

File ref:

County: Hampshire **Site Name:** Pamber Forest and Silchester Common SSSI

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

Local Planning Authority: Hampshire County Council, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SU 615608, SU 605623

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 175 **1:10,000:** SU 65 NW, SU 66 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951 **Date of Last Revision:** 22.10.93 (notified)

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 29.7.86 **Date of Last Revision:** 17.6.94 (confirmed)

Area: 340.48 (ha)

Other Information:

Pamber Forest (185.4 ha) is managed as a Local Nature Reserve. Silchester Common is registered and Tadley Common was designated a Countryside Heritage Site by Hampshire County Council in 1987. The site includes land which has been proposed for designation as a Special Protection area under the EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The site consists of an extensive ancient oakwood, Pamber Forest; two heathland Commons and a series of unimproved wet meadows. This association of ancient woodland, heath and grassland supports a diverse range of plants and animals, including many nationally rare species of bird listed in Annex 1 of the EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds.

Pamber Forest is dominated by sessile oak *Quercus patrea* with an understorey characterised by hazel *Corylus avellana* and has been traditionally managed as coppice with standards. The ground flora is dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* with bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and heather *Calluna vulgaris* locally frequent on the poor, acidic soils. The richer soils of the valleys in the south of the Forest support many plant species normally associated with ancient woodland. These include orpine *Sedum telephium*, wood horsetail *Equisetum sylvaticum*, lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*, wild daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, and the rare mountain fern *Oreopteris limbosperma*.

In the north of the site, woodland grades into the heathland of Silchester Common, which together with Tadley Common, represents the largest remnants of the once extensive north Hampshire heathland to the west of the River Loddon. These two Commons provide the best remaining example of the full transition from dry to wet heathland communities in north-west Hampshire and west Berkshire. The dry heathland is dominated by heather and dwarf gorse *Ulex minor* and has an associated rich flora including bristle bent-grass *Agrostis curtisii*, close to the edge of its range in Britain, petty whin *Genista anglica*, bell heather *Erica cinerea*, and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*. These dry communities grade into wet heath dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and supporting characteristic species such as cross-leaved heath, bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium* and bog spike-rush *Eleocharis multicaulis*.

The west side of Pamber forest is bounded by a series of unimproved neutral to acid, wet unimproved meadows. These meadows have an outstandingly rich flora containing many species now only found in unimproved ancient meadows, including southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, green-winged orchid *Orchis morio*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella* and meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*. The position of these meadows increases the value of the whole site by providing a diverse interface with the woodland.

The range of vegetation structure and habitats on this site supports a correspondingly rich and diverse invertebrate fauna. The woodland is particularly rich with over 40 species of nationally rare* or nationally scarce species including the light crimson underwing moth *Catacola promissa*, the deadwood beetles *Colydium elongatum* and *Grammoptera ustulata*, and the hoverfly *Cheilosia chrysocoma*. The heathland likewise supports a characteristic fauna including the silver-studded blue *Plebejus argus* and grayling *Hipparchia semele* butterflies, both of which are declining nationally.

The mosaic of open heath and gorse scrub provides ideal habitat for many heathland birds. These include stonechat *Saxicola torquata* together with three particularly vulnerable species of bird listed in Annex 1 of the EC Directive on the Conservation of Birds: woodlark *Lullula arborea*, nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata* which is here at the north-western limit of its range in Britain.

* Nationally rare species are equivalent to those listed in the British Red Data Book which includes those considered endangered, vulnerable or rare.