

File ref:

**County:** Hampshire      **Site Name:** Burghclere Beacon SSSI

**Local Planning Authority:** Hampshire County Council, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

**National Grid Reference:** SU 458568      **Area:** 83.15 (ha) 205.47 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 174      **1:25,000:** SU 45

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1954      **Date of Last Revision:** –

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

**Other Information:**

Part of the site is subject to an Access Agreement between the owner and Hampshire County Council.

Area of arable excluded in 1984.

**Reasons for Notification:**

Burghclere Beacon is a dome of chalk grassland crowned by an Iron Age hill fort, at the northern margin of the Hampshire chalk plateau. The site includes an extensive stand of juniper *Juniperus communis*, privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*, rose *Rosa* spp., bramble *Rubus* spp., wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and whitebeam *Sorbus aria*, which covers c. 20 ha to the west-facing slopes. There is little evidence of juniper regeneration (and some moribund bushes) and the site is probably witnessing a transition from juniper to a mixed scrub community, with the early indications of an eventual succession of woodland. The scrub is unusual on the chalk in lacking a yew *Taxus baccata*/ash *Fraxinus excelsior* component.

The open grassland is rich in herbs, with fescues *Festuca ovina* and *Festuca pratensis*, crested dog's tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, spring sedge *Carex caryophylla*, and locally quaking grass *Briza media* as dominants. Abundant herbs include ladies' bedstraw *Galium vernum*, hedge bedstraw *G. mollugo*, creeping thistle *Cirsium acaule*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, chalk milkwort *Polygala calcarea* and felwort *Gentianella amarella* and several species of orchids. There is a decidedly neutral element in the flora which suggests that the soils may in part be derived from superficial drift or loess.

In a national survey carried out in the early 1970s, the chalk scrub element of the SSSI was recognised as being a nationally important example of a stage in the succession from juniper scrub to woodland. The chalk grassland within the SSSI includes a wide range of aspect and soils and in particular include chalk grassland developed on gradients which elsewhere have mostly been converted to arable or ley.