

KENT WILDLIFE SITES

<u>Sites of Nature Conservation Interest</u>		Site Ref. No:	AS 40/SW 40
Site:	Longbeech Wood, Charing	Map Ref:	TQ 985510 TQ 996525
LPA:	Ashford/Swale	Natural area:	North Downs
Parish:	Charing/Challock	AONB:	Yes
Owner:	Private	SLA:	Yes
Category:	Woodland	TPO:	Yes
Area:	340.5 ha/842.4 acres	Protected species:	Yes
Date first notified:	1986	Public rights of way:	Yes
Dates amended:	1993 (map) February 1998		

DESCRIPTION

This large woodland complex is situated on the sands and clays of the plateau above Charing. Formerly all ancient mixed broadleaved woodland, most has been converted over a long period to pure chestnut coppice and mixed conifer plantation. However, 45 ancient woodland indicator plant species were recorded in 1997. There are fringes and tongues of relict woodland containing hazel, hornbeam and birch coppice together with shrubs including holly, aspen, goat willow, alder buckthorn and guelder rose. Most of the rides in the areas of managed chestnut and conifers on the plateau are very wide, with scrubby margins in parts, and support a variety of wet and dry acid heath species such as heather *Calluna vulgaris*, pill sedge *Carex pilulifera*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and lousewort ¹ *Pedicularis sylvatica* in damper areas. There has been some clearance of woodland along the south-eastern fringes.

Ground flora in the chestnut coppice is dominated by bluebell ² *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and bramble, together with wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*, red campion *Silene dioica* and wood pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*. The diversity of this part of the woodland is particularly good in the recently coppiced areas. Sessile and pedunculate oak and sweet chestnut standards are occasional, occurring more frequently in the southern part. There is very little ground flora under the mature conifer plantation. Where soils are slightly richer clay, relict species including violet helleborine *Epipactis purpurata* and broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* still survive under the larch. A feature of this area is the occasional isolated old pine, over 200 years old. A noteworthy plant is heath cudweed *Gnaphalium sylvaticum*, a declining species in the county.

There are occasional areas of relict mixed broadleaved woodland at the northern end of the complex. At TQ 995519 the woodland is richer, with old ash/field maple/hazel coppice still present. A large colony of herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia* occurs in this area, together with a variety of woodland herbs such as dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina* and woodland orchids, including greater butterfly orchid¹ *Plantanthera chlorantha* and early purple orchid *Orchis mascula*.

A strip of open chalk woodland at TQ 998522, badly damaged in the 1987 storm, has been added to the site. This still contains a number of standing mature beech as well as much fallen wood, and also areas of field maple/hazel/ash coppice and much regeneration. The upper part of the wood is less damaged mature hornbeam coppice, with a ground flora of wood anemone and bluebell. The open, grassy areas with their chalk soils support many common grassland species as well as woodland ones. A large active badger³ sett is present on the upper slopes of this strip of woodland. A small chalk grassland bank at the southern end is kept open by rabbits and supports a large population of cowslips *Primula veris*, together with hairy violet *Viola hirta*.

The site has been further extended to include Hurst Wood at TQ 996525. This small ancient woodland covers the ridge and slopes between two dry dip-slope valleys. The north-facing slopes and plateau are actively managed as coppice with standards. The coppice includes sweet chestnut and sycamore, with hazel, ash and hornbeam also occurring, particularly on the slopes, and a good number of oak standards. The south-facing slopes are generally unmanaged, with hornbeam/ash/field maple/hazel coppice. A small piece of woodland is present on the north side of the road which bisects Hurst Wood. The ground flora in Hurst Wood varies with the soils, which are fairly acid on the top of the hill and base-rich on the lower, south-facing slopes. Bluebell² and bramble, together with creeping hair-grass *Holcus mollis* and wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia* are common on the more acid soils. Wood spurge, wood anemone, moschatel, common twayblade *Listera ovata* and early-purple orchid are frequent elsewhere. A feature is the large colony of green hellebore¹ *Helleborus viridus* under ash coppice on the lowest south-facing slopes, where over 1000 plants were recorded.

44 bird species have been recorded from the whole site, including 35 breeding species. Most noteworthy of these are woodcock^{4,7,8}, tree pipit^{4,7,8}, great spotted woodpecker and seven species of warbler. Large flocks of siskin, redpoll and fieldfare^{2,4,5} are present in winter, as are the occasional sparrowhawk, hen harrier^{2,5,6} and long-eared owl. Grasshopper warbler^{6,9} and nightingale^{4,8} have bred here in the past.

19 butterfly species have been recorded, including white admiral and ringlet.

¹ County Scarce Plants. Atlas of Kent Flora. Philp. 1982.

² Protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

³ Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

⁴ Amber List. Birds of Conservation Concern 2002-2007.

⁵ Red Data Birds in Britain. NCC and RSPB. 1990.

⁶ Red List. Birds of Conservation Concern 2002-2007.

⁷ Rapid Decline. BTO Breeding Birds Report. 2000.

⁸ Kent Red Data Book Status 3. A. Waite (Ed.) 2000.

⁹ Kent Red Data Book Status 1. A. Waite (Ed.) 2000.