

COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

SITE NAME: SHEEPHOUSE WOOD

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: SP703235

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 165 **1:10,000:** SP62 SE, SP72 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 56.9 ha 140.7 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

Sheephouse Wood is a large, well-structured block of ancient pedunculate oak woodland carrying a wide range of stand types, some of which are relatively uncommon in the region. The site has a characteristically diverse woodland flora, a typical range of breeding birds and is of particular interest for its invertebrate fauna which includes notable and local species.

The woodland, which rises gradually to the north and is cut by numerous small clay-lined streams and channels, is situated in the low-lying Vale of Aylesbury on heavy, very poorly drained Oxford Clay. The soils range from deep, sticky neutral to basic in the east half to a drier acid soil containing pebbles in the west half.

The structure of the woodland is coppice with standards with much of the coppice grown into the canopy. The oak standards, which range from about 30 years in age to about 150, are closely spaced and in the west part of the wood have been promoted by singling the coppice. The dominant stand type is lowland hazel-pedunculate oak. In addition, there are stands of the less common wet maple type concentrated along the north and east margins and these grade locally into small stands of the typical wet ash-maple type. Ash is thinly distributed and combines with oak locally to form a stand of acid pedunculate oak-hazel-ash. Of the remaining stand types, wet ash-wych elm and suckering English elm are fragmentary. The western half of the wood contains large populations of wild service tree *Sorbus torminalis*, a species normally confined to ancient woodlands; also thickets of aspen *Populus tremula* and areas of silver birch *Betula pendula*, while goat willow *Salix caprea*, grey willow *Salix cinerea* and crab apple *Malus sylvestris* are well distributed throughout. Very locally a small amount of coniferous planting has taken place.

The shrub layer is diverse and well-developed. There are dense areas of coppiced hazel and much honeysuckle, also field maple, hawthorn, Midland hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata*, blackthorn, dogwood, guelder rose, dog rose and field rose, the blackthorn forming dense thickets on the south-east margin of the wood. Present, but less frequent, are elder, holly, privet and redcurrant.

The ground flora varies according to soil types and moisture content, but is largely dominated by bramble *Rubus fruticosus* or bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* in association with tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, wood millet *Millium effusum*, enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana* and patches of dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*. In the drier areas wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* occurs with sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* and locally pale sedge *Carex pallescens* and common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*. The rides are mostly very wet, supporting species that include wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, greater pond sedge *Carex riparia*, meadow-sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, floating sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans*, greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* and creeping-Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia*.

The invertebrate fauna includes the butterflies white admiral *Limenitis camilla*, purple hairstreak *Thecla quercus* and also black hairstreak *Strymonidia pruni*, a nationally restricted species largely confined to relics of ancient forest on the clay belt running through Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire to the East Midlands. Other local species of insect include the uncommon slender ground-hopper *Tetrix subulata*, the Cicadellid bug *Ledra aurita* (a species typically associated with mature oak) and a beetle *Glischrochilis hortensis* which is associated with dead wood.

The 40 species of bird recorded from the woodland include woodcock, together with breeding sparrowhawk, the three British species of woodpecker, nuthatch and tree creeper.