

# Swanscombe Peninsula gets national recognition as an SSSI

A valuable green space in the shadow of the M25, abundant in wildlife and with huge benefits for people, has today been designated a SSSI in recognition of its national importance for rare wildlife.

The 250 hectare site, alongside the Thames Estuary, forms a corridor of habitats connecting Ebbsfleet Valley with the southern shore of the River Thames between Dartford and Gravesend.

The site has an incredible assortment of grassland, scrub, wetlands, grazing marsh and saltmarsh habitat in a relatively small area, providing ideal conditions for a unique variety of wildlife.

The area is home to over 1,700 invertebrate species, which includes over a quarter of the UK's water beetle species and more than 200 species that are considered of conservation importance. It is one of just two places in the UK where the critically endangered distinguished jumping spider is found.

The rich and varied habitats on the peninsula also provide great conditions for breeding birds such as marsh harrier and bearded tit, and for nationally scarce plants threatened with extinction in Great Britain, such as the divided sedge and the slender hare's ear.

Divided sedge – picture: John Martin

Positioned close to major towns and with a large population living close by, Swanscombe Peninsula has enormous value as a green space and refuge for people as well as wildlife. The England Coast Path, once opened, will run around the northern boundary of the site, and with existing rights of ways, provide people with important places to enjoy nature.

James Seymour, Sussex and Kent Area Manager, Natural England, said:

The designation of Swanscombe Peninsula as an SSSI is great news for one of the richest known sites in England for invertebrates, ensuring essential refuge for many rare and threatened species that sadly are not able to thrive in the wider landscape.

Right on the doorstep of some of our most densely populated towns and cities, this new SSSI will also offer wonderful opportunities for people to connect with nature via the England Coast Path. This area is living proof that some of our most important species can thrive hand in hand with businesses and transport infrastructure. Special places like this will form the vital backbone of a national nature recovery network.

The new Swanscombe Peninsula SSSI incorporates the previously designated Bakers Hole SSSI, which covered 6.9 hectares with geological and archaeological features. These are vital for understanding past glacial periods and the use of the area by earlier Stone Age populations.

There are over 4,100 SSSIs in England, covering around 8% of the country's land area. More than 80% of these sites (by area) are internationally important for their wildlife and also designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Ramsar sites. Many National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are also SSSIs.

Natural England recognises that there is interest and consideration of potential development opportunities in the Swanscombe area. Designation of this site for its nationally important wildlife features is an important step towards ensuring that its environmental value is recognised and taken due account of in any future planning decisions.

The government has laid out its ambition in the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) for a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and wildlife, and has also [recently committed to protecting 30% of the UK's land by 2030](#) which will result in over 4,000 square kilometres of new land in England being designated.

Natural England's People and Nature survey has shown that almost 9 in 10 adults in England during lockdown reported that protection of the environment is important to them, and today's move will help ensure that local communities in Swanscombe and the surrounding areas continue to benefit from these wildlife-rich green spaces long-term.

## **Further information**

A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is one of the country's very best wildlife and/or geological sites. SSSIs include some of the most spectacular and beautiful habitats: wetlands teeming with wading birds, winding chalk rivers, flower rich meadows, windswept shingle beaches and remote upland peat bogs, as well as much loved woodlands, meadows, heathlands and wetlands close to where people live in our towns, cities and villages.

Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide. Natural England is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. It is Natural England's responsibility to notify an area as a SSSI when it believes the wildlife or geology is of special interest.

As of 11 March 2021, the SSSI has been formally notified to landowners and occupiers and other interested parties. There will be a 4 month period in which anyone can make representations or object to the notification. If all objections are resolved or none are submitted, the designation will be confirmed. If there are unresolved objections the Natural England Board will hear all of these; they must then decide whether to confirm the designation

(with or without reductions). If the notification is not confirmed within 9 months of the date of notification, the notification falls.