

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX SITE NAME: THE MENS

DISTRICT: CHICHESTER

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

Local Planning Authority: CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Ref: TQ 025231 Area: 204.4 (ha.) 505.1 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 197 1:10,000: TQ 02 SW, TQ 02 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1963 Date of Last Revision: 1980

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This is a Nature Conservation Review Site\*. A large part of the site is a reserve of the Sussex Trust for Nature Conservation. The site lies within the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and was formerly known as The Mens, The Cut and Bedham Escarpment.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The Mens remains as one of the most extensive examples of Wealden Woodland in West Sussex. It is important for its size, structural diversity and the extremely rich fungal and lichen floras which occur here. The wood supports a diverse community of breeding birds, and is the locality of a nationally endangered species of fly.

Much of the woodland lies on Weald Clay although in some places Paludina limestone outcrops at the surface. The woodland is predominantly high forest of sessile and pedunculate oak (*Quercus petraea* and *Q. robur* respectively), beech *Fagus sylvatica* holly *Ilex aquifolium* and locally, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, birches *Betula* spp. and wild service-tree *Sorbus torminalis*. Beech dominates the lighter soils over an understorey of holly and yew *Taxus baccata*. On the heavier clay soils oak-ash woodland occurs over a mixed shrub layer which includes hazel *Corylus avellana*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, crab apple *Malus sylvestris* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. In more open areas the dense ground flora is dominated by honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, wood melick *Melica uniflora* and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* with occasional butcher's broom *Ruscus aculeatus* and hairy woodrush *Luzula pilosa*. In the extreme north of the site the wood has been intensively managed on a coppice, or coppice-with-standards system. Here the shrub layer and ground flora are more diverse and include dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, sanicle *Sanicula europaea* and a number of orchids. Several uncommon tree species occur here, notably small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* and the wild service tree, both of which are indicators of ancient woodland sites.

The Mens has one of the richest lichen floras in the south-east, including several species closely associated with ancient woodlands. The site also supports a rich bryophyte flora (mosses and liverworts), with a number of locally rare species such as the moss *Brachydontium trichodes*. In addition The Mens is one of the richest woods in the country for fungi with three species of *Russula* for which this is the only known site. Two other species have been recorded from only two other sites in Britain.

The Mens has an important insect fauna. Many rare beetles (Coleoptera) are found here together with one species of fly *Chelostoma curvinervis* which is endangered with extinction. Woodland butterflies and moths (Lepidoptera) are also well represented here and include such notable species as the purple emperor *Apatura iris* and the orange footman moth *Eilema sororcula*. There is a diverse woodland breeding bird population; nightingale,

woodcock, wood warbler and all three British woodpeckers are amongst the birds which breed here.

\*'A Nature Conservation Review', D A Ratcliffe (1977) Cambridge.