

COUNTY: DORSET

SITE NAME: ABBOTSBURY CASTLE

DISTRICT: WEST DORSET

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

Local Planning Authority: West Dorset District Council, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: SY 560862

Area: 33.7 (ha.) 83.3 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 194

1:10,000: SY 58 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1959

Date of Last Revision: 1977

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

A narrow ridge of Greensand with a capping of Clay with Flints holding very interesting associations of plants characteristic of acid soils and uncommon in this part of Dorset.

The lower slopes below the hill fort have swards dominated by sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and common bent-grass *Agrostis capillaris*. On the steeper parts, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, bristle bent *Agrostis curtisii* and wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* are the major constituents of the turf and ling *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia* are scattered. Substantial areas of the slopes are covered by scrub, mainly western gorse *Ulex gallii* with common gorse *Ulex europaeus*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and broom *Cytisus scoparius*, but in the east the slopes of Wears Hill have dense stands of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and abundant bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*.

On low-lying ground immediately south of the castle there are small patches of soft rush *Juncus effusus* and flote-grass *Glyceria fluitans* where star sedge *Carex echinata*, low sedge *Carex demissa*, carnation-grass *Carex panicea* and cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium* also occur.

Abbotsbury Castle supports a lichen flora typical of acid substrates including *Coelocaulon aculeatum*, *Peltigera polydactyla*, *Rhizocarpon obscuratum* and *Usnea flammea*, some of which are uncommon.