

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 3 APRIL 1987

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: COURT FARM, SYDLING

DISTRICT: WEST DORSET

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

Local Planning Authority: WEST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: ST 617000 Area: 83.8 (ha.) 207.1 (ac.)
 SY 623988
 SY 623984

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 194 1:10,000: SY 69 NW, ST 60 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Within Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Adjacent to Hog Cliff SSSI. A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site comprises a series of unimproved downland slopes on the western side of the valley of the Sydling Water. These slopes on Middle and Upper Chalk have a variety of aspects and support varied plant communities characteristic of west/central Dorset and a rich assemblage of associated invertebrates.

The dominant grasses of the slopes are Sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina* with other grasses including Quaking-Grass *Briza media*, Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*, Crested Hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha*, Meadow Oat-grass *Avenula pratensis* and Downy Oat-grass *A. pubescens*.

There are abundant flowering herbs with Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, Hoary Plantain *Plantago media* and Stemless Thistle *Cirsium acaule* generally distributed. Leguminous herbs are particularly abundant on south facing slopes and include Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* and Common Restharrow *Ononis repens*. In certain areas there is an attractive plant community characteristic of damp chalk downs of West Dorset. This typically contains much Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Betony *Stachys officinalis*, Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria* and Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*. Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, Burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga* and Clustered Bellflower *Campanula glomerata* are other frequent constituents of this turf.

On flatter areas on top of the slopes, deposits of clay with flints have produced less calcareous soils with patches of Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, Common and Western Gorses *Ulex europaeus* and *U. gallii* and acidic grassland dominated by Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* with Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and Devil's-bit *Scabious*.

This site holds good populations of many typical downland butterflies including the local Chalkhill Blue *Lysandra coridon* as well as Small Blue *Cupido minimus* and Marsh Fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia*, both of which are scarce and declining species. The local Wood Tiger moth *Parasemia plantagenis* is abundant here.