

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: TREYFORD TO BEPTON DOWN

DISTRICT: CHICHESTER

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

Local Planning Authority: CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Ref: SU 840176

Area: 122.31 (ha.) 302.22 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey sheet 1:50,000: 197

1:10,000: SU 81 NW & NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954

Date of Last Revision: 1980

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This site lies within the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It was formerly known as Didling Hill and Bepton Down.

Reasons for Notification:

The escarpment from Treyford to Bepton Down contains representative examples of unimproved chalk grassland and yew woodland developed on the Upper, Middle and Lower Chalk of the western South Downs. Both of these habitats are rare nationally: the area of unimproved chalk grassland in particular has declined dramatically over the last few decades. Several particularly rare and uncommon mollusc species (snails) are also present.

The site comprises three separate blocks along the north scarp slope with additional areas in Stead Combe – an east facing dry valley. The semi-natural chalk grassland, chalk scrub and ash-beech-yew woodlands have been fragmented and altered by the extensive planting of conifers along the escarpment.

Species-rich unimproved chalk grassland dominated by sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* and upright brome *Bromus erectus* occurs throughout, with herbs such as round-headed rampion *Phyteuma tenerum*, horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* and carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris*. Several species of orchid are present including frog *Coeloglossum viride*, bee *Ophrys apifera* and musk orchids *Herminium monorchis*. Chalk bryophytes (mosses) are well represented and in addition *Racomitrium lanuginosum* has been recorded. This moss is rare in the south east and reflects the 'oceanic' nature of this north-facing ridge.

In ungrazed swards tor grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* becomes dominant thus reducing diversity, and in semi-improved areas Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* grows with it. However, herbs such as salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaris* and yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor* still persist.

Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* scrub is now invading much of the ungrazed grassland, while a more diverse mixed scrub community with hazel *Corylus avellana* and guelder rose *Viburnum opulus* is established in other areas.

Mature mixed woodland with yew *Taxus baccata*, beech *Fagus sylvatica* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior* clothes the lower slopes and Stead Combe. In all but the most shaded areas there is a dense ground cover of dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*. Bird's-nest orchid *Neottia nidus-avis* is also present. Ash dominated woodland tends to be more open with a diverse associated scrub layer and rides containing chalk grassland plants such as marjoram *Origanum vulgare* and yellow wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*.