COUNTY: HAMPSHIRE SITE NAME: MARTIN AND TIDPIT DOWNS

Local Planning Authorities: HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, New Forest District Council

National Grid Reference: SU 053187

Ordnance Survey Sheets: 1:50,000: 184 1:25,000: SU 01, SU 02

Hectares/Acres: 379.48/937.69

Date Notified (1949 Act): 1971 Date of Last Revision: 1979

Date Notified (1981 Act): 24.2.1987 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:
300ha of the Site of Special Scientific Interest are included within Martin Down National Nature Reserve. Part of Tidpit Down is subject to an Access Agreement between the owner, tenant, and Hampshire County Council. Much of the site is common land with registered sheep grazing rights.

Reasons for Notification:
Martin and Tidpit Downs form an extensive tract of chalk downland, chalk heath and scrub at the extreme east of the Dorset Downs on the Hampshire-Wiltshire border. They include a gently undulating plain rising to a high east-west ridge, the crest of which is marked by the Bokerley Ditch, a massive linear prehistoric earthwork. The whole area is rich in archaeological features of Bronze Age and subsequent dates, and these, together with the varied topography, soils, and differences in past management, contribute to great habitat variation.

The chalk flora is exceptionally rich and includes species with both distinctly south-west and eastern distributions. Of particular note are the large populations of bastard toadflax *Thesium humifusum*, field fleawort *Senecio integrifolius*, early gentian *Gentianella anglica*, saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* and lesser centaury *Centaurium pulchellum*, and the presence of at least eight local orchid species, including burnt-tip *Orchis ustulata*, green-winged *Orchis morio*, fly *Ophrys insectifera* and frog *Coeloglossum viride*. The downland is especially interesting in that it comprises grassland of varying ages, ranging from ancient herb-rich swards carpeting the Bronze Age earthworks and Bokerley Ditch, through herb-rich grassland last ploughed 400 years ago, to areas of comparatively recent turf ploughed in the 1940's and now reverting. The thorough documentation of the site provides a first-class opportunity for studying the influence of historical factors on the present day vegetation. Sheep grazing is currently increasing the botanical quality of the turf following a period of undergrazing in the 1960's and 1970's.

The presence of superficial Eocene residues in certain areas has provided less alkaline conditions which permit the development of ling *Calluna vulgaris* and gorse *Ulex europaeus*. The heath contains calcifuges such as bell heather *Erica cinerea*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, dwarf gorse *Ulex minor*, common bent *Agrostis tenuis*, the mosses *Polystrichum* species and *Dicranum scorparium* and *Cladonia* lichens, together with many of the constant chalk grassland species. These associations, with their exceptional mixture of calcifuge and calcicole species, are regarded as the best of their type in England. The presence of dwarf sedge *Carex humilis* in a chalk heath community is not known in any other site.

A wide range of more advanced seral stages is represented, from mixed scrub of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, rose *Rosa* species, etc., to locally yew *Taxus baccata* or oak *Quercus robur* wood. On the more acid

sites gorse *Ulex* species is an important scrub element. Well-established woodland occurs only in the extreme north of the site, at Kitt's Grave, where there is an intimate mosaic of woodland, well developed scrub and open grassy habitats. A degree of woodland continuity is suggested by evidence of past management as part wood-pasture and part hazel *Corylus avellana* coppice, together with a rich woodland ground flora containing such indicator species as early purple orchid *Orchis mascula*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and butcher's broom *Ruscus aculeatus*. Epiphytic growth, especially of lichens is unusually luxuriant for this area.

The scrub provides cover and feeding areas for the nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, lesser whitethroat *Silvia curruca* and tree pipit *Anthus trivialis*, as well as the more common species such as willow warbler *Phylloscopus trochilis*, linnet *Acanthis cannabina* and yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*. The open grassland is used for feeding by several birds of prey including barn owl *Tyto alba*, hobby *Falco subbuteo*, buzzard *Buteo buteo*, hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*, kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* and short-eared owl *Asio flammeus*. Montagu's harrier *Circus pygargus* has successfully bred in recent years. Martin Down is regarded as of regional importance as a regular breeding site for the secretive quail *Coturnix coturnix*.

The rich invertebrate fauna includes an outstanding assemblage of butterflies, with 36 species regularly recorded. Particularly notable are the large populations of marbled white *Melanargia galathea*, small blue *Cupido minimus* and dark-green fritillary *Mesoacidalia aglaja*, whilst there are also colonies of chalkhill blue *Lysandra coridon*, adonis blue *Lysandra bellargus*, silver-spotted skipper *Hesperia comma*, marsh fritillary *Euphydryas aurina* and Duke of Burgundy *Hamearis lucina*.