COUNTY: BERKSHIRE **SITE NAME:** BISHAM WOODS

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

Local Planning Authorities: Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, Berkshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU856850

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 175 **1:10,000:** SU88 NE, SU88 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1970 **Date of Last Revision:** 1975

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

Area: 83.67 206.75 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

An extensive area of predominantly broad leaved woodland situated on a steep north-west facing slope overlooking the River Thames at Marlow. Most of the site lies on the thin, freely-drained soils of the chalk escarpment, which is dissected in places by dry valleys with sunken tracks, but the upper part of the wood is situated partly on wet clay soils of the Reading Beds and partly on base-poor glacial sands and gravels.

Most of the woodland consists of beech high forest and, as such, represents a southern outlier of the Chiltern beechwoods. It is remarkable both for the diversity of its ground flora and the range of woodland types represented. Beech occurs with ash, cherry, wych elm, whitebeam, field maple, yew, holly and sycamore on the chalk slope and with oak, ash wych elm, birch, sweet chestnut and cherry on the more acid soils of the plateau. Shrubs include wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana*, guelder-rose *V. opulus*, elder *Sambucus nigra*, old man's beard *Clematis vitalba*, redcurrant *Ribes sylvestre* and field rose *Rosa arvensis*. The wood has been modified in parts by the planting of conifers (especially larch) and other exotics and invasion by sycamore, which is locally dominant, but many interesting variations in structure and species composition occur. Examples include small patches of hazel coppice, alder woodland with sallow *Salix caprea* along the watercourse at the foot of the slope, some hornbeam on wood banks and occasional wild service trees *Sorbus torminalis*.

The ground flora is one of the richest recorded from any Berkshire woodland site, although dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and ivy *Hedera helix* are dominant over much of the escarpment and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* dominates much of the plateau with bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* on dry sandy areas. Species of interest include yellow bird's nest *Monotropa hypopitys* and bird's nest orchid *Neottia nidus-avis* in leaf litter under beech, thin-spiked sedge *Carex strigosa* on the wetter clay soils, wood barley *Hordelymus europaeus*, tutsan *Hypericum androsaemum*, nettle leaved bellflower *Campanula trachelium*, wood goldilocks *Ranunculus auricomus* and four species of helleborine orchids *Epipactis* spp.

The site supports an interesting mollusc fauna including some species characteristic of ancient woodland conditions and chalky soils. Snails recorded include *Helicigona lapicida, Pomatias elegans, Cochlodina laminata, Lauria cylindracea, Acanthinula aculeata, Ena obscura* and *Abida secale*.