COUNTY: BERKSHIRE SITE NAME: INKPEN CROCUS FIELD

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

1981

**Local Planning Authorities:** Newbury District Council, Berkshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU370640

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 174 1:10,000: SU36 NE

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

Area: 3.2 ha 7.9 ac

**Other information:** Within North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The site is managed as a nature reserve by Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists Trust.

## **Description and Reasons for Notification**

An area of species-rich unimproved neutral grassland supporting several notable plant species. This habitat is now rare and rapidly declining in Britain.

Inkpen Crocus Fields overlie Bagshot Beds, and the soils consist of poorly-drained, seasonally-waterlogged loams and clays. Most of the site is on a moderate slope with a north, west or easterly aspect. A small spring-fed stream bisects the site.

The fields are a good example of a *Cynosurus cristatus-Centaurea nigra* meadow and pasture community. Characteristic species which occur throughout the site include red fescue *Festuca rubra*, common bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, crested dog's tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and red clover *Trifolium pratense*. Two sub-communities are represented. On flatter ground the *Lathyrus pratensis* sub-community, in which legumes are particularly prominent, is dominated here by common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, pignut *Conopodium majus*, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, common bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, red clover *Trifolium pratense* and sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, grading downhill to a slope with abundant meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, bugle *Ajuga reptans* and common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*.

The *Danthonia decumbens* sub-community across the remainder of the site contains species typical of more base-poor grasslands, including abundant common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, betony *Stachys officinalis*, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*. Small areas of flushed ground, dominated by meadowsweet and creeping buttercup *R. repens* with marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris* and common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, add to the diversity of the site.

More than ten species of plant indicative of ancient meadows with a long history of freedom from improvement and disturbance have been recorded, the more notable examples including bitter vetch *Lathyrus montanus*, meadow saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata* and thousands of the very rare Red Data Book plant spring crocus *Crocus vernus*, an alien species which is known to have been present at this site since 1800.