

COUNTY: KENT            SITE NAME: PURPLE HILL

DISTRICT: SWALE, MAIDSTONE

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

Local Planning Authority: MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL, Swale Borough Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 811622    Area: 15.1 (ha.) 37.3 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 178    1:10,000: TQ 86 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951    Date of Last Revision: 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1983    Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The site is Grade II in ‘A Nature Conservation Review’.

Reasons for Notification:

The site includes areas of chalk grassland, scrub and woodland. The grassland is of the upright brome *Bromus erectus*, sheep’s fescue *Festuca ovina* type and is extremely herb rich, with one nationally rare plant species occurring.

Among the many chalk downland herbs to be found here are salad burnet *Poterium sanguisorba*, rockrose *Helianthemum chamaecistus*, horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* and autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella*. In addition to the nationally rare Kentish milkwort *Polygala austriaca* other uncommon species of plants are also found including several orchids for example man orchid *Aceras anthropophorum*, fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*, and pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*.

The upper part of the woodland, on the clay with flints soil, is predominantly hornbeam coppice, although Stone Acre Wood is more varied, with oak, ash and wild cherry among others. The woodland floor is covered by bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, dog’s mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, brambles *Rubus fruticosus* and some wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and yellow archangel *Galeobdolon luteum*. The steeper slopes are mainly hazel coppice with large beech trees, and the ground flora here is more varied, including several scarce plants, such as stinking iris *Iris foetidissima*, fly orchid *Ophrys insectifera*, and lady orchid *Orchis purpurea*, the last is another species restricted to Kent. There are also small areas of scrub on the woodland edge, of hawthorn and various chalk-loving species such as wayfaring tree.