

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: HOD AND HAMBLEDON HILLS

DISTRICT: NORTH DORSET

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

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

National Grid Reference: ST 845125 Area: 103.9 (ha.) 256.7 (ac.)
ST 856107
ST 850115

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 194 1:10,000: ST 81 SW SE

Date Notified (under 1949 Act): 1954 Date of Last Revision: 1977

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

Other Information:

Part owned by the National Trust and part Dorset Trust for Nature Conservation reserve. Within Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Site amended by extension and deletion.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

These two hills rise steeply from the Stour Valley in North Dorset and form prominent landmarks. The fine chalk grassland and scrub communities exhibit very interesting local characteristics and the site is of considerable importance in the study of geographical distribution of plants and animals associated with the chalk.

The earthworks and hill slopes which provide all aspects have turf dominated by Red and Sheep's Fescues *Festuca rubra* and *F. ovina* with Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor* and locally, Upright Brome *Bromus erectus* and Wood False Brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*. On some slopes, mainly with southern aspects Dwarf Sedge *Carex humilis*, a plant of very restricted distribution is frequent and in places dominates the turf. Many characteristic and attractive plants are present including Devil's-bit *Succisa pratensis*, Betony *Stachys officinalis*, Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*, Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*. Several nationally rare plants occur in short turf in certain areas including Field Fleawort *Senecio integrifolius* and Early Gentian *Gentianella anglica*. Within the earthworks, deeper soils give rise to taller vegetation generally dominated by Tall Oat Grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*.

On some slopes, the north side of Hambledon Hill in particular, there is some development of mixed chalk scrub with Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*,

Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* and Wayfaring Tree *Viburnum lantana* progressing to incipient Ash *Fraxinus* woodland. There are also areas of long-established woodland dominated by Ash with Field Maple *Acer campestre*. Smaller amounts of Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and Hazel *Corylus avellana* occur together with stands of Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and Beech *Fagus sylvatica*, the latter also recently planted. The ground flora is typical of calcareous woodland with frequent Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and Stinking Iris *Iris foetidissima*. Locally, as at Hod Wood, Hart's Tongue Fern *Phyllitis scolopendrium* is particularly abundant. There is also a distinctive separate stand of Yew *Taxus baccata*, much of which has relatively recently invaded open grassland. Within the Yew grove shade is intense and there is no ground vegetation. Such pure Yew woodland is very rare in Dorset.

The sites are entomologically famous. Of particular note are the butterflies, especially Adonis Blue *Lysandra bellargus* and Marsh Fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia*, the latter in one of its last surviving chalk colonies.