

KENT LOCAL WILDLIFE SITE

KWT File No.: 855355

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| Site: | Sandpit Wood, Clapper Hill | Site Ref. No: | AS02 |
| LPA: | Ashford / Tunbridge Wells | Central Grid Ref: | TQ 855355 TQ 846358 |
| Parish: | Benenden / Biddenden / Tenterden | Category: | Woodland, stream, bog, grassland, pond |
| Owner: | Private | Natural Area: | High Weald |
| Area: | 139.51 ha | AONB: | No |
| First notified: | 1986 | TPO: | Yes (at western end) |
| Last revised: | 1993, February 1998, May 2009 | | |
| Last approved: | October 2010 | | |

REASON FOR DESIGNATION

This site comprises a large block of ancient woodland with woodbanks along some edges and supporting 29 recently recorded ancient woodland indicators. A number of streams run through the site and these have given rise to areas of wet woodland. The site also includes several areas of semi-improved neutral grassland which are contiguous with the ancient woodland.

RATIONALE FOR SITE BOUNDARY

The site boundary has been drawn to include the extent of the ancient semi-natural and ancient replanted woodland and its associated habitats including streams, flushes, ponds and unimproved/semi-improved neutral grassland all of which contribute to the overall wildlife interest of the site.

DESCRIPTIONWoodland

This large tract of High Weald woodland situated on high ground has dry, acid soils derived from Tunbridge Wells Sands and is dissected by a number of streams and associated valleys and gills. The soils on the lower slopes of these valleys and in the floodplains of the streams are heavy and damp, being derived from Wadhurst Clay.

Woodland habitats are diverse as a result of the varied geomorphology and differing management regimes. Managed sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* coppice with occasional pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* standards occupies the very acid soils of the plateau, with heather *Calluna vulgaris*, pill sedge *Carex pilulifera* and common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense* in more open parts and rides. Hard fern *Blechnum spicant* is frequent as is *Leucobryum glaucum*, a moss characteristic of very acid soils. Occasional open areas are dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. Pedunculate oak and beech *Fagus sylvatica* high forest are present, and oak and conifer plantations have been introduced on parts of



the higher ground. Old pedunculate oak coppice is frequent, sometimes as singled poles. Storm damage has affected some areas.

The most interesting areas are the unmanaged and managed slopes and floodplains of streams. Large mature beech and pedunculate oak are found on the sides of many gills, with hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, silver birch *Betula pendula*, downy birch *Betula pubescens* and hazel *Corylus avellana* coppice on the lower ground and ash *Fraxinus excelsior* / alder *Alnus glutinosa* coppice present in the boggy floodplains. The many shrubs occurring within the complex include holly *Ilex aquifolium*, guelder-rose *Viburnum opulus*, aspen *Populus tremula*, alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus*, rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and Midland hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata*.

Bluebell ¹ *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and, sometimes, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. dominate the woodland ground flora, together with wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, lesser skullcap ² *Scutellaria minor* and bugle *Ajuga reptans* where soils are slightly damper. Woodland orchids present include violet helleborine *Epipactis purpurata*, broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*, common twayblade *Listera ovata* and early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula*. Ramsons *Allium ursinum*, opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis*, pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*, remote sedge *Carex remota* and lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina* are locally dominant in the floodplains.

Alder carr, together with a more acid, boggy flora, occurs around the spring-line flushes and in some of the gills. Marsh violet ² *Viola palustris*, remote sedge, thin-spiked sedge ² *Carex strigosa* and narrow buckler fern *Dryopteris carthusiana* feature in these areas, often with sphagnum moss *Sphagnum* spp. In some places, these bogs are being colonised by young birch, but they still hold much interest, including the rare saprophytic liverwort *Cryptothallus mirabilis*, recorded in only three sites in Kent, and wood horsetail ^{3,4} *Equisetum sylvaticum*.

There are a number of shaded and often silted woodland ponds.

Woodbanks occur along some of the woodland edges.

Twenty nine recently recorded ancient woodland indicator plant species from a brief walk over survey (forty six have been previously recorded including a variety of sedges) and sixty-six bryophytes show the extent of the diversity. The corticolous lichen flora is also of interest, especially in the sheltered, unpolluted valleys.

Several badger ⁵ setts were recorded in 2009 and a landowner reported then that bats ¹ use the site.

Grassland

Two small semi-improved neutral grassland fields were added to site in 1993. The species rich field at TQ846358 has been managed sympathetically since at least the 1970s. A small pond created in one corner has colonised naturally with a wide variety of species typical of the Weald, including tubular water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*, water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* and marsh woundwort *Stachys palustris*. The aquatic moss *Drepanocladus aduncus*, which is quite local in the county, was also recorded. The meadow itself has a good assemblage of common herbs and grasses, including sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* and common sorrel



Rumex acetosa in addition to abundant adder's-tongue ² *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, sneezewort ² *Achillea ptarmica* and ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*.

A second semi-improved neutral grassland field at TQ853351 contains a variety of common herbs and grasses, including sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, field wood-rush *Luzula campestris* and bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*.

- ¹ Protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- ² County Scarce Plants. Atlas of Kent Flora. Philp. 1982.
- ³ County Rare Plants. Atlas of Kent Flora. Philp. 1982.
- ⁴ Kent Red Data Book Status 3. A. Waite (Ed) 2000.
- ⁵ Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

