

# Blaenau Gwent Wildlife Site/SINC Notification Form

## SITE SUMMARY

SITE NAME: **Hirgan Fields Grassland**

GRID REF: SO 141113

SURVEYOR(S): Rebecca Price

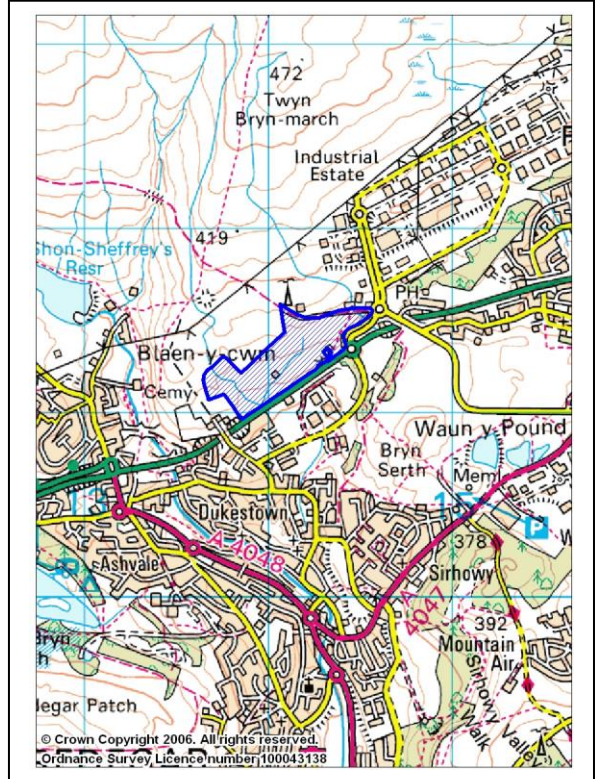
SIZE (approx.): 23.35ha

DATE OF SURVEY: 2005/2006 & 1/06/09

LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA:  
Blaenau Gwent

WARD: Tredegar

### SKETCH MAP OF SITES LOCATION:



### MAIN HABITAT TYPES PRESENT:

Habitat types	NVC type	Area (ha)
Semi improved neutral grassland	MG5/6/1	
Semi improved acid grassland	U4	
Semi improved poor grassland	MG6	
Dry heath/acid grassland mosaic	H12	
Marshy grassland	M23	
Running water/ditch	-	
Scattered scrub & trees	-	
Dry-stone walls	-	

### FULL DESCRIPTION OF SITE (including topography, adjacent land use, access and boundaries etc.):

#### Part 1, surveyed 2005 & 2006:

The complex of enclosed fields located between Hirgan-fach farm and Hirgan and The Wells Farms supports a combination of horse grazed acid grassland and acid grassland/dry heath, and neutral grassland managed for hay/silage. The area is situated to the north of the A465 heads of the valleys road, with open moorland to the north, and has a moderate/slight south easterly facing slope. The fields are divided by fenced dry stone walls with some accompanying scattered hawthorn. Ditches run alongside the walls in places.

Fields 1 and 5 at the north of the site support a mosaic of acid grassland and dry heath. The heathland communities are degraded and very heavily grazed by horses/ponies, however the fields support a good variety of indicator species including *Calluna vulgaris* (heather), *Vaccinium myrtillus* (bilberry), *Potentilla erecta* (tormentil) and *Pilosella officinalis* (mouse-ear hawkweed). *Melampyrum pratense* (common cow wheat) was also recorded.

Similarly, field 6, though heavily grazed retains a reasonable variety of acid indicators.

Field 7 supports a mix of acid, neutral and marshy species but qualifies under the acid grassland criteria.

Field 9 provides the best example of neutral grassland and could stand alone as a cWS. The area to the north of the ditch is of most interest with an MG 5 community including frequent *Conopodium majus* (pignut), *Hypochoeris radicata* (cat's-ear) and *Centaurea nigra* (common knapweed), accompanied in places by *Lotus corniculatus* (common bird's-foot trefoil) and *Luzula campestris* (field wood-rush). The grasses are fine and the sward relatively open. Towards the west, small pockets with a more acidic nature include *Potentilla erecta* (tormentil) and *Rumex acetosella* (sheep's sorrel). Indicators are fewer to the south of the ditch.

**Official Use Only:** Site selected as a Wildlife Site/SINC? YES  NO  Date:

Near to and extending out from the ditch a marshy sward includes *Juncus* species (rush species), *Molinia caerulea* (purple moor grass), *Rumex acetosa* (common sorrel) and *Holcus mollis* (creeping soft grass). The banks of the ditch are locally herb rich.

The remainder of the site consists largely of neutral grassland enclosures, many exhibiting a degree of agricultural improvement with *Ranunculus repens* (creeping buttercup) and *Trifolium repens* (white clover) a part of the sward. Overall, these fields support a reasonable variety of herbs. Despite the frequency and distribution of individual species being rather patchy, the indicator species threshold is reached/nearly reached in most cases. Many of the fields have marshy areas adding to diversity. Fields 3,4, and 11 (under the ownership of Hirgan farm) are cropped with a damp feel and species such as *Achillea ptarmica* (sneezewort), *Ranunculus flammula* (lesser spearwort), *Caltha palustris* (marsh marigold) are locally frequent. *Cirsium dissectum* (meadow thistle) was also locally recorded. Field 8 is species-poor. Fields towards the west, and managed by the Wells Farm (fields 10, 12 and 13) support taller, drier, grassier swards. Areas of marshy grassland are found on wetter ground near ditches and where drainage is poor. Here species include *Lychnis flos-cuculi* (ragged robin), *Caltha palustris* (marsh marigold), *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* (marsh pennywort) and *Galium palustre* (marsh bedstraw). Marshy grassland at the south of field 12 includes over 100 *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* (southern marsh orchid).

Fields 2, 3, 8, 10 and 12 are below the indicator threshold, however most retain a mix of neutral, acid and marshy indicators and are included in the cWS, constituting part of a definable management block.

The site in its entirety warrants consideration as a cWS due to the good variety of species it supports collectively and the comparative rarity of lowland neutral grasslands in this part of the North Sirhowy Valley. Whilst the indicator thresholds for individual grassland types is not confidently reached in all fields, the combined diversity of neutral, acid and marshy indicators in these borderline fields is sufficient to warrant inclusion in the candidate Local Wildlife Site.

#### **Part 2, surveyed 2009:**

The site comprises of two fields managed as hay meadow, and lies to the north of the A465. It is bordered by a house and garden to the west and agricultural land to the north. The fields are enclosed mainly by dry-stone walls (accompanied often by fences). The two fields are divided by a low dry-stone wall although this is not gated and in effect the two fields are one management unit. A mature sycamore lies towards the southern end of the eastern boundary and a few hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) trees lie alongside the northern end. A mature hedgerow including willow (*Salix* sp.), oak (*Quercus* sp.), hawthorn and rowan divides the site from the adjacent garden.

The southern field has a slight west facing slope and supports a semi-improved neutral meadow. A nice open sward is present with a variety of well distributed herbs and grasses that includes frequent common cat's ear (*Hypochoeris radicata*), common knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), field wood rush (*Luzula campestris*), red clover (*Trifolium pratense*), bulbous buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*) and local patches of yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*), common eyebright (*Euphrasia nemorosa*) and pignut (*Conopodium majus*). The east of the site in particular supports a good variety and density of herbs. These include native bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), especially mid way along the southern part of the site. Some locally ranker areas are present throughout the field and alongside the margins where tall coarse grasses are frequent.

Overall the northern part of the field supports a more grass dominated sward, open and of variable sward height. Common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), field wood rush and pignut are occasional and native bluebells are scattered locally. Herb richness is greatest across the north of the field, and alongside the southern edge with common knapweed, red clover, bulbous buttercup, yellow rattle occasional together with frequent common cat's ear and pignut. Regions of dry vegetation with an acid feel are also present locally with heath bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) apparent. Sedges (*Carex* spp.) form a local part of the sward.

A ditch runs east-west through the south of the field, as does a power line. The ditch was dry at the time of visit. It's lined with soft rush, common sorrel and creeping buttercup. The dry banks support an acid sward with tormentil, bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), purple moor grass (*Molinia caerulea*) and wavy hair grass present (*Deschampsia flexuosa*). Devil's bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) was also locally recorded here.

#### **Note:**

Hirgan Fields Grassland represents a combination of two previously separate SINC's (Hirgan Fields Grassland, approved by SINC Panel on 15th January 2008) and Land to the east of Dukestown Cemetery (approved by the SINC panel on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2010).

The combination of the two SINC's was approved at SINC panel meeting dated: 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2010

Please state the section(s) of the Wildlife Site Guidelines that this site qualifies under:

H20) Mosaic Habitats H6) Acid Grassland H4) Neutral Grassland H10) Heathlands & Grass-heath Communities	
Qualifying Habitat types	Number of indicator species present
<b>Part 1:</b>	
Acid Grassland	10/10/7/7 (fields 1/5/6/7)
Neutral grassland	7/7/9/11/5/11/7/9 (fields 2/3/4/9/10/11/12/13)
Heathlands & Grass-heath Communities	(acid indicators)
<b>Part 2:</b>	
Neutral grasslands	12