

COUNTY: ESSEX

SITE NAME: NORSEY WOOD

DISTRICT: BASILDON

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This site is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

Local Planning Authority: Basildon Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 686955

Area: 67.17 (ha.) 165.98 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 167

1:10,000: TQ 69 NE/SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1979

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The wood is scheduled as an Ancient Monument.

Reasons for Notification:

Norsey Wood is a large mixed chestnut coppice derived from acid oak woodland, situated on the east side of Billericay. It is ancient woodland, lying on a plateau, dissected in the south by a system of unusually steep-sided valleys. Soils are acidic being derived from Bagshot Sands and Gravels over London Clay. The interface between the gravels and clay has produced a series of springs and flushes. Due to its size, past history, which is well documented, varied soils and topography, it has a good variety of habitats, a rich flora and fauna and is one of the best woods of its type in Essex.

Sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* coppice is dominant on the plateau, hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* coppice on the east and south margins, birch *Betula pendula* and *B. pubescens* woodland in the north and alder *Alnus glutinosa* with occasional ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and willow *Salix spp.* in the valleys. Aspen *Populus tremula*, rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, common and sessile oak *Quercus robur* and *Q. petraea* are mixed with the main types. Chestnut and both oak species form a thin scatter of standards throughout. The coppice structure is well preserved with some stools of considerable size.

Bluebell *Endymion non-scriptus*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. are the dominant ground flora with wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*, slender and trailing St John's wort *Hypericum pulchrum* and *H. humifusum*, heath woodrush *Luzula multiflora* and the very local greater woodrush *L. sylvatica* on the more acid sands and gravels. Other important woodland species include wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, yellow archangel *Galeobdolon luteum*, wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*, butcher's broom *Ruscus aculeatus*, lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis* and herb paris *Paris quadrifolia* at its only locality in south Essex. Narrow and broad buckler-ferns *Dryopteris carthusiana* and *D. dilatata* are found on the valley slopes.

Additional interest is formed by the spring lines which give rise to colonies of opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, stands of pendulous sedge *Carex pendula* and small acidic flushes with sphagnum mosses (*Sphagnum palustrae* and *S. cuspidum* -- the latter very rare in Essex). Several colonies of Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*) probably represent one of the largest populations in the county. Water violet *Hottonia palustris*, an uncommon and decreasing plant in Essex, forms a large colony in one of the four woodland ponds.

A major grass ride supports a varied flora including ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* and common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, and is a favourite hunting area for some of the nine species of dragonfly found in the wood.