

COUNTY: KENT            SITE NAME: SWANSCOMBE SKULL SITE

BOROUGH: DARTFORD

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

Local Planning Authority: DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 597743            Area: 3.9 (ha.) 9.6 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 177            1:10,000: TQ 57 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951 (part)    Date of Last Revision: 1981  
1972 (part)

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1988            Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The SSSI boundary is coincident with two Geological Conservation Review sites, and part of the site is a National Nature Reserve.

Reasons for Notification:

Barnfield Pit, Swanscombe, the only site in the UK to yield unquestionable Lower Palaeolithic human remains, is probably the most famous and arguably the most important site in the British Pleistocene. In addition to its palaeoanthropological interest the site is of great importance for stratigraphy, palaeontology and Palaeolithic archaeology. For example, it is the only site in Britain which shows evidence of a Clactonian culture stratigraphically below an Acheulian culture and it therefore provides the basis for Lower Palaeolithic chronology in this country. The palaeontological record (molluscs, mammals and, somewhat controversially, pollen) provides evidence of climatic change, with at least one major interglacial represented. Within the sequence a major hiatus is recognised; the upper part of the beds below this level show the development of a fossil soil, which represents a further important aspect of the stratigraphic evidence at Swanscombe.

The site contains one of the richest Pleistocene vertebrate localities in Britain, and by far the richest locality attributable to the Hoxnian Interglacial. The extreme rarity of faunas of equivalent (Holsteinian) age from Continental Europe makes Swanscombe a site of considerable importance, quite apart from the world-famous human skull. The faunas include 26 mammalian taxa (eg man, macaque, lion, straight-tusked elephant, 2 extinct rhinos, horse, several deer, aurochs and small mammals) and many birds.

A horizon of fossil footprints, unique in the British Pleistocene, occurs immediately on top of the Lower Loam.