

COUNTY: ESSEX

SITE NAME: BOVINGDON HALL WOODS

DISTRICT: BRAINTREE

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

Local Planning Authority: Braintree District Council

National Grid Reference: TL 752290,
TL 758286,
TL 758283,
TL 762279

Area: 69.4 (ha.) 171.5 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:500,000: 167

1:10,000: TL 72 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1979

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Bovingdon Hall Woods are part of an 810ha Countryside Commission Demonstration Farm. The medieval woods on the estate have much additional historical interest; for example, Maid's Wood contains a disused Roman Road, and the pond in Peggantram's Wood is thought to be the moat to a Lodge of a former medieval park.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Bovingdon Hall Woods comprise 8 adjacent woods, predominantly ancient coppice-with-standards woodland, situated to the north of Braintree. This site is the largest extant example of small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* woodland in Essex, supporting both the acid pedunculate oak-lime woodland type and the only known example in Essex of the sessile oak-lime type. The presence of plateau alder woodland is also of conservation interest since this habitat is uncommon in Essex. Additional stand types present include wet ash-maple and pedunculate oak-hornbeam. The woods are on an almost level plateau of chalky boulder clay overlying London clay. There are three shallow valleys, two arising in Parkhall Wood and one in Bassingbourne Wood. The mainly loess-derived plateau soils, up to 1m thick, and Hanslope series are acidic, giving rise to a relatively uniform woodland flora.

The coppiced limewoods cover approximately 42ha. The rare sessile oak *Quercus petraea* lime type occurs only in Bovingdon Wood; elsewhere the pedunculate oak *Q. robur*-lime type, typical of large stands of small-leaved lime in eastern England is present. The lime is strongly dominant, but is sometimes mixed with hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* and hazel *Corylus avellana*. There are frequent patches of aspen *Populus tremula* and Birch *Betulus sp[p]*., invasion. Elm *Ulmus sp.* is found in parts of Parkhall, Bassingbourne and Maid's Woods. The wet ash-maple woodland type occurs in two relatively acidic forms in Bassingbourne Wood, Parkhall Wood and Maid's Wood. At Mill Hill the canopy is mixed, with pedunculate oak, lime, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and field maple *acer campestre*. Sweet chestnut occurs in Parkhall wood and Shoulder of Mutton Wood, whilst the alder *Alnus glutinosa* stools are in Parkhall Wood. The woodland is bounded by prominent woodbanks some of which support occasional individuals of the wild service-tree *Sorbus torminalis*.

The understorey is varied with elder *Sambucus nigra*, hazel, field maple and hawthorn *Crataegus sp[p]*. Wild cherry *Prunus avium* is found in Peggantrams and Shoulder of Mutton Woods, and holly *Ilex aquifolium* is dominant at Mill Hill.

The ground flora is dominated by bramble *Rubus spp.* Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* is found in Pegantrams and part of Blackbirds wood, whilst dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* is largely confined to the wood banks. Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* and creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis* are frequent but bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* is remarkably rare. Opposite-leaved go saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata* and early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula* are also present. Typical plants of the rides include yellow pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*, bog stitchwort *Stellaria alsine*, water-pepper *Polygonum hydropiper* and rushes *Juncus spp.*

The numerous ponds and dells are thought to be natural and exhibit a marked tendency to occur in pairs or clusters. The largest pond in Parkhall wood is exposed to the light and always wet and here gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, water figwort *Scrophularia auriculata* and fine-leaved water-dropwort *Oenanthe aquatica* are found.

Secondary woodland is found south of Pegantrams Wood, comprising hawthorn and oak, with blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and birch, east of Shoulder-of-Mutton Wood, with sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, and at Hoggs Farm which is dominated by invasive elm. There are also a number of small areas of planted broadleaves, and 7ha of conifers were planted in Parkhall Wood in 2 blocks when there was a lapse in coppicing in the 1960's.

Maid's Wood contains a small heronry and the woodland complex as a whole supports a rich and diverse fauna.