

Site name: Johnsons' Meadows **County:** Leicestershire

District: Charnwood

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

Local Planning Authority: Charnwood Borough Council

Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 sheet: 129 **National Grid reference:** SK533146

Notification date: 31 January 2020 **Area:** 6.61 ha

Reason for notification:

Johnsons' Meadows SSSI is of special interest for its nationally rare species-rich neutral grassland.

General description:

Lying close to the village of Woodhouse Eaves in Leicestershire, Johnsons' Meadows SSSI consists of a block of six species-rich lowland meadows situated on gently sloping ground overlying heavy soils. Two of the meadows support medieval ridge and furrow earthworks and a medieval settlement.

All of the meadows support a varied sward dominated by plants characteristic of species-rich lowland neutral grassland, including the grasses common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*. Common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* and red clover *Trifolium pratense* feature prominently. A large colony of southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* extends across the site providing a striking display of flowering spikes during early summer.

Other species which are common across all meadows and contribute to the quality of the sward include yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*. Species such as pignut *Conopodium majus*, meadow fescue *Festuca pratensis*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, betony *Stachys officinalis*, yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens* and goat's-beard *Tragopogon pratensis* are more localised, reflecting hydrological variation across and within the meadows as well as their different management histories.

The meadows supporting the medieval earthworks and ridge and furrow are especially diverse and are dominated by great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis* which reflects their antiquity and seasonally wet conditions.

The interest of the site is enhanced by mature and species rich hedgerows forming the principal boundaries between the meadows. These hedgerows provide valuable nesting, feeding and sheltering habitat for birds, mammals, herptiles and invertebrates.