

COUNTY: CHESHIRE

SITE NAME: BICKERTON HILL

DISTRICT: CHESTER/CREWE & NANTWICH

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

Local Planning Authority: CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Chester City Council/Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SJ 500530

Area: 89.87 (ha) 222.1 ac

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 117

1:10,000: SJ 45 SE & SJ 55 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1979

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984

Date of Last Revision: 14 December 1999

Reasons for Notification:

Bickerton Hill has been notified as a representative of the few, and comparatively small sized, remaining areas of lowland heath in Cheshire and for its assemblage of reptiles. The vegetation varies from open heathland, to dense developing birch *Betula pendula* woodland. Heather *Calluna vulgaris*-wavy hair grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and heather-western gorse *Ulex gallii* form the main open heathland community types.

General Description:

Bickerton Hill is the southern most part of a small range of hills of the Triassic era that rise above the plain of central Cheshire. Most of the site lies on a Keuper sandstone ridge and the soils are acidic in nature. Those on the ridge comprise mainly acidic brown sands grading to leached podzolic soils or to deeper less sandy brown earths.

The top of the hill and areas of the scarp slope are dominated by dwarf shrub species such as heather and bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* with bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* occurring in parts. Other heathland species also occur such as bell heather *Erica cinerea* with patches of western gorse and broom *Cytisus scoparius*.

Most of the woodland is dominated by birch however oak *Quercus petraea*, aspen *Populus tremula*, rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, gean *Prunus avium* and holly *Ilex aquifolium* are also present. Heather and bilberry are locally dominant in the woodland ground flora with the broad buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata* locally frequent.

The site supports several species of reptile including, the adder *Vipera berus*, common lizard *Lacerta vivipara* and slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*. Other fauna includes breeding pied flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*, the locally uncommon green hairstreak butterfly *Callophrys rubi* and glow worm *Lampyrus noctiluca* as well as a number of nationally scarce invertebrates. These include the bleached pug moth *Eupithecia expallidata*, alder kitten moth *Furcula bicuspis* and the soldier beetle *Malthus frontalis*.

Other Information:

Boundary extension. Approximately 90% of the site is owned and managed by the National Trust.