

COUNTY: SUFFOLK                      SITE NAME: BERNER'S HEATH, ICKLINGHAM

DISTRICT: WEST SUFFOLK

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

Local Planning Authority: Forest Heath District Council

National Grid Reference: TL 800765                      Area: 149.56 (ha.) 360 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 144                      1:10,000: TL 77 NE, TL 87 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1975                      Date of Last Revision: NA

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1983                      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

Berner's Heath supports the largest remaining area of heather-dominated heath in the Breckland, as well as smaller areas of lichen-rich acidic grassland, calcareous grassland, scrub and secondary woodland.

A large part of the heath-dominated heath is divided into blocks by a series of rides, and heather of different ages is present in different parts of the site. This reflects a recent history of rotational heather burning. In the youngest, most recently burnt areas the heather does not entirely cover the ground; sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella* is abundant and mosses such as *Polytrichum juniperinum* can carpet the ground. Where the Heather is slightly older and is growing vigorously there may be very few other plants growing with it, apart from scattered nettles, creeping thistles or other 'weedy' species. By contrast, the older heather, which has started to become more open again, supports the greatest number of associated plant species. There are several species of lichen and a number of flowering plant species including heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, common speedwell *Veronica officinalis* and sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*. This older heather is also the most important for the many species of specialised insects that live in association with heather.

Towards the edges of the site, particularly in the South East corner, the heather heath merges into acidic grassland. Much of this is dominated by the grass sheep's fescue *F. ovina*, but sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and crested hair grass *Koeleria cristata* also occur. Lichens form an important part of the sward and a good range of species is present, although the percentage cover of lichens is generally not high enough to class the vegetation as lichen/moss-dominated. Other plants associated with this grassland type include field woodrush *Luzula campestris*, harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, biting stonecrop *Sedum acre* and mouse-ear hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella*, chalk comes to the surface over a relatively small part of this Heath, and some of the best developed patches are associated with past soil disturbance. The grassland on these areas contains chalk grassland species such as larger wild thyme *Thymus pulegioides* and bird's foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*. Large parts of Berner's Heath are almost entirely free from scrub invasion but there is an area of self-set Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* becoming established along the southern edge of the site. Secondary woodland is largely confined to the outlying parts of the site and consists mainly of mixed age Scots Pine *P. sylvestris* and birch *Betula pendula*.