

COUNTY: KENT            SITE NAME: COBHAM WOODS

BOROUGH: GRAVESHAM/ROCHESTER UPON MEDWAY

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

Local Planning Authority: GRAVESHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL, Rochester upon Medway City Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 699686    Area: 235.2 (ha.) 581.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 178    1:10,000: TQ 66 NE, TQ 76 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1968    Date of Last Revision: 1981

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

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

This woodland and old parkland is representative of woods in North Kent which occur in part on acidic Thanet Sands and in part on chalk soils. One nationally rare plant species occurs in the arable land close to the wood. An outstanding assemblage of plants is present at this site which is also of importance for its breeding birds.

The flora of the woods reflects the range of soil types. The woodland itself, however, is largely sweet chestnut coppice with some coniferous plantations, while the parkland is now mature woodland, with some clearings, of oak, sweet chestnut, beech, hornbeam, and other species.

The variation of soil types is shown by the distribution of the shrubs and plants of the woodland floor which have fairly distinct preferences. Thus there is a gradation from bracken and brambles in the more acidic areas through to bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and eventually dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* in the most calcareous areas. This same pattern is found with the less common plants, for example wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides* and lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis* are found mainly on Thanet Sands, with sanicle *Sanicula europaea* and enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana* on the Chalk.

In the past this area was well-known for the large number of beetles and bugs it supported, however, although suitable conditions still prevail, there is little recent information on these groups. The breeding birds are better known and the woods hold a good variety of typical woodland species including three species of woodpecker, nuthatch, treecreeper, hawfinch, and marsh tit. Some of these species occur at relatively high densities.

Also included in the site is an area of arable land which is notable for the number of uncommon annual plant species which occur, especially along the field edges. The very rare and specially protected rough marsh-mallow *Althaea hirsuta* is perhaps of greatest interest – it has been known from here since 1792. Also present are such species as ground pine *Ajuga chamaepitys*, Venus's looking-glass *Legousia hybrida*, blue pimpernel *Anagallis foemina*, and white mullein *Verbascum lychnitis*. Another rare plant which grows at the woodland edge in the same area is the meadow clary *Salvia pratensis*.