

County: Greater Manchester **Site Name:** Red Moss

District: Bolton

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

Local Planning Authority: Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SD 635104 **Area:** 47.22 (ha) 116.63 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000 109 **1:10 000** SD 60 NW
SD 61 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 10 January 1995 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

Previous notification quashed on Judicial Review.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Red Moss is located between the M61 Motorway and the former British Rail locomotive workshops at Horwich, 1.5 km south of the town centre. Immediately to the south of the mossland lies a refuse tip. The site comprises an area of cutover raised mire formed over glacial deposits.

Lowland raised mire formerly occupied extensive areas of land in Greater Manchester and Merseyside, particularly on the floodplain terraces of the River Mersey, but is now rare both locally, nationally and in Europe. There are no undamaged lowland raised mires in Greater Manchester and Merseyside and Red Moss represents one of the few remaining examples of mire habitat bearing this type of semi-natural vegetation in these counties. Astley and Bedford Mosses, Highfield Moss and Red Moss are the best examples of lowland raised mire in this Area of Search. Red Moss is the best site in terms of the presence of peat-forming vegetation and hydrology.

The surface is for the most part dominated by the purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, as is commonly the case on drained and cutover peatlands. Within it, heather species, mostly *Calluna vulgaris*, form small patches of heathland, and fen may also be found. Birch and willow scrub occur very locally. *Sphagnum* mosses and cotton grasses grow in waterlogged conditions amongst the purple moor grass in some of the wetter areas. The pattern of vegetation is determined by amongst other things the variation in surface wetness dictated by the post-peat cutting topography and the drainage.

The special interest lies in the presence of vegetation with peat formation capability, and that the hydrology, or conditions necessary to support this vegetation, has not been irreparably damaged. Although this type of vegetation does not occupy a large proportion of the peatland, the lawns and hummocks of *Sphagnum* mosses, together with cotton grasses, are more extensive than on any other peatland in Greater Manchester and Merseyside.

Nine species of *Sphagnum* moss have been identified. Those such as *S. squarrosum*, *S. fimbriatum*, *S. auriculatum* and *S. palustre* are more usually found in fen, while others, such as *S. cuspidatum*, *S. capillifolium*, *S. subnitens*, *S. recurvum* and *S. papillosum* are typically but not exclusively those of the raised mire centre. Currently, it is the fen *Sphagnum* which have the greatest cover. In addition to the situations in which it is conspicuous, *Sphagnum* is also thinly scattered over all but the north-easterly part of the peat bog. Red Moss has the highest recorded number of *Sphagnum* species for comparable sites in Greater Manchester and Merseyside.

The common cotton grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, is widely distributed, but mostly concentrated with the pool areas and ditches, sometimes with *Sphagnum*. The hare's-tail cotton grass *Eriophorum vaginatum*, occurs very sparingly amongst the *Molinia*.

The existing arrangement of the surface features, having arisen from the abandonment of peat cutting, has resulted locally in a very wet surface, as is evident from the ability of *Sphagnum* moss to develop. These features, together with the approximate average residual peat depth of 3.5 m, and the fact that the level of peat surface is not significantly raised above the surrounding land indicates that the hydrology has not been irreparably damaged.

Other features are not part of the special interest, but in some cases contribute to the overall natural history interest. These are as follows:

Where influenced by water from different areas, notably the refuse tip, the reedmace *Typha latifolia* and soft rush *Juncus effusus* are common.

At the northern end of the bog there is an area of willow *Salix* spp. scrub. The understorey contains bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, reed canary grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and broad buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*. A bed of common reed *Phragmites australis* lies along the southern edge of the scrub woodland.

Snipe and teal breed on the open mossland. The ditches and pools of the Moss provide breeding sites for dragonflies including the common hawker *Aeschna juncea* and the locally scarce black darter *Sympetrum danae*.