

COUNTY: GLOUCESTERSHIRE

SITE NAME: SPEECH HOUSE OAKS

DISTRICT: FOREST OF DEAN

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

local Planning Authority: GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Forest of Dean District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 622123

Area: 16.26 (ha.) 40.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 162

1:10,000: SO 61 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1972

Date of Last Revision: 1974

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1983

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Within the Forest of Dean Forest Park.

Reasons for Notification:

The extensive woodland of Forest of Dean has been managed for timber production for many centuries with planting and careful management maintaining a mosaic of woodland types. The central region lies on the Coal Measures and supports oak woodland with a fairly restricted calcifuge ground flora. Surrounding this acid area are the limestone and Old Red Sandstone rocks which give rise to more fertile soils with a variety of woodland types over a richer ground flora.

This linear stretch of open oak woodland in the centre of the Forest of Dean is the richest known site for epiphytic flora in the area and contains a number of uncommon lichens and bryophytes.

The very ancient oaks *Quercus* spp. and hollies *Ilex aquifolium* along the Speech House Road occur over poorly drained acid loams. The ground flora is dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and common bent *Agrostis tenuis* and is typical of the grazed oakwoods of the Forest. The low level of atmospheric pollution and great age of individual trees have enabled a diverse epiphytic flora to develop, with 53 lichens and 15 epiphytic bryophyte species recorded. Of particular interest are the *Usnea* and *Parmelia* species, especially *P. caperata*, which are more luxuriant here than in many English woodlands. Uncommon, relict lichens found at this site include *Pertusaria hemisphaerica*, *P. flavida*, *Thelotrema lepadinum*, *Haematomma elatinum* and *Normandina pulchella*.

The old trees are also favoured by hole-nesting birds such as the redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*.