

File ref: (L) SD 46/3

County: Lancashire **Site Name:** Crag Bank

District: Lancaster

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

Local Planning Authority: Lancaster City Council

National Grid Reference: SD 489697 **Area:** 3.9 (ha) 9.63 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 97 **1:10,000:** SD 46 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1979 **Date of Last Revision:** –

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

Other Information:

Site boundary remains unchanged.

Reasons for Notification:

The site is an area of boulder clay ridges and marshy grassland on calcareous peaty soil situated 1 km south-west of Carnforth at an elevation of about 8 m OD ½ km from the coast. The site is remarkable for the range of plants present in such a small area (over 170 species have been recorded) including two nationally rare communities and several species which are rare or very limited in their distribution in Lancashire. The assemblage of species is unique in the county and includes some which are characteristic of fens and are not found elsewhere in Lancashire and others associated with its coastal situation.

Most of the site is occupied by level, poorly-drained ground. The soil is thin and peaty, suggesting that it is probably derived from a former coastal raised bog which has been removed by peat cutting, and it is calcareous due to the proximity of a boulder clay landscape rich in fragments of limestone. The site is divided across the middle by a shallow watercourse, the Black Dike.

North of the Black Dike the vegetation is dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* accompanied by numerous sedges *Carex demissa*, *hostiana*, *lepidocarpa*, *nigra*, *otrubae*, *panicea*, *pulicaris* and *spicata*. Many other plants occur in the wet, low-lying areas including species uncommon in Lancashire such as marsh helleborine, marsh lousewort, bog pimpernel, bog-bean and butterwort along with commoner species such as marsh marigold, water mint, lesser spearwort, marsh ragwort, ragged robin and numerous species of rush. This species-rich type of *Molinia* community, once no doubt widespread, has been reduced so much by drainage that it is now considered to be a rare and endangered habitat in Britain. Slow flowing ditches are an important feature of this area, containing fen pondweed *Potamogeton coloratus*, a notably rare plant nationally, occurring here at one of its only two locations in Lancashire, blunt-fruited water-starwort *Callitriche obtusangula* nearing the northern limit of its distribution in England, bladderwort *Utricularia vulgaris* now a very scarce plant in Lancashire and commoner species such as grey club-rush, common and lesser water plantains, water forget-me-not, soft rush and common reed. Two ridges of boulder clay are largely covered by dense scrub, mainly hawthorn but also containing gorse, ash and wild rose. These, however,

add further diversity to the site as the edges and small open areas support many species of neutral or slightly calcareous unimproved grassland, including uncommon plants such as fragrant orchid and saw-wort. A total of 85 species have been recorded on these ridges. There is also scattered willow scrub on the low-lying ground, particularly along old ditches.

South of Black Dike on the level ground the taller plants of wet places, such as meadowsweet, flag iris, angelica and common reed are more in evidence, and the area is dominated by blunt-flowered rush *Juncus subnodulosus* grading into a dense reedbed along the western edge. The blunt-flowered rush community, which is associated with basic groundwater, is rare in Britain. The rush itself is rare in Lancashire, known only at Robert Hall Moor SSSI and a few other scattered locations, and is uncommon in the north-west of England as a whole. This is the best population in Lancashire. At the south end, the site rises into a boulder clay ridge covered by a small area of ash and sycamore woodland with much hawthorn.

The combination of calcareous groundwater with a peaty soil gives the site affinities with the fen habitat and it is remarkable that, in spite of its small size and isolation, it contains several species associated with fens: in particular fen pondweed and blunt-flowered rush. The marsh helleborine is also found in a tall-growing form characteristic of fen habitats and unlike the north west England sand-dune plants. Similarly, the early marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata* resembles the fen sub-species *ochroleuca*. Proximity of the sea is reflected by the presence of grey club-rush, sea rush and the slender spike-rush *Eleocharis uniglumis* which are associated with coastal situations.