CITATION

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: PURBECK RIDGE (WEST)

DISTRICT: PURBECK

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

Local Planning Authority: PURBECK DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: SY 903819 Area: 146.1 (ha.) 360.9 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195 1:10,000: SY 88 SE, SY 98 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1952 Date of Last Revision: 1977

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:
Site amended by extension and deletion. Formerly named Great Wood and Stonehill Down SSSI. Adjoins Povington and Grange Heaths SSSI and South Dorset Coast SSSI.

Description and Reasons for Notification:
This site lies on the Upper Chalk of the Purbeck escarpment over which are superficial deposits of Clay with Flints. It includes a large area of mainly north-facing broad-leaved woodland as well as well as calcareous and acid grassland and scrub on varying aspects.

Great Wood has abundant Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and frequent Maple *Acer campestre* and Hazel *Corylus avellana* all formerly coppiced, with scattered Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* standards. There is a rich ground flora: on the lower, moister slopes, Ramsons *Allium ursinum*, is dominant with Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, Cuckoo Pint *Arum maculatum*. Lesser Celandine *Ranunculus ficaria*, Wood Sedge *Carex sylvatica* and Wood Melick *Melica uniflora*. Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* tends to dominate the drier mid-slopes whereas Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* is particularly abundant on the upper, more acid soil. Wood Sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, Pignut *Conopodium majus*, Greater Woodrush *Luzula sylvatica* and Creeping Soft-grass *Holcus mollis* are also frequent. The presence of Small Leaved Lime *Tilia cordata*, a species of very infrequent occurrence in Dorset woodlands, is of particular interest. The woodland also supports good populations of Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*, Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria* a local plant, parasitic on Hazel, and a rich bryophyte and lichen flora, including the rare lichen *Lecidea cinnabaria*.

The downland supports a range of community types including acid grassland, calcareous grassland and scrub. Differing aspects and varying levels of grazing, along with the range of soil types gives rise to a great diversity of flora and fauna. The closely grazed, south facing herb-rich, chalk grassland slopes are an increasingly rare feature in Dorset. Tor Grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* is dominant, but Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina*, Meadow Oat *Avenula pratensis* and Quaking Grass *Briza media* are frequent where grazing pressure is heavier producing a herb rich sward. Abundant herbs include Hoary Plantain *Plantago media*, Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*, Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*, Cowslip *Primula veris*, Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* and Wild Thyme *Thymus praecox*. Green Winged Orchid *Orchis morio*, Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera* all occur. There is a rich bryophyte community with several species which are rarely found in chalk grassland such as the liverwort *Riccardia multifida*. Some areas are unusually lichen-rich with high cover of *Cladonia rangiformis*.

The acid grassland is dominated by Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*. Herbs are infrequent here, the most conspicuous being Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, Bluebell and Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia*. Adders Tongue Fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum* also occurs locally, and in places the grassland has a high proportion of mosses and lichens.

Of particular interest in, the fauna is the chalk downland butterfly community with at least twenty-five breeding species including the rare Lulworth Skipper *Thymelicus acteon* and Adonis Blue *Lysandra bellargus*. The uncommon mollusc, the Large Chrysalis Snail *Abida secale* has been recorded on the chalk downland.