

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON THE 6TH DECEMBER 1988

COUNTY: ESSEX

SITE NAME: CHALKNEY WOOD

DISTRICT: BRAINTREE

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

Local Planning Authority: Braintree District Council

National Grid Reference: TL 875278

Area: 72.6 (ha.) 179.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 168

1:10,000: TL 82 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1955

Date of Last Revision: 1975

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1988

Date of Last Revision: 1988

Other Information:

Part is owned and managed by Essex county council as 'Access Woodland' for quiet public recreation; the remainder is owned by the Forestry Commission.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Chalkney Wood lies on a spur of land overlooking the Colne Valley, about one mile south-east of Earls Colne. Its soils are mainly acid silts and sands, but they overlie Chalk Boulder Clay. It is ancient woodland containing a number of stand types, including acid birch-ash-lime, acid pedunculate oak-lime, base-rich spingline alder and pedunculate oak-hornbeam. The lime stand types are the best examples in Essex.

The standard trees are oak *Quercus robur*, small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, birch *Betula* spp, sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* and a few hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*. About half of the coppice is composed of lime stools, but some areas are mostly chestnut and/or hornbeam coppice. In the southern corner, where the Chalky Boulder Clay is nearer the surface, the coppice comprises ash, field maple *Acer campestre* and hazel *Corylus avellana*. There are some small patches of aspen *Populus tremula* and, on the western corner, an area of non-invasive elm *Ulmus* sp. In the formerly planted areas, beech *Fagus sylvatica*, western red cedar *Thuja plicata*, hybrid larch *Larix x eurolepis*, western hemlock-spruce *Tsuga heterophylla*, lawson cypress *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*, Norway spruce *Picea abies*, grand fir *Abies grandis* and Corsican pine *Pinus nigra* var. *maritima* are all present. However, the wood retains many surviving native small-leaved lime and hornbeam coppice stools and standards. The northernmost compartments of the wood contain four valleys supporting base-rich alder woodland with ground flora communities containing marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*, opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and ramsons *Allium ursinum*.

The ground flora is dominated by bramble (*Rubus* spp generally: *R. idaeus* along some paths) but contains primrose *Primula vulgaris*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and, over large areas in the north of the wood, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. The flora includes two plants which are rare in Essex, violet helleborine *Epipactis purpurata* and thin-spiked wood-sedge *Carex strigosa*. Herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*, twayblade *Listera ovata*, early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula*, narrow buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana* and several mosses and liverworts uncommon in Essex also occur. These include *Eurhynchium schleicheri*, *Plagiothecium latebricola*, *Ulota crispa*, *Scapania irrigua* and *Scapania nemorosa*.

The wood is dissected by grassy rides; in the south (west) section of the wood, ancient, narrow rides which wind between the coppice stools; in the north(east) section, modern, wide, forestry rides. The ground flora of the rides includes yellow pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*, creeping Jenny *L. nummularia*, wood speedwell *Veronica montana* and remote sedge *Carex remota*. There are over twenty ponds or dells in the wood that are apparently natural.