

County: Lancashire **Site Name:** **Wrightington Bar
Pasture**

District: West Lancashire

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

Local Planning Authority: West Lancashire District Council

National Grid Reference: SD 538134 **Area:** 1.37 (ha) 3.39 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000 108 **1:10 000** SD 51 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1992 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

1. This is a new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Wrightington Bar Pasture lies at an altitude of around 90 m OD in the valley of Syd Brook, which flows between the villages of Wrightington Bar and Eccleston to the south-west of Chorley. It is important as one of the few remaining species-rich unimproved grasslands in Lancashire and represents the largest flushed example of this community type in the county. This vulnerable habitat is becoming increasingly rare both nationally and in Lancashire due primarily to agricultural intensification.

The pasture is situated on the south-facing slope and flood plain of a small valley. Soils vary from free-draining sands at the top of the valley slopes to alluvium in the valley floor. Numerous flushes exist throughout the site and a high water table in the vicinity of the brook results in a small permanently wet area. The ground conditions and local topography have demanded that the site is managed as pasture – no hay crop is taken.

The large amount of water supplied by the numerous flushes and seepage areas, combined with local drainage characteristics ensure wide variations in the soil moisture status across the valley side. As a result the majority of the site supports a mosaic of wet and dry unimproved, herb-rich neutral grassland co-dominated by red fescue *Festuca rubra* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* with crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris* and cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* all frequent. Herbs are well represented within the sward especially black knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*. Other components of the community such as lady's mantle *Alchemilla vestita*, yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and pignut *Conopodium*

majus are characteristic of old grassland and indicate a lack of improvement. Species of particular interest include dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, which reflects the low grazing pressure. The site is considered to be representative of the *Danthonia decumbens* sub-community of the *Cynosurus cristatus*–*Centaurea nigra* community as described in the National Vegetation Classification.

Flushes on the valley site are dominated by meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* with lesser amounts of greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre* and bog stitchwort *Stellaria alsine*. In addition, wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, cuckoo flower *Cardamine pratensis* and marsh horsetail *Equisetum palustre* are frequently found together with common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*.

The small flood plain at the foot of the valley slope is almost permanently wet. Numerous species are locally abundant and include floating sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans*, Yorkshire fog, soft rush *Juncus effusus*, hard rush *J. inflexus*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and great hairy willow-herb *Epilobium hirsutum*. The raised water table is a fairly recent event and the vegetation present appears to be transitional in nature between damp grassland and a developing mire community.

The sandy soils of the valley slopes support a species-poor acid grassland dominated by *Agrostis* and *Festuca* species with abundant heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and common tormentil *Potentilla erecta*. Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* has invaded this community to form discrete stands. Scrub invasion is apparent throughout the entire site, typically hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and gorse *Ulex europaeus* on the drier slopes with goat willow *Salix caprea* and alder *Alnus glutinosa* in the valley bottom.