

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: WORTH FOREST

DISTRICT: MID SUSSEX

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

Local Planning Authority: MID SUSSEX DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 259331

Area: 44.3 (ha.) 109.5 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 187

1:10,000: TQ 33 SW, TQ 32 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954

Date of Last Revision: 1980

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The site lies within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Reasons for Notification

This area of ancient Wealden ghyll woodland contains an example of a base-poor springline alder wood, this being a nationally uncommon woodland type. The site also supports a rich community of lichens.

The woodland lies on Tunbridge Wells Sand and Grinstead Clay, and is situated in a ghyll formed by a stream cutting down through the soft sandstone. Whereas the lower slopes and valley bottom are poorly drained, the upper slopes are drier and retain numerous old trees which support an uncommonly rich community of lichens, mosses and liverworts. At the west end of the site there is a small area of scrub on the valley slope.

Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and downy birch *Betula pubescens* are abundant in the valley bottom, where the field layer includes creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis*, smooth-stalked sedge *Carex laevigata* and ferns such as lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, narrow buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana* and mountain fern *Oreopteris limbosperma*. On much of the steep lower slope the wet ground supports carpets of *Sphagnum* mosses with clumps of purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*. Two locally uncommon ‘Atlantic’ mosses, *Hyocomium flagellare* and *Rhytidiadelphus loreus* occur in the ghyll; species which are associated with ancient woodland in the Weald. Small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* is also present, an uncommon tree in West Sussex on which the lichen *Lecidea cinnabarina* and moss *Dicranum tauricum* are found.

Much of the rest of the woodland consists of pedunculate oak-birch wood, with scattered elder *Sambucus nigra* and alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus*. Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia* are abundant.

Mature oak *Quercus robur* and beech *Fagus sylvatica* are present as standards in the woodland and also occasionally as pollards, marking old banks and walls. Old yew trees

*Taxus baccata* also occur along these boundaries. The older trees, especially oak, are the chief supporters of epiphytic communities which include the lichens *Chaenotheca brunneola*, *Parmelia revoluta*, *Dimerella diluta*, *Pertusaria hemisphaerica*, the 'beard-lichen' *Usnea subfloridana*, and the moss *Zygodon baumgartneri*.