

**County:** Lancashire **Site Name:** Lower Red Lees Pasture

**District:** Rossendale

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Rossendale Borough Council

**National Grid Reference:** SD 787178 **Area:** 4.2 (ha) 10.4 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000** 109 **1:10 000** SD 71 NE

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

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1994 **Date of Last Revision:** –

**Other Information:**

1. The property is owned by the National Trust.

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**

Lower Red Lees Pasture lies at an altitude of 183 m OD within the valley of the River Irwell, above Stubbins, at Ramsbottom. It is important as one of the few remaining examples of herb-rich unimproved neutral to slightly acidic pasture typical of south-east Lancashire. This vulnerable habitat has become scarce nationally and has almost been completely destroyed in Lancashire due to agricultural intensification.

The pasture is situated on the western slopes of the valley and supports a species-rich grassland plant community dominated by crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* with frequent Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus* and heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*. Various herbs are well represented within the sward, especially bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, cat's-ear *Hypochoeris radicata* and hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis* and *L. hispidus*, together with tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and field wood-rush *Luzula campestris*. Other components of the community such as lady's mantle *Alchemilla glabra* and adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum* are characteristic of old pastures and indicate a general lack of improvement. The pasture is representative of the *Danthonia decumbens* sub-community of the *Cynosurus cristatus*–*Centaurea nigra* community, as described in the National Vegetation Classification. These are typically found on upland margins over calcium deficient brown earth soils derived from siliceous materials that have traditionally been grazed and received annual applications of farmyard manure. Water seepages along a shallow tree and scrub-invaded clough on the northern boundary of the site

give rise to base-rich flush communities and areas of marsh grassland. Here soft rush *Juncus effusus*, compact rush *Juncus conglomeratus*, Yorkshire fog, field wood-rush and the sedges *Carex viridula* and *C. nigra* are dominant with wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*, cuckoo flower *Cardamine pratensis*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, marsh hawk's-beard *Crepis paludosa*, bristle club-rush *Isolepis setacea*, and reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*. Similar plant communities are also present within a small disused quarry towards the top of the pasture where the uncommon lemon-scented fern *Oreopteris limbosperma* occurs.

A small area of acid grassland adjacent to the clough supports a species-poor community dominated by common bent, sheep's fescue, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and tormentil, together with mat-grass *Nardus stricta*.