

COUNTY: DORSET      SITE NAME: GIANT HILL

DISTRICT: WEST DORSET

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

Local Planning Authority: WEST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: ST 668022      Area: 103.7 (ha.) 256.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 194      1:10,000: ST 60 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1952      Date of Last Revision: 1977

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

Other Information:

This site lies within the Central Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A small part is National Trust and Registered as Ancient Monument. The site boundary has been amended by extension and deletion.

Reasons for Notification:

Occupying steep slopes on the eastern side of the valley of the River Cerne, the site provides a typical example of Central Dorset Chalk Grasslands. Additionally there are small areas at the tops of the slopes with communities which have developed on the acid capping of Clay with Flints.

The swards are generally close-grazed and dominated by Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina* but an interesting feature is the local abundance of Heath Grass *Danthonia decumbens*, only rarely found in such frequency in downland. The turf is rich in herbs: Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*, Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, Betony *Stachys officinalis*, Devil's-bit *Succisa pratensis*, Clustered Bellflower *Campanula glomerata* and Burnet Saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga* are frequent. Acid communities at the tops of the slopes, dominated by Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, contain Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia*. Scrub largely composed of Common and Western gorses *Ulex europaeus* and *U. gallii*, is confined to the upper slopes but in parts of the site an attractive and valuable feature is the development of Ash *Fraxinus* woodland with Hazel *Corylus avellana* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* scrub.

There are good populations of most of the typical insects of chalk grassland including the local Marsh Fritillary butterfly *Eurodryas aurinia* in one of its few downland sites.