COUNTY: OXFORDSHIRE SITE NAME: SARSGROVE WOOD

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

1981

Local Planning Authorities: West Oxfordshire District Council, Oxfordshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SP305243

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 164 1:10,000: SP22 SE & SP32 SW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 Date of Last Revision:

Area: 41.5 ha 102.54 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

An outstandingly varied and largely ancient wood occupying the north and south-facing flanks of a small valley on the eastern edge of the Cotswolds where few such sites remain. The geology is complex with clays, siltstones, limestone and grit providing a wide range of soil conditions. These are reflected in the variety of different types of woodland vegetation and the long list of plants indicating both historical continuity and sympathetic management.

A stream with tributary runnels flows along the length of the site. On its narrow alluvial plain, base-rich alder woodland occurs where alternate-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium alternifolium* is known in its only Oxfordshire locality. Poorly drained soils on the valley sides are dominated by stands of ash-wych elm and wet ash-maple in association with pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, nettle-leaved bellflower *Campanula trachelium* and herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia*, scaly male-fern *Dryopteris affinis* and autumn crocus *Colchicum autumnale*. More freely-drained areas support stands of ash-maple and acid oak-ash-hazel, much of which has been managed as coppice-with-standards. Here the ground flora includes spectacular displays of early purple orchid *Orchis mascula*, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, bluebell *Hyacynthoides non-scripta*, early dog and sweet violets *Viola reichenbachiana* and *V. odorata*, and the uncommon narrow-leaved everlasting pea *Lathyrus sylvestris*. The woodland structure is diverse due to regular management and provides habitats for a wide variety of mammal, bird and invertebrate species. In addition there is a system of rides, stone walls and old lake beds.