

COUNTY: WILTSHIRE      SITE NAME: STRATFORD TONEY DOWN

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

Local Planning Authorities: SALISBURY DISTRICT COUNCIL, Wiltshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU 095246      Area: 23.1 (ha.) 57.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 184      1:10,000: SU 02 SE & NE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Within the Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Down Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Stratford Toney Down exemplifies the botanically rich sheep's-fescue–meadow oat-grass *Festuca ovina*–*Avenula pratensis* chalk grassland community. It also supports nationally rare plant and butterfly species. The site lies to the south-west of Salisbury and is a shallow dry valley which cuts north through Middle Chalk towards the River Ebble. The steep slopes have both east and west facing aspects.

The majority of the grassland is the sheep's-fescue – meadow oat-grass type, but upright brome *Bromus erectus* achieves dominance in some areas. Quaking-grass *Briza media* and crested hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha*, along with the sedges glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* and spring sedge *C. caryophyllea*, are widespread. Nationally rare species present on the site include the field fleawort *Senecio integrifolius* and burnt orchid *Orchis ustulata* as well as bastard-toadflax *Thesium humifusum* and dwarf sedge *Carex humilis* which are frequent. A wide range of downland herbs occur on the site. Devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, common rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium* and squinancy-wort *Asperula cynanchica* are widespread, as are dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris* and saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*. Betony *Stachys officinalis* is unusually frequent and occurs with meadow fescue *Festuca pratensis*. Annual and biennial plants requiring more open turf are also present, and these include yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris* and eyebright *Euphrasia nemorosa*. Orchids that are found on the site include bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*, fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*, and common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*.

A number of plants that favour slightly more acid conditions are found on the site. Of particular interest is the occurrence of heath speedwell *Veronica officinalis* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta* both uncharacteristic plants of open downland. Gorse *Ulex europaeus* which also prefers higher soil acidity is a major component of the scrub community. Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* joins gorse as the predominant

species of scattered scrub along the valley slopes. Some denser blocks of scrub are rich in species and further plants include wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana*, buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*.

A colony of the nationally rare adonis blue butterfly *Lysandra bellargus* occurs on the site and typical downland species such as the chalkhill blue *Lysandra coridon* and the marbled white *Melanargia galathea* also breed. Anthills, which are the nest mounds of the yellow meadow ant *Lasius flavus*, have developed on some slopes and support typical plants such as rock-rose and wild thyme *Thymus praecox*.