

COUNTY: SURREY SITE NAME: HORSELL COMMON

DISTRICT: WOKING

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

Local Planning Authority: WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Ref: TQ 003606

Area: 150.3 (ha.) 371.3 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 186

1:10,000: TQ 06 SW, SU 96 SE, SU 95 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1975

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Horsell Common SSSI is owned and managed by Horsell Common Preservation Society and much of the site is Common Land.

The boundary of the site has been modified at renotification by extensions and deletions.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Horsell Common is situated just north of Woking and consists of a rich mosaic of heathland habitats, ranging from open heath and acidic grassland to bog, heathland pools, and secondary woodland and scrub. It supports a variety of characteristic heathland plants and animals, including several which are local or rare.

The site lies on the Bagshot Beds, which give rise to an acidic sandy soil often overlain with peat in damp areas. Heathland has formed a major component of the landscape in southern England on acidic soils since Mesolithic times. The area of heathland in Britain has been greatly reduced by conversion to intensive agriculture, forestry and housing, a process which has accelerated this century so that 40% of heathland remaining in 1950 has now been lost. Surviving areas are seldom grazed by stock, and many are becoming overgrown with scrub and woodland.

Horsell Common retains many open heathland areas which are being maintained by active management. In dry parts of the site, ling *Calluna vulgaris* and bell heather *Erica cinerea* are dominant, often mixed with or replaced by dry acidic grassland composed of common and creeping bent-grasses *Agrostis capillaris* and *A. stolonifera*, sheep's fescue grass *Festuca ovina* and in taller areas purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*. Other plants found here include dwarf furze *Ulex minor*, dodder *Cuscuta epithimum* (a parasite of ling), and common cudweed *Filago vulgaris* which is rapidly decreasing in south-east England. In wet hollows and in extensive areas around Danewell Gutter, a mosaic of boggy grassland and wet heathland occurs, dominated by cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, purple moor-grass, heath rush *Juncus squarrosus* and bog moss *Sphagnum* spp. Plants growing amongst these include white beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba*, bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, and round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*. Another area of bog at Horsell Birch supports marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, yellow flag iris *Iris*

*pseudacorus*, the largest Surrey colony of lesser water-plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides*, and bog hair-grass *Deschampsia setacea*, which is scarce in Britain and rare in Europe as a whole. The only remaining Surrey colony of three-lobed water crowfoot *Ranunculus tripartitus* is found here in heathland pools.

Invasive trees and shrub are found scattered throughout the heathland areas and include gorse *Ulex europaeus*, broom *Cytisus scoparius*, Scot's pine *Pinus sylvestris*, silver birch *Betula pendula* and oak *Quercus robur*, and in wet areas downy birch *Betula pubescens* and grey sallow *Salix cinerea*. In many parts of the site these species have developed into secondary woodland with a ground flora of bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, with bog moss and purple moor-grass in wetter areas.

Horsell Common is probably one of the richest areas in Surrey for bees, wasps and ants (Aculeate Hymenoptera) and 163 species have been recorded, including the potter wasp *Eumenes coarctata*, 15 species of spider-hunting wasps (Pompilidae), and a solitary bee *Anthidium manicatum*. Many solitary bees and wasps nest in exposed sand occurring alongside paths and on the faces of an old sandpit, where the greatest concentration of these insects is found. Other locally-distributed insects found within the site include the silver-studded blue butterfly *Plebejus argus*, a rare stilt-legged fly *Micropeza lateralis* and a beetle *Melanophila acuminata*.

Many birds characteristic of heathland breed within the site including nightjar, stonechat, grasshopper warbler and snipe. The peripheral woodland areas support breeding woodland birds such as sparrowhawk, woodcock, tawny owl and spotted flycatcher.