



**Down Farm SSSI
Dorset**

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

Issued by Natural England's Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Team on 7 February 2019

Contact points and further information

This notification package is issued by Natural England's Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Team

Our address for correspondence is:

Natural England
W4
County Hall
Colliton Park
Dorchester
DT1 1XJ

Telephone: 0208 026 8075

Email: Sean.Cooch@naturalengland.org.uk

Online: <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/natural-england/down-farm>

Your contact point for specific enquiries relating to this notification is **Sean Cooch**

A second document (Down Farm 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 Down Farm SSSI is 7 February 2019

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This document explains why Down Farm is notified by Natural England as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 1.2 Down Farm is of special interest for its nationally important species-rich lowland meadow grassland and assemblage of grassland fungi.
- 1.3 It is an outstanding example of traditionally managed hay meadows. Small areas of unimproved grassland exist elsewhere in West Dorset but the meadows at Down Farm are a unique remnant that has survived due to careful management by the current owner.
- 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 Down Farm 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.

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 Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Team by **7 June 2019**. Representations can be sent by post, 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 Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Team will consider your objections or representations and will try to resolve them. If there are no unresolved objections,

approval to confirm this 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 September 2019. Please note that 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.
- 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 Down Farm 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-notice/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 Down Farm SSSI is of special interest by reason of the following nationally important features:
- **Species-rich lowland meadow grassland**
Down Farm supports an outstanding example of species-rich lowland meadow grassland. The sward comprises abundant sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and red fescue *Festuca rubra* with locally abundant crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris*. The meadows support characteristic herbs found in lowland neutral grasslands: common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* are abundant. There is also a small stand of more acidic vegetation present in one field, as well as interesting communities at some of the hedge bases showing

elements indicative of an ancient woodland ground flora. A distinctive feature at Down Farm is the green winged-orchids *Anacamptis morio* found across both meadows. Several counts since 2014 have exceeded 10,000 flowering spikes. 'Lowland meadows' are included on the list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England, as required under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

- **Assemblage of grassland fungi**

The unimproved grassland of Down Farm is distinguished by a rich assemblage of grassland fungi. Such sites with rich grassland fungi are uncommon in the Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight area. The key groups of this fungal assemblage are the waxcaps (*Hygrocybe* species), clubs, corals and spindles (Clavariaceae) and pinkgills (*Entoloma* species). The waxcap diversity is outstanding, with 22 species recorded including a number of high diversity indicator species as well as two species listed on the IUCN global Red List of Threatened Species.

5. Site boundaries and relationships with other SSSIs

- 5.1 The boundary has been drawn to include land supporting the features of special interest with a distinct surrounding hedged and banked boundary as well as a minor road demarcating the site.
- 5.2 Further clarification of the precise location of the boundary of the SSSI can be obtained from Natural England's Dorset, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Team at the address on page 2 of this document.
- 5.3 The closest SSSI, Bracket's Coppice and Ryewater Farm, is 2.8 km away and supports damp grassland stands.

6. Management of the SSSI

- 6.1 This notification includes at *Annex 2* a statement 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. The statement is intended to explain how we can work with and support owners and managers in continuing to achieve positive management of the SSSI.
- 6.2 This notification also includes a list of the operations requiring Natural England's consent at *Annex 3*. Some of the 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 activities, which can be approved.
- 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 Down Farm SSSI.

7. Supporting information

- 7.1 The detailed information, which has been used to assess the importance of this SSSI, 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: Down Farm **County:** Dorset
District: West Dorset
Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
Local Planning Authority: West Dorset District Council, Dorset County Council
Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 sheets: 194 **National grid reference:** ST501039
Notification date: 7 February 2019 **Area:** 8.09 ha

Reasons for notification:

Down Farm SSSI is of special interest for its nationally important species-rich lowland meadow grassland and a rich assemblage of grassland fungi.

General description:

Down Farm is situated on the chalk ridge that extends from the village of Maiden Newton north-west towards Chedington on the Dorset-Somerset border. The site lies to the north of the small market town of Beaminster and at its highest point is 235m. Down Farm sits just below a ridge which is composed of Upper Chalk but on the flatter and gently sloping land superficial deposits of clay-with-flints occur which give rise to both neutral and mixed acid soils. More varied superficial deposits including sand, alluvium and clay head occur and may explain the somewhat unusual vegetation with local and varied soil moisture profiles. The hay meadows at Down Farm are a remnant of previously extensive tracts of unimproved grassland once found across the common grazing land at the nearby Beaminster Down. Mature, flower-rich hedges now surround the meadows.

Species-rich lowland meadow grassland

The two meadows support an outstanding example of species-rich lowland meadow grassland.

The grassland sward comprises abundant sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and red fescue *Festuca rubra* with locally abundant crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, along with frequent to occasional meadow fescue *Schedonorus pratensis*, meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, downy oat-grass *Avenula pubescens* and field wood-rush *Luzula campestris*. Quaking-grass *Briza media* and heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* are occasional, whilst glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* and spring-sedge *Carex caryophyllea* are locally frequent.

The meadows support characteristic herbs found in lowland neutral grasslands: common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* are abundant. Other frequent to locally abundant herbs include red clover *Trifolium pratense*, common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, pignut *Conopodium majus*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* and rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, along with occasional lesser stitchwort *Stellaria graminea*, tufted vetch *Vicia cracca*, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*. Where soils indicate some seasonal dampness and are more acidic, a small stand of atypical vegetation supports lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*. In addition, the plant communities at the bases of some of the surrounding hedgerows show elements indicative of an ancient woodland ground flora, such as bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*.

A feature in both meadows is a significant population of green-winged orchid *Anacamptis morio* with counts of over 10,000 flowering spikes. Other orchid species are well represented, with smaller numbers of common *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and heath spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza maculata* and common twayblade *Neottia ovata*.

Assemblage of grassland fungi

Down Farm supports a nationally important assemblage of grassland fungi. At the time of notification 22 species of waxcaps *Hygrocybe* s.l.¹ species had been recorded with regular counts of 20 species recorded during single visit surveys, which in itself is an exceptional number.

The most abundant waxcap, and our largest species, is the deep-red crimson waxcap *Hygrocybe punicea* which appears here in most years in spectacular numbers during autumn into early winter. Two species listed as 'Vulnerable' on the global IUCN Red List of Threatened Species have been recorded: citrine waxcap *Hygrocybe citrinovirens*, a lemon-capped, white-gilled species, and dingy waxcap *Neohygrocybe ingrata* (= *Hygrocybe ingrata*). Other waxcaps indicative of important, high quality grassland fungi sites which occur frequently in both meadows include pink waxcap *Porpolomopsis calyptriformis* (= *Hygrocybe calyptriformis*), along with yellow foot waxcap *Cuphophyllus flavipes* (= *Hygrocybe flavipes*), fibrous waxcap *H. intermedia* and splendid waxcap *H. splendidissima*.

The assemblage also includes species from other groups of grassland fungi, including clubs, corals and spindles (Clavariaceae) and pinkgills *Entoloma* s.l. species. At least seven species of Clavariaceae have been recorded; one species, white spindles *Clavaria fragilis* (= *Clavaria fragilis* agg.), is locally frequent along with smaller numbers of fruiting bodies of smoky spindles *Clavaria fumosa*, apricot club *Clavulinopsis luteoalba* and the coral fungus *Ramariopsis subtilis* (= *Clavulinopsis subtilis*). Of particular note is the skinny club *Clavaria incarnata*, a 'Nationally Scarce²' species. At least 13 *Entoloma* s.l. species occur at Down Farm, notably the mealy pinkgill *Entoloma prunuloides*, a species characteristic of old grassland fungi sites, and other species infrequently recorded in Dorset such as *E. infula* and *E. mougeotii*.

¹ *Sensu lato*, meaning 'in a broad sense', used here to indicate that the genus includes taxa previously assigned to it.

² Nationally Scarce species have been recorded from 16-100 10km x 10km grid squares in Great Britain.

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 inserted by
Schedule 9 to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

A statement of Natural England's views about the management of Down Farm 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 with an assemblage of grassland fungi

It is essential that old un-fertilised grassland with a diverse community of grassland fungi should be managed using sympathetic and generally traditional methods. Applications of lime (except in exceptional circumstances and after consultation), artificial fertilisers, herbicides and fungicides should be avoided.

Grazing and/or mowing should keep the grassland short. Without such management or intervention 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, reduce botanical diversity and may compromise the fungal diversity of the site. Any clippings should be removed from the site rather than left on the ground.

At Down Farm the grassland is managed in most years by taking a hay cut in mid to late summer, with aftermath grazing through late summer to late winter, but the precise timing depends on local factors, including past management and current weather conditions. This management ensures the season's vegetation growth is removed and the sward kept relatively short through the autumn and winter. Stock tends to be removed in late winter with flexibility to graze spring growth before shutting up for the hay sometime in spring.

Occasionally the meadows have been treated as pasture land, maintained by longer periods of grazing. In general, the precise timing and intensity of grazing will vary, according to local conditions and requirements (such as the type or availability of stock, or the needs of individual plants or fungi) but should aim to keep a relatively open sward. Ideally, grazing should be removed at the peak time of fungal fruiting, although light grazing will help maintain a short sward into autumn/winter.

Light trampling can be of benefit by breaking down leaf litter and providing areas for seed germination, but excessive trampling that causes noticeable poaching of the meadows should be avoided at all times.

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

Date notified: 7 February 2019

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) substituted by Schedule 9 to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

The operations listed below may damage the features of interest of **Down Farm 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.

Standard reference number	Type of operation
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 fungicides and 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, fungus or plant remains, including tree, shrub, herb, hedge, dead or decaying wood, moss, lichen, fungal fruiting body, leaf-mould or turf.
12.	Tree and/or woodland management and alterations to tree and/or woodland management (including planting, felling, pruning and tree surgery, thinning, coppicing, changes in species composition, removal of fallen timber).
13a.	Draining (including the use of mole, tile, tunnel or other artificial drains).
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.

Standard reference number	Type of operation
15.	Infilling or digging of ditches, dykes, drains, ponds, pools, marshes or pits
20.	Extraction of minerals including hard rock, sand and gravel, topsoil, subsoil, chalk and spoil.
21.	Destruction, construction, removal, re-routing or re-grading of roads, tracks, walls, fences, hardstands, 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.
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: 7 February 2019

National Grid Reference: ST501039

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.