

County: Lancashire **Site Name:** Oak Field

District: Blackburn

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

Local Planning Authority: Blackburn Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SD 696153 **Area:** 20.7 (ha) 51.2 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000 109 **1:10 000** SD 61 NE
SD 71 NW

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

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

Other Information:

1. Site boundary remains unchanged.
2. Site formerly notified as Oakfield, Longworth Clough.

Reasons for Notification:

Oak Field is situated on the lower edge of Turton Moor immediately south of Delph Reservoir, above Longworth Clough, about 1 km west of Egerton on the northern outskirts of Bolton. It is a large field of about 50 acres of marginal grazing land. The part adjacent to Longworth Road is a level plateau at about 700 ft OD from which the land falls away to the south, gently at the west end but more steeply towards the east, to lower slopes at about 625 ft OD. The underlying rocks are Carboniferous shales and sandstones of the Bowland Series, covered by sandy deposits on the plateau and clay on the slopes, which are unstable and often slumped on the steeper parts. The naturally better drained soil on the plateau supports semi-improved acid grassland with signs of old ploughing rigs. The lower slopes are wet and dominated by soft rush in many places. The principal botanical interest of the site is to be found on a series of very extensive acidic flushes which occur in a band along the upper slopes. These constitute the most extensive example known in Lancashire of this type of habitat, once no doubt more widespread, which has become increasingly scarce due to drainage and agricultural improvement.

The flushes arise where groundwater wells out just below the plateau and form a series varying in species composition. Some are almost circular and form more or less level features, but water seeping out from them has formed acid (oligotrophic soligenous) mires over a wider area, extending down the slopes and in some places right to the bottom of the site. The water is poor in nutrients and does not contain any lime. The plant species present are those generally associated with acid soil

conditions; in particular bog asphodel and the white sedge *Carex curta*, an uncommon plant in Lancashire, indicate an absence of lime. *Sphagnum* moss is abundant, accompanied by soft rush, jointed rush, needle rush, purple moor-grass, common sedge, carnation sedge, bottle sedge and in places white sedge. Some areas are dominated by cotton-grass, accompanied by cranberry. There are some fine stands of bog asphodel and, more locally, patches of bogbean and yellow flag iris. Many other typical plants of wetland habitats are present including angelica, marsh thistle, marsh pennywort, water forget-me-not, spotted orchids, marsh arrow-grass and marsh violet. There are also scattered clumps of willow, alder and birch scrub.