CITATION

COUNTY: DEVON SITE NAME: SIDMOUTH TO BEER COAST

DISTRICT: EAST DEVON

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

Local Planning Authority: DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL, East Devon District Council

National Grid Reference: SY 130873, SY 235895 Area: 239.0 (ha.) 590.5 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 192 1:10,000: SY 18 NW, SY 18 NE, SY 28 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1952 Date of Last Revision: 1976
(minor boundary amendments)

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 Date of Last Revision: 1989

Other Information:
In East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Lyme Bay Heritage Coast. Parts owned by or covenanted to the National Trust. Parts managed as Nature Reserves by Devon Wildlife Trust. Boundary modified by a minor extension at the 1989 revision.

Descriptions and Reasons for Notification:
This stretch of Devon coastline supports the most westerly example of species-rich chalk grassland in England and a diverse invertebrate fauna is associated with the site. There are also important geological and stratigraphic features displayed here.

Extending for approximately 12km the site consists mainly of south-facing cliffs with occasional coastal valleys. The cliffs are generally very steep and in places rise to 160m above the shingle foreshore. In the west New Red Sandstone with a capping of Greensand occurs, but as the strata dip eastward chalk beds appear beneath an overlay of clay-with-flints.

The grassland of the cliff tops and ledges is characteristically species-rich with many plants typical of calcareous soils present. These include Purging flax *Linum catharticum*, Squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica*, Carline Thistle *Carlina vulgaris*, Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, Common Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*, Ploughman's Spikenard *Inula conyza* and Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*. Several species of orchid occur including Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and Autumn Lady's-tresses *Spiranthes spiralis*. The site also supports the nationally rare Purple Gromwell *Lithospermum purpurocaeruleum* and the nationally scarce Tree Mallow *Lavatera arborea*, Nottingham Catchfly *Silene nutans* and Sea Kale *Crambe maritime*.

In the coastal valleys woodland occurs with Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* forming the canopy in the drier parts and Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and Willows *Salix* spp. in the wet valley bottoms. In sheltered areas and along sections of the

cliffs a rich scrub community forms dense thickets. This includes Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, Wayfaring Tree *Viburnum lantana*, Wild Privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. Associated climbers are Traveller's-joy *Clematis vitalba* and Madder *Rubia peregrina*.

The wide variety of aspects and habitats supports an equally varied invertebrate fauna. Butterflies, grasshoppers and crickets are numerous. The nationally scarce Rufous Grasshopper *Gomphocerippus rufus*, Grey Bush-cricket *Platycleis denticulata* and Bog Bush-cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* have been recorded. In some of the streams the rare caddis flies *Plectronemia brevis*, *Adicella filicornis* and *Ernodes articularis* occur. A seasonally flooded pool supports a population of the nationally rare Fairy Shrimp *Chirocephalus diaphanus*, a species listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. The uncommon Brackish Water-crowfoot *Ranunculus baudotii* has also been recorded here.

These cliff sections provide the finest exposures of the Foxmould Sands and Chert Beds (Upper Greensand) in South-West England. The site may be used as the type locality for these members, and the section is of critical importance as a standard with which to compare and contrast inland exposures. The quality of exposure allows particularly good opportunities to study the sedimentology of Upper Greensand Chert and hardground formation. The site is also of importance as it contains some of the most westerly major Upper Cretaceous exposures in England, which are of great stratigraphic importance. They show the intriguing lateral thickness and facies variations of the Cenomanian Limestone, containing an abundant and in part rare fauna. The *Neocardioceras* Hardground at the tip of the Cenomanian yields ammonites that are scarcely known elsewhere in Britain at this horizon. The site beautifully displays the basal Turonian or Beer Stone, a large echinoderm-rich calcarenite lens and also the major erosional truncation of the Lower Turonian and Cenomanian. A unique site for its sedimentology and stratigraphically-important fossil horizons.