

County: Hampshire **Site Name:** Wick Wood and Worldham Hangers SSSI

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

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

National Grid Reference: SU 750365

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 186

1:10,000: SU 73 NE, 73 NW, 73 SE

Area: 98.37 (ha) 243.08 (ac)

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 2 March 1988

Date of Last Revision: –

Confirmed: 24 November 1988

Other Information:

The SSSI includes most of the former Candovers Farm Pit geological SSSI, no longer considered to be of special geological interest, but retained as an integral part of the biological SSSI.

Reasons for Notification:

Wick Wood and Worldham Hangers Site of Special Scientific Interest comprises a series of ancient semi-natural woodlands which occupy the steep Upper Greensand escarpment and adjacent Gault Clay vale between East Worldham and Selborne on the western edge of the Weald. The Upper Greensand forms an east-facing escarpment about twenty metres in height. At its base this gives way to the more gently sloping Gault Clay. At the junction of the two strata a number of springs rise. This juxtaposition of geomorphological features has a limited distribution in Britain being confined to East Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. The species-rich ancient woodland associated with these varied soils is ecologically distinct and contains a number of nationally rare woodland types.

The woodlands, or hangers, covering the escarpment have been managed as coppice-with-standards, although this practice has been largely discontinued. On the freely draining upper slopes ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and wych elm *Ulmus glabra* predominate forming an extremely rare woodland type which in Hampshire is confined to the Upper Greensand. Many of the wych elms have died but a number of live trees remain, one ancient coppice stool having a girth approaching eight metres. Beech *Fagus sylvatica*, pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* and whitebeam *Sorbus aria* also occur on the upper slopes. A few large coppice stools of small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* occur in Wick Hill Hanger. This rare species is strongly associated with ancient woodlands and is known from less than twenty localities in Hampshire, three of these being on Upper Greensand. The woodland ground flora on the rock-strewn, unstable slopes is sparse. Where wych elms have fallen it is dominated by stinging nettle *Urtica dioica* and red campion *Silene dioica*. Elsewhere bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and pignut *Conopodium majus* are common with more unusual plants such as the green helleborine *Helleborus viridis* which are confined to the most ancient woodlands. Where the soils are deeper and moister on the lower slopes, wych elm is replaced by field maple *Acer campestre* and hazel *Corylus avellana*. The rich ground flora is dominated by wild garlic *Allium ursinum* with wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia*, moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*, Solomon's seal *Polygonatum multiflorum* and the

parasitic toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*. An outlier of the Upper Greensand lies to the east of the escarpment forming a conspicuous landscape feature known as King John's Hill.

This supports an unusual suckering elm wood whose ground flora is dominated by male fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*, bluebell and dog's mercury.

Ash and Willow Plantations, Warner's Wood and Wick Wood occupy the poorly draining Gault Clay. They consist of pedunculate oak high forest and areas of pedunculate oak/ash standards with hazel and field maple coppice. Within Warner's Wood an area of beech woodland occupies a steep-sided stream gully where an abundance of hard fern *Blechnum spicant* flourishes. The ground flora in these clay woods is particularly rich and is characterised by the abundance of common dog-violets *Viola riviniana*, primroses *Primula vulgaris*, wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*. More uncommon species include thin-spiked wood sedge *Carex strigosa*, spurge laurel *Daphne laureola* and violet helleborine *Epipactis purpurata*. Fifty-seven species of plant such as these which are indicative of ancient woodlands have been found in the SSSI.

Further habitat diversity is provided by two ponds, fringed with lesser pond sedge *Carex acutiformis*, great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* and reedmace *Typha latifolia* and by a rush-dominated field adjacent to Warner's Wood which contains several species of plant found only in agriculturally unimproved grassland, such as ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and twayblade *Listera ovata*.

The varied woodland types and associated habitats are reflected in a rich faunal diversity. Birds include all three species of British woodpecker, nightingale, blackcap, whitethroat, lesser whitethroat and grasshopper warbler. Entomologically the site is also rich with twenty-four species of butterfly being recorded including white-letter hairstreaks which breed on the elms and brown hairstreaks on the areas of blackthorn. The pond in Warner's Wood supports thirteen species of damsel and dragonflies.