

COUNTY: EAST SUSSEX SITE NAME: HIGH WOODS

BOROUGH: HASTINGS

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

Local Planning Authority: HASTINGS BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 713100 Area: 33.5 (ha.) 82.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 199 1:10,000: TQ 70 NW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This is a new site.

Reasons for Notification:

This site is of primary importance for its sessile oak *Quercus petraea* coppice, a type of woodland not known to occur anywhere else in East Sussex. The woods have developed over Weald Clay and Lower Tunbridge Wells Sandstone and the variation in soils, drainage and management have resulted in a mosaic of woodland types, three of which are becoming rather rare in the national context. Several other semi-natural habitats: ponds, streams and an area of wet heath with acidic grassland are also present, thus increasing the diversity and interest of the site.

Two compartments of actively coppiced sessile oak woodland occur in the east and centre west of the site, over a sparse field layer of ground-ivy *Glechoma hederacea* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. Elsewhere the majority of the wood is dominated by pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* and birch *Betula pendula*. However, past management has resulted in a great deal of variation within this woodland type and other species locally dominate including sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*, alder *Alnus glutinosa*, beech *Fagus sylvatica*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* and holly *Ilex aquifolium*.

The shrub layer consists of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, elder *Sambucus nigra* and very occasionally alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus*. The field layer is dominated by bramble, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*.

Where base rich soils occur this becomes more diverse and includes dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* and marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, together with several notable species such as common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*, southern wood-rush *Luzula forsteri* and the mosses *Sphagnum squarrosum* and *Hookeria lucens*.

The other distinct woodland types present are mature alder-carr woodland and hornbeam – *Carpinus betulus* coppice, which occupies much of the north west of the site but rarely forms such discrete blocks as does the oak coppice.

The small area of wet heath and acidic grassland in the north east of the site is dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera* with patches of heather *Calluna vulgaris*, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and the sphagnum mosses *Sphagnum compactum* and *S. palustre*. Bracken invasion is a problem here and birch-grey willow *Salix cinerea* scrub occurs throughout.

Two small ponds support water starworts *Callitriche* species, common marsh-bedstraw *Galium palustre*, hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and a range of bryophytes (mosses and liverworts).

The invertebrate populations at Highwoods have yet to be studied in detail but it is likely that this site, particularly the oak woodland, supports a rich insect fauna. A number of mammals have been recorded from this site including a population of the very local yellow-necked mouse *Apodemus flavicollis*. Breeding birds include sparrowhawk, willow tit, green woodpecker and greater-spotted woodpecker.