

File ref:

**County:** Hampshire

**Site Name:** Highclere Park SSI

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

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

**National Grid Reference:** SU 454603

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 174      **1:10,000:** SU 45 NE, NW, SU 46 SE, SW

**Area:** 67.7 (ha) 167.3 (ac)

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

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 14 October 1991

**Date of Last Revision:** –

**Confirmed:** 7 May 1992

**Other Information:**

**Reasons for Notification:**

Highclere Park comprises an extensive open parkland of unimproved grassland with mature trees, pasture woodland and lakes. It is situated in north-west Hampshire where the Tertiary Clay of the Thames Valley abuts the Chalk and Greensand of the North Wessex Downs. The park is the earliest documented estate in Hampshire (AD 749). It was a Medieval Deer Park and later a Roccoco, then Capability Brown (c.1770) landscaped park. The grassland comprises a combination of calcifugous and calcicolous species which is unique in Hampshire. The mature parkland and wood pasture trees support a rich and diverse lichen and moss flora, with numerous species indicative of its ancient woodland origins. Outside the New Forest, it is one of the two richest sites known in the County for epiphytic lichens. The woodland stand-types are varied and include actively coppiced valley alder. Both the wood and grassland habitats grade into a swamp and fen community fringing two lakes. This matrix of habitats contains many regionally uncommon plants and additionally supports a diverse assemblage of invertebrates, with several notable species.

The woodland to the east of Duns Mere is a remnant of the Park's wood pasture origins, being dominated by mature beech *Fagus sylvatica* and pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*. The understorey is confined to low density holly *Ilex aquifolium*, hazel *Corylus avellana* and invasive rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum*. Elsewhere, especially north-east of Milford Lake and in Duns Wood, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* has regenerated to provide dense stands of ash boles. Sufficient light still reaches the poles of many old, often pollarded oaks to support a rich lichen flora. Of the 85 species recorded, over 20 are indicative of ancient woodland including *Arthonia vinosa*, *Bacidia biatorina*, *Biatorina atropurpurea*, *Pachyphiale corneola*, *Parmelia reddenda* and *Thelopsis rubella*. Polypody *Polypodium vulgare* also grows in profusion as an epiphyte of many of the oaks. The ground flora includes broad-leaved and green-flowered helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*, *E. phyllanthes* respectively, lemon-scented fern *Oreopteris limbosperma*, butcher's-broom *Ruscus aculeatus* and wood speedwell *Veronica montana*. Additionally, the alder woods support remote sedge *Carex remota*, opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*.

The neutral to slightly acidic grassland on the slopes down from the Temple are notable for the calcifuges and calcicoles growing in close juxtaposition. Bents *Agrostis* species and fescues *Festuca* species dominate, with such old grassland indicator species as sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica* and lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*. Calcifugous species include abundant heather *Calluna vulgaris*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, mat-grass *Nardus stricta* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, whilst the calcicoles element comprises dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, common rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor* subsp. *minor* and large thyme *Thymus pulegioides*. The slope supports a large populations of field gentian *Gentianella campestris* in its only north Hampshire location. The marshy grassland south of Duns Mere is unimproved with sneezewort, meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*.

The Temple grasslands grade into swamp and fen vegetation around Duns Mere. This is particularly rich in plant and invertebrate species, with an incipient bog flush community with much *Sphagnum* and such regionally scarce plants as marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, marsh violet *Viola palustris* and lesser skullcap *Scutellaria minor*.

Milford Lake and Duns Mere originated from the Bishop of Winchester's fishponds which were enlarged by 18th century landscaping. However, there is written evidence for a pool at Duns Mere dating from 1465. The marginal vegetation of the lakes is well developed and includes excellent examples of the succession from a free-floating vegetation of bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and amphibious bistort *Polygonum amphibium* into rafts dominated by common reed *Phragmites australis*, the reedmaces *Typha angustifolia* and *T. latifolia* and a range of sedges, including bottle sedge *Carex rostrata*.

The invertebrate interest is known to be rich and includes eight notable species which utilise all the habitats represented within the site. For example, of the 15 dragonfly species, two are notable including a strong colony of the ruddy darter *Sympetrum sanguineum* which favours abundant emergent lakeside vegetation, and the keeled skimmer *Orthetrum coerulescens*, normally associated with boggy acid pools on the southern heathlands. Other notable species include the hoverfly *Anasimyia contracta* and the snail-killing flies *Psacadina verbekei* and *Pherbina coryleti*. The occurrence of the notable woodland grasshopper *Omocestus rufipes*, which is typically found on moist scrubby heathland, but occasionally on chalk grassland; the mottled grasshopper *Myrmeleottatrix maculatus*, typical of dry heath; and the marbled white butterfly *Melanargia galathea* further reflects the range of acid and alkaline habitats represented in the site. The woodland also supports good invertebrate communities with such notable species as the hoverflies *Platycheirus tarsalis* (typically south-eastern in distribution), *Volucella inflata* and *Cheilosia antiqua*. Dead wood is also important for such species of the two hoverflies *Chalsosyrphus nemorum* and *Sphegina kimakowiczi*; the notable robberfly *Laphria marginata* and the woodland bee *Andrena furcata*.