

COUNTY: SURREY SITE NAME: CHIPSTEAD DOWNS

BOROUGH: REIGATE AND BANSTEAD

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

Local Planning Authority: REIGATE AND BANSTEAD BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 265579, TQ 268562 Area: 152.7 (ha.) 377.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 187 1:10,000: TQ 25 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1953 Date of last Revision: 1975

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

Other Information:

Most of the site is owned by Surrey County Council and is managed by Reigate and Banstead Borough Council as a public open space.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Situated on the dip slope of the North Downs, the Chipstead Downs complex includes areas of steeply sloping chalk grassland with associated scrub and secondary woodland, as well as large areas of ancient woodland over clay-with-flints on the plateau.

Banstead Wood occupies an extensive area of the plateau. Sessile oak *Quercus petraea* and birch *Betula* spp. are the main canopy trees, but beech *Fagus sylvatica* is co-dominant in places. Stands containing sessile oak are rare in Surrey.

Conifers, sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* and other exotic trees have been randomly planted into these stands, especially in the area known as Perrott's Wood. An understorey of hazel *Corylus avellana* is well developed in some areas whilst rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum* is locally abundant, and holly *Ilex aquifolium* is common throughout. The ground flora of Banstead Wood is dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*.

There are several areas of well-developed secondary beech woodland on the chalk slopes. Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and yew *Taxus baccata* are common and the shrub layer contains elder *Sambucus nigra*, hazel, holly, and field maple *Acer campestre*. Ivy *Hedera helix*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and bramble dominate the ground flora in which twayblade *Listera ovata* and white helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium* also occur.

Peripheral areas of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* scrub are widespread.

The remaining areas of chalk grassland have been largely neglected and extensive areas are dominated by tor grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* and false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*. However, in places where mowing and rabbit grazing have maintained a richer

chalk flora dominated by sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* and glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, rarer species occur and include white mullein *Verbascum lychnitis*, round-headed rampion *Phyteuma orbiculare*, bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*, fly orchid *O. insectifera* and the greater yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus angustifolius*, a plant which has become so rare as to be attached special protection as an endangered species faced with possible extinction.

An area of grassland at Fames Rough is periodically strip-ploughed to create a favourable habitat for three very rare arable weeds: ground pine *Ajuga chamaepitys*, cut-leaved germander *Teucrium botrys* and mat-grass fescue *Vulpia unilateralis*.

The butterfly fauna of the grassland is very rich. Species include brown argus, chalk hill blue, grizzled skipper and the holly blue. There are eleven fly species (Diptera) of local distribution recorded from the site.

The bird fauna of Chipstead Downs is diverse with woodland breeding species being well represented, these include sparrowhawk, lesser-spotted woodpecker, woodcock and wood warbler.