

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: GAWDYHALL BIG WOOD HARLESTON

DISTRICT: South Norfolk

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

Local Planning Authority: South Norfolk District Council

National Grid Reference: TM 250850                      Area: 30.0 (ha) 74.1 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 156                      1:10,000: TM 28 NW, NE, SW, SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –                      Date of Last Revision: –

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

Other Information:  
A new site.

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**

This site consists of a large area of ancient woodland on poorly-drained chalky boulder clays, typical of South Norfolk. Oak *Quercus robur* standards predominate over mixed coppice in which hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and hazel *Corylus avellana* are abundant. The hornbeam stands in particular support an exceptionally diverse ground flora, reflecting local soil variation.

Hornbeam coppice with frequent ash, hazel and maple *Acer campestre* occurs over much of the site but hornbeam is absent from the centre of the wood. Here ash and hazel coppice is abundant under pedunculate oak and ash standard trees. There is a good example of the nationally rare pedunculate oak-hazel-ash woodland of the light soil form on sandy soils. Shrubs are frequent throughout the stands and include dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, guelder rose *Viburnum opulus* and a single specimen of wayfaring tree *V. lantana* at its only known Norfolk station. The wood is notable for the abundance of large oak standards, some of which may be over 300 years old.

The ground flora reflects the underlying variations in soil-type and drainage. Dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* is generally dominant on the heavier alkaline soils and other species include primrose *Primula vulgaris*, hairy wood-rush *Luzula pilosa*, hard shield fern *Polystichum aculeatum*, sanicle *Sanicula europaeus*, twayblade *Listera ovata* and early purple orchid *Orchis mascula*. The lighter more acid soils support bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* with frequent honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*, wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis*. Notable plants such as broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*, lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis* and bird's-nest orchid *Neottia nidus-avis* have also been recorded.

The rides are generally wet with a diverse and distinctive flora. Characteristic species are tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia caespitosa*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, yellow pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum* and creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*. There are also a number of ponds into which willows *Salix* spp are invading.