

COUNTY: KENT            SITE NAME: HATCH PARK

BOROUGH: ASHFORD

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

Local Planning Authority: ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TR 063410            Area: 71.8 (ha.) 177.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 179, 189            1:10,000: TR 04 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1968            Date of Last Revision: 1981

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

Other Information:

A large area has been deleted from the site.

Reasons for Notification:

This site is of special interest for its unimproved acidic grassland, a scarce habitat in Kent, and its ancient pollard woodlands, the latter supporting the richest epiphytic lichen community in the county.

The acidic grassland is the remnant of a formerly much more extensive deerpark, and the turf here is believed to have remained unbroken for the last 500 years. This continuity has resulted in a relatively species-rich sward dominated by common bent-grass *Agrostis capillaris* and sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, but also containing such species as field wood-rush *Luzula campestris*, sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*, and upright chickweed *Moenchia erecta*, the last two being scarce in Kent. However, where bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* has colonised the grassland fewer herbs are present. Scattered trees occur over much of this area, principally oak *Quercus robur*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, beech *Fagus sylvatica*, and hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*. The deer park is grazed by a managed herd of mainly fallow deer *Dama dama*.

Associated with the deer park are several artificial ponds with adjacent areas of marshy grassland. The latter harbours several plants which are uncommon in Kent including bottle sedge *Carex rostrata*, marsh speedwell *Veronica scutellata*, and lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*. There is also an acidic flush dominated by bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp. and rushes *Juncus* spp., as well as a small area of dense willow *Salix* species scrub.

The woodlands are varied, but most are of ancient origin with pollarded oak and hornbeam predominating. Pollarding has been practised on the site since mediaeval times, and this is one of the very few examples remaining in Britain of actively managed pollard woodland. There are also some small plantations consisting

mainly of broad-leaved trees. The mature trees and pollards support 101 species of lichen, including *Opegrapha prosodea* for which this is the only locality in south-east England. The ground flora is generally sparse; bracken and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* are the most frequent species with dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and rose-bay willow-herb *Epilobium angustifolium* occurring locally.

The site is also of importance for the mature timber habitat supporting beetles (Coleoptera) and hole-nesting birds such as nuthatch, stock dove, and 3 species of woodpecker.