

COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

SITE NAME: ASTON CLINTON RAGPITS

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, Buckinghamshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SP888108

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 165                      1:10,000: SP81 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1976                      Date of Last Revision:

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984                      Date of Last Revision:

Area: 2.94 ha 7.28 ac

**Other information:** Most of the site is managed as a nature reserve by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists Trust; it is within the Chilterns AONB.

### Description and Reasons for Notification

Formerly worked for chalk freestone (rag), this small area of old pits and spoil heaps at the foot of the Chiltern escarpment has become colonised by an unusually rich assemblage of herbs, shrubs and invertebrates, including several which are rare in the county. A screen of mature woodland and a hawthorn hedge shelter add further interest to the site.

The grassland consists of mosaics of red fescue *Festuca rubra*, upright brome *Bromus erectus*, wood false-brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum* and tall oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*. The first two form species-rich swards maintained mainly by rabbits and walkers, and containing cowslip *Primula veris*, chalk milkwort *Polygala calcarea*, chalk eyebright *Euphrasia pseudokerleri*, Chiltern and autumn gentians *Gentianella germanica* and *G. amarella*, horseshoe and kidney vetches *Hippocrepis comosa* and *Anthyllis vulneraria*, twayblade *Listera ovata* and frog, bee, fly, fragrant, pyramidal, common spotted and greater and lesser butterfly orchids *Coeloglossum viride*, *Ophrys apifera*, *O. insectifera*, *Gymnadenia conopsea*, *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, *Platanthera chlorantha* and *P. bifolia* as well as the adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum* and fungi including a morel *Morchella* sp. The false-brome is associated with both existing and cleared scrub, as are certain herbs including valerian *Valeriana officinalis*, marjoram *Origanum vulgare* and male fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*.

Scrub ranges from regenerating dog-wood to well established trees of birch *Betula pendula* and goat willow *Salix caprea* and includes hawthorn (which constitutes the bulk of the hedge), wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana*, buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*, hazel, old man's beard *Clematis vitalba* and others. Of interest is a young plant of mezereon *Daphne mezereum*, probably bird-sown.

The woodland fringe consists of mature beech with yew, ash and whitebeam *Sorbus aria*, as well as Scots pine. The associated herbaceous flora includes white and broad-leaved helleborines *Cephalanthera damasonium* and *Epipactis helleborine* and abundant wood meadow-grass *Poa nemoralis*.

Some twenty-seven species of butterfly have been recorded in the Ragpits, an impressive total for such a small site. The chalk-hill and common blues *Lycaena coridon* and *Polyommatus icarus* and Duke of Burgundy *Hamearis lucina* are examples whose larval foodplants grow here.