COUNTY: Norfolk SITE NAME: WEST RUNTON CLIFFS

DISTRICT: North Norfolk

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

Local Planning Authority: North Norfolk District Council

National Grid Reference: TG 183432 TG 192430 Area: 17.56 (ha) 43.39 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 133 1:10,000: TG 14 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954 Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:
The site area has been reduced but 2 other sites, East Runton Cliffs and Beeston Cliffs include much of the former SSSI.

Reasons for Notification:
West Runton is one of the most important Pleistocene localities in the British Isles. In the cliff and foreshore are exposed a series of sediments representing two temperate stages (Pastonian, Cromerian) and three cold stages (Pre-Pastonian, Beestonian, Anglian). Pollen spectra indicative of temperate forests have been obtained from the temperate stages, while the cold stage deposits show permafrost structures and subarctic herb floras. The whole Cromer Forest-bed Formation sequence is overlain by glacial tills of the Anglian Glaciation. The sequence records several periods of transgression and regression (major advances and retreats of the sea) represented by alternations of marine and non-marine sedimentation. The entire Cromerian Interglacial vegetational cycle is represented within the West Runton Freshwater Bed and overlying marine sediments, and this locality has been designated the stratotype for the Cromerian stage. Molluscan and vertebrate fossils occur at several horizons, especially in the West Runton Freshwater Bed.

The West Runton Freshwater Bed (Cromerian Interglacial) has yielded by far the richest fauna of any open Pleistocene site in Britain. Fossils, dated to pollen Zones Cr Ib – IIb, include a wide range of large and small mammals, freshwater fish and other vertebrates. The fauna has considerable international importance for its value in correlations with early Middle Pleistocene deposits across Europe and beyond. Marine gravels above with pollen dated to Zone Cr III have also yielded an interesting but sparse vertebrate assemblage. The Pastonian ‘crag’ below the Freshwater Bed contains abundant vertebrates, of particular note are the voles and marine fish – the only known fauna which can with certainty be assigned to this lower Pleistocene stage. An internationally important locality for its vertebrate faunas.