CITATION

COUNTY: DEVON SITE NAME: SAUNTON TO BAGGY POINT COAST

DISTRICT: NORTH 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, North Devon District Council

National Grid Reference: SS 447408, SS 434393, SS 446376 Area: 152.8 (ha.) 377.6 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 180 1:10,000: SS 43 NW, 44 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1952 (part) Date of Last Revision: 1976

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

Other Information:
Amended from the previous Saunton Coast SSSI by extension and deletion. This site contains three Geological Conservation Review sites. In North Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In County Structure Plan Coastal Preservation Area and (partly) Nature Conservation Zone. Part owned by the National Trust.

Description and Reasons for Notification:
This section of the North Devon coast is of special interest for its geological exposures, and for its botanical features particularly maritime heathland, grassland and lichens.

Rugged cliffs form the main character of the site, rising to over 60m in places. The headlands at Saunton Down and Baggy Point face westerly into the Atlantic, and a wide range of conditions for plant growth is provided by the variety of aspect of clifftops, bare cliffs and crevices, exposed rocky shore and the sands of Croyde Bay and Burrows.

The coast between Saunton and Croyde is one of the most important localities for illustrating key features of the coastal geomorphology and Pleistocene stratigraphy of South West England. It is particularly noted for a series of shore platforms, large erratic boulders and a succession of raised beach, blown sand and head deposits. Together, these features provide one of the most comprehensive records in SW England of the evidence for former changes in sealevel and fluctuations in climate. They complement the geological interest at Fremington and Westward Ho!, making the Barnstaple Bay area one of the prime localities for Quaternary studies in the Region.

In the coastal section around Downend the lithological and sedimentological characters of the Lower Pilton Beds (Upper Devonian) are well displayed. A rich fauna is indicative of a late Famennian age. Tuff bands are present in the section, which indicate the occurrence of penecontemporaneous volcanic activity in the area and these form useful local marker-horizons, particularly as this section has undergone tectonic thickening. In the late Devonian, a transgression northwards brought about deeper-water conditions during the

deposition of the Pilton Beds. The transition from shallow-water sandstones and siltstones to deeper-water shales with cherts approximately coincided with the faunal changes marking the Devonian/Carboniferous boundary.

The site also contains the type section of the Baggy Beds and exposes good, representative sections of the Upcott Beds and Lower Pilton Beds. The Baggy Beds display an extensive range of sedimentary structures, including numerous bioturbation traces, which are of great importance in establishing a shallow marine, deltaic environment for these sediments, thus assisting the interpretation of the local and regional palaeoecology and palaeogeography. The site also includes 'Laticosta Cave', a well known Pilton Beds fossil locality. The site as a whole demonstrates a wide range of contrasting facies (marine and non-marine) in the Famennian (Upper Devonian).

Above the cliffs, much of Baggy Point is covered with dense low-growing Gorse *Ulex europaeus*. In places this gives way to communities of maritime heath with Heather *Calluna vulgaris* and maritime grassland containing Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Thrift *Armeria maritima*, Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Hairy Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus subbiflorus*, Autumn Squill *Scilla autumnalis*, Musk Stork's-bill *Erodium moschatum* and Sea Stork's-bill *E. maritimum*. Growing on the cliff ledges and crevices are Rock Samphire *Crithmum maritimum* and Sea Beet *Beta vulgaris* ssp. *maritima*, while Sea Kale *Crambe maritima* and Sea Stock *Matthiola sinuata* are found along the shore.

The rocks and mineral-rich soils support important lichen communities. On areas of compacted earth, *Pannaria microphylla* and *P. nebulosa* occur; both species have declined markedly in Britain and are not known elsewhere in Devon. This is the only recorded North Devon site for *Squamarina crassa* and the extremely rare *Lecania ralfsii*. On the coastal rocks themselves, *Verrucaria* communities are well developed and species rich; this is one of the best sites for such species in the County.

Site Notified to secretary of state on 21 November 1986