COUNTY: OXFORDSHIRE **SITE NAME:** PISHILL WOODS

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

Local Planning Authorities: South Oxfordshire District Council, Oxfordshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU715901, SU713905

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 175 **1:10,000:** SU79 SW, SU78 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1952 & 1977 **Date of Last Revision:**

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 **Date of Last Revision:** 1992

Area: 42.15 ha 104.1 ac

Other information: Formerly notified as Shambridge Wood (1952) and Pishill Bank (1977). The site lies within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The southern part is registered Common Land (CL69).

Description and Reasons for Notification

This site consists of two areas of semi-natural ancient woodland which contain a range of stand types typically associated with the Chilterns scarp. The ground flora is rich, with over thirty-five species associated with ancient woodlands including several species uncommon in the Chilterns. The structure of the two areas reflects contrasting traditional management practices and provides a range of important habitats for invertebrates.

The site occupies the north and south-facing slopes of a dry valley in the Upper Chalk, with local deposits of clay-with-flints over the chalk. The soils derived from these geological formations are characterised on well-drained silty and clay soils of the Andover 1 and Batcombe associations, thus giving a mixture of calcareous and acidic conditions across the site.

Pishill Bank, which is north-facing, is dominated by beech and pedunculate oak coppice, providing a good example of this now relict stand type in the Chilterns. The top of the Bank, where soils are more acidic, is dominated by oak in association with silver birch, hazel, honeysuckle, ling *Calluna vulgaris*, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and hairy wood-rush *Luzula pilosa*. Coppiced beech becomes more common downslope with whitebeam, cherry and crab-apple. The deeper soils at the foot of the slope support beech, hazel and field maple coppice together with yew, holly, hawthorn and guelder rose. These shelter a rich ground flora including the locally uncommon wood barley *Hordelymus europaeus*, goldilocks *Ranunculus auricomus* and early purple orchid *Orchis mascula*.

In contrast the south-facing slopes of Shambridge Wood contain beech-dominated woodland which has been managed as high forest. Small quantities of pedunculate oak, ash, cherry, whitebeam, yew and wych elm are associated with the beech. More open areas of younger vegetation and mixed woodland have a rich ground flora. Among the more local Chiltern plants are thin-spiked wood sedge *Carex strigosa*, pale St John's Wort *Hypericum montanum*, herb-Paris *Paris quadrifolia*, ramsons *Allium ursinum* and the shrub mezereon *Daphne mezereum* as well as over thirty plants strongly associated with ancient woodlands.

The invertebrate fauna, although poorly known, is typical of a diverse semi-natural woodland in the Chilterns. The importance of the deadwood habitats of the site are underlined by the presence of several species associated with such habitats including the longhorn beetle *Strangalia maculata*, the woodland hoverflies *Xylota sylvarum* and *Cheilosia variabilis* and the nationally uncommon hoverfly *Volucella inflata*.