

COUNTY: BEDFORDSHIRE **SITE NAME:** DEACON HILL

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

Local Planning Authorities: Mid Bedfordshire District Council
Bedfordshire County Council

National Grid Reference: TL 123295

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 166 **1:10,000:** TL 12 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951 **Date of Last Revision:** 1970

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

Area: 35.4 ha 87.47 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

Deacon Hill is a remnant of chalk downland with a characteristic species rich, calcareous grassland flora. Many of the plants are now uncommon in the county. Nationally this is a habitat that has been greatly reduced both in extent and quality through agricultural improvement and changes in agricultural practice.

Succession in the absence of grazing has produced areas of both scattered and continuous scrub; grazing has been resumed on parts of the site.

The grassland has a mosaic of plant associations. Dominant species are sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and upright brome *Bromus erectus* in association with abundant herbs including species characteristic of chalk grassland such as common rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, marjoram *Origanum vulgare*, clustered bellflower *Campanula glomerata*, carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris*, autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella*, yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* and spring sedge *Carex caryophyllea*. All these species are now uncommon in the county. Wild candytuft *Iberis amara*, field fleawort *Senecio integrifolius* and pasque flower *Pulsatilla vulgaris* are county rarities.

The scrub is dominated by hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, a characteristic invasive shrub of chalk downland, and other species include buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus* and wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana* with false-brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum* dominating the ground flora.

Additional habitats include a small piece of mixed plantation in the middle of the site.