

With ancient woodland, wildflower-rich grasslands and mature scrub, a 345 hectare beauty spot is putting the borough on the map for nature conservation.

In July 2018, Langdon Ridge – which includes Langdon EWT Nature Reserve, Dunton Plotlands, Marks Hill Wood, Willow Park and Langdon Hills Country Park – was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by Natural England. It means the land, which stretches from Basildon into Thurrock, will receive legal protection due to its national significance.

It is home to rare species such as the Deptford pink flower, the grizzled skipper butterfly and mocha moth.

Much of the evidence used by Natural England to justify the designation was collected by the Basildon Natural History Society (BNHS), which was formed in 1968 by a small group of amateur naturalists who shared a common interest in natural history and wildlife conservation.

Peter Furze has been a member of the society for 31 of its 50 active years, and now leads the conservation work parties which take place every Tuesday and Sunday from September to March.

"I have always been interested in the natural world. I found I had a bit of time free and one day I came along to join a work party, and I've been here ever since. It's a great opportunity to socialise," the 68-year-old explained.

"The work is as hard as you want to make it. There is something for everyone to do."

Peter has a real eye for detail - whether it is letting sunlight into woodland, allowing wildlife to move more freely or protecting natural trees.

In the words of former society chairman Dr Rod Cole:

"He really knows how to maximise the potential.

"He's a real credit to the society and is quite phenomenal. He has a talent for knowing what needs to be preserved. It's rare to have someone with such complex knowledge who can also direct the physical work."

Rod is moving away from Essex to retire in Somerset, happy in the knowledge that he is leaving behind a dedicated team and the legacy of the SSSI status. He compiled data and wrote a report about the area which was presented to government as part of the bid for formal conservation designation.

Miriam Heppell has been a committee member and publicity officer for the past 18 months, having first become involved in the society five years ago.

"I have two dogs and I absolutely love walking them through the reserve, so it's great that the SSSI status gives the site protection for future generations. The whole process took about two years from start to finish," she said.

"We are all absolutely devoted to preserving the natural history of the area and always looking to welcome new like-minded members. We want people to know that they have this beautiful open space and such rich wildlife on their doorsteps."

Monthly meetings are held at the Laindon Community Centre, in Aston Road, with guest speakers often making an appearance. The society, which is part of the Langdon Living Landscape alongside Basildon Council and Essex Wildlife Trust, also hosts regular social events.

For more information about the Basildon Natural History Society and how to become a member, visit [www.bnhs.net](http://www.bnhs.net)

# Conserving nature for future generations

