

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON THE 28TH FEBRUARY 1986

COUNTY: HERTFORDSHIRE      SITE NAME: SHERRARDSPARK WOOD

DISTRICT: WELWYN – HATFIELD

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

Local Planning Authority: Welwyn Hatfield District Council

National Grid Reference: TL 230139      Area: 74.9 (ha.) 185.1 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 166      1:10,000: TL 21 SE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This is a new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Sherrardspark Wood is situated on high ground between the Lea and Mimram river valleys; on the gravel and sand Reading Beds which cap the clay and chalk of the London Basin. The acid soils support an extensive ancient semi-natural sessile oak/hornbeam *Quercus petraea*/*Carpinus betulus* woodland. A significant part of this wood is dominated by mature sessile oak high forest, a habitat now rare throughout lowland England. Smaller areas of Birch *Betula sp.* and mixed deciduous woodland are included in the site, together with a small coniferous plantation adding to habitat diversity.

The sessile oak high forest contains large areas of mature stand with trees above 30m high and up to 250 years old. Some areas support an understorey of previously coppiced hornbeam, with occasional standards of this species also present. Elsewhere both silver and downy birch *Betula pendula* and *B. pubescens* make up the canopy with pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, wild cherry *Prunus avium* and field maple *Acer campestre* scattered throughout the woodland. The shrub layer is dominated by honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* and holly *Ilex aquifolium* with some rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*, the latter under taller oaks. Typically for woodland of this type on acid soils the ground flora is sparse and dominated by bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*.

Towards the north chalk comes to the surface, reflected in woodland once dominated by wych elm *Ulmus glabra* and now being invaded by sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*. A diverse flora persists here comprising dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, yellow archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and broad buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*. Two uncommon helleborines are known from the wood, violet and broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis purpurata* and *E. helleborine*. Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*, another local Hertfordshire species, is also present. In more acidic conditions a small mixed plantation supports a considerable amount of heather *Calluna vulgaris*.

Additional habitats are provided by swallowholes fed by woodland streams and which hold seasonal water. A disused railway cutting bisects the wood and exposes calcareous soils. Colonisation by spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* and guelder rose *Viburnum opulus* is underway. A typical woodland ride

flora is developing forming an important habitat for invertebrates which does not occur elsewhere in the wood.