

County: Wiltshire **Site Name:** Botley Down

District: Kennet

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

Local Planning Authority: Wiltshire County Council Kennet District Council

National grid Reference: SU 292598 **Area:** 12.71 ha

Ordnance Survey Sheet: 1:50,000: 174 1:10,000: SU 25 NE & SU 26 SE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1989 **Date of Last Revision:**

Other Information:

Within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Botley Down is an area of chalk downland supporting a rich flora and a variety of associated butterflies. It is located to the east of the Vale of Pewsey at the intersection of the chalk of Salisbury Plain, the Hampshire Downs and Marlborough Downs.

Botley Down occupies a predominantly west to south west facing scarp of Lower and Middle Chalk. Unimproved grassland occurs on moderate to gentle slopes, and on the banks and ditches of several linear earthworks. In recent years the site has been lightly grazed but is still virtually scrub free. The sward is of the sheep's fescue-meadow oat-grass *Festuca ovina* - *Avenula pratensis* type with upright brome *Bromus erectus* present in small amounts. A total of 16 species of grass have been recently recorded.

Herbs make up a high proportion of the turf, with cowslip *Primula veris*, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* and salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor* notably abundant. There are areas of short turf on the mid slope where chalk milkwort *Polygala calcarea* and horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* occur in quantity, with less frequent occurrence of squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica* clustered bellflower *Campanula glomerata* autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella* and carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris*. Orchids are widespread, such as lesser butterfly orchid *Platanthera bifolia*, early purple orchid *Orchis mascula* and large numbers of fragrant, and pyramidal orchids *Gymnadenia conopsea* and *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. Also of note is the occurrence of the nationally restricted field fleawort *Senecio integrifolius* and a small colony of knapweed broomrape *Orobanche elatior* the latter being parasitic upon the roots of great knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*.

Typical chalk grassland grades into a more neutral vegetation type at the top of the slope, characterised by the presence of field woodrush *Luzula campestris*, sorrel *Rumex acetosa* and meadow saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*.

Associated invertebrates include many butterflies. Amongst 24 species recently recorded are dingy skipper *Erynnis tages*, brown argus *Aricia agestis*, marbled white *Melanargia galathea*, chalkhill blue *Lysandra coridon* and small blue *Cupido minimus*. The narrow bordered bee hawk moth *Hemaris tityus* has been seen on the site and both five - and six-spot burnet moths *Zygaena trifolii* and *Z. filipendulae* are also present.