COUNTY: OXFORDSHIRE **SITE NAME:** STURT COPSE

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

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

National Grid Reference: SP400150

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 164 **1:10,000:** SP31 NE/SE, SP41 NW/SW

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

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

Area: 5.3 ha 12.9 ac

Other information: Formerly known as Sturt Wood SSSI.

Description and Reasons for Notification

The site is an important relic of the ancient hanging ash-wych elm woodlands of the Evenlode Valley and is noted for several uncommon plants. It is a distinctive and exceptional example of the few remaining woods of this group on the steep Jurassic limestone slope above the river. Structurally, it is the most intact.

The wood is characteristic of the biologically rich ash-wych elm woodlands of the south-west limestones of Britain. It is typified by huge, ancient coppice stools of ash and wych elm (the latter now dead in the upper parts due to Dutch elm disease) and large old pedunculate oak pollards and standards. Some of the stools carry the epiphyte polypody *Polypodium interjectum*, which is uncommon in the area. The shrub layer is diverse and dominated mostly by old hazel coppice and locally by elder. The ground flora is largely dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and locally by ramsons *Allium ursinum*, nettle *Urtica dioica* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. Notable species which have a nationally limited distribution include yellow star-of-Bethlehem *Gagea lutea*, toothwort *Lathraea squamaria* and hard shield-fern *Polystichum aculeatum*. Opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* indicates wetter woodland soils at the bottom of the slope.

The bryophyte flora and invertebrate fauna of the Evenlode woodlands, recorded in the 1950s, include national and local rarities.