

**COUNTY:** OXFORDSHIRE

**SITE NAME:** ASHDOWN PARK

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

**Local Planning Authorities:** Vale of the White Horse District Council

**National Grid Reference:** SU285820

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 174 **1:10,000:** SU28 SE

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1950 **Date of Last Revision:** 1977

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

**Area:** 9.2 ha 22.7 ac

### **Description and Reasons for Notification**

This site is of interest for the lichen flora associated with a large number of naturally situated sarsen stones. Twenty species of lichen have been recorded, many of which are uncommon in the area. Some of these species have declining populations as a result of air pollution, loss of suitable habitat and the effects of modern agricultural practices. In most areas where sarsens occur the stones have been removed or buried to permit ploughing and access for farm machinery. Ashdown Park is considered to be the best site for sarsen lichens surviving outside Wiltshire and Dorset.

Ashdown Park is situated at an altitude of 170 metres at the foot of the Berkshire Downs. The soils consist of sandy loams overlying chalk, on which lie the scattered stones. These boulders are relicts of an Eocene stratum of hard, acid sandstone. Native acid rock is extremely local in this area, occurring in only a few localities in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire.

The stones occur within grassland which is heavily grazed to ensure that they do not become overgrown and shaded. The parkland area has been planted with a number of ornamental trees.

The sarsens at Ashdown support a rich cryptogamic flora with a characteristic association of species known as the *Parmelion conspersae*. The following lichens are particularly noteworthy: *Aspicilia caesiocinerea* which is frequent around weathering pits, *Buellia saxorum* which is frequent on vertical surfaces and in Britain apparently confined to sarsens, *Candelariella coralliza* and *Rinodina atrocinerea*, both of which are common at Ashdown, and *Parmelia loxodes* which is at the eastern edge of its range. The lichen flora on this site may have taken many centuries to develop. Sarsen stones which have been moved elsewhere, as at Ashbury, Lambourn Church, Parkplace and Whiteknights Park, do not exhibit this flora.