

County: Lancashire **Site Name:** Lytham St Anne's
Dunes

District: Fylde

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

Local Planning Authority: Fylde Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SD 310305 **Area:** 24.54 (ha) 60.64 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000 102 **1:10 000** SD 33 SW

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

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

Other Information:

1. Thirty-nine acres of land at Starr Hills, east of Clifton Drive North were declared as a Local Nature Reserve on 2 July 1968.
2. The site is adjacent to the Ribble Estuary SSSI.
3. Dune Helleborine is a national rarity listed in the British Red Data Book.
4. This is a new site.

Reasons for Notification:

Lytham St Anne's dunes are located between Blackpool and St Anne's on the Fylde Coast. They occur as a narrow strip between the recreational and residential developments of these popular holiday resorts, and form the remnants of an extensive dune system, which once existed along this stretch of coast.

At Starr Hills the dunes reach their maximum width and are important as the best example of a calcareous dune system remaining in Lancashire. In spite of past sand extraction, seasonal pressures from holidaymakers and the small size of the dune system, it still shows classic features of dune formation and ecological succession including the widest range of foredune, yellow dune, dune grassland, acid dune grassland, dune scrub and dune slack habitats found anywhere along the Fylde Coast. These support a rich and varied dune flora typical of southern and western Britain with over 230 species of higher plants, some of which are scarce nationally or uncommon locally, occurring on the northern and southern limits of their distribution range. A rich invertebrate fauna is also present including many species associated with coastal and dune habitats which are rare or uncommon species. The foredunes and yellow dunes rise sharply from the foreshore and are composed of a

highly calcareous sand supporting four types of plant community. Sand couch *Elymus farctus* dominates the lower levels of the foredunes, together with stands of lyme-grass *Leymus arenarius*. The yellow dunes are dominated by marram grass *Ammophila arenaria* which is the main dune-forming plant, and other characteristic species include sea holly *Eryngium maritimum* and sea spurge *Euphorbia paralias*, a nationally scarce species.

On the landward side of the dunes large areas of dune grassland occur on levelled ground interspersed by a series of low hillocks and an intricate pattern of damp hollows or dune slacks, created during past sand-winning activities. Such areas support a number of herb-rich plant communities which vary considerably according to various soil conditions, the effects of trampling and rabbit grazing. Notably, small areas of acid dry dune grassland are present dominated by marram grass, sand cat's-tail *Phleum arenarium* and red fescue *Festuca rubra* with wild pansy *Viola tricolor*, common mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum* and the rare dune fescue *Vulpia membranacea*. Large-flowered evening primrose *Oenothera erythrosepala* also occurs where there is bare sand. Extensive areas of herb-rich calcareous dune plant communities surround these co-dominated by marram grass, red fescue and restharrow *Ononis repens* with locally abundant sand sedge *Carex arenaria*, bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella*, kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* and eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis*. Wild thyme *Thymus praecox* is found on rabbit-grazed areas where carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris* and biting stonecrop *Sedum acre* also occur. Of particular note is the presence of the rare dune helleborine *Epipactis dunensis*, green-flowered helleborine *Epipactis phyllanthes* var. *pendula* and Isle of Man Cabbage *Rhynchosinapis monensis*, in addition to locally scarce species such as common broomrape *Orobanche minor*, Danish scurvy-grass *Cochlearia danica* and blue fleabane *Erigeron acer* which are present on the northern limits of their distribution range.

Dewberry *Rubus caesius* is a small wood plant occurring throughout the dune grassland whilst sea buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* is the only species forming scrub in three small areas within the Nature Reserve.

The series of exceptionally large and extensive dune slacks on either side of Clifton Drive North support a wide range of species which vary according to the depth of water and degree of moisture retention in relation to the water table. In the drier slacks creeping willow *Salix repens* is the most common plant forming a hummocky carpet with red fescue and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* and other species including locally abundant yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, grass-of-Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*, red and white clovers *Trifolium pratense* and *T. repens*. In addition the rare seaside centaury *Centaureum littorale* and round-leaved wintergreen *Pyrola rotundifolia* are present as well as the less frequent bee orchid *Ophrys apifera* and pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, which are locally scarce and occur here on the northern limit of their distribution range. In damper areas large populations of common spotted and marsh orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, *D. incarnata* and *D. purpurella* occur with their hybrid *D. fuchsii* 3 *praetermissa*.

There are also abundant marsh helleborine *Epipactis palustris*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* and knotted pearlwort *Sagina nodosa*, as well as the rare variegated horsetail *Equisetum variegatum* and the uncommon yellow birds' nest orchid *Monotropa hypopitys* and small-fruited yellow sedge *Carex serotina*. The largest slack in the south-west corner of the site is permanently wet. Its central zone of standing water is dominated by water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* and water-crowfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis* with fringing marsh pennywort, marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, water forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, lesser spearwort *R. flammula* and branched bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*. A large clump of the rare hybrid rush *J.*

balticus 3 *inflexus* is a notable feature as is common cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*. There is also a small stand of reed canary grass *Phalaris arundinacea* with several small bushes of willow *Salix alba* and *S. cinerea*.

Butterflies and moths are the most studied of the invertebrate fauna of the dunes and over 150 species have been recorded. Many of these are typical of coastal and dune habitats such as the Dark Tussock *Dicailomera fascelina* and the Portland Moth *Ochropleura praecox*, both nationally notable species. The vulnerable Sandhill Rustic *Luperina nickerlii gueneei*, once thought to be extinct from the area, has more recently been rediscovered. The occurrence of a small colony of common lizard is also of note, as are several pairs of nesting stonechat at their only breeding locality in the Fylde area.