

File ref:

County: Isle of Wight **Site Name:** Bonchurch Landslips SSSI

Local Planning Authority: Isle of Wight County Council, South Wight Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SZ 582785 **Area:** 28.2 (ha) 69.68 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 196 **1:25,000:** SZ 57

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

Mostly owned by South Wight Borough Council.

Reasons for Notification:

The Site of Special Scientific Interest comprises ash *Fraxinus excelsior* woodland on Gault clay landslips immediately below the Upper Greensand escarpment. The landslips descend steeply eastward to soft, eroding cliffs. The ashwoods appear largely to be primary, though clearly modified by some felling and replanting. Oak *Quercus robur* and beech *Fagus sylvatica* are also present in the stand and there are many very old trees of all three species. Both the old trees and the abundant Greensand boulders on the woodland floor support an exceptionally rich bryophyte and epiphytic lichen flora. Southern calcicole bryophytes are particularly well represented and the lichen flora includes the rare *Gyalectina carneolutea*, confined in Britain to the southern coast of England. As a structural type the Bonchurch landslip woodland would not seem to have any close parallel.

The lower slopes of the landslips support a complex mosaic of species-rich acidic and calcareous plant communities on unstable clays and sands. The close juxtaposition and mixing of disparate plants is of considerable ecological interest. The habitats represented include calcareous grassland, supporting such species as pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*; calcareous scrub; basic flushes; and acid heathland. The last community comprises heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea* and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*. The reed *Phragmites australis*-dominated basic flushes have large populations of marsh helleborine *Epipactis palustris*, and also support harvest mice *Micronys minutus*.

Geomorphologically, the site is of great interest for its complex of mass-movement features, including the Undercliff itself and the coastal landslips and mud flows beneath it.