

COUNTY: LEICESTERSHIRE

SITE NAME: BEACON HILL,
HANGINGSTONE & OUTWOODS

DISTRICT: CHARNWOOD

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

Local Planning Authority: CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: SK 512147, SK 523152 Area: 140.8 (ha.) 348.00 (ac.)
SK 512165

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 129 1:10,000: SK 51 NW, SK 51 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1956 Date of Last Revision: 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Beacon Hill is managed by Leicestershire County Council as a public open space. Parts of the Outwoods are also open to the public.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Beacon Hill and Outwoods provide some of the best habitat in Leicestershire for breeding birds. The Outwoods support one of the most interesting stands of ancient semi natural alder woodland in the County.

The Hangingstone Hills and Outwoods area includes some important geological exposures that have yielded coelenterate impression fossils unique in the British Isles and of world-wide significance in the study of early life forms.

Biology

Beacon Hill supports a succession of semi-natural habitats ranging from acidic grassland around the rocky outcrops at the summit, down through bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* covered slopes into areas of secondary oak *Quercus robur* and birch *Betula pendula* woodland.

A pond at the eastern end of Beacon Hill feeds a small stream. Associated marshy ground supports bog moss *Sphagnum* spp., marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* and bog violet *Viola palustris* all of which are scarce in Leicestershire. A second pond on the hill is one of only three known breeding sites in the County for the palmate newt *Triturus helveticus*.

Such habitat diversity makes the hill attractive to a wide variety of breeding birds including tree pipit, grasshopper warbler, redstart, cuckoo, green woodpecker, lesser spotted woodpecker, whitethroat and tawny owl.

Hangingstone golf course supports a similar range of habitats but the areas of close mown acidic grassland are more extensive and heather *Calluna vulgaris* occurs in places. The area supports a high density of badger setts.

Although much altered by recent replanting the Outwoods retain many of the plants characteristic of ancient semi-natural woodland on dry acidic soils, including common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*. A large stand of coppice grown alder *Alnus glutinosa* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior* occupies the wet ground in the north of the wood. The shrub layer here contains redcurrant *Ribes rubrum* and guelder-rose *Viburnum opulus*. The ground flora is diverse and includes pendulous sedge *Carex*

pendula, opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, water avens *Geum rivale*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* and ramsons *Allium ursinum*. Another breeding site of the palmate newt is located in this area.

The Outwoods support a variety of breeding birds including tawny owl, nuthatch, redstart and three species of woodpecker.

Geology

The Hangingstone Hills – Outwoods area includes a type section for the Hanging Rocks Conglomerate Member of the Brand Hill formation and exposures of the volcanoclastic Hallgate Member of the Maplewell Group (Charnian Supergroup). The latter have yielded the best examples of the late Precambrian fossils for which the Charnian sequence is framed.

Exposures in North Quarry, Hangingstone contain the first British Precambrian metazoan fossils to be discovered and studied. The forms present are *Charnia masoni*, (frondose), *Charniodiscus concentricus* and a variety of discoidal impression fossils.

The crags in Outwoods contain complex impression fossils of probable coelenterate origin, namely ovoid medusoid jellyfish in strong relief. The only specimen of arthropod-like *Pseudovendia charnwoodensis* was also found here.

The complex structure of the “medusoids” is uniquely exhibited at this locality.

As fossils found at Hangingstone and Outwoods are closely comparable with those found in Newfoundland, Russia and South Australia, the site is of great importance in the study of Precambrian palaeontology.