

COUNTY: KENT      SITE NAME: CHARING BEECH HANGERS

BOROUGH: ASHFORD

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

Local Planning Authority: Ashford Borough Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 979484      Area: 53.1 (ha.) 131.2 (ac.)

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

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1968      Date of Last Revision: 1981

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

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

This site is representative of woodland on Middle and Upper Chalk. Much of the site lies on a steep, south-west facing escarpment which is chiefly dominated by mature pedunculate oak-ash beechwood, although hazel coppice is also abundant. The diverse ground flora is characteristic of the thin chalk soils and includes a number of scarce species. Invertebrates recorded include the rare slug *Limax tenellus* and the square spot moth *Ectropis consonaria*.

Beech woodland is best represented at the south-eastern end of the escarpment, especially on the upper slopes where beech occurs in association with oak, ash and sycamore. There is prolific sycamore regeneration, and the dense shade results in an impoverished ground flora of bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and bramble. On the lower slopes beech is less abundant, and there is a more varied understorey which includes yew, field maple, wayfaring tree, wild privet and elder. The sparse ground flora is chiefly dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* with false brome grass *Brachypodium sylvaticum*, bramble and ivy *Hedera helix* occurring frequently. Spurge laurel *Daphne laureola* and nettle-leaved bellflower *Campanula trachelium* are also present. Several scarce plants indicative of long-established woodland occur, including yellow bird's nest *Monotropa hypopitys*, tall broomrape *Orobanche elatior* and the orchids white helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*, violet helleborine *Epipactis purpurata*, fly orchid *Ophrys insectifera* and bird's nest orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*. Broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* is found in scattered grassy clearings with fairy flax *Linum catharticum* and common rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*.

Woodland dominated by beech, hazel, ash and sycamore, has become established in disused chalk pits at the top of the slope. The understorey layer is similar to that on the lower slopes but also includes hazel, ash, whitebeam and dogwood coppice.

The north-western half of the escarpment is dominated by hazel coppice with some ash under a few large standards of beech and ash. The ground flora is diverse and the species composition resembles that on the lower slopes to the south-east. This woodland type merges with sweet chestnut and hornbeam coppice under pedunculate oak standards on the

upper slopes. The sweet chestnut has been cut recently but the hornbeam is more mature.

Invertebrates recorded from the site include the rare slug *Limax tenellus* and several scarce moths, including *Xestia rhomboidea*, *Depressaria douglasella*, *Ectropis consonaria*, *Pandemis cinnamomeana*, *Anania stachydalis* and *Ptycholomoides aeriferanus*.