

Site No. 7086

**COUNTY WILDLIFE SITE FULL RECORD SHEET**NAME: **Burwell Brick Pit**

File code: E/08.06.05

Parish(es): Burwell

County: Cambridgeshire

Grid ref: TL577689

**Habitat information**

<i>Code</i>	<i>Habitat type</i>
A21	Scrub: dense/continuous
A22	Scrub: scattered
B22	Grassland: neutral, semi-improved
B3	Grassland: calcareous
F1	Swamp
F12	Swamp: Tall Fen vegetation
G1	Open water: standing water
J4	Bare ground

**Site Area**

14.35 ha

**Site description**

A disused brick pit comprising an area several hectares in extent containing a large lake thickly fringed with reed swamp, dried out water bodies, and expanses of rough grassland in places colonised by areas of scattered and dense scrub. The large areas of swamp of the NVC Lesser Reed-mace *Typha angustifolia* community (S13) recorded in 1996 and for which the site was previously selected as a Wildlife Site, appeared to be much reduced in extent. Small patches remain, however, the apparent drying out of much of the site has resulted in Common Reed *Phragmites australis* and Wood Small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos* now dominating. Common Reed dominates the narrow marginal fringe to the lake. The water quality in the lake remains good. A large patch of Long-stalked Yellow Sedge *Carex viridula ssp. brachyrrhyncha* is found immediately north of the lake. The shallow open water area to the west of the site is also being colonised by Common Reed and Common Reed-mace *Typha latifolia*. An area to the south of this linear water body has both Common Reed and Lesser Pond Sedge *Carex acutiformis*, though the later appears to be suffering drought stress as this area progressively dries out. Other wetland plants recorded in low numbers included Greater Pond Sedge *Typha latifolia*, Gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, Common Spike Rush *Eleocharis palustris*, Hemp Agrimony *Eupatoria cannabinum*, Common Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, Purple Loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus*, Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus* and Common Comfrey *Symphytum officinale*. Large areas in the centre of the site, to the west and north of the lake, support a drying out swamp community that appears to be transitional between several NVC communities, including S4 Common Reed swamp and S25 Common Reed – Hemp Agrimony tall-herb fen.

The majority of the grassland, on moderate slopes toward the site perimeter and on flatter ground adjacent to the water bodies, is dominated by Wood Small-reed and Common Reed *Phragmites australis* in a coarse and unmanaged sward. In places the sward becomes more open with chalky clay soil exposed and there is a range of grassland forbs, most of which indicate calcareous conditions and recent disturbance. They include

Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, Ox-eye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* and Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca*, as well as Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*, Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Hoary Ragwort *Senecio erucifolius*, Mouse-ear Hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*, Blue Fleabane *Erigeron acer* and Black Medick *Medicago lupulina*. Other notable plants recorded include Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*. However, some of the notable species previously recorded were not observed during the current survey, including Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, Meadow Rue *Thalictrum flavum* and Burnet Saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*. The failure to record all these species should not be taken as definitive proof of their absence. However, the apparent absence or rarity of so many species previously recorded, coupled with the evidence of less bare ground observed between the aerial photographs of 1998 and 2003, suggests that natural successional processes and the increased dominance of Wood Small-reed may have resulted in significant changes.

Areas of scrub are dominated by Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* with much Dog Rose *Rosa canina* as well as Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*, Alder Buckthorn *Frangula alnus* and some willow species including Crack Willow *Salix fragilis*, Grey Sallow *Salix cinerea* and the hybrid *Salix x ehrhartiana*.

The site boundaries have been amended to exclude the buildings and disturbed ground at the south end of the site.

#### **Site assessment**

The site qualifies as CWS under the Habitat Mosaic criteria, because it is a site greater than 10 ha that supports naturally regenerating grasslands, scrub, marshy grassland, swamp and open water, several of which (the S4 Common Reed swamp community, the S13 Lesser Reed-mace swamp community, the S25 Common Reed – Hemp Agrimony tall herb fen community and the naturally regenerating grasslands) are approaching County Wildlife Site standard in their own right.

However, the site no longer qualifies by virtue of containing at least 0.05 ha of a good example of the NVC Lesser Reed-mace swamp community (S13).

#### **Site status**

County Wildlife Site  
former Site of Natural History Interest

#### **Surveyor**

Martin Baker  
08/06/2005 & 05/07/2005

Site No. 7083

**COUNTY WILDLIFE SITE FULL RECORD SHEET**NAME: **Burwell Disused Railway**

File code: E/5.7.05

Parish(es): Burwell  
Swaffham Prior

County: Cambridgeshire

Grid ref: TL5765

**Habitat information****Code** *Habitat type*

A22 Scrub: scattered

B31 Grassland: calcareous, unimproved

CG03 *Bromus erectus* grassland**Site Area**

2.23 ha

**Site description**

The banks and verges of this dismantled railway, which cuts through the Devil's Dyke SSSI, support large areas of species rich unimproved calcareous grassland of the NVC CG3 Upright Brome community. The majority of the site is a cutting whose banks rise to their highest point, several metres tall, where the site intersects the Devil's Ditch, but at the eastern end the track is above the adjacent land.

The sward is mostly dominated by Upright Brome *Bromopsis erecta* and characterised by frequent numbers of many strong calcareous indicator plants such as Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, Sainfoin *Onobrychis viciifolia*, Greater Knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*, Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis*, Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, Quaking Grass *Briza media*, Crested Hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha*, Meadow Oat Grass *Helictotrichon pratense* and Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina*. Other species which are locally frequent or occasional include Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, Wild Thyme *Thymus polytrichus*, Common Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularia*, Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca*, Dwarf Thistle *Cirsium acaule*, Wild Basil *Clinopodium vulgare* and Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*. Rare species are Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Marjoram *Origanum vulgare*, Tor Grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* and Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. In total this site supports at least 39 grassland indicator plants, of which 24 are strong. Some of the other typical species are Black Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*, Ox-eye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Cowslip *Primula veris*, Perforate St John's-wort *Hypericum perforatum*, Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria* and Hoary Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*. Species recorded during the previous survey but not seen on this occasion were Mouse-ear Hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*.

Towards the edges of the site the grassland becomes taller and coarser, perhaps affected by agricultural spray drift, though a number of the taller grassland indicator species such as Greater Knapweed, Field Scabious and sprawling species such as Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* still occur. West of the Devil's Dyke, the southern half of the track and cutting slope have a coarser grass sward as a result of the shading by the boundary hedgerow.

Vegetation now covers all of the former track bed except for 2 wheel lines where farm vehicles travel down the centre of the track. Kidney Vetch and Horseshoe Vetch are particularly prominent along the track bed. The Kidney Vetch is the larval food plant of the Small Blue butterfly and Horseshoe Vetch is the larval food plant of the Chalk-hill Blue butterfly. Both these species are nationally declining this site supports one of the few remaining colonies of both in Cambridgeshire. The grassland is managed by annual cutting in autumn / winter, though some additional cutting is undertaken in small areas by local volunteers to maintain suitable conditions for the butterfly species. Towards the eastern end of the track bed a small population of Spanish Catchfly *Silene otites*, a Nationally Rare plant, is found.

Scattered scrub occurs throughout the site including Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, Privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, and Roses *Rosa sp.* While these are frequent in patches they are kept in check by the annual mowing regime. A hedgerow of similar species borders the southern boundary west of the Devil's Dyke, and a few bushes (possibly the remains of a hedge), occur towards the far eastern end.

The easternmost section, 100m in length, is heavily shaded by trees, mainly Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, growing on the embankment and an adjacent poplar plantation.

**Site assessment**

The site qualifies because it contains at least 0.05 ha of the NVC Upright Brome grassland community (CG3) and supports a population of a Nationally Rare vascular plant species (current status to be confirmed). Additionally it qualifies because it supports frequent numbers of at least 6 strong and at least 16 strong or weak calcareous grassland indicator species. The site also qualifies because it supports one of the five largest colonies in the county of the nationally declining Small Blue and Chalk-hill Blue butterflies.

**Site status**

County Wildlife Site

former Site of Natural History Interest

**Surveyor**

Martin Baker

05/07/2005

Site No. 7088

**COUNTY WILDLIFE SITE FULL RECORD SHEET**

NAME: **Spring Close**  
 File code: E/19.7.03  
 Parish(es): Burwell  
 County: Cambridgeshire  
 Grid ref.: TL587660

**Habitat information**

<i>Code</i>	<i>Habitat type</i>
A21	Scrub: dense/continuous
A22	Scrub: scattered
B22	Grassland: neutral, semi-improved
B5	Grassland: marsh/marshy grassland
B6	Grassland: poor semi-improved
G2	Open water: running water
J21	Boundaries, intact hedge
J23	Boundaries, hedge with trees

**Site Area**

5.11 ha

**Site description**

The site includes an area of neutral and slightly calcareous grassland on the earthworks of Burwell Castle. It is bounded largely by mature hedgerows with trees and used for informal recreation. The flatter parts of the site are regularly mown and dominated by a coarse species-poor turf. The embankments are less frequently mown and include patches of species-rich turf with good numbers of calcareous and neutral grassland indicators, where they have not been taken over by dense blocks of Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* scrub. The Species-rich grassland areas support abundant Erect Brome *Bromopsis erecta*, Yellow Oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens* and Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina*, with frequent False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*. Within this sward Black Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*, Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca* were frequent, but other species including, Quaking Grass *Briza media*, Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, Ox-eye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Hoary Plantain *Plantago media*, Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, Cowslip *Primula veris*, Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa* and Wild Clary *Salvia verbenaca*, only occasional to rare. A small paddock in the north-west corner, used for horse-grazing, is badly over-grazed with 85% bare earth.

Dwarf Thistle *Cirsium acaule* and Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, both recorded during the previous survey were not observed on this occasion. This together with the extent of scrub and state of the other habitats indicate that this site has declined in interest and is in need of enhanced conservation management.

Spring water was flowing from five points at the headwater at the east of the CWS, at the time of survey. There are some low steep banks around which there has been some erosion from trampling. Immediately below the spring the stream is very over-shaded, running 8-10cm deep over chalky alluvium, as it winds its way around the south and west edges of the CWS. The marsh lies in the old moat of the 'castle' and along the edge of the stream where it is shaded. The open marsh holds abundant Greater Reed-mace *Typha latifolia*, Hairy Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* and Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*. Occasional /

rare are Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta*, Field Horsetail *Equisetum arvense*, Fool's Water-cress *Apium nodiflorum*, Lesser Pond Sedge *Carex acutiformis*, Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus*, Bulbous Rush *Juncus bulbosus* and Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus*. The shaded stream-side marsh is co-dominated by Fool's Water-cress, Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga* and Floating Sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans* with Hairy Willowherb frequent, Hairy Bitter-cress *Cardamine hirsuta* occasional and Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris* rare.

**Site assessment**

The site qualifies because it supports frequent numbers of at least 8 neutral grassland indicator species.

**Site status**

County Wildlife Site  
former Site of Natural History Interest

**Surveyor**

Sharon Brown  
19/07/2003

Site No. 7087

**COUNTY WILDLIFE SITE FULL RECORD SHEET**NAME: **The Swamp**

File code: E/20.5.03

Parish(es): Burwell

County: Cambridgeshire

Grid ref.: TL584657

**Habitat information****Code** *Habitat type*

- A111 Woodland: broadleaved, semi-natural  
 B22 Grassland: neutral, semi-improved  
 B6 Grassland: poor semi-improved  
 B5 Grassland: marsh/marshy grassland  
 G1 Open water: standing water  
 J232 Boundaries, hedge with trees, species-poor  
 J262 Boundaries, seasonally wet ditch  
 MI27 *Filipendula ulmaria*-*Angelica sylvestris* mire

**Site Area**

1.50 ha

**Site description**

This small meadow comprises several habitats that all merge gradually into one another and all of which are of some interest, with the fen meadow of the NVC *Filipendula ulmaria* - *Angelica sylvestris* community (M27) particularly notable.

The grassland while all of similar type may be divided in two by the level of grazing. The north and west of the meadow is the area normally available to the ponies and geese when the electric fencing is complete. The grass matrix holds abundant / frequent False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata* and Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*. The herbs which are low growing or can resist heavy grazing are most prominent in the fenced area; Self Heal *Prunella vulgaris*, Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta*, Common Mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum* and Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*. On the east of the meadow Black Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*, Tufted Vetch *Vicia cracca* and Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* are frequent and are partly over grown with Spear Thistle *Cirsium vulgare* and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. Rare species of interest include Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, Cowslip *Primula veris* and Bugle *Ajuga reptans*.

The marsh covers the SE of the field and the ditch, the latter being most species-rich probably because there is a constant flow of water here, while the main marsh is summer dry and generally un-grazed. Along the ditch species include abundant Lesser Pond Sedge *Carex acutiformis*, Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica* and Fool's Water-cress *Apium nodiflorum*. In the marsh Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Hairy Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* and Cleavers *Galium aparine* are abundant. Other species present include frequent Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre* and occasional / rare Black Sedge *Carex nigra*, Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus*, Water Mint, Fen Bedstraw *Galium uliginosum*, Water Figwort *Scrophularia auriculata*, Water-cress *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum* and Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus*.

There are two ponds; one is a shallow pond used by the geese, thus without vegetation and with silty water, while the other is a deep square dug pond with opaque water. The banks are steep leaving only a narrow vegetated edge with Lesser Pond Sedge, Meadowsweet, Bittersweet *Solanum dulcamara* and Yellow Flag. There are also some planted Iris sp. On the east side is a small zone of Goat Willow *Salix caprea* and Hairy Willowherb which may cover what was previously also a pond. The Stonewort *Chara sp.* previously recorded were not present due to the change (decline) in habitat quality of the ponds.

There are gappy hedges, reasonably species rich but leggy, with occasional standards around the site. Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Elder *Sambucus nigra*, Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Field Maple *Acer campestre* are the most frequent species. The disused railway line at the southern end of the site is now covered in woodland and scrub comprising similar species to the hedgerows..

**Site assessment**

The site meets criteria for selection as a CWS because it contains at least 0.25 ha of the NVC Meadowsweet - Wild Angelica mire community (M27). It also has a pond with beds of Stoneworts.

**Site status**

County Wildlife Site

**Surveyor**

Sharon Brown  
20/05/2003