

COUNTY: KENT

SITE NAME: HOTHFIELD COMMON

BOROUGH: ASHFORD

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

Local Planning Authority: Ashford Borough Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 969458                      Area: 56.4 (ha.) 139.3 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 189                      1:10,000: TQ 94 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951                      Date of Last Revision: 1961

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985                      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This site is managed by the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation by arrangement with Ashford Borough Council. This site is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

Reasons for Notification:

Hothfield Common contains the best example of a valley bog in Kent; the associated heathland, though fragmented, forms a good example of the vegetation type. Both of these habitats are scarce in Kent. The entomology has been well studied and an outstanding assemblage of over 1,000 species of insects has been recorded, including several notable species found nowhere else in Kent. The common also has an interesting breeding bird community.

Acidic bog communities have formed in four small valleys at Hothfield Common where springs emerge at the junction of the sandy Folkestone Beds and the impervious Sandgate Beds. Changes in management since 1940 have resulted in scrub encroachment and the loss of true bog conditions in all except one valley. Elsewhere various types of marshy grassland and fen are now present, although recent management has attempted to reverse the encroachment by scrub in some areas. The areas of true bog are dominated by bog mosses *Sphagnum* species; twelve species have been identified including two for which this is the only locality in Kent. Several species of flowering plant are present which are very scarce in Kent, including bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, marsh St John's wort *Hypericum elodes*, round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*; flea sedge *Carex pulicaris* and cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*. The relict bogs are now dominated rushes *Juncus* species, grasses especially purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, and mosses, and in the northern valley, greater tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata*. Some remnants of the former plant communities remain, including some *Sphagnum* moss, and bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* in the northern valley. Invasion of the bogs by birch and willow has been a serious problem since grazing ceased about 1940, but attempts are now being made to prevent further encroachment.

The majority of the common was formerly a patchwork of heather-dominated heathland and acidic grassland. Invasion by birch and bracken following the cessation of grazing and serious fires have resulted in the loss of most of the grassland, and about half of the heathland. The remnants are of interest, however, since these plant

communities are uncommon in Kent. The heathland is dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris*, with cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and purple moor-grass being generally frequent. Several uncommon plants also occur, including petty whin *Genista anglica*, dwarf gorse *Ulex minor* and heath rush *Juncus squarrosus*, and there is a good lichen flora which includes several *Cladonia* species. The acidic grassland is especially notable for the presence of several 'spring ephemeral' plants, such as whitlow-grass *Erophila verna* and bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*, and eight species of clover have been recorded, including the scarce clustered clover *Trifolium glomeratum*. These are now restricted to small patches of grassland beside the roads, but bracken control is being carried out, with the intention of re-establishing the grassland.

Much of the site now colonised by bracken and woodland. Of the latter, most is fairly recent but the Tolls on the east side of the common were planted with a variety of trees including beech, oak, Scots pine, sweet chestnut and Wellingtonia during the nineteenth century. Silver birch is predominant elsewhere, but some oak, willow and other species also have become established. The woodland supports a good breeding bird community, including woodpeckers, treecreeper and tree pipit. Draining the common on its western side are a series of small streams, and there is also a small pond. All three British species of newt have been recorded in the pond.

The common has outstanding entomological interest. The insects associated with heathland and bog are of special importance in view of the limited amounts of these habitats in Kent. Bugs, moths, Hymenoptera (bees, wasps and ants) and flies are especially well represented, with several species which are nationally rare, including the bee *Lasioglossum semilucens* and two species which have only been recorded in Kent at Hothfield; the bug *Pachybrachius luridus* and the crane fly *Tipula holoptera*. Several other species also have here their only locality in Kent.