

COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

SITE NAME: HOWE PARK WOOD

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

Local Planning Authorities: Milton Keynes Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SP833344

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 152, 165 **1:10,000:** SP83 SW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1994 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 21.4 ha 60 ac

Other information: Howe Park Wood is owned by Milton Keynes Borough Council and managed as a public access woodland, with priority given to nature conservation management by the Milton Keynes Parks Trust Ltd. The site is within the designated area of the new City of Milton Keynes.

Description and Reasons for Notification

Howe Park Wood is an ancient semi-natural woodland on the south-western outskirts of Milton Keynes, and is one of the largest tracts surviving in this area. Records of the existence of Howe Park Wood date back to the 13th century and possibly to the 11th century. For much of its history it has evidently been managed as a coppice-with-standards woodland, although, as its name suggests, it is possible that in the early medieval period it was part of a medieval park. A number of surviving large ancient oaks *Quercus robur* and one ancient crab apple *Malus sylvestris* reflect the wood's past as a deer park.

The wood is situated on heavy poorly drained calcareous boulder clays. The soils derived from these clays range from free draining loams to seasonally waterlogged gleyed clays, with some areas of drier acid soils. Some areas are seasonally waterlogged, the whole site draining down to the Loughton Brook which runs along the north-western boundary of the wood.

The range of soils and drainage and the long history and low intensity of past management has led to Howe Park Wood retaining a wide range of woodland trees and shrubs. On the more calcareous clays the wood consists of ash/maple/dog's mercury woodland while on the freer-draining and more acidic areas there are stands of oak/bracken/bramble woodland. Small stands of apparently native hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* coppice occur in the wood far to the north-west of its accepted native range. Hazel coppice is frequent and both species of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and *C. laevigata* are common. Patches of blackthorn are also found, both within the wood and along its margins. On the wettest seasonally inundated soils the woodland is dominated by aspen *Populus tremula*, while willow *Salix caprea* and willow *S. cinerea* are common, reflecting the heavy and generally waterlogged soils of this wood. In recent decades there has been a neglect of the coppice and a removal of many of the oak and ash stems from the wood. This has been followed in more recent years by active management opening up the rides and, in some areas, the planting of oak and other native species. In some areas coppice work has been reinstated.

The drier soils support woodland vegetation of bramble *Rubus fruticosus* with hairy-woodrush *Luzula pilosa*, wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia* and honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*, and extensive patches of bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*. A wider range of plants of base-rich soils may be found on the clays including dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* along with typical associates such as wild arum *Arum maculatum*, yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, woodruff *Galium odoratum*, pignut *Conopodium majus*, primrose *Primula vulgaris* and the woodland violets *Viola odorata* and *V. riviniana*. Orchids present include common twayblade *Listera ovata*, early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula*, broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* and greater-butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*. The wood is rich in a range of species typical of wet woodland and fen edge. These include meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, wavy bitter-cress *Cardamine flexuosa*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, the sedges *Carex remota*, *C. paniculata*, *C. pendula*, *C. strigosa* and *C. sylvatica*, and rushes *Juncus* spp. The wet grassy rides contain a number of grassland species including the sedges *Carex spicata* and *C. flacca*, Cuckoo flower *Cardamine pratensis* and the adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. This diverse array of woodland plants is typical of ancient woodland and indicative of a long history of traditional management.

The wood is known to support a rich diversity of moths with almost 300 species recorded including the buff footman *Eilima dephana*, the slender brindle *Apanema scolopacina*, the sycamore *Apateles aceris* and the pinion streaked snout

Schrankia costae *strigalis*. The wood also contains white admiral *Limenitis camilla*, purple hairstreak *Thecla quercus* and the nationally scarce wood white *Leptidea sinapsis*, while the dense blackthorn thickets support colonies of the nationally rare black hairstreak butterfly *Strymonidia pruni*, a Red Data Book species confined to fewer than 35 colonies between Oxford and Peterborough.