

COUNTY: LEICESTERSHIRE

SITE NAME: LEIGHFIELD FOREST

DISTRICT: HARBOROUGH

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

Local Planning Authority: HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: SK 767027                      Area: 166.68 (ha.) 411.86 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 141                      1:10,000: SK 70 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1956                      Date of Last Revision: 1981

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

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

The site contains some of the best remaining examples of ash-maple woodland in Leicestershire and is representative of ancient semi-natural woodland developed on the heavy clays of eastern central England. This site is listed in the Nature Conservation Review.

Biology

Leighfield Forest comprises a group of woods in the Eye Brook Valley of which the largest are Loddington Reddish, Tugby, Tilton and Skeffington woods. The Eye Brook has cut through Jurassic Lias Clays and Marlstone, together with their capping of gravels and clays, and the woods which have developed on soils derived from these strata have stood since at least the thirteenth century. The tree stands are characterised by the dominance of ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and oak *Quercus robur* although, locally, elm *Ulmus procera* and sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* are significant. The understorey of hazel *Corylus avellana* and field maple *Acer campestre* is often dense and the mixed association of shrubs includes dogwood *Swida sanguinea*, Midland hawthorn *Crataegus oxycanthoides* and privet *Ligustrum vulgare*. The ground flora is dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, with clumps of tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and male fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*. The wood forget-me-not *Myosotis sylvatica* is abundant and the presence of wood vetch *Vicia sylvatica*, herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*, nettle leaved bellflower *Campanula trachelium* and small teasel *Dipsacus pilosus* is of interest. Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and rushes *Juncus* spp. occur extensively in the rides with bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* locally abundant. The list of moths and beetles recorded from these woods is impressive and includes a number of rare or localised species some of which are at the northern limit of their British distribution. Of additional interest is the variety of the breeding bird community.

Also included within the site are areas of species-rich neutral grassland and marsh. The grassland is notable for the abundance of adder's tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum* and the community includes such characteristic species as spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, betony *Betonica officinalis* and cowslip *Primula veris*. Locally spring-fed marshes occur dominated by greater tussock sedge *Carex paniculata*, blunt-flowered rush *Juncus subnodulosus* and common reed *Phragmites australis*.