

County: Hampshire **Site Name:** Wealden Edge Hangers SSSI

Local Planning Authority: Hampshire County Council, East Hampshire District Council

National Grid Reference: SU 737312–SU 735259

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 186 **1:25,000:** SU 72, 73

Area: 210.7 (ha) 518.9 (ac)

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1979 **Date of Last Revision:** –

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

Other Information:

131ha of the SSSI comprise the Wealden Edge Hangers Local Nature Reserve owned and managed by Hampshire County Council.

Reasons for Notification:

The Wealden Edge Hangers comprise the mainly wooded easterly facing escarpment of the Hampshire chalk plateau, at the western extremity of the Weald. Arguably, this SSSI is one of the ecologically most interesting and diverse series of Chalk woodlands in Britain. It exhibits a wide range of woodland types including mono-specific yew *Taxus baccata* (in some cases developed over former juniper *Juniperus communis* scrub), yew/beechness *Fagus sylvatica* and beech/ash *Fraxinus excelsior* with beech/wych elm *Ulmus glabra*/field maple *Acer campestre*/ash, and oak *Quercus*/hazel *Corylus avellana*, on deeper soils, and moist ash/alder *Alnus glutinosa* wood by escarpment-foot springs. Ash, beech and elm all occur in coppice forms. A wide range of calcareous shrubs occur.

The ground flora of this series of woods is collectively rich and includes large populations of many rare or locally distributed species such as columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*, white helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*, narrow-leaved helleborine *C. longifolia*, broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*, and bird's-nest orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*.

On the damper areas along the scarp foot, often on scree, occurs also the largest concentration of Italian lords-and-ladies *Arum italicum* ssp. *neglectum* in Britain. A large number of 'old woodland' indicator species are present, often in abundance. The escarpment is extremely dissected and the deep combes contain *Ulmus glabra*/*Fraxinus*/*Acer campestre*/*Corylus* woods which appear to be of primary origin, though formerly coppiced; these are partly on scree, partly on combe deposits. Here ferns such as hart's-tongue *Phyllitis scolopendrium*, soft shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum* and lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina* are plentiful. The springs rise at a remarkably high level on these combes, possibly because this area has not so far been heavily exploited for water extraction and in the associated moist woodland occur in one site both species of golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium*, while ramsons *Allium ursinum* and thin-spiked wood-sedge *Carex strigosa* are abundant. Box *Buxus sempervirens* occurs in several places.

The bryophyte flora is extremely rich, comprising 111+ species and the lichen flora (though lacking any exceptional rarities) is the richest for any woodland on chalk in Britain, after Cranborne Chase, with 74 species. The total vascular flora of the area comprises a known 289 species, of which 31 are trees and shrubs.