

County: Lancashire **Site Name:** Myttons Meadows

District: Ribble Valley

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

Local Planning Authority: Ribble Valley Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SD 703531 **Area:** 10.0 (ha) 24.7 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000 103 **1:10 000** SD 65 SE
SD 75 SW

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

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

Other Information:

1. This is a new site.
2. The site lies within the Forest of Bowland AONB.

Reasons for Notification:

Myttons Meadows are situated on the south-eastern edge of the Forest of Bowland at an altitude of between 155 m and 180 m OD, approximately 1 km north-west of Slaidburn. The site comprises a series of three fields below Myttons Farm and part of another field to the south, which together represent the largest and best surviving example of traditionally managed, species-rich meadow grassland identified in Lancashire. This nationally scarce and highly vulnerable habitat has, in Lancashire, been almost completely destroyed by agricultural intensification so that, in the county context, this site is regarded as being of outstanding importance.

The soils are derived from glacial drift containing fragments of the underlying Carboniferous Limestone and tend to be neutral to calcareous in nature. The variations in depth of drift, soil moisture content and base status are reflected in slight floristic differences evident within the site, while management practices have had a significant effect upon the species composition of the vegetation within the individual fields.

The eastern field adjacent to Croasdale Brook is managed as a traditional hay meadow and supports a uniformly rich and diverse grassland flora with over 95 species having been recorded. The community is of the 'northern hay meadow' type, containing a range of grass species co-dominated by sweet vernal-grass and red fescue with soft brome, hairy oat-grass, Yorkshire fog and common bent occurring frequently within the sward. The uncommon hybrid fescue is also found here along with perennial rye-grass, meadow foxtail and rough meadow-grass. The field is herb-rich throughout

and supports many species characteristic of old meadows, notably wood anemone, common bistort, two species of lady's mantle *Alchemilla glabra* and *A. xanthochlora*, pignut, great burnet, yellow rattle and meadowsweet. In addition are certain old meadow species indicative of base-rich conditions such as rough hawkbit, meadow crane's-bill and cross-wort. A range of sedges occur within the community including spring *Carex caryophyllea*, carnation *C. panicea*, hairy *C. hirta*, glaucous *C. flacca*, flea *C. pulicaris* and pale sedge *C. pallescens*, while occasional wetter areas are dominated by lesser pond-sedge *C. acutiformis* in association with brown sedge *C. disticha*, water avens, marsh marigold and marsh hawk's-beard. Most notable amongst the low-frequency associates of the main community are melancholy thistle (occurring mainly along the edges but also within the main sward), globeflower, common spotted orchid and common twayblade which occur between the Eller Beck and a wall which forms the southern boundary of the field.

The adjacent field to the south contains a small knoll which, presumably because of its shape, has escaped agricultural improvement. The community is akin to that described above but, in addition to melancholy thistle, common spotted orchid and twayblade, includes such notable species as fragrant orchid and the locally scarce adder's-tongue fern.

To the west is a small field formerly part of the larger hay-field above it but fenced off because of steeply sloping ground and waterlogged conditions at the foot of the slope. The management of this field differs from those on either side of it as it is grazed rather than mown, and this is reflected in the patchiness and uneven height of the vegetation. The lower part of the field is wet and the vegetation is dominated by lesser pond-sedge with Yorkshire fog, red fescue, tall fescue and rough meadow-grass and abundant meadowsweet, marsh marigold, creeping buttercup and water avens. Along the eastern boundary the banks of a small stream support globeflower, marsh valerian, marsh hawk's-beard, bitter vetch and great hairy willow-herb with abundant glaucous sweet-grass in the shallow water. The middle section of the field is occupied by a steep bank supporting the same species-rich, northern hay-meadow community as the adjacent fields. Species indicative of base-rich conditions occur, such as hairy oat-grass, quaking grass, glaucous sedge, spring-sedge and rough hawkbit, but in contrast other areas on the upper slopes support species typical of more acid conditions such as mat-grass, common bent, oval sedge, many-headed wood-rush and tormentil.

To the north-west is the largest of the three fields which is also under traditional hay-meadow management with aftermath grazing. The higher frequency of soft brome and perennial rye-grass in this field plus the apparent absence of sedges, is indicative of more intensive agricultural management practices in the past which have altered the species composition to some extent. However, the sward is uniformly rich throughout in grasses and herbs and is typically co-dominated by sweet vernal grass, crested dog's-tail, soft-brome and red fescue, with an abundance of great burnet, yellow rattle and pignut, frequent oxeye daisy, rough hawkbit, meadow buttercup, red clover and lady's mantle *Alchemilla glabra* and *A. xanthochlora* and occasional wood anemone, tufted vetch and burnet saxifrage.