



DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT LEATHEMSTOWN, CO ANTRIM. ARTICLE 24 OF THE NATURE CONSERVATION AND AMENITY LANDS (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1985.

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland (the Department), having consulted the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside and being satisfied that the area delineated and described on the attached map (the area) is of special scientific interest by reason of the flora and fauna and accordingly needs to be specially protected, hereby declares the area to be an area of special scientific interest to be known as the 'Leathemstown Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

The area is of special scientific interest because of its grassland plant and animal communities. Leathemstown is an area of marginal agricultural grassland surrounding a small reservoir in the Belfast Hills. In general, unimproved grassland is not widespread in Northern Ireland and the Belfast Hills contain a relatively high proportion of the resource, although it tends to be rather fragmented. Leathemstown contains a range of different species-rich grassland types that are concentrated within a relatively small area. Associated habitats include wetland, woodland and scrub and add to the overall diversity of the site.

Soils have developed from glacial tills and are locally acidic in nature as a result of surface leaching. However, where drainage is poor, base-enrichment from springs and from surface flushing is common. The varied soil conditions are reflected in a wide range of different grassland types.

The vegetation over much of the area is dry, species-rich mesotrophic grassland, typically dominated by Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, but with a wide range of associated species including Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca*, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and the notable Greater Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*.

Where soils are less freely-draining and flushing is more pronounced, there are localised stands of very species-rich wet vegetation. These are often dominated by Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Common Sedge *Carex nigra*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus* and Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*. The richness of these unimproved wet grasslands is characterised by the wide range of frequently occurring associated species including Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea*, Common Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Bugle *Ajuga reptans* and the mosses *Calliergon cuspidatum* and *Climacium dendroides*.

Wetland and woodland habitats add to the overall diversity of the area. The reservoir has a large catchment and high flushing rates. Although water quality is generally good with low levels of enrichment, the associated vegetation is rather atypical of natural lake environments and aquatic plant communities tend to be poorly developed. The floating vegetation is composed of Amphibious Bistort *Persicaria amphibia* and Broad-leaved Pondweed *Potamogeton natans* with a limited growth of Stoneworts *Chara* spp. Emergent swamp vegetation occurs around the edges of the reservoir and is dominated by Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* with occasional Bladder-sedge *Carex vesicaria*, Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata*, Lesser Water-plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides* and Shoreweed *Littorella uniflora*. Swamp vegetation merges into a narrow band of Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* with scattered Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, Water-plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica* and Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus*. Several areas of scrub and a small linear stretch of woodland associated with the outlet of the river contain Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and the rare Shady Horsetail *Equisetum pratense*.

At least ten species of butterfly have been recorded from the area including abundant Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*, Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina* and Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus* with occasional Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*, Painted Lady *Cynthia cardui* and Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus*.

SCHEDULE

The following operations and activities appear to the Department to be likely to damage the flora and fauna of the area:

1. Any activity or operation which involves the damage or disturbance by any means of the surface and subsurface of the land, including ploughing, rotovating, harrowing, reclamation and extraction of minerals, including limestone, gravel and peat.
2. Any change in the present annual pattern and intensity of grazing, including any change in the type of livestock used or in supplementary feeding practice.
3. Any change in the established method or frequency of rolling, mowing or cutting.
4. Any change in the annual pattern of application of manure, slurry or artificial fertiliser.

5. The application of herbicides, fungicides or other chemicals deployed to kill any form of wild plant, other than plants listed as being noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.
6. The storage or dumping, spreading or discharge of any material not specified under paragraphs 4 or 5 above.
7. The destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant, seed or plant remains, other than for
 - (i) plants listed as noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977;
 - (ii) normal cutting or mowing regimes for which a consent is not required under paragraph 3 above.
8. The release into the area of any animal (other than in connection with normal grazing practice) or plant. 'Animal' includes birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates; 'Plant' includes seed, fruit or spore.
9. Burning.
10. Changes in tree or woodland management, including afforestation, planting, clearing, selective felling and coppicing.
11. Construction, removal or disturbance of any permanent or temporary structure including building, engineering or other operations.
12. Alteration of natural or man-made features, the clearance of boulders or large stones and grading of rock faces.
13. Operations or activities which would affect wetlands (including marsh and streams), e.g.
 - (i) change in the methods or frequency of routine drainage maintenance;
 - (ii) modification of the structure of any watercourse;
14. The killing or taking of any wild animal except where such killing or taking is treated as an exception in Articles 5, 6, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21 and 22 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.
15. The following activities undertaken in a manner likely to damage or disturb the wildlife of the area:
 - (i) Educational activities;
 - (ii) Research activities;

- (iii) Recreational activities;
 - (iv) Exercising of animals.
16. Changes in game, waterfowl or fisheries management or fishing or hunting practices.
17. Use of vehicles or craft likely to damage or disturb the wildlife of the area.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment for
Northern Ireland on 30 APRIL 1997



ROBERT C MARTIN
Chief Executive

R. Lanchester Civil Servant in Charge South Belfast

FOOTNOTES

- (a) Please note that consent by the Department to any of the operations or activities listed in the Schedule does not constitute planning permission. Where required, planning permission must be applied for in the usual manner to the Department under Part IV of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. Operations or activities covered by planning permission are not normally covered in the list of Notifiable Operations.
- (b) Also note that many of the operations and activities listed in the Schedule are capable of being carried out either on a large scale or in a very small way. While it is impossible to define exactly what is "large" and what is "small", the Department would intend to approach each case in a common sense and practical way. It is very unlikely that small scale operations would give rise for concern and if this was the case the Department would normally give consent, particularly if there is a long history of the operation being undertaken in that precise location.