

File ref:

County: Hampshire **Site Name:** Butter Wood SSSI

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

Local Planning Authority: Hampshire County Council, Hart District Council, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SU 720525 **Area:** 134.96 (ha) 333.49 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 186 **1:10,000:** SU 72

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

Part registered and confirmed as common land.

Reasons for Notification:

Butter Wood comprises a large tract of mainly deciduous woodland straddling the London Clay, Reading Beds and the edge of the Chalk. Its varied geology and chequered management history is reflected in the wide range of stand-types, and diverse structure and ground flora. The greater part of the site was formerly an extensive wood pasture, with many broad rides and glades which persist today. Several ancient, named copses, formerly managed as coppice-with-standards but now neglected, adjoin Butter Wood and are included within the Site of Special Scientific Interest, adding greatly to the range of stand-types represented. Part of the former coppice has been cleared and reforested with conifers, but the broad rides support neutral to acid grassland with abundant water avens *Geum rivale*, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, bugle *Ajuga reptans* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, and thus this area has also been included within the site.

The Site of Special Scientific Interest is known to support a rich Lepidoptera and other invertebrate fauna (for example 25 species of butterfly can be seen annually), associated largely with the presence of glades, rides and ancient trees.

Butter Wood proper is an outstanding example of ancient wood pasture. Though long discontinued, evidence of this traditional management practice is reflected in the open canopy, the presence of scattered old trees, principally oak *Quercus robur* and less commonly beech *Fagus sylvatica*, and the many broad grassy rides and glades. The area consists mainly of oak-hazel woodland in the south, grading to an oak-birch association with scattered holly on the more acidic soils in the north. The ground flora is typically rather species-impooverished, especially on the more base-deficient soils. Characteristic species include tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. The broad, mown, rides provide considerable diversity. Those in the north have an acidic grassland flora, with ling *Calluna vulgaris*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and abundant bryophytes, whilst those on the more neutral soils in the south are comparatively more species-rich with pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*, yellow pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and betony *Stachys officinalis*.

A number of small ponds, though now largely overgrown and silted up, are scattered throughout the wood. These are presumed relics which provided drinking water in the days when cattle grazed the wood. In the extreme north-east

the woodland has an irregular and immature open structure, and has developed from formerly open common land. In places there is a relict purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*-dominated community, kept open by periodic swiping, and containing such typical marsh species as greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, fen bedstraw *Galium uliginosum*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, betony *Stachys officinalis* and rushes *Juncus* species, as well as a number of heathland plants, for example, dwarf gorse *Ulex minor*, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and ling *Calluna vulgaris*.

The adjoining copses provide an interesting comparison with the ancient wood-pasture, illustrating the effects of different woodland management traditions upon structure and ground flora. These enclosures were principally managed in hazel coppice with oak and ash standards, though the later was also frequently coppiced. Field maple *Acer campestre* occurs as both coppice and maiden trees. The coppice rotation has been abandoned for many years, however, and the copses have subsequently become neglected. Despite increased shade, the ground flora has remained species-rich, with abundant dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, and several species indicative of a long continuity of woodland cover, including such uncommon plants as thin-spiked wood-sedge *Carex strigosa* and Solomon's-seal *Polygonatum multiflorum*. The very rare low-growing deciduous shrub mezereon *Daphne mezereum* has been recorded.

The site also includes the west end of Greywell canal tunnel, now entirely silted up and overhung with trees, but developing an interesting flora with abundant thin-spiked wood-sedge *Carex strigosa* and distant-flowered sedge *Carex remota*. Alder *Alnus glutinosa* has its only station in Butter Wood here.