

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: WOOLCOMBE

DISTRICT: WEST DORSET

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

Local Planning Authority: WEST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: SY 557957 Area: 18.8 (ha.) 46.5 (ac.)
 SY 553962

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 194 1:10,000: SY 59 NE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site.

Within Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The site comprises a system of valleys cutting through the Lower Chalk, Upper Greensand and Gault Clay and holding small tributary streams of the River Hooke. On the lower-lying Gault Clay, which receives base-rich seepage water from above, rich fen communities have developed over peat and there is also wet woodland with a diverse associated flora. Parts of the higher slopes support unimproved acidic grassland.

The fen at Woolcombe is one of the most extensive of its kind in the county. The dominant plants are Marsh- and Greater Horsetails *Equisetum palustre* and *E. telmateia*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and Blunt-flowered- and Jointed Rushes *Juncus subnodulosus* and *J. articulatus*. Associated species include Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Common Spotted- and Southern Marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and *D. praetermissa*, Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*, Marsh Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, Fen Bedstraw *Galium uliginosum* and Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*. Locally, Common-, Glaucous- and Carnation Sedges *Carex nigra*, *C. flacca* and *C. panicea* are frequent and there are stands of Greater Tussock Sedge *Carex paniculata* and Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus*. Two very uncommon plants known in few other Dorset localities occur in the fen: Water Avens *Geum rivale* grows very locally near one of the streams and Marsh Fern *Thelypteris thelypteroides* is present in an open area within the wet woodland.

The wet woodland is dominated by Common Sallow *Salix cinerea* and Alder *Alnus glutinosa*. Guelder Rose *Viburnum opulus* and Red Currant *Ribes sylvestris* are frequent components of the shrub layer and there is a rich ground flora including Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, Remote Sedge *Carex remota*, Moschatel *Adoxa*

moschatellina, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*. Drier woodland on the higher slopes is dominated by Hazel *Corylus avellana* with occasional Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*. The main components of the ground flora of this woodland are Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scriptus* and Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*. Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula* is frequent and the uncommon Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis* and Herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia* also occur.

Small areas of unimproved dry acidic grassland on the Lower Greensand slopes are dominated by Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris* with Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and Field Woodrush *Luzula campestris* prominent associated species.