

COUNTY: LEICESTERSHIRE

SITE NAME: OWSTON WOODS

DISTRICT: HARBOROUGH/MELTON

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

Local Planning Authority: Harborough District Council, Melton Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SK 790065

Area: 141.11 (ha.) 348.69 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: No 141

1:10,000: SK 70 NE, SK 80 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1956

Date of Last Revision: 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1983

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

The largest continuous area of semi-natural woodland in Leicestershire containing an unusually high diversity of woodland types representative of ancient woods on clay soils in central eastern England.

Biology:

Owston Woods are developed primarily on soils derived from Jurassic Upper Lias and Glacial Boulder Clays. Although subjected to silvicultural modification, particularly in the west, much of the ancient semi-natural woodland remains. Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and hazel *Corylus avellana* characterise large areas, but smaller areas are characterised by alder *Alnus glutinosa* and others by a mixture of ash, field maple *Acer campestre*, small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* and birch *Betula pendula*. The ground flora is locally dominated by bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and bluebell *Endymion non-scriptus* and is exceptionally rich, particularly in the east, with frequent hairy woodrush *Luzula pilosa*, greater butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*, twayblade *Listera ovata*, early purple orchid *Orchis mascula* and ransoms *Allium ursinum*. A number of small watercourses cross the site and these carry populations of the opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*.

The list of moths, beetles and other insects recorded from these woods is impressive and includes a number of rare or localised species. Of additional interest is the variety of the breeding bird community, the small-mammal fauna, and the presence of wooded rides.