

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: FOXLEY WOOD

DISTRICT: Breckland

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

Local Planning Authority: Breckland District Council

National Grid Reference: TG 056227 Area: 122.7 (ha) 303.2 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 133 1:10,000: TG 02 SW, TG 02 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954 Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 Date of Last Revision: N/A

Other Information:

The site is listed in the Nature Conservation Review.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Foxley Wood forms the largest area of ancient woodland now remaining in Norfolk. It is situated in the centre of the county on a plateau of calcareous boulder clay which is overlain within parts of the wood by acid sandy tills. The consequent variation in soil type and drainage has resulted in the development of an unusually wide range of woodland stand types, including several which are nationally rare. The wood is also exceptionally rich in plant species, with over 250 different species recorded, and there is in addition considerable entomological interest. Coppicing has continued until recently in parts of the wood, although part has been replanted with conifers.

Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* standards occur throughout much of the wood in association with two of the three major woodland stand-types. On acid sands lowland Hazel-Pedunculate Oakwood is present, and occurs towards the centre of the wood as oak high forest stands with Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* and Holly *Ilex aquifolium*. The associated ground flora is characteristically calcifuge in nature with Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* dominant, and other species including Purple Moor Grass *Molinia caerulea*, Trailing St John's Wort *Hypericum humifusum* and the uncommon Hairy Woodrush *Luzula pilosa*.

On the clays, acid Pedunculate Oak-Hazel-Ash woodland is present, being replaced by wet Ash-Maple stands on heavier calcareous clays to the west. Hazel *Corylus avellana* and Field Maple *Acer campestre* coppice occur either under Oak and Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* standards with Birch, or as mixed coppice with Ash and a variety of shrubs. Several uncommon tree and shrub species are present, most notably Wild Service Tree *Sorbus torminalis*, Small-leaved Lime *Tilia cordata* and Midland Hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata*. Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scriptus* dominate the ground flora in these areas, and a number of local plant species are present including Herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia*, Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*, Greater Butterfly Orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*, Orpine *Sedum telephium*, Lily-of-the-Valley *Convallaria majalis* and Thin-spiked Wood Sedge *Carex strigosa*. In wet areas Wood Small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos* and Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* are common.

Where the soils are waterlogged Alder *Alnus glutinosa* is present. This forms both scattered stands of plateau Alderwood, a nationally rare woodland type, and an area of base-poor springline Alderwood along a stream arising within the wood. This latter feature appears to be unique within ancient enclosures. The ground flora of these areas is of a fen woodland type, and includes Long-stalked Yellow Sedge *Carex lepidocarpa* and Bladder Sedge *Carex vesicaria*.

There is a well-developed system of wide, regularly mown rides through the wood, mostly with a damp grassland vegetation including an abundance of Water Avens *Geum rivale* and Tufted Hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*. Bracken glades and marshy areas also occur within the wood, and are an important element in structural diversity.

The invertebrate fauna of the site is diverse with several uncommon butterflies, most notably Purple Emperor *Apatura iris* and White Admiral *Ladoga camilla*.