

**COUNTY:** BERKSHIRE

**SITE NAME:** OLD COPSE, BEENHAM

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

**Local Planning Authorities:** Newbury District Council, Berkshire County Council

**National Grid Reference:** SU589685

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 174                      **1:10,000:** SU56 NE

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1984                      **Date of Last Revision:**

**Area:** 8 ha 19.77 ac

**Other information:** Within North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

### **Description and Reasons for Notification**

A species-rich coppice-with-standards woodland on London Clay situated on the north side of the Kennet valley.

The site is on gently sloping ground, with damp to poorly-drained wet clay soils. A few small streams with associated wet flushes arise in the wood.

The wood is particularly important as an example of the wet ash/wych elm stand type. It also contains four other woodland stand types: neutral valley alderwood, wet ash/maple, acid oak/hazel/ash and hazel/oak.

The dominant canopy species are variable, consisting mainly of oak and ash standards in hazel, wych elm or alder coppice. Wild cherry *Prunus avium*, maple and areas of birch also occur. The shrub layer is dominated by hazel with some goat willow *Salix caprea*, holly *Ilex aquifolium* guelder, rose *Viburnum opulus* and occasional elder *Sambucus nigra* and dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*.

The ground flora is rich and varied, and includes several species indicative of ancient woodland. Some of these are relatively uncommon, such as wild daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, the sedge *Carex strigosa* and orpine *Sedum telephium*. The vegetation ranges from areas dominated by bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* with wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and primrose *Primula vulgaris* on the drier, more acid soils under oak, ash and hazel, to localised areas on wetter soils with *Carex strigosa*, great horsetail *Equisetum telemateia*, golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*. These communities occur mainly beneath alder on flushed ground where clay outcrops beneath permeable sands and gravels.