File ref:

County: Lancashire **Site Name: Wyre Estuary**

District: Wyre, Fylde

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

Local Planning Authority: Fylde Borough Council
Wyre Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SD 350440 **Area:** 1,488.03 (ha) 3,675.43 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000 102 **1:10 000** SD 33 NE
SD 34 NE
SD 34 NW
SD 34 SE
SD 34 SW
SD 35 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 27 January 1995 **Date of Last Revision:** **–**

Other Information:

1. The site forms part of 'Morecambe Bay (including Wyre-Lune)' listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review', edited by D. A. Ratcliffe (1977), Cambridge University Press.

2. The site is adjacent to the Lune Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest and incorporates Barnaby Sands Marsh and Burrows Marsh SSSIs.

3. The site is an integral part of the Morecambe Bay complex of estuaries and shore which collectively meet the criteria for inclusion within the Morecambe Bay Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, and as a Special Protection Area under Article 4 of the European Community Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The Wyre Estuary, lying just south of Lune Estuary is an integral part of Morecambe Bay, one of the two largest areas of intertidal estuarine flats in Britain (the other being the Wash). The whole estuarine complex is of international significance for wintering wading birds and of national significance for wintering wildfowl. The Wyre in its own right is of national importance for wintering and passage black-tailed godwit, wintering turnstone and for wintering teal in times of hard weather. The Wyre Estuary, including those parts within Barnaby Sands Marsh and Burrows Marsh Sites of Special

Scientific Interest, supports the largest area of ungrazed saltmarsh in North West England. The transitions from low to upper marsh are well developed and there are extensive transitions to freshwater swamp communities above high water mark.

The most extensive areas of saltmarsh are found on the east side of the estuary between Barnaby Sands and Staynall, on the west side north of Stannah and on the north side upstream of Shard Bridge. Much of the latter has recently developed on actively accreting mud.

The seaward edge of the saltmarsh is dominated by those species specialised to colonising bare mud and withstanding frequent tidal inundation – the glassworts *salicornia* spp., annual sea-blite *Suaeda maritima* and common saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia maritima*. Common cord-grass *Spartina anglica* is abundant on some of the marshes but appears to be declining. Higher up the marshes there are extensive areas of saltmarsh communities characterised by grazing-sensitive species. The Wyre supports the largest area in Lancashire of saltmarsh dominated by sea-purslane *Halimione portulacoides* and also the largest area of a mixed community distinctive for the presence of common sea-lavender *Limonium vulgare*, sea plantain *Plantago maritima* and sea arrowgrass *Triglochin maritima*. The nationally scarce lax-flowered sea-lavender *Limonium humile* is also present. Most of the sea-purslane dominated saltmarsh is downstream of Shard Bridge. Upstream, especially on the north side, there are extensive areas dominated by sea aster *Aster tripolium*.

On the upper saltmarsh there is a mixture of communities with species typical of a less saline influence. Saltmarsh rush *Juncus gerardi*, sea rush *Juncus maritimus*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and spear-leaved orache *Atriplex prostrata* are all present and, locally, there is long-bracted sedge *Carex extensa*. Of particular interest are the extensive transitions to brackish or freshwater habitats on the landward side. Here swamp is the dominant community with common reed *Phragmites australis* or sea club-rush *Scirpus maritimus*. In places the landward transition is to sea couch *Elymus pycnanthus*. Other transition species present include hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and parsley water-dropwort *O. lachenalii*.

Ornithologically the Wyre Estuary is an integral part of the Morecambe Bay–Lune–Wyre system, the second most important intertidal area in Britain after the Wash for wintering and passage wading birds. The Wyre is nationally important in its own right for wintering and passage black-tailed godwit and wintering turnstone (numbers exceeding 1% of the British population). In spring and autumn the estuary regularly supports 200 black-tailed godwit and during the winter months about 100 feed and roost in the estuary. Peak numbers of turnstone feeding in the estuary have in recent years averaged at 640.

The Wyre is also known to be an important hard weather roost for teal. Large numbers of lapwing and golden plover use the estuary for roosting at low tide. Numbers of the former have in some years approached 1% of the UK population.

Movements of roosting and feeding birds within the Wyre and between this and other estuaries are complex with different parts of the estuary being important for birds at different stages of the tide. The major high tide roost in Armhill with smaller ones at Stannah, Burrows Marsh, Barnaby Sands and Knott End Skears. On spring tides birds are displaced from the smaller roosts to Armhill which, on occasions, can hold over one thousand birds. Along with black-tailed godwit, turnstone, lapwing and golden plover, other wading birds which regularly use the estuary include oystercatcher, redshank and dunlin. The oystercatchers and turnstones feed at the mouth of the estuary on the rocky skears at Rossall Point and Knott End. Golden plover and lapwing roost at low tide around the upstream of Shard Bridge, the former feeding on the Lune estuary to the north at high tide. Waders roosting on the Wyre may be using other parts of the Morecambe Bay complex at low tide.