

COUNTY: KENT            SITE NAME: WESTERHAM MINES

DISTRICT: SEVENOAKS

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

Local Planning Authority: SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 455528    Area: 26.2 (ha.) 64.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 188    1:10,000: TQ 45 SE

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

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

Other Information:

This site was formerly known as Hosey Common. The area of the site has been reduced. The mines are a nature reserve managed by the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation.

Reasons for Notification:

The principal interest of this site is the use of its abandoned ragstone mines by a variety of hibernating bats. The surrounding area is chiefly mixed secondary woodland on former heathland, with pockets of remnant heath.

With the increasing scarcity of bats in south-east England and the continued loss of the few suitable hibernacula remaining available to them, these mines represent an important winter refuge for bats in the county. Five species have been recorded hibernating here: whiskered bat *Myotis mystacinus*, Brandt's bat *M. brandti*, Daubenton's bat *M. daubentoni*, Natterer's bat *M. nattereri* and long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus*. The number of bats using the mines declined from the 1950s onwards, largely because of disturbance, but the fitting of grilles (allowing access for bats, but not humans) and devices to maintain the air flow through the mines is thought to have led to an increase in numbers in recent years. However, it is very difficult to locate all the bats using the tunnels and different species use them at different times during the winter. Thus it is extremely hard to estimate the true numbers using the mines. There is also evidence that some use is made of the mines by bats in summer.

A rich insect fauna exists in and around the tunnels, flies (Diptera) being particularly well represented, and some moths also hibernate in the mines.

The mixed woodland around the old mines is typical of that which now covers much former heathland on the Lower Greensand in Kent. Oaks *Quercus petraea* and *Q. robur*, birch *Betula* sp., bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* dominate the vegetation, but remnants of former heathland, including

ling *Calluna vulgaris*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, occur locally.

The area has supported a rich heathland breeding bird community, including nightjar.