

File ref:

County: Devon **Site Name:** Great Haldon Heaths

District: Teignbridge

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

Local Planning Authority: Devon County Council, Teignbridge District Council

National Grid Reference: SX 900785, SX 907787, SX 907784 **Area:** 53.2 (ha)
131.5 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 192 **1:10,000:** SX 87 NE, SX 97 NW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1988 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site comprises three fragments of a type of lowland heath found only in south-west England, where it was once widespread but is now very restricted in distribution. A diverse heathland bird community is present and some uncommon insects have been recorded.

The site is located at the southern end of the Great Haldon hills and lies within an altitude range of 180 to 230 m. The hills have an Upper Greensand base which is overlain by Tertiary-age deposits consisting of clay and flinty gravels. The soils are generally acidic with a locally humose surface horizon and, being slowly permeable, are subject to slight seasonal waterlogging in places. One part of the site is directly affected by groundwater seepage.

The major part of the dry heathland is dominated by a mosaic of heather *Calluna vulgaris* and western gorse *Ulex gallii* with varying proportions of bell heather *Erica cinerea* and cross-leaved heath *E. tetralix*. The lichen *Cladonia impexa*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and bristle bent *Agrostis curtisii* are frequent throughout, the latter species being characteristic of heaths in south-west England. Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* occur as occasionals.

In the wetter parts, particularly where affected by groundwater, purple moor-grass and cross-leaved heath become more abundant. The boggy areas support rich wetland plant communities with bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp. forming carpets within which grow jointed rush *Juncus articulatus*, soft rush *J. effusus*, bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, white beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* and pale butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica*, the latter having a marked south-westerly distribution in England. Pools have formed in places and these support bog pondweed *Potamogeton polygonifolius*. Scattered scrub in these wetter areas consists mainly of willow *Salix* spp.

The nationally scarce bog bush-cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* and silver-studded blue butterfly *Plebejus argus* are present. Characteristic breeding birds include nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and stonechat *Saxicola torquata* and the site is also a well-known feeding and roosting station for birds of prey, notably hobby *Falco subbuteo* and hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*.

