SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: CHURCH HILL, TRALEE

SITE CODE: 001341

Churchill is a small village approximately 8km north-west of the town of Tralee in north county Kerry. The site is located less than 0.5km from the village and comprises a small, rocky limestone ridge with a calcareous flora (the area of the site is only 4ha). It is situated in pasture land which is currently being heavily fertilized and also heavily grazed by cattle.

Despite being heavily fertilised the site retains a surprisingly good flora and includes many species typical of calcareous rock habitats. The main habitats are lowland dry grassland and exposed rock outcrops including a small former limestone quarry. Within the old quarry there is abundant growth of Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthenum vulgare*), which is almost absent from the rest of the site and there are ferns such as Maindenhair Spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*), Wall-rue (*A. ruta-muraria*) and Rustyback (*Ceterach officinarum*). At the top of the limestone hill Alexanders (*Smyrium olusatrum*), Common Mallow (*Malvia sylvestris*), Pellitory-of-the-wall (*Parietaria judaica*) and Hart's-tongue (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*) are common and there are two plants of the introduced (mainly coastal) species Milk thistle (*Silybum marianum*). The thin, calcareous soil around the rock outcrops supports the growth of many species, for example Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*), Biting Stonecrop (*Sedum acre*), Shining Crane's-bill (*Geranium lucidum*), Dove's-foot Crane's-bill (*G. molle*), Common Cornsalad (*Valerianella locusta*) and Thyme-leaved Sandwort (*Arenaria serpyllifolia*). Many of the species are associated with calcareous and/or coastal locations – the site is very close (c. l.5km) to Tralee Bay. Common Whitlowgrass (*Erophila verna*) is also found here, but only rarely.

Further down slope, to the south-west of the site, there is lowland dry grassland which, because of the heavy fertiliser application, has a luxuriant growth of grass species. It is dominated by Smooth Meadow-grass (*Poa pratensis*), Crested Dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*) and Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*), with herbs such as Daisy (*Bellis perennis*), Mouse-ear Hawkweed (*Hieracium pilosella*), Bulbous Buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*) and the legumes - white clover (*Trifolium repens*), Lesser Trefoil (*Trifolium dubium*) and Black Medick (*Medicago lupulina*).

Other herbs often associated with dry, thin soils still remain in the sand, namely Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*).

The major threat to the survival of this small area of calcareous grassland is the heavy application of fertiliser (favouring the growth of the Gramineae). It is recommended that the site is included as a NHA of local importance and in order to retain the site's historical interest, a management agreement sent to the landowner regarding the application of fertiliser. It is thought that the sword could recover if sensibly grazed,

but remedial action would have to be implemented, sooner rather than later, if the site is to remain as botanically interesting.

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