

Date Notified: 21 March 1988

File ref: (L) SD 66/4

County: Lancashire **Site Name:** Clear Beck Meadow

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 616676 **Area:** 0.5 (ha) 1.2 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 97 **1:10,000:** SD 66 NW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1988 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

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

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Clear Beck Meadow is situated in the valley of the River Hindburn approximately 1½ km to the east of the village of Wray and at an altitude of 60 m OD. Although small in size the site represents one of the best examples of species-rich meadow grassland in Lancashire. This nationally scarce and highly vulnerable habitat has, in Lancashire, been almost completely destroyed by agricultural intensification, so that a site displaying such an exceptional diversity of plants and containing many species representative of unimproved meadows is regarded as being of outstanding importance in the County context.

The site lies at the foot of a steep, wooded slope on the edge of the floodplain of the River Hindburn and is enclosed on its southern side by Clear Beck, a tributary stream of the Hindburn. Unlike the larger, more accessible fields adjacent to it, Clear Beck Meadow has escaped agricultural improvement and supports an exceptionally diverse grassland flora. Over 80 species have been recorded from within the main sward, while the associated habitats of woodland and open water contribute a further 57 species, located around the edges of the meadow, to the overall range of plants within the site.

The community is of the “northern hay meadow” type, containing a total of 19 different grass species, co-dominated by sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*, with crested dog’s-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, rough meadowgrass *Poa trivialis* and downy oat-grass *Avenula pubescens* occurring frequently within the sward. Other grasses include quaking grass *Briza media* and yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*, occurring locally within the site and indicative of more base-rich conditions. Notable by its very low frequency is perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, a species much favoured in modern farming practice and commonly an indicator of agricultural improvement.

The grassland is herb-rich throughout, and supports many species characteristic of old meadows, notably pignut, great burnet, wood anemone, ox-eye daisy, common bistort, two

species of lady's mantle *Alchemilla glabra* and *A. xanthochlora*, yellow rattle, betony, eyebright and meadowsweet. In addition are certain old meadow species indicative of base-rich conditions such as rough hawkbit, crosswort and spring sedge *Carex caryophylla*. Of particular note are the colonies of common and heath spotted orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and *D. maculata* spp. *ericetorum*, and the occurrence of the early purple orchid *Orchis mascula* and the locally scarce adder's tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. Orchids and sedges, along with other susceptible species such as adder's-tongue fern, are among the first plants to be lost by an intensification of agricultural practice and are, consequently, rarely found now within hay meadows or pastures. The occurrence of such species, the exceptional range of plants characteristic of old meadows and the site's overall floral diversity, combine to make this one of the most important examples of a habitat type which has all but disappeared from the Lancashire countryside.