



# Essex Wildlife Trust



Protecting Essex Wildlife

Living Landscapes

Living Seas

Local Wildlife Sites

Water for Wildlife

Biological Records

Essex Biodiversity

**Planning**

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Frequently Asked Questions

Habitat explorer

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## Planning in Essex

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Essex is blessed with a rich and varied wildlife heritage and the county is famous for its coastline, arguably the longest in England; the coastal wetlands of Essex are renowned for their extensive areas of grazing marsh, lagoons, shingle, mudflats, saltmarsh, fresh water pools and reedbeds. In addition, there are extensive river systems, tracts of ancient woodland, mosaic and grassland, and important brownfield sites, with heaths, wetlands and important wildlife corridors scattered throughout the county within the wider farmed countryside. These beautiful wild places are vulnerable and many are under threat from development.

### Development pressures in Essex

Essex County Council is one of the largest county councils in England, serving a resident population of 1.7 million and an extensive geographic area containing twelve districts. It has three national and regional growth areas: Essex Thames Gateway; Haven Gateway; part of the London, Stansted, Cambridge and Peterborough growth corridor; and a regional growth point at Chelmsford. The first three growth areas are defined as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and include strategic waste, energy, transport and water schemes.

- The Thames Gateway area includes the district authorities of Basildon, Castle Point and Rochford and is the focus for a great deal of housing and business development by 2021.

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- The Haven Gateway encompasses coastal ports and the surrounding area stretching from Mersea Island in Essex to Felixstowe in Suffolk, and includes the towns of Colchester, Clacton, Harwich, Manningtree and Ipswich.
- The London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough Corridor is an area stretching north from London, including the Essex districts of Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford, recognised as an area with substantial growth pressure in terms of both business and housing.

These areas have been identified as having rapidly increasing development demands and this means considerable pressure is being placed on the county's remaining wildlife and wild spaces in these regions. Essex Wildlife Trust is engaged with the planning system to try to ensure that any development does not harm the natural environment, by scrutinising and commenting on both strategic planning policy and planning proposals. We are also working with the planning system to ensure that Essex is able to adapt to the impacts of climate change through, for example, the protection and enhancement of habitat networks (Living Landscapes) in emerging new Local Plans.

#### Importance of wildlife

The future of the countryside rests with the survival of many native species. Animals and plants have an intrinsic right to exist and it is up to us to protect them now before it is too late. Wildlife areas are important in facilitating leisure time activity for many people wishing to escape the stress of living in urban areas. In addition they have economic value, both in terms of their produce and also because they make a vital contribution to local and national economies through the provision of ecosystem services. Whilst the initial impact of development has a major effect on the countryside, the additional infrastructure that expands as a result influences our quality of life.

## Local Wildlife Sites

### Dry Street Pastures, Basildon – a Local Wildlife Site

allocated for housing development. Photo: Annie Gordon

We focus, in particular, on the protection of Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS), through early engagement with local authority strategic planning and policy development. Local Wildlife Sites are extremely important areas of land with significant wildlife value. They may support both locally and nationally threatened species and habitats; many sites will contain



habitats and species that are recognised to be important under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which sets out strategies for the conservation of our most vulnerable wildlife. Together with Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Local Wildlife Sites are fundamental as they provide an absolutely vital contribution towards maintaining the current levels of wildlife in Essex. However, while the status of SSSI is a statutory designation, LoWS do not have this level of protection (although they are a material consideration in the planning system). Consequently, they are frequently threatened by development proposals.

## Planning consultations

Local authority strategic planning proposals (for example, housing site allocations) sometimes pose a threat to the natural environment. Where this occurs, we will object to the proposals unless adjustments can be made to avoid or mitigate the damage. In the last twelve months, we have examined and commented on a wide range of new Local Plan consultation documents published by local authorities across Essex. When resources permit, we have also commented on and objected to a number of high-profile individual planning applications. Many of our comments and objections have been noted by local authorities and we are proud that we have saved some sites from permanent loss.

## Volunteering

Essex Wildlife Trust welcomes the support of volunteers who are able to act as planning representatives, working across the county to keep up-to-date with new planning applications, for example by keeping a close eye on local newspapers. Volunteer planning representatives can flag up those planning applications that may affect the wildlife in their area and send these to our Conservation Officer, who will then respond accordingly.

If you are interested in getting involved please contact Annie Gordon, Conservation Officer.

Telephone: 01621 862976 / [email](#)



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