**Red Lodge Heath SSSI and Red Lodge Conservation Group**

**Red Lodge Heath SSSI**

Red Lodge Heath is an important site both historically and for its wildlife. This 20.75 hectare site is a remnant of a medieval rabbit warren that would have extended as far as Freckenham. At the end of the 19th century George Rothschild, one of the pioneers in recognising the need for nature conservation, included Red Lodge Heath as a site that should be protected because of its important assembly of wildlife. However, in the 20th century much of the heath was lost to housebuilding, road construction and agriculture, so only one-tenth of the original warren and heathland remains. Gravel extraction has created the deep pits and ponds and the site comprises a mix of habitats: dry acid grassland, chalk grassland, lichen heath and wet woodland. In 2005 the site was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest, one of 3000 legally-protected wildlife sites in the UK. The site is important for its invertebrates, including the nationally rare five-banded tailed digger wasp, and some nationally rare plants, including Breckland Thyme.

With the current expansion of housing development in the area and the proposed Sunnica Energy Farm adjacent to Red Lodge, the SSSI will become even more important as a haven for local wildlife.

**Red Lodge Heath Conservation Group**

Up to 2010 the heath had been used for off-road motor-cycling, and fly-tipping. Local residents, supported by Natural England and members of the parish Council, formed the Red Lodge Conservation Group to address these issues and improve the site for the benefit of wildlife and the community. With the support of the main landowner of the site, Upton Suffolk Farms Limited, funding from a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and grants from the National Lottery Awards for All Scheme and the Parish Council, many improvements have been made. Twenty tons of waste, five of which were toxic, were removed from the site, which was enclosed by fencing. This has eliminated motor cycle and quad bike activity, creating a peaceful and safe environment. The Conservation Group worked to remove scrub, improve the grassland, and maintain good access on paths. Steps have been constructed to improve access through the woodland. Annual mowing controls the growth of bracken. Information boards have been installed on the site. Surveys of the site made by Natural England in 2024 recorded 627 species of invertebrate and assessed its condition was favourable although vulnerable as it is surrounded by housing. A report made by West Suffolk Council in 2024 on visitor impact on sites in the area concluded that Red Lodge Heath would not sustain more intense use without deterioration to the environment. The Conservation Group holds regular work parties throughout the year and would like to encourage more residents to join them, particularly as they are a very small group engaged in conservation work. As the members are now well into retirement age a new generation needs to be recruited to continue the good work that has been achieved on the site.

The Red Lodge Conservation Group would appreciate any assistance the Parish Council could provide to promote its work and encourage new members.

Jennifer Hall ( Chairman)