

County: Essex **Site Name:** Hockley Woods

District: Rochford

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

Local Planning Authority: Rochford District Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 833917 **Area:** 91.3 (ha) 225.6 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1: 50 000: 178 **1: 10 000:** TQ 89 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1979 **Date of Last Revision:** -

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1988 **Date of Last Revision:** 1988

Other Information:

Most of the site is owned and managed by Rochford District Council.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Hockley Woods are a contiguous group of ancient coppice woods incorporating Great Bull wood, Great Hawkwell Wood, Beeches Wood and Parson's Snipe. They lie on the crest and slopes of a ridge of pre-glacial gravels and clay north-west of Southend-on-Sea. They form one of the most extensive areas of ancient woodland in South Essex, the dominant stand types comprising the Sweet Chestnut variants of Pedunculate oak-hornbeam - birch-hazel variant and acid Sessile oak-hornbeam. The population of Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea* is probably the largest in eastern England.

The woodland is mainly Oak standards, over Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* or Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa* coppice. A large part of the central area is a mixture of these two types. Pure Hornbeam is found in parts. Sessile Oak is the predominant oak and occurs on the higher gravel ridges. Pedunculate Oak *Q. robur* is found on the clays and loams of the valleys and hybrids are common where the two species merge. Birch *Betula spp.* is locally dominant both as coppice and standards. Wild Service Tree *Sorbus torminalis* grows throughout the woods and over forty clones have been identified. Wild Cherry *Prunus avium* is especially abundant in Parson's Snipe.

The ground flora is dominated by Bramble *Rubus fruticosus agg.* and Creeping Soft-grass *Holcus mollis* with substantial areas of Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. Common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*, Slender St. John's-wort *Hypericum pulchrum*, Wood Melick *Melica uniflora* and Yellow Archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* are locally plentiful. Butcher's-broom *Ruscus aculeatus* is found on the boundary banks. Heath Dog-violet *Viola cania*, Great Wood-

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Hockley Wood (cont...)

rush *Luzula sylvatica* and Narrow-leaved Everlasting-pea *Lathyrus sylvestris*, all local plants in the county, occur in the more open areas. Three species of orchid have been recorded, including Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis* and, by a stream and marshy area, Broad-leaved Helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*. Other plants found in this habitat include Woodruff *Galium odoratum*, Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga*, Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris* and Square-stalked St. John's-wort *Hypericum tetrapterum*. Additional interest is provided by a seasonally wet pond with Water-violet *Hottonia palustris*, an uncommon and decreasing plant in Essex.

The woods are also of significant historical interest: "The Anglo-Saxon perimeter has been nibbled away by many small encroachments, but the internal boundary banks are probably the most extensive fully described for any wood in England". (O. Rackham, 1986, 'The Woods of South East Essex').