COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE SITE NAME: FINEMERE WOOD

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

1981

Local Planning Authorities: Aylesbury Vale District Council, Buckinghamshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SP718218

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 165 1:10,000: SP72 SW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990 Date of Last Revision:

Area: 45.7 ha 112.9 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

Finemere Wood is a large ancient pedunculate woodland supporting rich communities of native plants, birds, insects and other animals. In particular the wood contains populations of some local butterflies, including the nationally rare wood white and black hairstreak. Parts of the wood consist of neglected conifer plantations and the site also incorporates an adjacent area of unimproved rough grassland and scrub.

Finemere Wood lies on a gentle to moderately southerly aspect, situated in the Vale of Aylesbury. Overlying Oxford Clay, soils are generally heavy and poorly drained, giving rise to marshy areas within the wood. A small stream crosses the wood, and part of the River Ray is included within the grassy area to the south of the wood.

The areas of native woodland consist of ash-maple stand types, where oak, or oak and ash, dominate the canopy, together with field maple and hazel coppice in the understorey and shrub layer. Ash-maple ancient woodland is particularly associated with the slightly calcareous clay soils found mainly in the Midlands and south-east England. Midland hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata* is frequent, particularly in areas of long-neglected coppice where it has become exceptionally tall. Other associated trees and shrubs include crab apple, honeysuckle, common hawthorn, blackthorn, aspen, dogwood and wild privet. The presence of old coppiced hornbeam in part of the wood is unusual as this species mainly occurs in East Anglia and the south-east.

The field layer is dominated by common herbs and grasses including bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*. A number of species which are particularly associated with ancient coppice woodland occur, including wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, woodruff *Galium odoratum*, yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, primrose *Primula vulgaris* and sanicle *Sanicula europaea*. Sedges include remote *Carex remota*, wood *C. sylvatica* and the less common pendulous sedge *C. pendula*. Wood barley *Hordelymus europaeus*, a nationally rare grass normally associated with beechwoods in Buckinghamshire, is also present.

Parts of the wood are rather scrubby in nature, having been partially felled and underplanted with conifers. Downy birch, grey willow and goat willow are common in these areas, along with hazel, dogwood, hawthorn and other shrubs. Areas of suckering English elm also occur. Some oak and ash standards have been left and, in time, some of these areas may regenerate fully into closed-canopy broadleaved woodland.

Rides and other open areas support a remarkably diverse flora, providing food and nectar sources for butterflies and other invertebrates. In damper places species include soft rush *Juncus effucus*, wood small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, ragged-robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre* and greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*. Further species occur on the drier gravel of the rides themselves including wild strawberry *Fragaria vesca* and trailing tormentil *Potentilla anglica*, a species with a restricted distribution in the county. Invertebrates include *Gongylidieilum latebricola*, an uncommon spider, and the mere wainscot, a local species of moth which feeds on the small wood-reed.

The site supports a variety of butterflies typical of ancient woodland in lowland England. Noteworthy species include white admiral, purple hairstreak, holly blue, wood white and black hairstreak. Both wood white and black hairstreak have declined recently in Britain and occur in only a few sites elsewhere in the county. Wood white feeds on woodland legumes whilst black hairstreak relies on the blackthorn which forms a boundary to parts of the wood. Other woodland insects include the hoverflies *Criorhina ranunculi* and *Didea fasciata* and moths such as brindled white-spot, green arches and lilac beauty.

The SSSI includes an area to the south of the wood supporting a variety of habitats including a blackthorn hedge, scattered scrub, rough grassland and a dry herb-rich bank. The grassland is dominated by tufted hair-grass and other tall-growing species including hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, hoary ragwort *Senecio erucifolius* and false fox sedge *Carex otrubae*. The bank supports a variety of herbs often associated with calcareous soils including abundant glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, spring sedge *C. caryophyllea*, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, cowslip *Primula veris* and fairy flax *Linum catharticum*. Another chalk plant, rest-harrow *Ononis repens* grows along the gravel track at the entrance to the wood. Further diversity is provided by the River Ray which supports a number of wetland plants along its banks. These areas support a wide variety of insects and other animals. Butterflies have been well recorded, and include dingy and grizzled skippers, common blue, orange-tip, small heath and marbled white. The uncommon dark green fritillary has also been seen.

The site supports a wide range of birds including many which are local in the county. Resident woodland specialists include nuthatch, treecreeper, woodpeckers and tits. The scrub habitats support breeding nightingales and a variety of warblers including whitethroat, lesser whitethroat, garden warbler and the declining grasshopper warbler. Other noteworthy species include tawny owl, sparrowhawk, turtle dove and woodcock. The site is visited by large numbers of wintering birds, particularly thrushes such as redwing and fieldfare and finches.