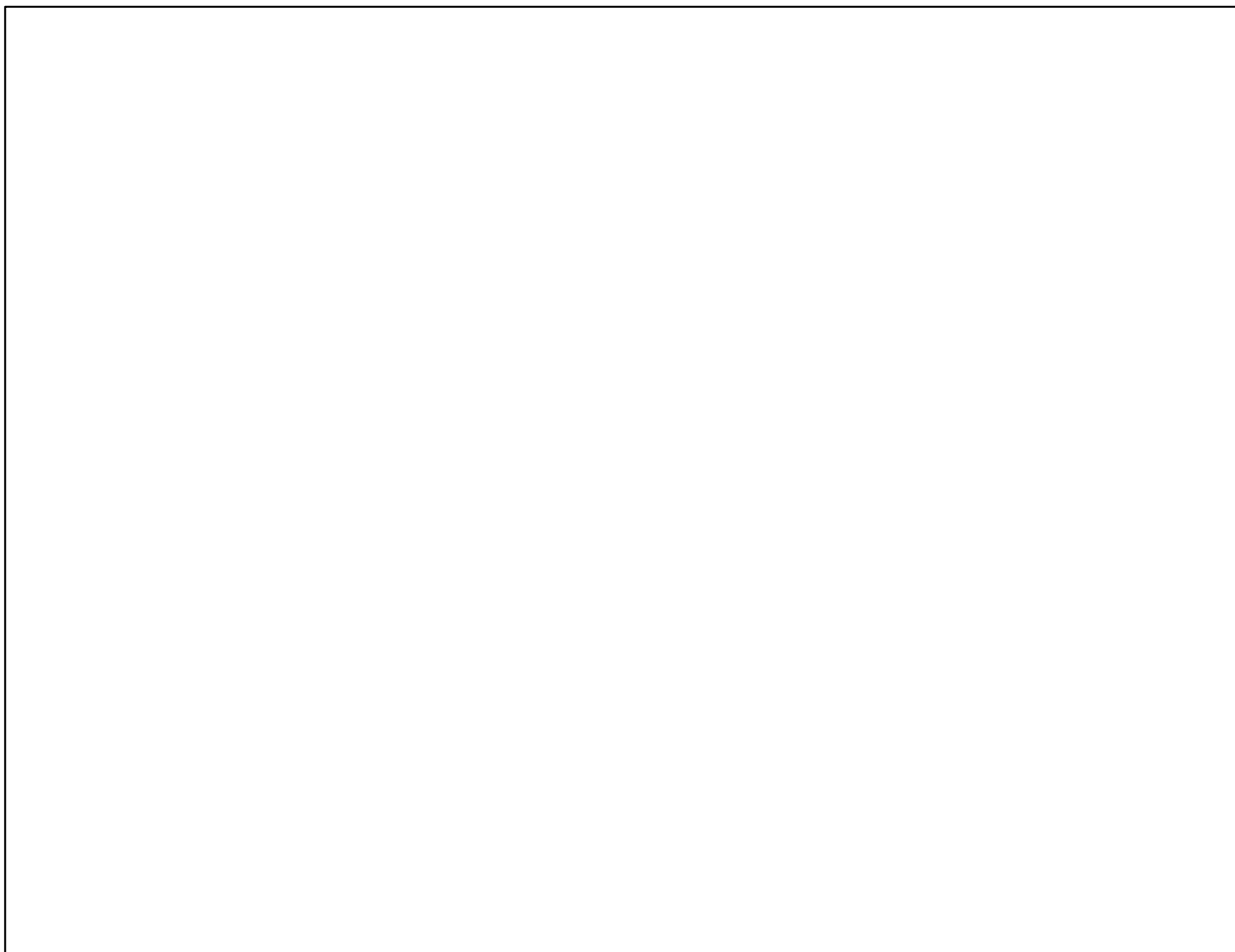


Co161 Wivenhoe Cross Pit (29.4 ha) TM 046230



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This site is a complex mosaic of scrub, woodland and grassland habitats on land mostly affected by aggregate extraction, centred on a stream valley. The northernmost field is former arable land now supporting a flower-rich community of tall ruderals such as Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), Common Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), Rosebay Willowherb (*Chamerion angustifolium*) and Square-stalked Willowherb (*Epilobium tetrapterum*) with lower growing species such as Red Bartsia (*Odontites vernus*), Common Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*), Autumn Hawkbit (*Scorzoneroides autumnalis*), Common Cudweed (*Filago vulgaris*) and *Cladonia* lichens.

To the southwest is an area of uneven, disturbed ground with exposed banks and damp hollows, within which the SPIE digger wasp *Cerceris quinquefasciata* (RDB3) and its brood parasite cuckoo-wasp *Hedychrum niemelai* (RDB3) have both been recorded. A number of other Nationally Rare and Scarce invertebrates have also been observed here. The vegetation includes acid grassland species such as Sheep's Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) with Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*), Perforate St John's-wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), Weld (*Reseda lutea*) and, in damper hollows, Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*).

To the east is a small damp field corner that supports a lush vegetation of Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*), Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*), Great Willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*), Smooth Tare (*Vicia tetrasperma*), Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) and abundant Fleabane. Similar vegetation is found in fields on either side of the stream valley, which itself supports a belt of wet willow (*Salix* sp.) and Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) scrub and woodland.

The field to the west of the stream valley slopes up towards the houses of Field Way and, away from the damper low ground, it is dominated by coarse grass species with willow and Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) scrub. In the lower, damper area of this field there are colonies of the ERDL species Southern Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) and the Nationally Scarce Divided Sedge (*Carex divisa*).

Flooded gravel pits on either side of the stream valley are used for fishing and fringed with mature willows.

At the southern end of the site is Gravel Pit Grove, an area of old woodland occupying a low-lying gravel working. Its canopy is made up of Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), with Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*), Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*), Alder and Aspen (*Populus tremula*). The understorey is sparse, but includes Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) with invading Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). Ground flora include Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), False-brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*), Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*) and Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) with localised Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and Bramble. A damp hollow towards the southern boundary holds Sallow (*Salix cinerea*) with Common Marsh-bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) and Marsh Thistle (*Cirsium palustre*). Of particular note is an extensive population of Common Polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*) on the southern boundary bank.

Ownership and Access

The majority of the site is under mixed private ownership. Apart from an area of public open space associated with the disturbed ground in the northwest, the only official public access is via a public footpath that runs along the western edge of the site, from the allotments northward, before turning east and crossing the stream valley to join Keelars Lane.

Habitats of Principal Importance in England

Wet Woodland, Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land

Selection Criteria

HC2 – Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland on Non-ancient Sites
HC3 – Other Priority Habitat Woodland Types on Non-ancient Sites
HC11 – Other Neutral Grasslands
HC27 – Post-industrial Sites
HC28 – Small-component Mosaics
SC1 – Vascular Plants
SC18 – SPIE Invertebrates

Rationale

Gravel Pit Grove is old secondary woodland that conforms to the Lowland mixed Deciduous Woodland HPIE description, while much of the Alder and willow scrub along the stream valley fits the description for the Wet Woodland HPIE. The more species rich grasslands within the site are of sufficient interest to warrant selection, but they do not represent the NVC MG5 community. Much of the land is post-industrial, but this criterion is specifically used to select the extent of nesting habitat that would support *Cerceris quinquefasciata*, which triggers the SC18 criterion. Populations of Southern Marsh Orchid, Divided Sedge and Common Polypody are significant enough to justify the SC1 criterion. Other parts of the site are of insufficient quality to justify their own habitat criterion, but contribute to its overall wildlife interest and are included here using the Small-component Mosaics criterion.

Condition Statement

Variable

Management Issues

Much of the grassland habitat, and the disturbed land in the northwest, is lacking the management necessary to maintain it in good condition, with more frequent cutting required to maintain a good diversity of plant species and an appropriate habitat structure. Removal of Bramble and other scrub would also be of benefit as would thinning of the woodland.

Review Schedule

Site Selected: 2008

Reviewed: 2015 (considerable extension to the south)