COUNTY: SURREY

SITE NAME: WHITMOOR COMMON

DISTRICT: GUILDFORD, WOKING

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

Local Planning Authority: GUILDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL, WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Ref: SU 985 535

Area: 164.1 ha, 405.3 acres

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 186

1:10,000: SU 95 SE

Date notified (under 1949 Act): 1955

Date of last revision: 1975

Date notified (under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of last revision: 1993

Other Information: This site forms part of Thames Basin Heaths proposed Special Protection Area for Birds (pSPA), proposed for designation under the European Commission Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds (the Birds Directive). It is managed as a public open space by Surrey County Council.

Reasons for Notification

Whitmoor Common is an extensive area of London Basin heathland characteristic of the soils of the Bagshot and Bracklesham Beds. The site contains a range of heathland habitats, as well as areas of woodland, grassland, and both standing and running water. A mosaic of wet heath and acidic grassland dominates the open areas. There is also an extensive area of dry heath as well as smaller stands of bracken and neutral grassland. Approximately half the site is covered with woodland, which varies in its age and composition. This site is the location of a rare spider, a scarce beetle, and two plants which occur only rarely in Surrey. It supports many characteristic heathland birds, including a strong breeding population of nightjar Caprimulgus europaeus, a bird listed on Annexe 1 of the Birds Directive.

Heathland

The drier areas of heath in the south and east are dominated by heather Calluna vulgaris, with bell heather Erica cinerea, dwarf gorse Ulex minor, wavy hair-grass Deschampsia flexuosa and common bent grass Agrostis tenuis. To the north west, impeded drainage has given rise to wet heath and acidic grassland communities consisting of heather, cross-leaved heath Erica tetralix, purple moor-grass Molinia caerulea, tufted hair-grass Deschampsia cespitosa and the moss Polytrichum commune. Boggy depressions which occur within the area of wet heath are dominated by Sphagnum moss. Several characteristic plants occur in the areas of wet heath. These include bog asphodel Narthecium ossifragum, bog pimpernel Anagallis tenella, round-leaved sundew Drosera rotundifolia, white beak-sedge Rhynchospora alba, and marsh club-moss Lycopodiella inundata. The marsh gentian Gentiana pneumonanthe, which has only one other location in Surrey, is also found in association with the wet heath community. In addition the areas of wet heath support several bryophytes (liverworts and mosses), amongst them Calliergon cordifolium, Campylopus brevifilis, Riccia fluitans, Gladopodiella francisci and Hypnum imponens. Scattered throughout the heathland is a scrub of gorse Ulex europaeus, broom Sarothamnus scoparius and birch Betula spp. A nationally scarce spider, Oxyopes heterophthalmus and a nationally scarce beetle Hyperaspis pseudopustulata also occur in the heathland areas.
Grassland

An area of short, dry grassland in the northern part of the Common supports a number of interesting and localised plants, including sheep’s-bit *Jasione montana*, sand spurrey *Spergularia rubra*, little mouse-ear *Cerastium semidecandrum*, early hair-grass *Aira praecox* and silvery hair-grass *A. caryophyllea*.

Woodland

Birch and pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* form the major woodlands, and there are also several stand of mature Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*. The majority of the woodland is of recent origin, and has colonised areas which were formerly open heath. On poorly drained areas downy birch *B. pubescens*, tends to be dominant, whilst on drier ground silver birch, *B. pendula* predominates. The more establish woodlands are dominated by pedunculate oak which occurs together with both species of birch, hazel *Corylus avellana*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and Scots pine. In the extreme west of the site there is a swamp of mature alder *Alnus glutinosa* and crack willow *Salix fragilis*, whilst grey willow *Salix cinerea* occurs in wet areas around the ponds and stream.

Water

The water areas at Whitmoor Common, totalling 3.6 hectares, include two ponds and several streams. Many unusual species have been recorded at Brittons pond (SU 990 531) including orange foxtail *Alopecurus aequalis*, many stalked spike rush *Eleocharis multicaulis*, bog stitchwort, *Stellaria alsine*, tubular water dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa* and horned pondweed *Zannichellia palustris*. Although the populations of these plants have declined as a result of clearance of reedmace *Typha latifolia* in 1971, recovery is highly likely given suitable management. The other pond (SU 983 539) is dominated by a tall fen vegetation of rushes *Juncus* spp., reedmace and sallow scrub. The streams contain pond water-crowfoot *Ranunculus peltatus* and contribute to the wetland communities at times of flooding.

Birds

The diverse habitats within the site, particularly the open heath and scrub, provide ideal breeding areas for characteristic heathland bird species. Among these are nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, woodlark *Lullula arborea* and stonechat *Saxicola torquata*.

Whitemoor Common forms part of Thames Basin Heaths pSPA, which consists of a group of heathlands extending from Wisley in Surrey to Tadley in Hampshire and Bracknell in Berkshire, supporting nationally important populations of a number of bird species. These include nightjar and woodlark, both listed on Annexe 1 of the Birds Directive as being rare and in need of protection. Thames Basin Heaths pSPA, taken as a whole, supports an estimated 9.2 and 29.4% respectively of the British breeding populations of nightjar and woodlark.