

**COUNTY:** CAMBRIDGESHIRE                      **SITE NAME:** BEDFORD PURLIEUS

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

**Local Planning Authorities:** Peterborough City Council

**National Grid Reference:** TL 042995

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 141                      **1:10,000:** TL 01 SW, TL 09 NW

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1969                      **Date of Last Revision:** 1972

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1983                      **Date of Last Revision:**

**Area:** 523 ha 211 ac

**Other information:** This site is included in 'A Nature Conservation Review' (Cambridge University Press, 1977, ed. D A Ratcliffe).

### **Description and Reasons for Notification**

This is an ancient woodland supporting a variety of woodland community types which are largely restricted nationally in their distribution to lowland England. Since 1945 ancient woodlands have declined in extent particularly in the more intensively farmed regions and the fraction which remain are therefore of high conservation value. In a national context, Bedford Purlieu is noted for its great diversity of herbaceous plants and associated fauna as well as for the wide range of coppice woodland types. Coppicing, the periodic recutting of underwood stems which then grow on again from the stool, was the traditional management of this woodland.

In a Cambridge context the site is exceptionally rich in its variety of species which largely reflect the diversity of soil types arising from the Jurassic limestone covered in places by clay drift with patches of sand.

Oak *Quercus robur* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior* are generally dominant throughout the wood but the coppice types represented include small leaved lime *Tilia cordata*, ash, hazel *Corylus avellana*, wych elm *Ulmus glabra* and maple *Acer campestre* on the calcareous clays, and birch *Betula* sp. and sessile oak *Quercus petraea*-hazel on acidic sands. The ground flora holds a number of species at the limits of their national distribution such as the grass mountain melick *Melica nutans*. Other notable species include ramsons *Allium ursinum*, lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*, columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*, herb-Paris *Paris quadrifolia* and fly orchid *Ophrys insectifera*.