

COUNTY: WORCESTERSHIRE

SITE NAME: ARELEY WOOD

DISTRICT: WYRE FOREST MALVERN HILLS

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

Local Planning Authority: WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Wyre Forest District Council, Malvern Hills District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 785710      Area: 64.16 (ha.) 158.48 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 138      1:10,000: SO 77 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1955      Date of Last Revision: 1978, 1971

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 25/5/1985      Date of Last Revision: 8/4/1998

#### Other Information:

Formerly part of the Wyre Forest SSSI which is classified as a Grade 1 site in 'A Nature Conservation Review' edited by D A Ratcliffe (Cambridge University Press 1977). The renotification incorporates extension along the Gladder Brook valley and minor deletions to the 1985 boundary.

#### Description and Reasons for Notification:

Areley Wood is a large ancient semi-natural woodland, with substantial parts under coppice management. The woodland is situated in an area of concentrated biodiversity interest within the Midland Plateau Natural Area and is the largest example of damp alder-oak wood present. It is also of special interest for the assemblage of breeding bird species. The steep valley along the Gladder Brook is base-rich and provides variety to the woodland stand types and to the floristic interest.

The site lies 1 kilometre west of the town of Stourport on Severn, Worcestershire. The woodland lies close to the southern reaches of the Wyre Forest and is a remnant of a once extensive tract of ancient woodland.

The woodland overlies the Old Red Sandstones of the Devonian Period, with a small part over the Upper Carboniferous Coal Measures. This geology gives rise to steeply dissected valleys, with areas of overlying glacial clay head deposits. The main drainage is formed by the Gladder Brook and smaller tributaries flowing east into the River Severn. The soils are acidic to neutral, giving rise to significantly different stand types from the Wyre Forest SSSI to the north. Waterlogged spring-line seepages are frequent in the wood.

#### Woodland Flora

The woodland is dominated by the pedunculate oak-bracken-bramble woodland stand type with a mixture of sessile oak *Quercus petraea*, pedunculate oak *Q. robur*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and scattered yew *Taxus baccata*. The woodland has an unusual abundance of alder *Alnus glutinosa*, due to influence of groundwater flushing; this

forms a transition between the oak-bracken-bramble and alder-ash-creeping jenny woodland stand types. The wood originates from stored coppice approximately 100 years old, over a third of which has been re-coppiced to form a dense, diverse understorey. Frequent trees and shrubs in the coppice include birch *Betula pendula*, hazel *Corylus avellana*, wild cherry *Prunus avium*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, holly *Ilex aquifolium*, rowan *Sorbus acuparia*, wild service *S. torminalis* and crab apple *Malus sylvestris*. Small areas of conifer are present. Along the Gladder Brook valley the woodland is more base-rich, with a greater diversity of shrubs and trees including ash, alder, field maple *Acer campestre*, crack willow *Salix fragilis* and aspen *Populus tremula*. Small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* is common including several ancient pollards, with occasional large-leaved lime *T. platyphylous* which is nationally scarce. Wych elm *Ulmus glabra* used to be a common tree but is now limited to the understorey by Dutch elm disease. There is an area of sloping alder carr woodland adjacent to the brook rich in ferns, including narrow buckler fern *Dryopteris carthusiana*, scaly male fern *D. affinis* and hard fern *Blechnum spicant*.

On the drier ground the woodland conforms to the oak-birch-wavy hair-grass woodland type with bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, bracken *Pteridium aquifolium*, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense* and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. Damper soils dominate most of the woodland with ramsons *Alium ursinum*, frequent wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, nettle-leaved bellflower *Campanula trachelium* and pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*. On more base rich soil broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* and violet helleborine *E. purpurata* occur. The nationally scarce narrow-leaved bitter-cress *Cardamine impatiens* occurs along disturbed trackways in the wood. The rides contains a number of locally uncommon species of unimproved grasslands, including lady's mantle *Alchemilla filicaulis* ssp. *vestita*, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* and adder's tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*.