

File ref:

County: Hampshire **Site Name:** Catherington Down SSSI

Local Planning Authority: Hampshire County Council, East Hampshire District Council

National Grid Reference: SU 692143 **Area:** 12.12 (ha) 29.34 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 197 **1:25,000:** SU 61

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

Local Nature Reserve Declared: 1979. This site of Special Scientific Interest is a Local Nature Reserve owned by Hampshire County Council and managed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Naturalists' Trust.

Reasons for Notification:

Catherington Down is an area of chalk grassland and narrow fringing woodland belts on predominantly west-facing downland slopes near the southern extent of the main Upper Chalk outcrop in Hampshire. The site lies mostly between the 80 m and 115 m contours and there are locally very steep slopes as the site includes a series of fine lynchet banks of medieval origin. About one-third of the area has rather less steep slopes, deeper soils and a turf dominated by coarse grasses. Development of scrub and incipient woodland is more apparent here. A belt of oak *Quercus robur* woodland forms the lower, woodland boundary, whilst part of the high, eastern edge is covered by a strip of oak standards over old hazel *Corylus avellana*. This latter woodland is separately fenced and has a typical spring woodland flora which includes, locally associated with hazel, toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*.

The main part of Catherington Down has short downland turf with a good range of chalk herbs, including large populations of several species of limited distribution such as pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, autumn lady's tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* and, most notably, round-headed rampion *Phyteuma tenerum*. Invasion of scrub is not a major problem and the turf is kept short by grazing. Blocks of scrub on the lower slopes and deeper soil areas form a contrasting habitat of value to small birds and provide shelter for a good range of common butterfly species.

The site is representative of a rare and rich habitat now confined to a relatively small number of localities in Hampshire.