

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER SITE NAME: BIRCHEND

DISTRICT: MALVERN HILLS SITE REF: 15WNN

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

Local Planning Authority: HEREFORD & WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL, Malvern Hills District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 671444 Area: 3.1 (ha.) 7.6 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 149 1:10,000: SO 64 SE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1989 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Site boundary alteration (extension).
Formerly known as Birchend Wood.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The site lies on a ridge overlooking the River Frome near the village of Castle Frome. The soils are calcareous being derived from the under-lying Psammosteus Limestone. The site has been selected as it supports two types of semi-natural woodland which are nationally scarce as well as an area of calcareous grassland, dominated by upright brome *Bromus erectus*, which is likewise restricted in its national distribution.

The woodland is in two distinct parts. One is an area of ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and field maple *Acer campestre*, coppice with standards, lying on the plateau at the top of the ridge. Other tree species include pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, silver birch *Betula pendula* and alder *Alnus glutinosa*. The shrub layer is dominated by hazel *Corylus avellana* with a number of calcicole species such as dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, red currant *Ribes rubrum*, field maple and guelder-rose *Viburnum opulus*.

The other area of woodland lies on the side of the ridge and is dominated by mature beech *Fagus sylvatica*, with ash and yew *Taxus baccata*. Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, field maple and hazel are present as minor components of the shrub layer.

The ground vegetation throughout the woodland is extremely rich and calcicole in character. In the coppice with standards it includes wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* and primrose *Primula vulgaris*. The beech woodland has a sparser ground flora, but includes species such as common dog-violet *Viola riviniana*, wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides* and sanicle *Sanicula europaea*. Green hellebore *Helleborus viridis*, together with stinking hellebore *H. foetidus*, has been recorded at one of its few stations in Herefordshire.

Seven species of orchid have been recorded including white helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium* and fly orchid *Ophrys insectifera*, both of which are rare in this part of the Welsh Borders.

The adjacent limestone grassland represents the only sizeable area of this type of grassland remaining in Herefordshire. Upright brome is the dominant species associated with many characteristic limestone plants such as common rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, wild thyme *Thymus praecox*, salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, hoary plantain *Plantago media*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum* and yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*. In addition several locally uncommon species are present including dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*

and pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. This wealth and variety of herbs encourages an abundance of insect life. Species present include marbled white butterfly *Melanargia galathea*, five-spot and six-spot burnet moths *Zygaena lonicerae* and *Z. filipendulae* and numerous micro-lepidoptera including one nationally rare species *Eriocrania chrysolepidella* and one uncommon species, *Stigmella aeniofasciella*, which is known from only one other site in Herefordshire.