



**The Leasowes SSSI
Dudley**

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

Issued by Natural England's West Midlands Team on 7 February 2019

Contact points and further information

This notification package is issued by Natural England's West Midlands Team
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Your contact point for specific enquiries relating to this notification is **Katie Lloyd**

A second document (*The Leasowes 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 The Leasowes SSSI is **7 February 2019**

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This document explains why The Leasowes is notified by Natural England as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 1.2 The Leasowes supports a diverse mosaic of semi-natural habitats, including woodland, wood pasture, scrub and grasslands. It is of special interest for its assemblage of grassland fungi and species-rich neutral grasslands.
- 1.3 The Leasowes sits on the edge of a heavily urbanised part of the Black Country, a landscape with significant potential for wildlife, geology and people. There is a substantial area of Country Park within the site boundary and the area is valued locally for its importance to wildlife and as a green space.
- 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 The Leasowes 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 West Midlands 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 West Midlands 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 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 The Leasowes 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 The Leasowes SSSI supports a diverse mosaic of semi-natural habitats, including woodland, wood pasture, scrub and grasslands. It is of special interest for the following nationally important features that occur within the wider habitat mosaic:
- **Assemblage of grassland fungi**

The unimproved grassland vegetation of The Leasowes is distinguished by a rich assemblage of grassland fungi. The Leasowes is one of a few sites in the West Midlands to contain these types of unimproved grassland together with a rich fungal assemblage. This is largely attributable to the lack of agricultural improvement and low nutrient status of the land, together with regular grazing by livestock and rabbits. The key groups of fungi in this assemblage are the waxcaps (*Hygrocybe* species), clubs, corals and spindles (clavarioids) and earthtongues (geoglossoids), with

pinkgills (*Entoloma* species) adding to the fungal diversity. The waxcap diversity is exceptional, with 28 species recorded by their fruiting bodies. Two of the grassland fungi found here, date waxcap *Hygrocybe spadicea* and olive earthtongue *Microglossum olivaceum* agg., are included on the list of priority 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.

- **Species-rich neutral grassland**

Stands of species-rich neutral grassland occur widely in the SSSI and the most extensive area is on the open north-facing slopes in the south of the site. The swards are generally species-rich with grasses including common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus* and sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, and frequent herbs including common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and greater *Lotus pedunculatus* and common bird's-foot-trefoils *L. corniculatus*. Species indicating a more acidic type of lowland neutral grassland are occasional throughout the sward, including heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*. 'Lowland meadows' (including the species-rich neutral grasslands at The Leasowes) are included on the list of priority habitats in England.

5. Site boundaries and relationships with other SSSIs

- 5.1 The Leasowes SSSI encompasses The Leasowes Country Park. The species-rich grasslands are predominantly in the south of the site but also occur on the golf course in the centre of the site and in smaller fields in the north. Grassland fungi are widely distributed across the SSSI, including the golf course.
- 5.2 The boundary has been drawn to include land supporting the features of special interest and those areas required to ensure the long-term sustainability of these features. The mosaic of habitats (including open wood pasture, woodland strips and shelter belts) helps to facilitate grassland fungi colonising new areas within the site. They also act as buffer zones for the site, securing a more connected, resilient landscape in an already fragmented urban setting. Habitats and permanent manmade features that do not help the connectivity of the interest features, including car parks, buildings and ornamental gardens, have been excluded from the SSSI where practical.
- 5.3 The boundary of the SSSI is marked by a combination of fence-lines, hedgerows and woodland edge and is generally bordered by residential properties and roads. Further clarification of the precise location of the boundary of the SSSI can be obtained from Natural England's West Midlands Team at the address on page 2 of this document.
- 5.4 The Leasowes SSSI is close to several SSSIs, most of which are designated for their geological features. The nearest biological SSSI is Illey Pastures, approximately 2.3km away and separated from it by residential areas and a dual carriageway. Illey Pastures is notified for its species-rich lowland neutral grassland.

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 The Leasowes 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: The Leasowes

Unitary Authority/County: Dudley

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

Local Planning Authority: Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 sheets: 139

National grid reference: SO979840

Notification date: 7 February 2019

Area: 63.60 ha

Reasons for notification:

The Leasowes is of special interest for its nationally important assemblage of grassland fungi and for its species-rich neutral grasslands.

General description:

The SSSI encompasses The Leasowes Country Park, east of Birmingham and within the Black Country urban conurbation. Historically an extensive area of grazed pastures and small arable fields, the site is a relic of the former farmed landscape. It now supports a diverse mosaic of semi-natural habitats, including woodland, wood pasture, scrub and grasslands.

Assemblage of grassland fungi

The Leasowes supports an outstanding diversity and abundance of grassland fungi. The Leasowes is one of a few sites in the West Midlands to contain these rich grassland fungi assemblages and this is largely attributable to the lack of agricultural improvement and low nutrient status of the land, together with regular grazing by livestock and rabbits.

The waxcap *Hygrocybe* s.l.¹ species diversity is exceptional, with 28 species recorded at the time of notification. Species include crimson waxcap *Hygrocybe punicea*, which is strongly indicative of unimproved grassland and is abundant in places, scarlet waxcap *Hygrocybe coccinea*, a robust and sticky red waxcap common in unfertilised pastures, parrot waxcap *Gliophorus psittacinus* (= *Hygrocybe psittacina* agg.) and pink waxcap *Porpolomopsis calyptriformis* (= *Hygrocybe calyptriformis*). In addition, date waxcap *Hygrocybe spadicea*, which has a conspicuous combination of brown cap and orange gills, and citrine waxcap *Hygrocybe citrinovirens*, a lime-yellow species which is listed as 'Vulnerable' on the global IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, have both been recorded on the site. Other waxcaps indicative of important, high quality grassland fungi sites which have been recorded at The Leasowes include yellow foot waxcap *Cuphophyllus flavipes* (= *Hygrocybe flavipes*), fibrous waxcap *Hygrocybe intermedia*, orange waxcap *H. aurantiosplendens* and *H. turunda*, a small orange-yellow waxcap with a distinctive dark-speckled cap.

At least 11 clubs, corals and spindles (clavarioid species) and five earthtongue (geoglossoid) species have been recorded by fruiting body, including the rare and newly described earthtongue species *Microglossum truncatum* (= *Microglossum olivaceum* agg.). Pinkgills *Entoloma* s.l. species add to the diversity of the assemblage.

The highest diversity and abundance of grassland fungi is found in the southern grasslands of the site, however, waxcap species have been recorded in areas across the SSSI, including the golf course.

Species-rich neutral grassland

Small stands of species-rich neutral grassland occur widely in the SSSI, with a notable concentration on the open north-facing slopes in the south of the site, where they form a close

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

mosaic with scattered stands of hawthorn scrub and less rich semi-improved grasslands. The grassland sward varies according to slope, soil and the underlying geology of clay and sandstone layers of the Halesowen beds. Grassland on the steeper slopes and banks is generally most diverse and supports a finer, more open sward.

The grasslands are generally flower-rich with a range of grass species including common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus* and sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, with frequent herbs including common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, greater bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*, yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, red clover *Trifolium pratense*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*.

Additionally, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, hairy sedge *Carex hirta* and mouse-ear hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum* are locally frequent to abundant across the grasslands of the site. Damp areas contain meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*.

Occasionally present throughout the sward are heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*, jointed rush *Juncus articulatus* and springy turf-moss *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*, indicating a more acidic type of neutral grassland, particularly on the southern slopes.

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 The Leasowes 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

Species-rich neutral grassland with an assemblage of grassland fungi

Lowland neutral grasslands require active management if they are to retain their conservation interest, including their assemblages of grassland fungi. In order to maintain a species-rich sward and fungal assemblage, each year's growth of vegetation must be removed. Otherwise 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 and fungal diversity of the site.

In hay meadows, the above objective is traditionally achieved by closing the fields to stock in the late autumn and cutting the resultant growth as hay. The cut is usually done in mid-July, but the precise timing depends on local factors, including past management and current weather conditions. It should always 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/early autumn. Aftermath grazing is important for maintaining a species-rich sward through the control of competitive grasses. Light trampling of the soil by grazing animals also provides suitable sites for seedlings to establish and helps break down leaf litter. However, heavy poaching (i.e. excessive soil disturbance) must be avoided.

On neutral pastures, this management is achieved largely through grazing alone. The precise timing and intensity of grazing will vary both between and within sites, according to local conditions and requirements (such as the type or availability of stock, or the needs of individual plants, fungi or animals of conservation concern) but should aim to keep a relatively open sward without causing excessive poaching.

Other areas of grassland with fungal interest, such as the golf course at The Leasowes, should be managed by cutting to ensure that the sward is not too high during fruiting times of late summer and autumn and will therefore encourage a better display of fruiting bodies.

Applications of artificial fertilisers, herbicides and fungicides should be avoided. After mowing, any clippings should be removed from the site rather than left on the ground.

The grasslands at The Leasowes occur with a mosaic of hawthorn and gorse scrub, woodland and wood pasture. As well as supporting certain fungal communities, the transition between grassland, scattered scrub and woodland can provide buffering and connecting habitat, as well as being important for other wildlife, especially birds and invertebrates. Any surrounding, well-managed hedgerows may considerably add to the habitat in providing shelter for invertebrates.

Where possible, supporting habitat should be managed in order to help the possible expansion and connection of high value grasslands and fungal assemblages, in order to further increase the resilience of the interest features of the site.

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

Excessive trampling and erosion of grassland by cattle and the recreational use of the site, by foot or bike, should be avoided in areas that are particularly rich in fungi, and a precautionary approach to the destruction, picking or collection of fungus fruit bodies should be maintained.

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 package.

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 **The Leasowes 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).
13b.	Modification to the structure of water courses (streams, springs, ditches, dykes, drains), including their banks and beds, as by re-alignment, regrading, damming or dredging.

Standard reference number	Type of operation
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, drains, ponds, pools, marshes or pits
20.	Extraction of minerals including hard rock, sand and gravel, topsoil, subsoil 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.
- 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: SO979840

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.