

COUNTY: KENT                      SITE NAME: PARK WOOD, CHILHAM

BOROUGH: ASHFORD

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

Local Planning Authority: ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TR 043526                      Area: 31.2 (ha.) 77.1 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 179 & 189                      1:10,000: TR 05 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985                      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

This site is a good representative of long established woodland on chalk soils in Kent. It is largely hazel and hornbeam coppice under oak standards, with diverse rub and ground layers. Several plant species characteristic of calcareous soils are present, including the uncommon lady orchid *Orchis purpurea*. The wood also contains an outstanding assemblage of invertebrates which includes the rare wasp *Crossocerus distinguendus* and there is also a large breeding bird community.

The wood lies on a south-east facing slope, and a dry valley runs up through the centre of the site. A strip of chalk grassland runs along the south-western boundary; on the other boundaries and within the wood are earth banks marked by pollards of oak and ash, indicating the ancient origin of the wood.

Much of the woodland is hazel and hornbeam coppice under standards of pedunculate oak, but sweet chestnut coppice is also abundant, especially in the north-western part of the wood. Other coppiced species include field maple, ash and birch, whilst mature tree species include ash, whitebeam, beech, birch and yew. There are dense stands of yew adjacent to the strip of chalk grassland and towards the north eastern part of the wood where there has been some recent coppicing. There are also some mature conifers scattered throughout the wood but mainly located towards the southern corner; these probably date from the turn of the century.

The shrub layer includes hawthorn and several species characteristic of chalk soils, such as buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*, wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana* and guelder rose *V. opulus*. Bramble, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* are the principal components of the ground flora, which also contains the less common species wild liquorice *Astragalus glycyphyllos* and columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*. Several uncommon species indicative of long established woodland occur,

including wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*, een hellebore *Helleborus viridus*, stinking iris *Iris foetidissima* and herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*, and the orchids: lady orchid *Orchis purpurea* and butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*. Ferns are frequent and include buckler fern *Dryopteris dilatata*, narrow buckler fern *D. carthusiana* and male fern *D. filix-mas*.

The strip of calcareous grassland along the south-western boundary is dominated by the grasses tor grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* and sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, but the herb-rich sward also contains nettle-leaved bellflower *Campanula trachelium* and the characteristic downland species dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, common rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium* and horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*. Many of the woodland shrub species are also present, together with spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, and elder *Sambucus nigra*.

Broom *Cytisus scoparius* and trailing St John's wort *Hypericum humifusum* are present on less calcareous soils, and in the lower part of the dry valley are several clearings dominated by bracken and bramble.

Invertebrates recorded in the wood include two rarities; the wasp *Crossocerus distinguendus* and the fly *Stratiomys potamida*, and several uncommon species including the woodland grasshopper *Omocestus rufipes*, plumed prominent moth *Ptilophora plumigera*, satin lutestring moth *Tetheella fluctuosa* and a butterfly, the Duke of Burgundy fritillary *Hamearis lucina*. Amongst the breeding bird species present are nightingale, nuthatch, green and great spotted woodpeckers and tawny owl.