

COUNTY: CAMBRIDGESHIRE **SITE NAME:** OUT AND PLUNDER WOODS

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

Local Planning Authorities: East Cambridgeshire District Council

National Grid Reference: TL 660549

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 153 **1:10,000:** TL 65 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1955 **Date of Last Revision:** 1971

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 28 ha 70 ac

Other information: This site was formally known as Little Widgham and Out Woods. Little Widgham (under separate ownership) has now been removed from the scheduled site following its conversion to conifer plantation.

Description and Reasons for Notification

These woodlands are of ancient origin and hold plant and animal communities of three main association types, namely wet ash-maple, which is the dominant type, together with hazel-ash and lowland pedunculate oak-hazel types. The woods are situated over chalky Boulder Clay which further influences the components of the associated plant and animal communities. Such woodland types are restricted to the heavy soils of lowland England and have undergone a rapid decline in their extent during the latter half of this Century. The Out and Plunder Woods have remained relatively unmodified since the Middle Ages, and as such stable conditions have endured which allow for the maintenance of rich and diverse plant and animal communities. Of note is the presence of the oxlip *Primula elatior*, a plant which is restricted to ancient Boulder Clay woodlands and occurs mainly in Cambridgeshire and Essex.

The site comprises two main woodland blocks, Out Wood and Sparrows Grove, and Plunder Wood, all of which have been traditionally managed as coppice-with-standards. Dominant tree species are ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and field maple *Acer campestre*, which occur as mature coppice. Oak *Quercus robur* standards are present throughout the wood and oak coppice occurs in Plunder Wood. The 'small coppice' of hazel *Corylus avellana* provides understorey structure together with shrubs such as wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, guelder rose *Viburnum opulus*, dogwood *Swida sanguinea* and spindle *Euonymus europaeus*.

The ground flora is typically of dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and oxlip *Primula elatior*, together with areas dominated by low bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and bluebell, with herb-robert *Geranium robertianum*, sweet violet *Viola odorata* and early dog-violet *V. reichenbachiana*. Other herbs include water avens *Geum rivale*, hairy woodrush *Luzula pilosa*, wood-sedge *Carex sylvatica* and wood speedwell *Veronica montana*. A dry, acid influence occurs where patches of sand and gravel lie near the surface. This is unusual for the county and supports less common flora including a variety of mosses such as *Leucobryum glaucum*, and *Pleuridium subulatum*. The grassy rides provide additional habitat diversity and further enhance the value of this well structured woodland for bird, invertebrate and other animal life.