

COUNTY: KENT SITE NAME: GREAT CRABBLES WOOD

DISTRICT: GRAVESHAM

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

Local Planning Authority: GRAVESHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 703703 Area: 32.9 (ha.) 81.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 178 1:10,000: TQ 67 SE, 76 NW, 77 SW

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 site is representative of woods on North West Kent Tertiary sediments; these comprise a succession of strata over Upper Chalk ranging from Blackheath gravels to Woolwich loams and Thanet sands, which give rise to a range of soil types. Most of the woodland is mixed coppice under oak standards, with sweet chestnut as the dominant species. A number of scarce plants occur, including lady orchid *Orchis purpurea* and man orchid *Aceras anthropophorum*.

Acidic Blackheath gravels form a ridge in the northern part of the wood; this slopes away gradually to the south east, with neutral Woolwich loams on the upper slope and calcareous Thanet sands underlying the southern half of the wood. Chalk outcrops in the south-east corner. The succession of soils is reflected in the species composition of the tree canopy, shrub layer and ground flora.

Dry, open oak-birch woodland with a ground flora of bracken and bramble on the Blackheath gravels merges with sweet chestnut coppice under oak standards on the damper Woolwich loams. The oak standards are chiefly pedunculate oak, although sessile oak also occurs, especially on the ridge. Other coppice species present include hornbeam, ash, field maple and hazel, and the ground flora is dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and bramble. The woodland on the calcareous Thanet sands is similar to that on the loams, but the scarce plant bird's foot *Ornithopus perpusillus* has also been recorded.

A strip of woodland along the southern boundary is dominated by hazel and ash coppice, with some field maple, sweet chestnut and hornbeam coppice under pedunculate oak standards. The shrub layer is varied and includes spindle, wayfaring tree and traveller's joy, which are all characteristic of the calcareous soils. The diverse ground flora is dominated by dog's mercury with ivy *Hedera helix* and several scarce species are present. These include lady orchid, man orchid, white helleborine

Cephalanthera damasonium, bird's nest orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*, wild liquorice
Astragalus glycyphyllos and spurge laurel *Daphne laureola*.