

[News story: Essex haven for nature gets new protection](#)

As the Essex town of Basildon celebrates its 70th birthday this year, [Natural England](#) has announced new protection for the iconic landscapes of nearby Langdon Ridge.

2019 marks the UK government's [Year of Green Action](#), a year-long drive to help people to connect with, protect and enhance nature. Langdon Ridge is easily accessible from Basildon, and the newly-notified Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) will help ensure it remains both a thriving place for nature, and a valuable green space enjoyed by future generations.

Around 345 hectares of land across parts of the town and surrounding areas has received legal protection for its nationally significant array of grassland, woodlands, rare plants and insects.

The new designation will ensure stronger protection for features such as wildflower rich grasslands, woodland habitats, as well as rare species such as the Deptford Pink and the Grizzled Skipper butterfly.

The new SSSI will encompass sites that are well known for their natural history in the local area, including the [Dunton Plotlands Nature Reserve](#), [Langdon Hills Country Park](#), [Marks Hill Wood](#) and [Willow Park](#).

Natural England's Interim Chief Executive, Marian Spain said:

Natural England is here to make sure that people and nature can thrive together. I am delighted therefore that we have been able to extend the protection for this nationally important network of sites around Basildon which as well as being of huge value for wildlife is a much loved and much used open space for local people.

The support from our partners and stakeholders across the area has been vital to our work and we look forward to continuing to work with them. This is an ideal area for people to make a commitment to get involved with the Year of Green Action, with lots of opportunity to engage with, enjoy and help protect nature close to where they live.

Habitat fragmentation is a key conservation challenge, and a key element of this designation is that it looks at how species use the landscape as a whole. The SSSI will ensure protection for not only the existing high quality environments, but also the interconnecting green corridors of habitat that enable species to move between locations.

The [Natural England](#) Board has confirmed the designation of the site after considering responses to a four-month long consultation.

Natural England Board member, Dr Simon Lyster said:

Langdon Ridge is an amazing wildlife-rich landscape within 25 miles of central London that fully deserves SSSI status.

It is particularly extraordinary because it is a large, 345 hectare mosaic of species rich grassland and woodland right on the edge of Basildon, providing a brilliant opportunity for local residents to enjoy nature right on their doorstep. Away from the town it offers fantastic views of the Thames Estuary and links in well with other SSSIs in that part of Essex.

Langdon Ridge is living proof that wildlife and people can both thrive if the will is there, and congratulations to all the local people and organisations who have made it possible.

Whilst nature conservation is the primary aim of the new SSSI, given its location on the urban edge, the importance of this area for people hasn't been ignored. The designation as a SSSI will ensure that local communities will continue to have opportunity to connect with nature on their doorstep as part of their daily lives.

Research has shown how the natural environment provides society with benefits in terms of helping mental and physical health, offering informal recreation opportunities, inspiration for art, and helping people feel connected with their local area. This new SSSI will ensure nearby residents will continue to have this amazing natural resource protected in the long term.

Whilst Natural England has led on this new designation, this achievement is thanks to the hard work and support of many key stakeholders.

Natural England has worked closely with partners such as [Essex Wildlife Trust](#), [Thurrock](#) and [Basildon Councils](#), and [Basildon Natural History Society](#) to gather the evidence needed to proceed with this designation. This partnership approach will continue in the coming months, as we work together to build a long term vision for a wildlife-rich, accessible environment around Basildon.

Eamonn Martin, Basildon resident and former London Marathon winner, said:

I know this area well from my many training runs around Basildon. It is marvellous news that more of our precious countryside will be protected for local people to enjoy.

Green action can be as simple as going for a run in the local park or changing your training route to take in a local nature reserve with public access.

I would encourage local residents and families to improve their health and get exercising, through walking and running, at Langdon

Ridge.