

COUNTY: SURREY SITE NAME: WOLDINGHAM & OXTED DOWNS

DISTRICT: TANDRIDGE

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

Local Planning Authority: TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid References: TQ 370540 Area: 128.9 (ha.) 318.5 (ac.)  
TQ 385543  
TQ 375562

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 187 1:10,000: TQ 35 NE, SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1955 Date of Last Revision: 1975

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

Other Information:

This site was formerly known as Chelsham and Woldingham Group SSSI. The boundary of the site has been altered by major deletions and several extensions, and no longer includes the Nore Hill Pinnacle Local Nature Reserve. The site is within Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Part is Common Land and part is owned by the National Trust.

Reasons for Notification:

Woldingham and Oxted Downs Site of Special Scientific Interest is situated to the south of the village of Woldingham and comprises a large area of downland on the scarp and dip slopes of the North Downs where these reach their greatest height in Surrey. The site includes rich chalk grassland, scrub, and mature and secondary woodland supporting many species of characteristic plants and animals, a number of which are rare.

Soils of the site are derived mostly from the underlying chalk except where plateau deposits overlie the chalk on the crest of the Downs.

Chalk grassland has developed over hundreds of years of traditional grazing management and once covered most of the North Downs. It is now becoming severely reduced in area by modern agricultural, industrial and housing development, and many remaining areas are becoming overgrown with scrub where grazing has ceased. This process has resulted in a loss of at least 71% of chalk grassland in Britain between 1934 and 1972. This site retains several large areas of rich chalk grassland, as well as many smaller areas now surrounded by scrub. Where the turf is grazed short by stock or rabbits, the sward is dominated by red and sheep's fescues *Festuca rubra* and *F. ovina* together with quaking grass *Briza media*, yellow oat grass *Trisetum flavescens*, purging flax *Linum catharticum*, bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*, thyme *Thymus praecox*, common centaury *Centaureum erythraea*, yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* and early gentian *Gentianella anglica*, a plant found only in Britain. Where the sward is

taller, it is dominated by upright brome *Bromus erectus*, wood false-brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum* and tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum*. Other plants include salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuschii* and greater butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*, which grows in one of its largest Surrey colonies in the north-east of the site.

Scrub occurs throughout the site, and is composed of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, whitebeam *Sorbus aria*, wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana*, wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare* and spindle *Euonymus europaeus*. The ground vegetation is composed of dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* with occasional twayblade orchid *Listera ovata*. In many areas of the site scrub has developed further into secondary woodland. On Chaldon's Common the sandy acidic soil supports open oak *Quercus robur* and birch *Betula pendula* woodland, where the scarce blue pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis* ssp. *foemina* occurs. Elsewhere thin chalky soils support sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and hawthorn woodland with a ground vegetation of dog's mercury, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and ivy *Hedera helix*. Some areas of woodland are more mature, such as Great Church Wood, which is dominated by ash, oak and hazel *Corylus avellana*, with a rich ground layer including bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and the Surrey rarity herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*. Hanging wood is dominated by ash and field maple *Acer campestre*, and also has a rich flora including nettle-leaved bellflower *Campanula trachelium* and sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, whilst a beech *Fagus sylvatica* hanger at Whistler's Steep supports the scarce plants stinking hellebore *Helleborus foetidus* and mezereon *Daphne mezereum*.

The south-facing slopes and sheltered patches of grassland surrounded by scrub support a rich invertebrate fauna. The rufous and stripe-winged grasshoppers *Gomphoceripus rufus* and *Stenobothrus lineatus*, the Roman snail *Helix pomatia* and a hoverfly *Microdon devius* are among the rare species which occur here.