

Site name: Holly Rock Fields **County:** Leicestershire

District: North West Leicestershire

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as substituted by Schedule 9 to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Local Planning Authority: North West Leicestershire District Council, Leicestershire County Council

National Grid reference: SK 461144 **Area:** 3.95ha

Ordnance Survey Sheets: **1:50,000:** 129 **1:10,000:** SK 41 SE

Notification date: 28 March 2013

Reasons for notification:

Holly Rock Fields SSSI is a nationally important site for its lowland species-rich neutral grassland. The grassland consists mainly of the nationally scarce National Vegetation Classification (NVC) type MG5 crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* – common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* grassland.

General description:

Holly Rock Fields consists of four floristically diverse small fields managed as pasture and meadow, situated approximately 11 km north-west of Leicester, near the town of Coalville. The fields are bordered by fences, hedgerows and stone walls.

The site comprises of lowland species-rich neutral grassland on soils derived from the clays of the Triassic Keuper Marl. The fields have not undergone any agricultural intensification which, combined with differences in local topography, drainage and historical management, has resulted in a sward that has a rich and varied floral composition within and between fields across the SSSI. This contrasts with surrounding land which mainly consists of improved and semi-improved pasture/meadow, urban fringe and remnant heathland.

The site supports a varied sward dominated by four grass species and several other grass species at lower abundances. The dominant species are common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. The less abundant species include downy oat-grass *Avenula pubescens*, quaking-grass *Briza media*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, and yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*. Broad-leaved herbs, including common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris* and common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, are common and widespread across the site.

Other characteristic neutral grassland species are also well-represented but are less widespread, although still typically occurring in two or three of the four fields. These include spring sedge *Carex caryophyllea*, pignut *Conopodium majus*, cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, autumn hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, field woodrush *Luzula campestris*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*, betony *Stachys officinalis* and red clover *Trifolium pratense*.

In places the diversity of the sward is enhanced by the presence of species that are typically characteristic of dry acidic grassland, such as harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis* agg., heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, mat grass *Nardus stricta* and heath milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*. There are also wet flushes and areas which are poorly drained where localised transitions occur between dry species-rich neutral grassland, wet grassland and mire. In particular, these areas support a rich sedge flora including green-ribbed sedge *Carex binervis*, spring-sedge *C. caryophyllea*, glaucous sedge *C. flacca*, common sedge *C. nigra*, oval

sedge *C. ovalis*, pale sedge *C. pallescens*, carnation sedge *C. panacea*, pill sedge *C. pilulifera* and common yellow-sedge *C. viridula* subsp. *Oedocarpa*, as well as bristle club-rush *Isolepis setacea*, cuckoo flower *Cardamine pratensis*, purple moor grass *Molinia caerulea*, jointed rush *Juncus articulatus*, compact rush *J. conglomerata*, greater bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus* and tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*.