

Date Notified: 18 December 1989

File ref: SD 31/4

**County:** Merseyside **Site Name:** Hesketh Golf Links

**District:** Sefton

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council

**National Grid Reference:** SD 352190      **Area:** 14.6 (ha) 36.1 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 108      **1:10,000:** SD 31 NE

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

**Other Information:**

1. This is a new site.
2. The Sand Lizard is a protected species under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**

Hesketh Golf Links is situated 2 km north east of Southport town centre on the south side of the Ribble Estuary and about 0.5 km inland of the coast road enclosing the former saltmarsh at Marshside.

This is the most northerly site in Britain of the nationally rare sand lizard *Lacerta agilis* and supports a significant proportion of the now much reduced Lancashire coastal population, itself one of the most important populations of this reptile in the country.

Fixed 'grey' sand dunes are the main feature of the site and the specialised habitat of the sand lizard. These form representative outlying examples of the dune complex of the Sefton coast which is the best example of a calcareous dune system on the north west coast of England.

Flat areas of modified dune grassland occur between the dunes and are managed intensively as fairways, greens and tees for the golf course.

The dunes are characterised by an almost complete vegetation cover of two main communities: 1) tall, rank grassland dominated by red fescue *Festuca rubra*, false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and velvet bent *Agrostis canina* with sparse lyme-grass *Leymus arenarius* and sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*; 2) short, more open and herb-rich grassland with a high cover of mosses and lichens usually on the tops of the dunes. Dominant species are ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, red fescue, early hair-grass *Aira praecox* and sand sedge *Carex arenaria* with cat's-ear *Hypochoeris radicata*, rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, lesser hawkbit *Leontodon taraxacoides*, marram grass *Ammophila arenaria*, common restharrow *Ononis repens* and creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens* frequent. Occasionally more lime-loving plants such as carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris*, common centaury *Centaurium erythraea* and purging flax *Linum catharticum* occur.

There are a few hollows, or dune slacks dominated by creeping willow *Salix repens* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* but only one is seasonally wet. This is part of a fairway around a pond and supports glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, sand sedge and marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*.

Woodland and scrub has developed on some dunes and formed patches of gorse *Ulex europaeus*, broom *Cytisus scoparius*, sea buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*, goat willow *Salix caprea*, grey willow *Salix cinerea*, poplars *Populus* spp., sycamores *Acer pseudoplatanus*, and pine trees *Pinus* spp.

This important sand lizard population favours south facing banks which have a mix of occasional scrub, grass/herb swards of varying heights and bare sand patches. Bare sand is used particularly by the lizard for egg-laying.

Due to the residential and associated development in the town of Southport these dunes and their sand lizard population are effectively isolated from the main dune complex and sand lizard population further south.