

COUNTY: DORSET                      SITE NAME: OAKHILLS COPPICE

DISTRICT: EAST DORSET

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

Local Planning Authority: EAST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: ST 981089                      Area: 14.4 (ha.) 35.6 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195                      1:10,000: ST 90 NE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990                      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site. Lies within the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Oakhills Coppice is the largest remaining area of ancient semi-natural woodland within the large complex of woodlands known as Chetterwood. These woods occupy the high ground between the Rivers Tarrant and Allen and have developed on soils formed from drift deposits and clay with flints above the underlying chalk. Oakhills Coppice is important for its communities of epiphytic lichens which are indicative of a long and continuous history as mature woodland.

The woodland at Oakhills is predominantly of the Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* – Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* – Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* type typical of acidic soils. Here mature Oak high forest has developed over an understorey of Hazel *Corylus avellana* and Birch *Betula pendula*. The ground flora has abundant Bracken, Bramble, Yellow Archangel *Galeobdolon luteum* and Bluebell *Endymion non-scriptus*. In a few areas a more base-rich flora is evident with Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* dominant.

Oakhills Coppice is a rich lichen site with over 90 species recorded including 9 species indicative of woodland with a long history of ecological continuity. Two of these species have restricted distributions in the British Isles: *Parmelia reddenda* and the rare *Pannaria mediterranea*. The lichen communities of the mature Oaks are a particular feature of the site. Several species indicative of the very restricted *Lobarion* community occur including *P. reddenda*, *Arthonia vinosa* and *Pachyphiale cornea*. Another rich community, of which *Parmelia perlata* is a conspicuous component, is characteristic of unshaded Oak bark. Mature Oaks also support several species of restricted occurrence including

*Schismatomma cretaceum* and *Gyalecta truncigena*. Communities on Hazel, mature Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Beech *Fagus sylvatica* contribute considerably to the species diversity and range of community types. These include the *Graphidion* community which is well-represented forming crustose mosaics on the smooth bark of Hazel and Beech. The *Usneion* community is more characteristic of the woodland canopy and includes *Usnea articulata*, a species restricted to south-west England.