

COUNTY: KENT            SITE NAME: LYMPNE ESCARPMENT

DISTRICT: SHEPWAY

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

Local Planning Authority: SHEPWAY DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TR 132345      Area: 143.1 (ha.) 353.6 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 189      1:10,000: TR 13 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951      Date of Last Revision: 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Boundary amendments to this site include several extensions and a small deletion.

Reasons for Notification:

The site consists of a steep escarpment of Kentish ragstone formed by the Hythe Beds of the Lower Greensand. Ragstone is a hard sandy limestone which produces calcareous soils. The grassland and woodland of this site are among the best remaining examples of semi-natural habitats on ragstone in Kent. Wet ash-maple is the predominant woodland type with a small area of calcareous ash-wych elm wood. Many plants usually associated with chalk soils occur in the grassland. The south-facing slope is close to the sea and the resulting mild humid conditions encourages the growth of ferns and mosses. Numerous springs and flushes occur at the base of the escarpment at the junction of the ragstone and the Atherfield Clay.

Lympne Park Wood is the largest remaining example of ash coppice woodland on the ragstone escarpment. It is thought to be of ancient origin with a long history of woodland cover. Most of the wood is ash, field-maple and hazel coppice with oak and ash standards. Wych elm is present in a small area in the south-east corner. Many of the mature elms have been killed by Dutch elm disease but some saplings have survived. The calcareous nature of the soil is shown by the presence of shrubs such as spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, wayfaring-tree *Viburnum lantana* and privet *Ligustrum vulgare*. The ground flora is mostly dominated by brambles *Rubus fruticosus* but other plants present include stinking iris *Iris foetidissima*, early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula* and common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*.

Outcrops of ragstone are frequent on the upper slopes of the escarpment. The vegetation here is dominated by grasses such as fescues *Festuca* species cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum*. Grazing helps to minimise a diverse flowering plant community including cowslips *Primula veris*, carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris* and

hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale* which are associated with calcareous soils. Due to the high humidity of the area wood sedge *Carex sylvatica* and stinking iris, species usually restricted to woods, are able to grow in the open grassland.

Past landslips have produced much scree at the foot of the escarpment and the grassland here is dominated by tor-grass. The marshy ground below the springline has tall herb vegetation including plants such as great horsetail *Equisetum telemateia*, great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, ragged-robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and water figwort *Scrophularia auriculata*.