

County: Essex **Site Name:** West Wood

District: Uttlesford

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

Local Planning Authority: Uttlesford District Council

National Grid Reference: TL 622333 **Area:** 23.6 (ha) 58.3 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1: 50 000: 167 **1: 10 000** TL 63 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1973 **Date of Last Revision** 1975

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 **Date of Last Revision:**

Other Information:

Owned and managed as a nature reserve by The Essex Naturalists' Trust.

Reasons for Notification:

West Wood is an ancient wood situated about 1½ miles north-east of Thaxted on soils composed of Chalky Boulder Clay and sandy loam. Formerly dominated by elm which has since died, the wood is now mostly ash as a result of a natural regeneration. The ill-drained clay areas give rise to wet conditions that favour a rich and varied flora, including Oxlip.

There is an open canopy of Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* with a small proportion of Field Maple *Acer campestre* and Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*. There are Oak *Quercus robur* standards in the eastern end of the wood. The underwood consists of Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Maple, Hornbeam, some recently planted Oak, and include Ash which is regenerating from seed over large areas.

Bramble *Rubus spp.* and Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* dominate the herb layer, with Tufted Hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and Pendulous Sedge *Carex pendula* in the wetter areas. Oxlip *Primula elatior*, Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and Wood Forget-me-not *Myosotis sylvatica* are locally abundant. Other plants include Herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia* and five species of orchid, notably Greater Butterfly *Plantanthera chlorantha* and Broad-leaved Helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*. There are colonies of Bushgrass *Calamagrostis epigejos*, a decreasing plant in Essex, and Wood Barley *Hordelymus europaeus* one of only two sites for the grass in the County.

The wood has wide rides which support a varied flora including damp-loving species such as

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West Wood (cont...)

Meadow-sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Corn and Water Mints *Mentha arvensis* and *M. aquatica*.

Two ponds, and a small area of secondary scrub on the eastern corner of the wood, are included within the boundary of the site. There is a small Norway Spruce plantation.