

COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

SITE NAME: PITSTONE HILL

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

Local Planning Authorities: Aylesbury Vale District Council

National Grid Reference: SP950145

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 165 **1:10,000:** SP91 NE, SE & SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951 **Date of Last Revision:** 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 **Date of Last Revision:** 1993

Area: 22.91 ha 56.61 ac

Other information: Within the Chilterns AONB and crossed by the Ridgeway long-distance footpath. Part of the site is registered Common Land (cl 273) owned by Buckinghamshire County Council.

Description and Reasons for Notification

An area of chalk downland on a steeply sloping, west facing section of the Chiltern escarpment. The grassland on the steeper parts of the slope is very rich botanically and supports several locally and nationally uncommon plants. Small areas of improved pasture, mixed woodland and scrub are also present. The site is situated on Middle Chalk with very thin, poor soil on the steep slopes, but thicker, slightly richer soil on the top of the plateau.

The botanically rich grassland is mainly associated with the steeper, lower parts of the site and on the sides of the ditches and trackways of the archaeological features. The range of plants present includes the nationally scarce pasque flower *Pulsatilla vulgaris* and field fleawort *Tephrosia integrifolia* as well as more common species such as clustered bellflower *Campanula glomerata*, frog orchid *Coeloglossum viride*, large thyme *Thymus pulegioides*, autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella*, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule* and squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica*. The grassland is taller amongst the areas of scattered scrub with upright brome *Bromopsis erecta*, common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, wild basil *Clinopodium vulgare* and cowslip *Primula veris*. Mounds of the yellow meadow ant *Lasius flavus* are abundant in parts of the grassland.

The improved grassland on the upper part of the site is dominated by grasses, but retains occasional chalk grassland plants such as burnet saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*, glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* and hoary plantain *Plantago media*.

The open ground is important in supporting a large number of breeding meadow pipits and skylarks, while the areas of scrub and woodland support breeding willow warbler, yellowhammer and dunnoek. Twenty-six butterfly species have been recorded including the small blue *Cupido minimus*, Duke of Burgundy *Hamearis lucina* and silver spotted and Essex skippers *Hesperia comma* and *Thymelicus lineola*.