COUNTY: WILTSHIRE SITE NAME: NORTH MEADOW CRICKLADE

DISTRICT: NORTH WILTSHIRE

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

Local Planning Authority: WILTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, North Wiltshire District Council

National Grid Reference: SU 094946 Area: 44.4 (ha.) 109.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 163 and 173 1:10,000: SU 09 NE

SU 19 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1971 Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Subject to common rights. Part of the site is a National Nature Reserve owned by the Nature Conservancy Council.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

North Meadow is a traditionally managed hay meadow with a rich flora which includes the largest British population of snakeshead fritillary *Fritillaria meleagris*. The site lies on the alluvial deposits of the floodplain of the Rivers Churn and Thames near Cricklade.

The meadow is 'lammas land', grazed in common between 12 August and 12 February each year and cut for hay no earlier than 1 July. This pattern of land use has existed for centuries, helping to maintain a rich grassland flora.

Over 250 species of higher plant occur on the meadow, including abundant grasses such as red fescue *Festuca rubra*, perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, crested dog's tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and yellow oatgrass *Trisetum flavescens*. Meadow brome *Bromus commutatus* and meadow barley *Hordeum secalinum* are also frequent in the turf. The flora is rich in herbs with typical hayfield species such as pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis* and black knapweed *Centaurea nigra*. Adder's tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, common meadowrue *Thalictrum flavum* and ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* also occur.

A striking feature of the site is the large population of snakeshead fritillary, with around 500,000 plants flowering each year. North Meadow is estimated to support about 80% of the British population of wild fritillary plants.

Several ditches border the meadow, adding to the biological diversity of the site. Plants found in these marginal watercourses include slender tufted-sedge *Carex*

acuta, marsh arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris* and great water-dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*. The common frog also breeds in these areas. Old channels crossing the meadow hold tubular water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*, marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*, marsh foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*, early marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata* and brown sedge *Carex disticha*.

Typical meadow butterflies such as meadow brown *Maniola jurtina*, common blue *Polyommatus icarus* and small heath *Coenonympha pamphilus* are common, whilst the more local marsh fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia* has been recorded. Bordering hedges support populations of gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*, ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus* and speckled wood *Pararge aegeria*. Altogether 14 species of dragonfly have been recently recorded, mainly at the meadow edge, although several such as brown hawker *Aeshna grandis*, black-tailer skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum* and the ruddy darter *Sympetrum sanguineum* also feed over the meadow.