

**County:** Lancashire **Site Name:** Warton Crag

**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 494730 **Area:** 73.00 (ha) 180.4 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000** 97 **1:10 000** SD 47 SE

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1976 **Date of Last Revision:** –

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

**Other Information:**

1. This site is listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review', edited by D. A. Ratcliffe (1977), Cambridge University Press.
2. This site lies within the Arnside–Silverdale AONB.
3. 48 acres of the site was designated as a Local Nature Reserve by the Lancaster City Council on 30 March 1984.
4. *Sorbus lancastriensis* is listed in the British Red Data Book – 'Vascular Plants'.
5. Red squirrels, a protected species listed under Schedule 5 of the above Act, are resident.
6. Boundary revised by partial deletion on renotification.

**Reasons for Notification:**

Warton Crag is a limestone hill rising to a height of 163 m OD overlooking Morecambe Bay 2 km north of Carnforth. It supports the best example of limestone grassland in Lancashire, some good examples of limestone pavement, an area of northern calcareous hazel-ash woodland and a number of plant species which are nationally rare or very restricted in their distribution, being confined to limestone habitats. The Crag is divided into Allotments by stone walls indicating an earlier history of use as rough grazing land but only two Allotments are grazed at present.

The limestone strata form a series of scars and terraces on the south side of the Crag. The terraces are covered by loess, a wind-blown post-glacial deposit which has given rise to quite a deep brown earth soil supporting neutral grassland, now largely dominated by bracken and scrub. On the scars,

screes and places where limestone pavement has been removed in the past the soil is a rendzina, a thin soil derived from limestone fragments. It is here that the limestone grassland is to be found, consisting mainly of blue moor-grass *Sesleria albicans* (common on limestone but very restricted nationally), accompanied by sheep's fescue and meadow oat-grass with many characteristic herbaceous plants such as rock-rose, thyme, lady's bedstraw, purging flax, kidney vetch, horseshoe vetch, ploughman's spikenard, mullein, common centaury, rue-leaved saxifrage, the biting and white stonecrops and species which are restricted nationally such as spring cinquefoil, limestone bedstraw and the spring sandwort. The population of the nationally rare dark red helleborine is the best in the Arnside-Silverdale AONB. On rocks and cliffs the ferns wall-rue and maidenhair spleenwort are common, and red valerian and marjoram are conspicuous. In a few places the nationally rare whitebeam *Sorbus lancastriensis* occurs, which is confined to the vicinity of Morecambe Bay, and an uncommon species of polypody fern *Polypodium australe*. A number of hawkweeds have been recorded including two nationally rare species *Hieracium cymbifolium* and *H. pseudostenstroemii*.

Limestone pavements occur at several places on the south of the Crag and also in Three Brothers Allotment (so named after three large limestone glacial erratics) on the north side. These consist of slabs of limestone (clints) separated by fissures (grykes). In addition to many of the species listed for limestone grassland and cliffs these support the uncommon pale St John's-wort and a number of fern species occur in the grykes including male fern, buckler fern and the nationally rare rigid buckler fern *Dryopteris villarii*.

Potts Wood and Strickland Wood consist mainly of northern calcareous hazel-ash woodland, which is typical of limestone situations which have reverted to woodland from a former history of grazing use. They are dominated by ash and sycamore, with occasional sessile oak, birch and groves of yew. Hazel and holly are common shrubs, and the ground vegetation is dominated by dog's mercury and false brome grass. This type of woodland is also invading the terraces and pavements of the more open Allotments in the form of scrub accompanied by hawthorn, blackthorn, rose and other shrubs.

The open areas on the south-facing slopes of the Crag are a valuable site for butterflies. Over 20 species occur including the high brown fritillary and northern brown argus which are notably rare species nationally. The woodlands are valuable for breeding birds and red squirrels.