

COUNTY: DORSET                      SITE NAME: LYSCOMBE AND HIGHDON

DISTRICT: WEST DORSET

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

Local Planning Authority: WEST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: ST 745015                      Area: 81.0 (ha.) 200.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 194                      1:10,000: ST 70 SW, SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1977                      Date of Last Revision: –

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

Other Information:

Site boundary amended through extension and deletion.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Situated between the River Piddle and the Devils Brook, the chalk slopes which form this site have the complete range of aspects and support an important example of the rich and attractive chalk flora of central Dorset.

Large areas are generally close-grazed and support swards which are botanically varied containing several grasses, notably Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina* with Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Meadow Oat *Avenula pratensis*, Tall Fescue *Festuca arundinacea*, Quaking Grass *Briza media* and Crested Hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha*. Heath Grass *Danthonia decumbens*, only found locally on downland, is also present. The sedges *Carex flacca* and *C. caryophylla*, Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, Hoary Plantain *Plantago media* and Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium* are all frequent components of the turf and Cowslip *Primula veris* and Devil's-bit *Succisa pratensis* are locally very abundant. The local Woolly Thistle *Cirsium eriophorum* is present and Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*, which is most often encountered on the north east Dorset chalk, also occurs.

The diversity of this site is increased by the presence of scrub and woodland. The scrub is typically varied and contains Gorse *Ulex europaeus*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Privet *Ligustrum vulgare* and an unusual amount of Holly *Ilex aquifolium*. The woodland is mostly Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* with Hazel *Corylus avellana* and small amounts of Oak *Quercus robur* and Field Maple *Acer campestre*. It has a varied ground flora including Wild Garlic *Allium ursinum*, Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*, Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*, Enchanter's Nightshade *Circaea lutetiana* and Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*. A notable feature of one of the woods is the occurrence of the uncommon Meadow Saffron *Colchicum*

*autumnale* and the very local lichen, *Stenocybe septata* occurs on old Holly *Ilex aquifolium*.

There is an abundant and varied fauna. The typical butterflies of chalk downland are especially frequent including good numbers of the local Chalkhill Blue *Lysandra corridon*. A rare spider, *Pseudomaro aenigmatia*, has also been recorded.