

**County:** Lancashire **Site Name:** Tarnbrook Meadows

**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 586556 **Area:** 10.8 (ha) 26.7 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000** 102 **1:10 000** SD 55 NE

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

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1989 **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:**

Tarnbrook Meadows are situated near the head of the valley of the Tarnbrook Wyre on the western flank of the Bowland massif, an outlier of the Pennine uplands in north Lancashire. The site comprises a series of eight fields, lying at an altitude of between 155 and 180 m OD around the hamlet of Tarnbrook, and is the only known example in the county of a series of adjacent species-rich meadow grasslands. Elsewhere, this nationally scarce and highly vulnerable habitat has survived only as isolated and individual fragments. These traditionally managed unimproved meadows are amongst some of the best examples of their kind remaining in the county.

The main vegetation community type of the fields is knapweed-crested dog's-tail grassland, good examples of which are becoming increasingly rare nationally, and have all but disappeared from the Lancashire countryside as a result of agricultural intensification. This is the characteristic grassland of grazed hay meadows which have been managed in a traditional manner. The commonest grasses are sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*, with crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and rough meadowgrass *Poa trivialis*. Twenty-four species of grass out of a total of 109 herb species have been recorded from the site as a whole. Leguminous species are prominent, particularly tufted vetch *Vicia cracca* and meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* and in places knapweed *Centaurea nigra* or yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* are also abundant. Small areas within some of the fields have a rather different appearance. In the westernmost fields steep banks support abundant bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and pignut *Conopodium majus* –

species indicative of a long history of freedom from improvement – and where the ground is wetter marsh marigold *Caltha palustris* can be the dominant plant.

The abundance of legumes and the absence of orchids from the site and sedge species from some of the fields, is probably due in part to past applications of phosphatic fertiliser in the form of basic slag, a practice which was commonplace when this was widely available. However, the high diversity of species and communities, the low frequency of perennial rye-grass (a species much favoured in modern farming practice) throughout the site together with occurrence of a number of species typical of unimproved meadows, indicates that these fields have never been subjected to intensive farming methods, and combine to make this one of the most important and largest examples of this habitat type in the county.