

COUNTY: BERKSHIRE

SITE NAME: IRISH HILL COPSE

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

Local Planning Authorities: Newbury District Council, Berkshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU405670

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 174 **1:10,000:** SU46 NW

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

Area: 16.00 ha 39.52 ac

Other information: Within North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Description and Reasons for Notification

An ancient coppiced woodland occupying the top and slopes of a hill on Tertiary deposits overlying the Upper chalk. The plant communities reflect the geology and soil conditions from acid soils on the gravel cap to base-rich soils on the chalky lower slopes.

The woodland stand types include an extensive area of calcareous ash/wych elm coppice on the hill sides, merging into wet ash/maple and acid oak/ash/hazel woodland with aspen, on the higher parts of the site. Many of the ash and wych elm coppice stools are large, indicating long continuity of coppice management until recent times.

The ground flora is very rich. The lower slopes, under wych elm, tend to be dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, with abundant herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*, toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*, Solomon's seal *Polygonatum multiflorum*, twayblade and early purple orchids *Listera ovata* and *Orchis mascula* and, locally, wild daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*. Many other spring flowering plants occur on the more acid soils, including wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, woodruff *Galium odoratum*, wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* in great profusion.