

COUNTY: KENT            SITE NAME: PARKGATE DOWN

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 168460            Area: 7 (ha.) 17.3 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 179 & 189    1:10,000: TR 14 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1968            Date of Last Revision: –

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

Other Information:

This site is a Kent Trust for Nature Conservation reserve.

Reasons for Notification:

The interest of this site is centred on the unimproved grassland on the west-facing slope of a dry valley. Dense scrub is present on the upper slope. The grassland is especially noted for its orchids including the nationally rare late spider orchid *Ophrys fuciflora* which is restricted to a few sites in East Kent. A number of other scarce plants also occur.

The grassland, grazed by sheep and cattle, is dominated by tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* and fescues *Festuca* species. A wide range of typical chalk downland plants are also present including dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, common milkwort *Polygala vulgaris* and salad burnet *Poterium sanguisorba*. Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris* also occurs here and the scarce slender bedstraw *Galium pumilum* is found at the north end of the site.

The site is well known for its orchids with at least ten species having been recorded. Fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* and common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* are probably the most numerous. Uncommon species include lady orchid *Orchis purpurea* and musk orchid *Herminium monorchis*, both of which flower intermittently. The latter is only found in a few sites in SE Kent and here can sometimes number several hundred flowering spikes. Another interesting feature of the site is the colony of the rare monkey orchid *Orchis simia* which was introduced here by seed in 1958. It was first seen in flower in 1965 and since then the number of flowering spikes has increased to over 20 by 1983.

Hawthorn and blackthorn scrub, with some neglected hazel coppice is present on the deeper soils at the top of the slope. This is very dense in places with little ground vegetation present. Elsewhere the scrub is more open with some tall growth of bracken and brambles. The bracken and also thistles are encroaching on

the grassland at the bottom of the slope. Typical scrubland birds breed in this area including nightingales.