

**CYNGOR CEFN GWLAD CYMRU
COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST CITATION

CARMARTHENSHIRE

WHITEHILL DOWN

<u>Date of Notification:</u>	1987
<u>National Grid Reference:</u>	SN 290135
<u>O.S. Maps:</u>	1:50,000 Sheet number: 158 & 159 1:25,000 Sheet number: SN 11 & SN 21
<u>Site Area:</u>	46 ha

Description:

This site, situated on moderately sloping ground rising from the Afon Taf, north of Laugharne, is an outstanding example of unimproved and semi-improved herb-rich meadowland. It forms part of a larger medieval 'open-field' system, a farming practice that was once widespread, particularly in the settled 'Englishries' of south Wales. The open-fields at Whitehill Down are known to have been in continuous use since being granted to the burgesses of Laugharne early in the fourteenth century.

On the better drained soils the most frequent grasses in the sward are sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus* and cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*. Mixed with these is a variety of other plants, especially in the damper areas, where such species as carnation sedge *Carex panicea*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, whorled caraway *Carum verticillatum*, green-winged orchid *Orchis morio* and southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* occur.

On the wetter and heavier soils, which are mainly in the lower parts of the site, the sward is dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*. In areas which are not regularly cut it occurs as a rough and rank growth with scattered scrub, but with some notable species such as whorled caraway, petty whin *Genista anglica*, twayblade *Listera ovata* and cowslip *Primula veris*. Where the grassland is regularly mowed, there is a wider range of plant species, including great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and several acid-loving species such as heather *Calluna vulgaris* and heath milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*.

In the south-eastern part of the site there is an area of reedswamp (common reed – *Phragmites australis*) bordering the river and grading into purple moor-grass/whorled caraway grassland. Of particular note in the wet intermediate zone is the occurrence of bulbous foxtail *Alopecurus bulbosus*, a nationally scarce coastal plant. Also growing in the south-eastern part of the site is the uncommon lesser butterfly-orchid *Platanthera bifolia*.

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