

*Our*  
**Strategic Plan**

**2020**

**2030**

*A Wilder Essex*

**2023 edition**

Love **Essex** • Love **Wildlife**



**Essex**  
Wildlife Trust



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## The challenge

**The time to act is now.** We are in the midst of a combined **climate and ecological emergency** and there is now an urgent need to respond to this crisis by reversing the decline in our natural world.

We are rapidly approaching a tipping point whereby we either start to deliver nature's recovery or we cross a line from which we may never be able to come back. The stakes have never been higher. The necessary resources and regulatory framework to tackle the drivers of change have not been forthcoming from successive governments in recent years. The onus is therefore on us to work in partnership for nature's recovery at an unprecedented scale and speed.

By most estimations we have until the end of the decade to meet the challenge before the damage is irreversible. The next few years may therefore be the most important in the history of nature conservation.

Given the scale of the challenge, the focus of our strategy is impact, specifically in the context of how we restore nature, encourage people to act on its behalf, and how we continue to be a thriving organisation in an increasingly volatile operating environment. It charts a course that will enable us to make the most of our resources over the next few vital years.

The challenge may be daunting but this strategy should be a source of hope and optimism. It is an incredibly important and exciting time to be part of an organisation that can genuinely make a difference, delivering fundamental benefits to wildlife through active interventions on the ground and by inspiring collective and individual action across the county.

As passionate professionals, there is nowhere better to be at this moment in time than Essex Wildlife Trust. More so than ever, **we need to think globally but act locally.**

We are part of a **wider grassroots movement** of Wildlife Trusts



# Essex Wildlife Trust

Essex Wildlife Trust was **founded in 1959** by a group of pioneering men and women with the foresight to recognise the importance of a county-based Trust to protect wildlife and inspire a lifelong love of nature.

As one of the largest Wildlife Trusts in the country, we now have the benefit of **over sixty years of experience** in tackling environmental challenges, spanning terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems. With our track record of delivering tangible benefits for wildlife across the county, we are well placed to support stakeholders, landowners, and decision-makers to deliver solutions that secure wildlife gain and help nature's recovery, while also widening access to nature and bringing people and wildlife closer together.

There has never been a more important time for Essex to have a Wildlife Trust that delivers high impact. We are at the centre of the nature crisis: our county is one of the most over-developed in the UK, a country which is, according to the Biodiversity Intactness Index, one of the most nature depleted countries on Earth. We are at the epicentre.

**“Widening access to nature and bringing people and wildlife closer together”**

## The Wildlife Trusts movement

We do not face this challenge alone. Although we are an independent charity, **we are part of a wider grassroots movement of Wildlife Trusts** across the UK who engage in critical conservation work and campaign collectively on behalf of wildlife and the natural world.

Our movement embodies the concept of **'think globally, act locally'**, ensuring that our conservation efforts do not stop at the county border. All of our work connects to a larger vision for wildlife in the UK with the ultimate aim of restoring nature and living fairly within environmental limits.

The county is a human construct. The species we protect are not confined by our local boundaries. Neither should we be.

**“All of our work connects to a larger vision for wildlife in the UK”**



**Protecting** wildlife  
and **inspiring** a lifelong  
love of nature

# Our vision

A county **rich in wildlife** with people **connected to nature**

We are dependent on the natural world in every aspect of our lives. The air that we breathe. The water we drink. The food we eat. Our physical and mental health.

We know that the state of nature is the best barometer for the overall health of our planet, and we know that the more connected we feel to nature, the more we strive to protect it. **Bringing people close to nature is the key to unlocking a better, brighter future for everyone.**

We are ambitious for our county's future. We want Essex to be known for the richness of its wildlife, which will be the hallmark of a healthier, happier county. **We want Essex to be wilder because we need a wilder Essex.**

We want people to value natural capital, but we also want wildlife to be valued for its own sake, because of its beauty, its complexity, and its enduring power to inspire.

**“We want Essex to be wilder because we need a wilder Essex”**

# Our mission

**Protecting** wildlife and **inspiring** a lifelong love of nature

We will achieve our vision of being a county rich in wildlife and connecting people with nature by focusing our efforts and resources on two areas: **protecting** and **inspiring**.

**Modern conservation must inspire people beyond the conservation community.** We cannot do it all ourselves. In this way, we see our engagement work as ‘indirect conservation’ because the outcome should be the same: a better deal for wildlife.

Although we have relatively large landholdings in Essex, we cover a proportionally small area of the county and only some of these are coastal. If every garden in Essex were to become a mini nature reserve, the amount of space for nature in our county would be significantly higher.

We serve the entire county. We want to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to develop a lifelong love of nature and to enable access, covering every area of Essex, urban as well as rural, coastal as well as terrestrial.

**“Modern conservation must inspire people beyond the conservation community”**

# Our values

Our values are fundamental to who we are and how we operate as an organisation. In all areas of our work we are:

## Impactful

- We are science-led
- We demonstrate impact across all activities
- We start with the end in mind
- We recognise the power of storytelling

## Collaborative

- We work with partners for the greater good
- We explore new opportunities and thinking
- We embrace innovation and change
- We share our vision and expertise

## United

- We all play a part in achieving our mission
- We show a united front
- We support colleagues
- We work together as one

## Proactive

- We are solutions-focused
- We have a can-do attitude
- We are optimistic about the future
- We are not afraid to lead

# Our strategic aims

Our strategy has three strategic aims that support us in delivering our vision. Each aim is supported by two objectives. There is no priority to the order in which our aims appear within the framework, other than the fact that **Thrive** lays the foundations that maximise our ability to **Restore** and **Take Action**.

**1**  
Restore

**2**  
Take Action

**3**  
Thrive



Our values are fundamental to who we are and how we operate as an organisation.

# Our strategic framework

## 1. Restore

### Objective 1.1

Leading wildlife gain across the county

### Objective 1.2

Enhancing the conservation value of our land

## 2. Take Action

### Objective 2.1

Creating places of wonder

### Objective 2.2

Bringing people and wildlife closer together

## 3. Thrive

**Objective 3.1** Working together for wildlife

**Objective 3.2** Making the best use of our resources

### Delivering our strategy

We will support the delivery of the strategy by ensuring that all staff, volunteers, and members understand how they can contribute to achieving our aims and objectives and are supported by clear, relevant work plans and an Impact Framework that drive the direction of travel and measure success.

## Aim 1

# Restore

**30% of land and sea in Essex actively managed for nature's recovery by 2030.**

As a wildlife charity, our aim is to **deliver significant and measurable impact for wildlife in Essex**. Over the next decade, restoring nature is where we can realise the most gain. In this context, we define 'restore' in much broader terms than traditional preservation work, encompassing any conservation efforts that help to bring about nature's recovery including creating new habitat. Restoring nature to the extent that 30% of land and sea is actively managed for nature's recovery by the end of 2030 is therefore our overarching aim for this strategic period.

Over this period, our work will need to be even more evidence-led and outward-looking. We will identify opportunities to protect and manage our nature reserves more sustainably, as we seek to buffer and extend them, while protecting – and sometimes reintroducing – key species and contributing to the restoration of habitats across the county to make nature's recovery in Essex a reality. Adaptation to ecological and climate change will also become an increasingly important aspect of our work, and we will aim to share our successes with the widest range of audiences possible in order to maximise our impact.

As a result, the Trust will be recognised not only for its positive impact on biodiversity conservation in Essex but for our contribution to the base of scientific evidence that underpins the deployment of nature-based solutions.

Our aim is to deliver **significant and measurable impact for wildlife conservation in Essex**

**Objective**

**1.1**

**Leading wildlife gain across the county**

We will be the driving force for nature's recovery in Essex, working in partnership within and across county boundaries to achieve the best possible gain for wildlife, from landscape and rivers to marine and coastal recovery.

We will lead on nature-based solutions to address the biodiversity crisis and build climate resilience, demonstrating biodiversity net gain and the value of natural capital on sites that we either manage or are able to influence.

We will ensure nature's recovery is at the forefront of planning and development, working in partnership to influence decision making at every level.



**Objective**

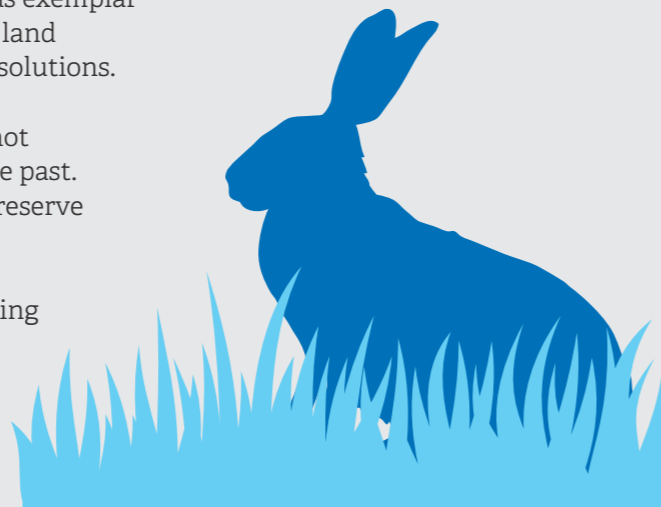
**1.2**

**Enhancing the conservation value of our land**

We want to lead by example. We will therefore enhance the conservation value of our sites and establish them as exemplar reserves, demonstrating excellence in conservation, land management, and the deployment of nature-based solutions.

There is no time to waste on interventions that do not work or are no longer as effective as they were in the past. We will therefore take an evidence-led approach to reserve management.

We will be guided by an effective ecological monitoring programme that captures trends and informs evidence-based reserve management decisions, especially in relation to our key species.



We will be the **driving force** for **nature's recovery** in Essex



# Inspiring access to the natural world and mobilising people action to protect it



## Aim 2

# Take Action

## 1 in 4 people in Essex taking action for nature and climate by 2030.

The challenge we face in Essex is beyond the capacity of any single organisation to solve, including Essex Wildlife Trust. We know that engagement is as important as direct conservation when it leads to tangible benefits for wildlife and the natural world, which is why we consider engagement to be an indirect form of conservation.

Our aim is to widen access to nature, provide great wildlife experiences, deepen nature connection, and ultimately encourage the people of Essex to take individual and collective action for wildlife. Only by reaching the tipping point of 1 in 4 people taking action for nature and climate will we change behaviour and shift social norms in our county. That we can't protect wildlife in perpetuity on our own does not stop us from leading the way by demonstrating what is possible, advising and inspiring others, and lobbying people in positions of power.

We are well-equipped to do so. We have a significant membership base and a large number of Nature Discovery Centres that are important gateways to nature, allowing us to engage with millions of visitors. We are also the largest county-based provider of outdoor education in the UK, providing learning opportunities for all stages of life. Furthermore, we have been a leading light in conservation communications and brand for several years, with burgeoning expertise in campaigning and community organising, while we also work closely with our Local Groups to mobilise communities.

Between now and 2030, after two years of being hamstrung by Covid, we will be back in the heart of communities, working with groups and individuals, building social capital, inspiring access to the natural world and mobilising people action to protect it.

Objective

# 2.1

## Creating places of wonder

We are fortunate to have a constellation of incredible Nature Discovery Centres across the county. These centres will provide a gateway to great wildlife experiences, deepen nature connection and widen access to the natural world, thereby helping to address some of the social inequalities that are exacerbated by limited access to nature and the many health and wellbeing benefits.

We will use our centres to offer inspiring experiences, including events, education, interpretation, and wildlife spectacles that encourage people to take action for nature and climate, driven by a deep connection and a growing sense of stewardship across the county.

We will ensure an excellent visitor experience at all of our centres, encouraging greater loyalty and more active involvement with the Trust while securing the income that keeps our centres financially sustainable and helps to support our conservation work.

Our nature reserves will also be places of wonder, but for quieter, self-guided exploration.



Objective

# 2.2

## Bringing people and wildlife closer together

Part of the solution to the current nature crisis is to bring people and wildlife closer together. Our aim is to provide all people in Essex with opportunities to engage with wildlife at every age and stage of life, positioning ourselves at the forefront of outdoor education and community engagement in all its forms.

Because we believe in wildlife for all, we will have supporters in every corner of the county who represent all demographic groups in Essex. We will manage our relationships with supporters and stakeholders to ensure that every supporter feels valued and empowered.

We will leverage our growing communications and campaigning capabilities to raise our profile and increase engagement, inspiring members, donors, partners, visitors, and funders to take individual and collective action, as well as influencing decision-makers through advocacy, lobbying, and policy work.



# Opportunities to engage with wildlife at every age



**Embed our values** throughout the organisation so that they run like a **golden thread** through everything we do

### Aim 3

# Thrive

**A thriving organisation delivering high performance and high impact.**

Our ability to achieve significant and measurable impact for wildlife relies on having strong foundations.

We need to develop a high-performance culture, where individuals and teams focus on the best outcome for the Trust, engendering a positive, can-do attitude. We must embed our values throughout the organisation so that they run like a golden thread through everything we do.

We need a culture in which staff and volunteers feel proud, motivated, and engaged, and have a shared understanding of what constitutes success. The ability to measure our performance through a transparent impact framework and key performance indicators is crucial.

At a time of financial hardship, and when the competition for charitable funds is so intense, we must ensure the best possible use of our resources and secure financial sustainability, not only by ensuring maximum efficiency across all departments but also by diversifying our income streams to leverage upon new opportunities.

The ongoing maintenance of our assets and resources needs to be planned well in advance, with a rolling programme of work that is fully costed and accurately reflects the true cost of running the Trust's varied and complex activities.

## Objective 3.1

### Working together for wildlife

We cannot achieve anything as an organisation without our people, who are our greatest asset. That we are a values-based organisation is also mirrored in our culture. We are fortunate to have a talented community of staff who are motivated by working for a great cause and are determined to make a difference. We are people who care.

We want to take this even further. We want to recognise the importance of every role, every member of staff and volunteer, and celebrate how they contribute to our charitable aims. We will continue to be driven by the desire to improve our equality, diversity, and inclusion, understanding that this engenders a greater breadth of experience and talent.

We will be recognised as individual experts in our fields who collectively deliver for wildlife, who love our work, and who live our culture. At leadership level, we will continue to be authentic and empathetic, modelling a progressive form of leadership that values emotional intelligence in service to the cause.



## Objective 3.2

### Making the best use of our resources

Success depends on our ability to make the best use of our resources. As well as our people, this encompasses our whole estate and our assets. Critical among these resources is our finances. After several years of investment budgets, we are on a glide path to financial sustainability. Reviewing progress against this path will be crucial over the next few years.

We need to become a cost-efficient organisation with a culture of strategic spending and smart saving, guided by a long-term view of our finances. As part of this, we will continue to diversify our income streams to manage the risk associated with unstable sources of income, such as agri-environment schemes, and we will review all aspects of our finances, from target-setting to financial reporting.

Another critical resource is our systems. Increasingly, organisations are only as good as their systems. We will therefore continue with our Digital Transformation Programme, ensuring that our systems and policies maximise our performance and impact, and continue to build efficiencies in our operations.



We will be recognised as **individual experts** in our fields who **collectively deliver** for wildlife

We will measure our **success** and **impact** against our three targets



## Measuring success

We will measure our success and impact against our three targets through a comprehensive **Impact Framework** that identifies and defines our long-term performance indicators until the end of the strategic period.

### Targets

1

30% of land and sea in Essex actively managed for nature's recovery by 2030

2

1 in 4 people in Essex taking action for nature and climate by 2030

3

A thriving organisation delivering high performance and high impact



The next ten years could be the most important in the history of nature conservation

A carpet of bluebells in beech photo: Guy Edwardes/2020VISION

# Summary of aims and objectives

## Vision

**A Wilder Essex:** A county rich in wildlife with people **connected to nature**

## Mission

**Protecting** wildlife and **inspiring** a lifelong love of nature

## Values

ICUP:  
**Impactful | Collaborative | United | Proactive**

**Aim 1: Restore** 30% of land and sea in Essex actively managed for nature's recovery by 2030

**Objective 1.1**  
Leading wildlife gain across the county

**Objective 2.1**  
Enhancing the conservation value of our land

**Aim 2: Take Action** 1 in 4 people in Essex taking action for nature and climate by 2030

**Objective 2.1**  
Creating places of wonder

**Objective 2.2**  
Bringing people and wildlife closer together

**Aim 3: Thrive** A thriving organisation delivering high performance and high impact

**Objective 3.1**  
Working together for wildlife

**Objective 3.2**  
Making the best use of our resources

## Governance and Delivery

**Governance:**  
Board of trustees

**Strategic oversight:**  
Strategic Leadership Team

**Operational oversight:**  
Operational Leadership Team

**Delivery: Directorates:**

- Conservation
- Engagement
- People and Culture
- Finance and Systems
- Income Generation

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