COUNTY: OXFORDSHIRE **SITE NAME:** BEAR, OVEYS AND GREAT BOTTOM WOODS

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

Local Planning Authorities: South Oxfordshire District Council, Oxfordshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU693840, SU703830

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 175 **1:10,000:** SU78 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1955 **Date of Last Revision:** 1977

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 58.6 ha 144.8 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

This site incorporates two blocks of beech woodland containing a range of stand types, some of which are nationally uncommon. The diverse ground flora of this site contains over 40 species normally associated with ancient woodland in southern Britain, including one species afforded special protection under Schedule 8 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act.

These woods lie on a series of dry valleys which cut through the Upper Chalk. A variety of soil types exist on the site, ranging from acid clay with flints, to moist calcareous loams with or without pebbles. These soils fall within the Hornbeam 1 series. Some parts of Oveys and Great Bottom Woods have well drained, fine flinty soils of the Charity 2 series. The soil depth varies from very shallow on the steeper slopes to deep horizons in the valley bottoms. Some chalk is exposed in the northern and eastern sides of Bear Wood.

The woodland is predominantly beech high forest intermixed with pedunculate oak, ash, silver birch, wych elm, field maple and wild cherry. The stand types vary with soil type and depth and include acid pedunculate oak-beech, calcareous pedunculate oak-ash-beech-maple variant, and dry ash-maple. Small areas of plantation occur in the southern and northern parts of the site with ash, beech and larch used in the crop. One small block of ash with hazel coppice is present in the southern part.

The flora of the shrub and ground layers varies with soil type and gradient. Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, elder *Sambucus nigra* and rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* occur over much of the site, while spurge laurel *Daphne laureola*, an uncommon species associated with ancient woodland, also occurs in the shrub layer in parts of the site. The ground flora contains bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* over much of the site. Less common elements of the ground flora, which are usually associated with ancient woodland, include broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*, southern wood-rush *Luzula forsteri*, yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, woodruff *Galium odoratum* and goldilocks' buttercup *Ranunculus auricomus* and the moss *Leucobryum glaucum*. The varied fungal flora includes the club fungus *Ramaria stricta* and the ink-cap *Coprinus picaceus*; both are usually associated with beech woodland in southern England.