COUNTY: SURREY  SITE NAME: OCKHAM AND WISLEY COMMONS

BOROUGHS: ELMBRIDGE, GUILDFORD

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

Local Planning Authorities: ELMBRIDGE BOROUGH COUNCIL, Guildford Borough Council

National Grid References: TQ 070585, TQ 082585  
TQ 084592, TQ 078595  
Area: 269.6 (ha.) 666.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 187  
1:10,000: TQ 05 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act.): 1975  
Date of Last Revision: –

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

Other Information:
The majority of Ockham & Wisley Commons SSSI is owned and managed by Surrey County Council as an Open Space. The site includes several areas of Common Land. The boundary of the site has been modified at renotification by several deletions and extensions. The lakes at Pains Hill and Silvermere are no longer part of this site.

Reasons for Notification:
This site consists of a large tract of heathland lying between the Mole and Wey Rivers near Cobham, containing areas of heath, bog, open water, secondary woodland and scrub. This variety of habitats supports a rich community of heathland plants and animals, including a large number of rare and local insects.

Lowland heaths have been a feature of the British landscape for several thousand years, but the area of heathland has been reduced steadily by land-use changes such as conversion to intensive agriculture, forestry or urban development. This loss has been particularly rapid this century, and 40% of heathland remaining in 1950 has now been destroyed. As their habitat is destroyed, the many specialised plants and animals which live on heathland have become increasingly rare. Since little heathland is still maintained by grazing, much of it is becoming overgrown with scrub and trees, a process which may be seen clearly at this site.

The site lies on Bagshot beds, which give rise to an acidic sandy soil supporting heath dominated by ling Calluna vulgaris and bell heather Erica cinerea, and in grassy areas by common bent grass Agrostis capillaris and wavy hair-grass Deschampsia flexuosa. Amongst these plants grow dwarf furze Ulex minor, petty whin Genista anglica and shepherd’s cress Teesdalia nudicaulis. Animals found here include such local insects as the silver-studded blue butterfly Plebejus argus and the wood tiger beetle Cicindela sylvatica. In wet areas, where the sand is overlain by peat, the heath is dominated by ling, cross-leaved heath Erica tetralix, purple moor-grass Molinia caerulea, tufted hair-grass Deschampsia cespitosa and bog-moss Sphagnum spp. Also found here are royal fern
Osmunda regalis, lesser skullcap Scutellaria minor, meadow thistle Cirsium dissectum and creeping willow Salix repens, and the largest Surrey colonies of bog hairgrass Deschampsia setacea which is local in Britain and rare in Europe as a whole. Among the many local insects found here are bog bush-cricket Metrioptera brachyptera and a large robber fly Asilus crabroniformis.

Most of the heathland is very overgrown with bracken Pteridium aquilinum and invasive trees and shrubs; mainly silver birch Betula pendula, Scot’s pine Pinus sylvestris and oak Quercus robur. In several parts of the site there are dense pine plantations which have replaced the heathland completely.

There are several areas of open water within the site, including Bolder Mere and a number of ponds and pools in the wet heathland. Plants growing around the water include several Surrey rarities including shoreweed Littorella uniflora, marsh St John’s wort Hypericum elodes and lesser water-plantain Baldellia ranunculoides. Locally-distributed plants include needle spike-rush Eleocharis acicularis and pillwort Pilularia globulifera. Open water surrounded by heathland presents an ideal habitat for many dragonflies and damselflies (Odonata), and over 20 species have been recorded from the site which is thus of national importance for this group. They include the rare white-faced dragonfly Leucorrhinia dubia, the local hairy dragonfly Brachytron pratense and the ruddy darter Sympetrum sanguineum. The site also supports many other local and rare invertebrates. It is of national importance for true flies (Diptera); rare species include a bee fly Thyridanthrax fenestratus and a crane-fly Tipula livida, while the crane-fly Limonia inusta is among the many local species. A large number of local beetles (Coleoptera) are also found, including the ground beetle Amara infima and the weevil Bytiscus populi.