

NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 12 MARCH 1996

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: LUSCOMBE VALLEY

DISTRICT: POOLE

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended. Part Local Nature Reserve (LNR) declared under Section 19 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

Local Planning Authority: POOLE BOROUGH COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: SZ 042892 Area: 58.07 (ha.)
 SZ 046895

Ordnance Survey Sheet: 1:50,000: – No 195 1:10,000: SZ 09 SW, SZ 09 SE, SZ 08 NW, SZ 08 NE

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1995

Other Information:

A new site. Part adjoins Poole Harbour SSSI.
The site includes all of Luscombe Valley LNR which is managed by Poole Borough Council.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Luscombe Valley SSSI is part of the complex of heathland sites which together comprise the Dorset Heathlands. This is one of the major lowland heathland areas in Britain, with the sites showing a high degree of ecological cohesion and clear ecological trends and patterns. The heathlands are important in a European and international context for their plant and animal communities.

The Luscombe Valley site lies in a narrow valley with an underlying geology of Branksome Sand, some river terrace deposits but mostly gravel head and alluvium. The site has been much altered, with its former heath and mire communities now fragmented and reduced in area. Such fragmentation has occurred throughout the Dorset heaths, with about 86% having been lost since the mid 18th century. Nonetheless this site still supports a range of important habitats with heath, acid grassland and mire communities within a matrix of pine woodland and the grassland of a close mown golf course. A small stream flows along the valley bottom and into Poole Harbour. Moving down the valley towards the harbour the habitats change from heathland and mire to freshwater reedbeds and finally to brackish habitats.

At Evening Hill the site slopes down to the Poole Harbour shoreline. It is largely semi-natural and heathy in character. Here there is a mosaic of dry heath, acid grassland and scrub with some Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* and maritime pine *P. pinaster* woodland. A fringe of grassland adjacent to Poole Harbour supports maritime

species such as lyme grass *Elymus arenarius*, sea-purslane *Halimione portulacoides*, sea beet *Beta vulgaris* and the nationally rare Bermuda-grass *Cynodon dactylon*.

Within Luscombe Valley there are extensive roughs and dry heath slopes on which heather *Calluna vulgaris* is widely dominant, with typical associated plants such as bell heather *Erica cinerea*, bristle bent *Agrostis curtisii*, common gorse *Ulex europaeus*. Western gorse *U. gallii* is also common, a distinctive feature of the Dorset heaths lying north of Poole Harbour. Much of the fairways are unimproved acid grassland with common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, bristle bent and heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* which is locally frequent. Sheep's bit *Jasione montana*, common cat's ear *Hypochaeris radicata* and sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella* are also present. Scots pine and maritime pine with birch *Betula* sp. and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* are the dominant species of the surrounding woodland.

On the valley floor there is an area of species rich mire vegetation. This is characterised by a variety of bog mosses including *Sphagnum magellanicum* and the nationally scarce *S. pulchrum*, and other plants such as bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, white beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba*, common cotton grass *Eriophorum angustifolium* and oblong-leaved sundew *Drosera intermedia*. The mire vegetation grades into common reed *Phragmites australis* with stands of bog-myrtle *Myrica gale*. The lower part of the valley is varied with carr woodland and reedswamp. Kingfisher¹ *Alcedo atthis* is a resident on the several channels. The nationally scarce dotted sedge *Carex punctata* is present in one of its few locations in Dorset.

The site supports a characteristic heathland fauna. Of particular note are several populations of the endangered and specially protected sand lizard *Lacerta agilis*² which occur mostly on the dry heathland slopes. The mire communities support two species of nationally scarce bush-crickets, long-winged conehead *Conocephalus discolor* and bog bush-cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera*. A notable variety of rare and scarce moth species have been recorded including the Scarlet Tiger *Callimorpha dominula*, cream-boarded Green Pea *Earias chlorana*, Maple Pug *Eupithecia inturbata*, Horse Chestnut *Pachycnemia hippocastana*, obscure Wainscot *Mythimna obsoleta*, twin-spotted Wainscot *Archanara geminipunctata*, silky Wainscot *Chilodes maritimus*, and dingy Mocha *Cyclophora pendularia*.

¹Species listed in Annex 1 of the EC Birds Directive.

²European protected species listed in Schedule 2 of Habitats Regulations 1994.