would not conflict with the management of any important botanical or invertebrate interest that may be present. In order to maximise plant diversity, arisings from cutting should be removed from the site as part of this management process.

The grassland management also needs to take account of the habitat requirements for great pignut *Bunium bulbocastanum*. This species thrives in slightly taller areas of the sward, so parts of the site that are of particular importance for it should be identified, and have grazing or cutting timed for later in the season to allow it to flower and set seed.

Any surrounding, well managed hedgerows may considerably add to the habitat in providing shelter for invertebrates.

The application of pesticides including herbicides or fertilizers would be damaging but occasional dressings of lime may be acceptable.

For the damper meadows, regular and careful maintenance of surface drainage including ditches and drains may be necessary to prevent adverse changes in the plant species composition of the sward. Deepening of surface drainage should be avoided.

**Date notified: 13 October 2020**

## ***Annex 3***

### **List of operations requiring Natural England's consent**

This is a legal document on which you have a right to make objections or representations, as explained in part 3 of this notification document.

## Operations requiring Natural England's consent

### Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Section 28 (4)(b) (as amended)

The operations listed below may damage the features of interest of **Cowslip Meadow SSSI**. Before any of these operations are undertaken you must consult Natural England, and may require our consent.

It is usually possible to carry out some of these operations in certain ways, or at specific times of year, or on certain parts of the SSSI, without damaging the features of interest. If you wish to carry out any of these activities please contact a Natural England Adviser who will give you advice and where appropriate issue you with a consent. Please help us by using the form sent to you with the notification documents to ask us for consent to carry out these operations.

In certain circumstances it will not be possible to consent these operations, because they would damage the features of interest. Where possible your Natural England Adviser will suggest alternative ways in which you may proceed, which would enable a consent to be issued. To proceed without Natural England's consent may constitute an offence. If consent is refused, or conditions attached to it, which are not acceptable to you, you will be provided with details of how you may appeal to the Secretary of State.

<b>Standard reference number</b>	<b>Type of operation</b>
1	Cultivation, including ploughing, rotovating, harrowing and re-seeding.
2	Grazing and alterations to the grazing regime (including type of stock, intensity or seasonal pattern of grazing).
3	Stock feeding and alterations to stock feeding practice.
4	Mowing or cutting vegetation and alterations to the mowing or cutting regime (such as from haymaking to silage).
5	Application of manure, slurry, silage liquor, fertilisers and lime.
6	Application of pesticides, including herbicides (weedkillers) whether terrestrial or aquatic, and veterinary products.
7	Dumping, spreading or discharging of any materials.
8	Burning.
9	Release into the site of any wild, feral, captive-bred or domestic animal, plant, seed or micro-organism (including genetically modified organisms).
10	Killing, injuring, taking or removal of any wild animal (including dead animals or parts thereof), or their eggs and nests, including pest control, and disturbing them in their places of shelter.
11	Destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant or plant remains, including tree, shrub, herb, hedge, dead or decaying wood, moss, lichen, fungus, leaf-mould or turf.
12	Tree and woodland management and alterations to tree and woodland management (including planting, felling, pruning and tree surgery, thinning, coppicing, changes in species composition and removal of fallen timber).
13a	Draining (including the use of mole, tile, tunnel or other artificial drains).
13b	Modification to the structure of water courses (streams, springs, drains and ditches), including their banks and beds, as by re-alignment, re-grading, damming or dredging.

- 13c Management of aquatic and bank vegetation for drainage purposes.
- 14 Alterations to water levels and tables and water utilisation (including irrigation, storage and abstraction from existing water bodies and through boreholes). Also the modification of current drainage operations.
- 15 Infilling or digging of ditches, dykes, drains, ponds, pools, marshes or pits.
- 20 Extraction of minerals, including hard rock, sand and gravel, topsoil and sub-soil.
- 21 Destruction, construction, removal, re-routing or re-grading of roads, tracks, walls, fences, hard-stands, banks, ditches or other earthworks, including soil and soft rock exposures, or the laying, maintenance or removal of pipelines and cables, above or below ground.
- 22 Storage of materials.
- 23 Erection of permanent or temporary structures or the undertaking of engineering works, including drilling.
- 26 Use of vehicles or craft.
- 27 Recreational or other activities likely to damage or disturb the features of special interest or their habitats.
- 28a Game and waterfowl management and hunting practices and alterations to game and waterfowl management and hunting practice.

**Notes**

- i. This is a list of operations appearing to Natural England to be likely to damage the special features of the SSSI, as required under section 28 (4) (b) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 substituted by Schedule 9 to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
- ii. Where an operation has been granted a consent, licence or permission from another authority separate consent will not be required from Natural England. However, other authorities are required to consult Natural England before such consents, licences or permissions are issued.
- iii. Any reference to 'animal' in this list shall be taken to include any mammal, reptile, amphibian, bird, fish, or invertebrate.

Date notified: 13 October 2020

National grid reference: TL082247

## ***Annex 4***

### **Map showing the land notified**

This is a legal document on which you have a legal right to make objections or representations, as explained in part 3 of this notification document.



Insert map(s) here