

COUNTY: KENT

SITE NAME: HAM STREET WOODS

BOROUGH: ASHFORD

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended. This site is of national importance and part has been designated a National Nature Reserve (NNR) under Section 16 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

Local Planning Authority: Ashford Borough Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 996352                      Area: 172.2 (ha.) 425.5 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 189                      1:10,000: TQ 93 NE, TR 03 NW, SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1989

Other Information:

The boundary of the site has been amended at renotification to include Ham Street Woods National Nature Reserve. A former part of the site (Burnt Oak Wood) is now included in the nearby Orlestone Forest SSSI; several areas have been deleted. Part of the site is listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review'\*

Reasons for Notification:

This site forms a nationally important representative of its main woodland type, and includes a series of broadleaved woodlands to the north east of Ham Street village. It supports outstanding bird and invertebrate communities.

Centuries of traditional management in British woodlands have resulted in semi-natural 'ancient' (more than 400 years old) woodland rich in characteristic plant and animal species. During recent decades modern forestry (especially coniferisation), development and conversion to agriculture have led to the loss of much of this natural diversity, and richly wooded areas such as this part of the Weald are now rare.

This site lies on the edge of a plateau of sands and clays which is cut into by a number of small valleys. The higher parts of the site have acidic soils, supporting woodland mainly dominated by pedunculate and sessile oaks *Quercus robur* and *Q. petraea*, downy and silver birches *Betula pubescens* and *B. pendula* and hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*; other trees include wild cherry *Prunus avium*, wild service *Sorbus torminalis* an aspen *Populus tremula*. The ground vegetation includes bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and in the most acidic areas ling heather *Calluna vulgaris*, gorse *Ulex europaeus* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*.

The soil of the valley-sides is damper and more nutrient-rich, and here the woodland also includes ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, hazel *Corylus avellana*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, midland hawthorn *C. laevigata* and in the wettest areas alder *Alnus glutinosa*. The ground vegetation is often dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and

includes greater butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* and early purple orchid *Orchis mascula*.

Most of the site has been managed in the past as coppice-with-standards and in parts the coppice is still cut regularly on rotation. This allows plants such as bluebell, primrose *Primula vulgaris* and wood anemone to flourish, and plants of open areas such as goldenrod *Solidago virgaurea* and heath cudweed *Gnaphthodium sylvaticum* to colonise.

The complex structure of the woodland provides a wealth of micro-habitats which together support a large number of specialised and often scarce or rare invertebrates. A particularly rich invertebrate fauna is associated with dead and rotting wood and also with wet areas within pools, woodland and shaded streams. Twelve scarce or rare dead-wood species are known to occur, including the nationally rare beetle *Tomoxia biguttata*; species associated with wet areas include a rare fly *Anthomyza bifasciata* which breeds in the seed-heads of lesser reed-mace *Typha angustifolia* in forest ponds, as well as two scarce dragonflies, and scarce species of fly, waterbeetle and lacewing.

Recently-coppiced open areas and rides support a number of scarce species, in particular those associated with aspen.

The site supports many breeding bird species characteristic of woodland. These include common species such as treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*, spotted flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* and redpoll *Carduelis flammea* as well as less-common ones such as nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* and sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*.

\* 'A Nature Conservation Review' Edited by D A Ratcliffe, 1977 Cambridge.