COUNTY: NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

SITE NAME: OLD SULEHAY FOREST

District: East Northamptonshire

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

Local Planning Authority: East Northamptonshire District Council

National Grid Reference: TL 063984

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 142

1:10,000: TL 09 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1973

Date of Last Revision: 1973

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1983

Date of Last Revision: 1983

Area: 29.9 ha 73.9 ac

Other Information: The area of the site has been reduced since the last revision. The wood is covered by a Tree Preservation Order.

Description and Reasons for Notification

One of an important group of ancient woodlands on calcareous strata in the north-eastern part of Rockingham Forest. Such woods have been significantly reduced by quarrying and re-afforestation over the last 40 years.

The varied soil conditions give rise to several coppice types, notably the nationally restricted acid birch-ash-lime and acid pedunculate oak-lime stand types. A diverse ground flora includes a number of species of rare occurrence in Northamptonshire.

The canopy is almost entirely semi-natural and typically consists of overstood coppice and standards, with patches of younger self-grown trees. On heavy, poorly-drained clay field maple Acer campestre, hazel Corylus avellana and Midland hawthorn Crataegus oxycanthoides are the main underwood species with standards of oak, ash and occasionally wych elm Ulmus glabra.

Outcrops of acidic sands are associated with a mixture of birch and oak over hazel, and stands of small-leaved lime Tilia cordata. The composition of the shrub layer exhibits subtle changes with a difference in soil depth and drainage.

A few herbs are widespread or locally abundant, eg dog’s mercury Mercurialis perennis, bracken Pteridium aquilinum, bramble Rubus fruticosus, ramsons Allium ursinum, wood anemone Anemone nemorosa and bluebell Hyacinthoides non-scripta. A majority are more localised and some confined to open areas. Among the less common species are: nettle-leaved bellflower Campanula trachelium, narrow buckler-fern Dryopteris carthusiana, wood meadow-grass Poa nemoralis and deadly nightshade Atropa belladonna.

The rides and clearings add to the floristic interest of the site and provide habitat for butterflies and other insects. The wood has a long documented history and contains archaeological features.