

File ref:

County: Hampshire **Site Name:** Butser Hill SSSI

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

National Grid Reference: SU 714198 **Area:** 231.2 (ha) 571.3 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000 197 **1:25 000** SU 71, 72

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951 **Date of Last Revision:** 1979

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

Other Information:

The Site of Special Scientific Interest is within the Queen Elizabeth Country Park, managed by Hampshire County Council and the Forestry Commission. It includes Oxenbourne Down Local Nature Reserve (96.6 ha) managed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Naturalists' Trust under an Agreement with Hampshire County Council.

Reasons for Notification:

Butser Hill is a chalk massif with a discontinuous cap of clay-with-flints. The massif has been eroded to leave a series of deep combes in which the modern spring-line is about 1 km from the combe-head. The combes on the south-east flank support dense yew *Taxus baccata* woods and the remaining slopes of the Hill are sheep-grazed chalk grassland. The calcareous yew woods are outstanding examples of a habitat with a very small representation in Britain. The series of vegetation types represented in the SSSI – chalk grassland, mixed scrub and yew wood – were the subject of a series of pioneer ecological studies. The yew woods and seral communities are among the finest examples known on the English chalkland and with the total range of habitat combine to make this site of outstanding nature conservation importance.

Most of the Local Nature Reserve supports dense yew *Taxus baccata* woodland with associated whitebeam *Sorbus aria*. There is an aggressive invasion of scrub into remaining open downland, with hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* particularly evident. Young yew trees are clearly advancing in the cover which thorn affords.

All aspects and a variety of conditions of shelter are found within the Site of Special Scientific Interest. Some areas of grassland have been maintained by scrub clearance; others are kept close-nibbled by rabbits. The downland flora is varied and rich, but is lacking in some of the very local species found at some sites. On the highest south-facing slopes of Oxenbourne Down, at about 300 m, a fragmentary example of chalk heath occurs with gorse *Ulex europaeus* locally common and very occasional clumps of heather *Calluna vulgaris* growing in a highly leached flint and chalk rubble. The insect fauna is well recorded and contains a number of local species.

The north-facing escarpment supports an exceptionally rich bryophyte flora.