

03 June 2026



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APOLOGIES: Committee Services
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CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Doug Wilkinson

Dear Councillor

You are summoned to attend the meeting of the;

STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

on **THURSDAY 11 JUNE 2026 at 7.30 pm**

in the **Council Chamber, Maldon District Council Offices, Princes Road, Maldon.**

Please Note: All meetings will continue to be live streamed on the [Council's YouTube channel](#) for those wishing to observe remotely. Public participants wishing to speak remotely at a meeting can continue to do so via Microsoft Teams.

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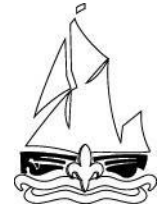
A copy of the agenda is attached.

Yours faithfully

Chief Executive

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP:

| | |
|------------------|---|
| CHAIRPERSON | Councillor A Fittock |
| VICE-CHAIRPERSON | Councillor M G Bassenger |
| COUNCILLORS | J R Burrell-Cook S Dodsley J Driver M F L Durham A S Fluker K M H Lagan S J N Morgan U G C Siddall-Norman P L Spenceley |



**AGENDA
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

THURSDAY 11 JUNE 2026

1. **Chairperson's Notices**

2. **Apologies for Absence**

3. **Minutes of the Last meeting** (Pages 5 - 10)

To consider the Minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 19 March 2026 (copy enclosed).

4. **Disclosure of Interest**

To disclose the existence and nature of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, Other Registrable interests and Non-Registrable Interests relating to items of business on the agenda having regard to paragraph 9 and Appendix B of the Code of Conduct for Members.

(Members are reminded that they are also required to disclose any such interests as soon as they become aware should the need arise throughout the meeting).

5. **Public Participation**

To receive the views of members of the public, of which prior notification in writing has been received (no later than noon on the Tuesday prior to the day of the meeting).

Should you wish to submit a question please complete the online form at:
www.maldon.gov.uk/publicparticipation.

6. **Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy Review**
(Pages 11 - 232)

To consider the report of the Director of Place, Planning and Growth, (copy enclosed).

7. **Replacement of Pay and Display Parking Machines** (Pages 233 - 238)

To consider the report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services and Communities (copy enclosed).

8. **Culture and Heritage Strategy** (Pages 239 - 340)

To consider the report of the Director of Strategy and Improvement, (copy enclosed).

9. **Pay Policy Statement 2026 / 27** (Pages 341 - 360)

To consider the report of the Director of Strategy and Improvement, (copy enclosed).

10. **Budget Monitoring Report - Period 12 (31 March 2026)** (Pages 361 - 380)

To consider the report of the Director of Finance (copy enclosed).

11. **Appointment of Representatives on Outside Bodies and Working Groups**
(Pages 381 - 382)

To consider the report of the Chief Executive, (copy enclosed).

12. **Any other items of business that the Chairperson of the Committee decides are urgent**
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NOTICES

Recording of Meeting

Please note that the Council will be recording and publishing on the Council's website any part of this meeting held in open session.

Fire

We do not have any fire alarm testing scheduled for this meeting. In the event of a fire, a siren will sound. Please use either of the two marked fire escape routes. Once out of the building please proceed to the designated muster point located on the grass verge by the police station entrance. Please gather there and await further instruction. If you feel you may need assistance to evacuate the building, please make a member of Maldon District Council staff aware.

Health and Safety

Please be advised of the different levels of flooring within the Council Chamber.

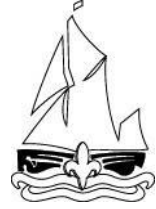
Closed-Circuit Televisions (CCTV)

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Lift

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**000000MINUTES of
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
19 MARCH 2026**

PRESENT

Chairperson Councillor J Driver

Vice-Chairperson Councillor J C Stilts

Councillors M F L Durham, CC, A Fittock, P L Spenceley, M E Thompson,
W Stamp, CC (Substitute for K M H Lagan) and J C Hughes
(Substitute for R H Siddall)

1. CHAIRPERSON'S NOTICES

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through some general housekeeping arrangements for the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTION NOTICE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J R Burrell-Cook, S Dodsley, K M H Lagan, A M Lay and R H Siddall. In accordance with notice duly given, Councillor W Stamp was attending as a substitute for Councillor Lagan and Councillor J C Hughes as a substitute for Councillor Siddall.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 January 2026 be approved and confirmed.

4. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

There were none.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No requests had been received.

6. PROJECT MANAGEMENT OFFICE AND PROCESS IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Strategy and Improvement presenting the Corporate Project Management Office (PMO) and Improvement Framework (the Framework) attached as Appendix 1 to the report, for review and adoption.

The Head of Performance, Improvement and LGR presented the report reminding Members that the Council had adopted a Process Improvement Framework in 2021 which set out how it would use improvement methodologies to improve productivity as a Council. The Framework document at Appendix 1 was an update to the 2021 and 2024 documents and built on the learning and achievements of the last five years. The Head of Performance, Improvement and LGR outlined the changes following the recent transformation programme and the support that the improvement team would be giving across the whole of the Council. It was noted that the new Strategic Framework highlighted how there would be a likely impact on team resources as a result of the upcoming LGR work. The report highlighted the tools and templates in place to ensure consistency and how this was supported by the internal governance of project management. As well as approving the framework, Members were requested to make a referral to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for awareness of the team as a resource as this linked to the work carried out by this Committee.

The Chairperson moved the recommendations set out in the report and these were duly seconded.

Councillor W Stamp raised a query regarding 'Stakeholder Engagement: active communication and involvement throughout the project life cycle' and in response the Head of Performance, Improvement and LGR explained that from the start each project defined the stakeholder(s) and what their communications plan would be. This would be signed off as part of the business case sign off and monitored throughout the project. The Head of Performance, Improvement and LGR explained that the associated risk would be if a project had not gone through the process and advised that she could not comment on a specific project without looking into the details. Councillor Stamp asked that it be noted she had raised this query and confirmed she would speak to the Officer outside of the meeting regarding a related matter.

In response to a question, the Director of Finance drew Members attention to section 8 of the framework which highlighted the expectations in respect of programme reporting and benefit realisation. He would expect that the project work seen through the PMO would have a clear tangible benefit as being derived for residents in some measurable manner.

The Chairperson then put the recommendations which were duly agreed.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the PMO and Improvement Strategic Framework (Appendix 1 to the report) be adopted;
- (ii) That the Framework is presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for awareness and to highlight the resource that can support improvements.

7. LEASE EXTENSION AND CONSOLIDATION OF UNIT 2 SPRINGFIELD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, BURNHAM-ON-CROUCH

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Assets, Coast and Countryside requesting an extension to a lease for a business unit at Unit 2, Unit 2A and additional land at Springfield Business Park, Burnham-on-Crouch.

The report provided background information relating to the leases for units on Springfield Road Business Park and set out the number of years remaining on the three areas of land the subject of this report.

The Head of Assets, Coast and Countryside presented the report and advised that the Council had received a request from the leaseholder of the three leases requesting that they be combined and extended for a term of 90 years. It was noted that as the leases were not contracted out of the Landlord and Tenant Action 1954 the Tenant had an automatic right to review their agreements when they expired. Granting one lease would allow the terms to be aligned and reduced the administrative burden.

Members were reminded of a similar extension agreed in October 2025 and the delegation also agree at that time to approve such leases where the remaining lease term was less than 40 years. In this case, as one of the remaining leases was over 40 years the requested extension was being brought to the Committee for consideration.

The Chairperson moved the recommendations as set out in the report and these were duly seconded.

In response to a question regarding the proposed new valuation of the combined area to allow the new agreement to be agreed at current market value, Officers provided reassurance of the current delegation arrangements and how officers would seek to negotiate with the leaseholder. However, if a lease under market value was sought this would be brought back to the Committee as Officers did not have delegated authority to approve such leases.

The Chairperson then put the recommendation which was duly agreed.

RESOLVED that the Council agrees for a new lease for Unit 2 Springfield Industrial Estate for a term of 90 years.

8. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - PERIOD 9 (END DECEMBER 2025)

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Finance providing an updated financial position for the period ended 31 December 2025 (Period 9). Members noted that this was not the standard quarterly update but helped to provide background information regarding planning for future years budgets.

The Director of Finance presented the report which provided an update on a number of areas including the following:

- **Revenue Budget Monitoring (Period 9)**, including the underspend against the 2025 / 26 budget for operating activities. It was reported that operating costs were forecast to be below the net expenditure estimates in the budget and combined with additional unbudgeted grant expenditure the planned use of £572k from general reserves included in the budget was not expected to be required. A nil forecast was therefore being shown. This meant that the general fund reserves would be retained at a higher level than previously estimated and Appendix 1 to the report provided further details.
- **Capital budget monitoring (Period 9)** Appendix 2 to the report provided details of the main projects which was substantially unchanged from period 8. The report detailed a list of projects completed during the year to December 2025.
- The report also provided an update **delivery against the five largest projects up to 31 December**
- **General Fund Creditors and Debtors** – Payments to suppliers were usually taken as soon as the payment was authorities and a table at paragraph 3.7.1 highlighted the percentage of invoices paid within 30 days.

Outstanding debt for general fund activities at as 31 December 2025 was set out at paragraph 3.7.2 and Members' attention was drawn to the level of debt being pursued (over 55 days). It was noted that of this debt £88k has been based to a debt collection agency, £44k had a payment plan in place and £30k had been paid since 31 December 2025. All debt was actively pursued, and write-offs only took place where all options had been pursued.

- **Reserves** – Appendix 3 to the report detailed the movements on Earmarked Reserves for 2025 / 26.
- **Revenue Budget Reconciliation** – Appendix 4 to the report provided detail of the revenue budget reconciliation between the opening and closing budget.

The Chairperson moved the recommendations as set out in the report. This was duly seconded.

In response to questions raised, the Director of Finance provided the following information:

- details of monies passed to debt collectors, the level of collection and how the related costs were taken from the amounts collected. Along with the Finance Team, the Director sought to ensure that all debt was collected in a timely way. In response to the discussion the Director agreed to bring back further detail on debt including debt more than two years old and the related costs to the Council.
- the Council's budget provided a contingency relating to the cost for setting up Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Members' attention was drawn to Appendix 3 which detailed Earmarked Reserves and provided some commentary in respect of 'used costs incurred relating to LGR'. The 2026 / 27 budget papers contained provision to top-up this reserve if required. The Director informed the Committee that he was comfortable with the current position, explaining that if there were costs that transpired and accounted for within the current financial year, they would be met by a drawdown from reserves, as appropriate. The Director advised he would highlight this information in the outturn report due to be considered by the Committee in June 2026.

The Chairperson put the recommendations set out in the report and upon a vote being taken these were duly agreed.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- (i) notes that the forecast revenue expenditure outturn as at 31 December 2025 is £20k over budget against the net service budget of £14.114m; also that the improved income position in a number of areas means that use of general reserves can be avoided. Further information can be found at section 3 and Appendix 1 to the report along with reasons for significant variances.
- (ii) notes the forecast capital expenditure outturn as at 31 December 2025 which is for a total capital programme delivery of £5.654m against revised budget of £6.980m, and the details of schemes completed in the year so far (paragraph 3.3.4 to the report). Further information can be found at Appendix 2 to the report along with reasons for significant variances.
- (iii) approves the movements in Earmarked Reserves set out in Appendix 3 to the report;

- (iv) notes the revenue budget reconciliation between the opening and current budget in Appendix 4 to the report.

There being no other items of business the Chairperson closed the meeting at 8.08 pm.

J DRIVER
CHAIRPERSON

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**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF PLACE, PLANNING AND GROWTH**

**to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
11 JUNE 2026**

**ESSEX COAST RECREATIONAL DISTURBANCE AVOIDANCE MITIGATION
STRATEGY REVIEW**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the review of the Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) and recommend the final Strategy (**APPENDIX 1**) for approval. It is also recommended to revoke the existing Supplementary Planning Document and replace it with an updated Technical Advice Note.
- 1.2 RAMS was first adopted by the Council in 2020 (paragraph 3.2.1). The current report reflects a review of the strategy that was directed to be undertaken by Natural England (Dec 2023 – paragraph 3.4.1) in part to ensure that baseline data for the strategy, originally compiled in 2010/11, was kept up to date.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Council:

- (i) that the revised and updated Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) 2026 and tariff (**APPENDIX 1**) be approved, superseding the current RAMS 2018-2038;
- (ii) that the new RAMS tariff of £500 per new dwelling or qualifying unit (index linked and inclusive of a 5% admin fee) be applied to new development from 1 August 2026;
- Note: the current fee is £175.55 and benchmarks as low compared to tariffs nationally, while the new fee is mid-range, The new fee includes increased expectations of eligible housing units, and is considered not just for the implementation period, but also for the maintenance period.
- (iii) that the adopted Essex Coast RAMS Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) be revoked, noting that its content is no longer aligned with the updated RAMS;
- (iv) that Members agree in principle to replace the Essex Coast RAMS SPD with an Essex Coast RAMS Technical Advice Note (TAN), recognising that this will provide a consistent mechanism to guide decision-making for local authorities within the RAMS partnership area;
- (v) that authority be delegated to the Director of Place, Planning and Growth, in consultation with Planning Policy Working Group to agree and publish the TAN once drafting is complete.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 The majority of the Essex coastline is covered by internationally important nature conservation sites that support significant bird populations through a range of designations including a Special Area of Conservation¹ (SAC), Special Protection Areas² (SPAs) and Ramsar³ sites that afford strict legal protection.
- 3.1.2 There are ten protected habitat sites along the Essex coast. Four are within the Maldon district; Essex Estuaries SAC, Blackwater Estuary SPA & Ramsar, Dengie SPA & Ramsar, and Crouch & Roach Estuaries SPA and Ramsar. A map of these sites is provided on page 10, Map 1 of the RAMS at **APPENDIX 1**.
- 3.1.3 As more homes are built in Essex, more people will live and work near the coast, leading to an increase in coastal visitors and demand for recreation such as walking, dog walking, cycling and water-based activities. This brings important social and economic benefits, including improved wellbeing and access to nature. However, higher visitor numbers can place pressure on sensitive coastal habitats, through increased recreational activities causing disturbance to birds and damage to areas such as saltmarsh and mudflats.
- 3.1.4 The Essex Coast RAMS 2018-2038 sets out how to protect the unique bird populations of the Essex coastline while allowing new homes to come forward. It ensures compliance with The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), known as the 'Habitats Regulations'. This is UK legislation that protects internationally important habitats and species.
- 3.1.5 Under the Habitats Regulations, local authorities are Competent Authorities, who have a legal duty to ensure that development does not adversely affect the integrity of protected sites. Where a risk of harm is identified, effective mitigation must be secured before development can be permitted.
- 3.1.6 The RAMS is a co-ordinated approach between twelve Essex Local Planning Authorities (LPAs)⁴ which aims to mitigate the recreational impacts of new residential development on protected coastal habitats and bird populations. It ensures that planned housing growth across Essex can take place in a lawful and sustainable way, while safeguarding sensitive species and habitats protected by international nature conservation designations. The Essex Coast RAMS is one of eleven strategic solutions nationally, of which seven are related to coastal habitats.
- 3.1.7 The strategic RAMS approach enables developers to contribute towards a coordinated mitigation package (referred to in the RAMS as the Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM)) delivered across a wide area, rather than being required to provide bespoke mitigation on a site-by-site basis for individual planning applications. This approach is widely used nationally and has been repeatedly demonstrated to be effective, efficient and legally robust through the planning process. Developers can also choose to provide their own bespoke

¹ SACs are protected areas which support high-quality habitats and species.

² SPAs are protected areas which support rare, vulnerable and migratory birds.

³ Ramsar sites are areas of wetland of international importance which are designated under the Convention of Wetlands under the Ramsar Convention 1971.

⁴ Basildon Borough Council, Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Castle Point Borough Council, Chelmsford City Council, Colchester City Council, Maldon District Council, Rochford District Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council, Tendring District Council, Thurrock Borough Council and Uttlesford District Council

mitigation rather than pay the RAMS tariff, however this is extremely resource intensive. The RAMS provides a clear and efficient mechanism for complying with the Habitats Regulations, for both developers and LPAs.

3.1.8 There may be some developments that may also have 'alone impacts' due to their intensive use and close proximity to protected habitat sites meaning they may also be required to provide bespoke mitigation. This would be managed during the planning application process through consultation with Natural England.

3.1.9 If an LPA chooses not to be a part of the strategic RAMS solution, they would still have a legal obligation to comply with the Habitat Regulations and would therefore have to put their own arrangements in place, which would have significant implications for resources by comparison.

3.2 **Current RAMS 2018 - 2038**

3.2.1 It is important to note that the RAMS was originally drafted in 2018, adopted by the Council in 2020 and has been used successfully in the determination of planning applications since. Alongside this, an SPD was also produced and adopted to summarise the RAMS into a concise guide for developers demonstrating why mitigation is needed. The SPD also sets out the process for how they must comply with the RAMS and formalises the arrangements for securing the developer contribution of £175.55 per net new dwelling or qualifying unit of development (2026 fee).

3.2.2 The entirety of Maldon district is within the Zone of Influence (Zoi) of the protected habitat sites (page 50, Map 5 of **APPENDIX 1**). The Zoi was established in the RAMS adopted in 2020. Since adoption of the RAMS and SPD, every planning application for net new dwellings and other eligible residential development⁵ has paid the tariff upfront prior to the grant of planning permission or signed a legal agreement to ensure the tariff is paid prior to commencing the development. If a payment or legal agreement is not received or agreed, this constitutes a reason to refuse the application.

3.2.3 Upon adoption of the existing RAMS in 2020, it was agreed by the twelve LPAs that Chelmsford City Council (CCC) would be the Accountable Body. This means that they manage the tariff across Essex and deliver the mitigation measures. The LPAs collect the tariff as part of planning applications and transfer it to CCC to fund mitigation measures. The measures are delivered through the Bird Aware Essex branding which includes a RAMS Delivery Manager, a Lead Coastal Ranger and three Coastal Rangers who cover the Essex coastline. The governance structure of RAMS is set out on page 56, Figure 3 of **APPENDIX 1**.

3.2.4 As of 1 April 2026, the total collected across Essex Councils and transferred to the Accountable Body is £2,715,389. The total transferred by Maldon District Council (MDC) is £40,065.

⁵ Net new dwellings, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), Gypsy and Traveller pitches, caravan parks, Residential Institutions such as schools and care homes (on a case-by-case basis)

3.3 Mitigation measures undertaken within the Maldon district

3.3.1 The Bird Aware Essex team provide the mitigation for the in-combination effects of increased recreational disturbance and pressure as a result of housing growth across Essex.

3.3.2 A core part of the mitigation measures is engaging with coastal visitors, informing them of the protected nature of the coast and how they can enjoy the coast responsibly without disturbing the over-wintering and breeding birds and their habitats. A significant proportion of engagement is related to being considerate while dog walking, as dogs have been identified as a main disturbance to ground nesting coastal birds.

3.3.3 A flat rate tariff is collected for all new homes in the Zol across Essex, however, as the Maldon District is a coastal authority with four protected habitat sites along the coastline, a significant proportion of the tariff collected is spent within the district. Proportionately, a higher level of the tariff is spent in the district than the money collected by the Council, benefitting birds within the protected habitats on the district coastline. A large proportion of the Bird Aware Essex team's activity is on and around the Blackwater Estuary, with its own dedicated resource. Coastal Rangers also cover the Dengie and Crouch Estuaries, focussing on engagement with residents, local groups and visitors to promote awareness of coastal birds and habitats and the disturbance they face from recreational pressure on the coastline. A summary of activities undertaken within Maldon District is set out below:

- To date, rangers have undertaken approximately 486 site visits within the Maldon district, in and around the Blackwater and Dengie Peninsula, including sites such as Maldon Promenade Park, Heybridge, Goldhanger, Osea, Tollesbury, Maylandsea, St Lawrence, Steeple and Bradwell and includes coastal paths between and around these sites.
- Rangers have spent over 1,442 hours on site around the Maldon District Area undertaking engagement, patrols and monitoring activities.
- There is a dedicated ranger assigned to cover the Blackwater Estuary, this is proposed to increase in the updated strategy.
- The team attend events and work with stakeholders in the area to deliver the mitigation.
- They have supported and attended the Maldon U-Fest and led walks as part of the Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival.
- They have delivered talks and presentations across the district to parish councils, community groups and sailing clubs and led guided walks in partnership with local farmers. This has led to them engaging with over 4,454 people just within the Maldon district area. This has included communities around the Dengie and Bradwell such as the Othona community and Tillingham Parish Council.
- The team are also represented at the Blackwater Partnership to support projects to improve the Blackwater estuary environment, collaborating with multiple partners.
- They collaborate with different partners, landowners and projects such as the Share Our Shores Project, protecting beach nesting birds such as Little Tern and Ringed Plover.

- Bird Aware Leaflet boxes have been installed around the coast including in Tollesbury, Wicke Farm and Goldhanger Creek to disseminate information about the protected sites and project.
- The Blackwater Estuary coastal ranger undertakes Wetland Bird Surveys in Mayland and continues to gather records which are submitted to the British Trust for Ornithology about this area, so that long term trends to bird numbers can be monitored in this location.
- The team maintains static people counter data in Lawling Creek, Mayland to monitor footfall on the coastal path in this location.
- Bird Aware Essex have launched the Great Coastal Birdwatch for the past three years from Maldon Promenade Park.

3.4 The RAMS Review

- 3.4.1 In December 2023, Natural England wrote to the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership, which the Council is part of, formally advising of the need to undertake a review and update the RAMS mitigation package. In line with established best practice, strategic mitigation solutions should be reviewed approximately every five years.
- 3.4.2 Under the Habitat Regulations⁶ mitigation measures must be secured and effective for as long as the plan or project has the potential to affect the protected site. In practice, this requires mitigation to be provided in perpetuity for the lifetime of the development. The original RAMS package was costed only to the end of the Local Plan period and not for the duration of the impact, which was identified by Natural England as a fundamental matter that needed to be addressed. A review was required to ensure that mitigation measures are fully funded and secured for the duration of the impact of development, i.e. in perpetuity.
- 3.4.3 In addition, the original visitor surveys undertaken in 2011-2013 had become dated and therefore an update to this evidence base was required. It was also noted that predicted housing growth across Essex had increased significantly since the creation of the original RAMS. Consultants Footprint Ecology were therefore commissioned to produce an updated RAMS.
- 3.4.4 The review of the RAMS began in summer 2024. A RAMS Review Steering Group was set up to manage the review process, including engagement with Footprint Ecology. There is also a general RAMS Steering Group who meet every 4-6 weeks, which at least one representative from each LPA attends. The RAMS Review Steering Group regularly updated the main steering group throughout the review. Progress has also been regularly reported and agreed by the Essex Planning Officers Association (EPOA) Chief Officers Forum, which operates as the RAMS Project Board.
- 3.4.5 Natural England has endorsed the approach to the review and final RAMS documentation (**APPENDIX 4**). The final RAMS has also been endorsed by the Steering Group on Tuesday 21 April 2026 and by EPOA Chief Officers on Thursday 30 April 2026. Final approval of the RAMS and the revised tariff rests with the Council.

⁶ Regulation 63 (Appropriate Assessment) and Regulation 64 (Derogations)

3.5 Key differences between the current and updated RAMS

3.5.1 The key updates from the existing RAMS are:

1. An updated mitigation package, taking into account increased housing growth and in-perpetuity mitigation for the lifetime of development.
2. Updated tariff fee.
3. Amended development types eligible to pay the tariff.

3.5.2 Updated mitigation package and tariff

- 3.5.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in December 2024 changed the standard methodology for calculating housing numbers. This has led to the significant increase in the numbers of new homes which need to be built in the Zol, since the adoption of the current RAMS.
- 3.5.2.2 Projections indicate approximately 148,309 new dwellings within the Zol over the next 20 years. It is noted that this is a predicted figure agreed by LPAs in 2025 in order to agree a baseline for the RAMS review. Future reviews of the RAMS will take into account changes to proposed predicted housing growth.
- 3.5.2.3 With an estimated 609,786 existing dwellings in the Zol in 2025, this represents a 24% increase in the housing stock within the Zol. This growth will result in a commensurate increase in recreational visits to designated coastal sites, requiring an enhanced mitigation response.
- 3.5.2.4 Updated visitor surveys undertaken by Footprint Ecology in winter and summer 2025 (**APPENDIX 2**) demonstrated that increased recreational pressure remains a key impact. It was therefore concluded that an enhanced mitigation package is necessary to ensure compliance with the Habitats Regulations.
- 3.5.2.5 The updated package builds on the original adopted measures and introduces enhanced interventions where necessary to reflect increased housing growth, changes in recreational patterns and visitor behaviour and the requirement to deliver mitigation effectively for the lifetime of the development. It was developed through workshops and engagement with key stakeholders and subsequently refined in discussion with LPAs and Natural England. The outcome is a robust and proportionate mitigation package capable of ensuring that the recreational pressure arising from new development, in-combination, will not lead to adverse effects on the integrity of protected sites.
- 3.5.2.6 The updated RAMS accounts for approximately double the amount of housing growth, 148,309 new homes, in comparison to that in the current RAMS, 72,907 new homes. This has resulted in the baseline cost of the mitigation package being doubled, prior to including an in-perpetuity cost to account for mitigation for the lifetime of the development.
- 3.5.2.7 The original mitigation package was not costed in perpetuity i.e. it did not take into account the lifetime of the development. This omission was a primary reason why the RAMS tariff remained significantly lower than tariffs for comparable strategic schemes elsewhere in the country, despite the scale and sensitivity of the Essex coastline. A summary of tariffs in comparable strategies nationally is set out in paragraph 3.5.5.5 below.
- 3.5.2.8 Natural England identified this as a key matter that needed to be addressed as part of the RAMS review. Had the original mitigation package in the current RAMS been

costed in-perpetuity from the outset, the baseline tariff would have been £489 per dwelling, rising with inflation to approximately £660 at 2025 values. As the current RAMS does not include an in-perpetuity cost, the current 2026 tariff stands at £175.55.

3.5.2.9 The updated RAMS now fully aligns with the requirement for mitigation to be effective for the lifetime of the development. An 80-year period has been adopted to account for in-perpetuity mitigation, which is consistent with national practice for other strategic mitigation solutions. The total cost of delivering the updated mitigation package in perpetuity is £72,594,500. Full details of what is included in the mitigation package can be found on pages 88 - 89 of **APPENDIX 1**. An overview of the mitigation package cost is set out below.

| Mitigation | One-off / capital cost | Rolling cost | Multiplier for rolling cost | Total cost |
|--|------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Delivery Manager | | £69,800 | 80 | £5,584,000 |
| Ranger team leaders (two posts) | | £104,500 | 80 | £8,360,000 |
| Rangers (six full-time, three seasonal) | | £341,250 | 80 | £27,300,000 |
| Vehicles and other resources for rangers | | £55,000 | 80 | £4,400,000 |
| Dog project staffing costs | | £52,250 | 80 | £4,180,000 |
| Dog project resources | | £8,000 | 80 | £640,000 |
| Communications Officer staffing costs | | £31,350 | 80 | £2,508,000 |
| Communications costs | | £11,000 | 80 | £880,000 |
| Production of monitoring strategy and monitoring support | £17,500 | | 80 | £17,500 |
| Monitoring and data staffing costs | | £28,625 | 80 | £2,290,000 |
| Monitoring resources | | £15,000 | 80 | £1,200,000 |
| Visitor surveys | | £35,000 | 16 | £560,000 |
| Education / community engagement officer | | £52,250 | 80 | £4,180,000 |
| Resources for schools and events | | £6,000 | 80 | £480,000 |
| Engagement material for holiday parks etc. | £15,000 | | | £15,000 |
| Site-specific projects | | £125,000 | 80 | £10,000,000 |
| Total mitigation package | | | | £72,594,500 |

3.5.2.10 The mitigation package includes £10,000,000 allocated for 'site specific projects'. These are set out in the project list on page 65 of **APPENDIX 1**. Potential opportunities for site-specific projects were identified in a series of workshops hosted in September 2025. The opportunities listed are not intended to be exhaustive. Many are suggestions and are not firm commitments at this stage. However, they provide opportunities where further mitigation work can be identified by partners such as Natural England and Bird Aware Essex.

3.5.2.11 It is important that, whilst collecting a significant level of money through the tariff, the Council maintains appropriate oversight and plays an active role in shaping the scope and direction of the mitigation measures within the Maldon district. Ongoing

engagement and collaborative input will be facilitated through the Environmental and Sustainability Working Group.

3.5.2.12 Examples of the type of mitigation in the Maldon District funded by the current mitigation package can be found in paragraph 3.3.3 above.

3.5.3 Tariff Apportionment

3.5.3.1 The current RAMS tariff operates as a flat rate across the Zol. As part of the RAMS review, alternative approaches to apportioning the tariff were considered using data from updated visitor surveys.

3.5.3.2 All alternative approaches to apportionment were found to introduce significant complexity, large disparities in tariffs (with some rates exceeding £1,500–£1,900 per dwelling), challenges arising from Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), and practical difficulties in implementation. A summary of each approach that was considered is set out below.

| Apportionment Approach | Explanation | Impact for Maldon district |
|---|---|---|
| Uniform approach (current approach) | Flat Rate Tariff across Essex where all new housing within the Zol pays the same regardless of location or size of dwelling. | This is a simple and transparent approach, which is current practice in Essex. |
| Local Authority split based on visitor percentage from visitor survey data | This would be impacted by LGR and would have large variations in tariff cost across the Zol, up to approximately £1,554 per dwelling for some authorities. | As a coastal authority, this approach would have resulted in a higher tariff for developments within Maldon district. |
| Using visit rate per Local Authority area | Complicated to implement and would have large variations in tariff up to approximately £1,939 per dwelling for some authorities. | As a coastal authority, this approach would have resulted in a higher tariff for developments within Maldon district. |
| Different tariff payment zones based on proximity of housing to coast i.e. higher tariff cost for housing near to protected habitat sites | Complicated tariff model to implement, would give multiple tariffs within single LPA areas, would require understanding of housing growth per zone, would require a change to the Zol, not commonly used elsewhere. | As a coastal authority, this approach would have resulted in a higher tariff for developments within Maldon district. |
| Hybrid approach for each Local Authority based on visitor impact (percentage of new houses compared to existing houses) | Complicated and would give a significantly different tariff rate, up to £1,600 per dwelling in some areas. | As a coastal authority, this approach would have resulted in a higher tariff for developments within Maldon district. |

3.5.3.3 Following consideration by the RAMS Steering Group and endorsement by Chief Officers via EPOA, it was agreed that retaining a single, flat tariff across Essex

provides the most transparent, fair and administratively efficient approach. This remains consistent with current practice in Essex.

3.5.3.4 All other approaches to tariff apportionment would have resulted in a higher tariff for new dwellings in Maldon district, due to the closer proximity of new development within the district to the protected habitat sites along the coastline.

3.5.4 RAMS Tariff

3.5.4.1 CCC, as the Accountable Body, already holds £2,043,416 of RAMS monies collected through the tariff by Essex Councils. This money will contribute towards the cost of the total mitigation package. Therefore, to calculate the tariff per net new dwelling, the existing monies have been taken off the total mitigation cost. The resultant figure has then been divided by the predicted number of new dwellings over the 20-year period of the updated RAMS. This equates to a tariff cost of £476 per new dwelling or qualifying unit (rounded to the nearest pound). The new tariff is in line with tariffs nationally, as set out in the table in paragraph 3.5.5.5 below.

3.5.4.2 It is proposed to include a 5% admin fee for MDC to account for the costs of collecting and processing the tariff payment. This would result in the 2026 tariff for MDC costing £500 per net new dwelling or qualifying unit of development.

3.5.4.3 A summary of the mitigation and tariff costs are set out below.

| Mitigation | Cost |
|---|---|
| Total mitigation package in perpetuity | £72,594,500 |
| Existing RAMS monies held by the Accountable Body | £2,043,416 |
| Total mitigation less existing monies | £72,594,500 - £2,043,416 = 70,551,083 |
| Estimated number of new homes in the ZoI needing mitigation over 20 years | 148,309 |
| Total mitigation cost divided by estimated housing growth | £72,594,500 / 148,309 = 475.70 |
| Tariff per new dwelling (rounded to the nearest pound) | £476 |
| MDC 5% admin fee | £23.8 |
| Total MDC tariff (rounded) | £500 per net new dwelling or qualifying unit of development |

3.5.4.4 The tariff will be further adjusted on an annual basis to take into account Retail Price Index linked inflation. Housing growth will also be monitored and taken into account as part of future reviews.

3.5.4.5 A benchmarking exercise was undertaken comparing the Essex Coast RAMS with other strategic mitigation solutions nationally. The current tariff of £175.55 is significantly lower than tariffs from comparable strategic mitigation solutions elsewhere in the country which typically range from £300 to over £1000, with an average cost of £500. The updated tariff is therefore in line with comparable tariffs nationally. A summary of the tariff costs of other strategic solutions nationally is set out below.

| Area / Strategic Solution | Current Tariff Cost (2025 or 2026 cost depending on when each website was updated) |
|--|--|
| Essex Coast RAMS - Current RAMS | £175.55 per dwelling |
| Essex Coast RAMS - If an 'in-perpetuity' cost had been included originally | £660 per dwelling |
| Essex Coast RAMS - Updated tariff | £ 476 per dwelling |
| South East Devon | £852 - £977 per dwelling |
| North Kent Coast – Birdwise NK | £337.49 per dwelling Canterbury - £174.91 - £848 per dwelling |
| East Kent Cost - Birdwise EK | £268 - £1,074 per dwelling |
| Northumberland Coast - Space for Shorebirds | £320 - £600 per dwelling |
| Bird Aware Solent | £465 - £1,207 per dwelling |
| Wildlife Wise Suffolk Coast | £145.90 (zone A) and £384.51 (zone B) About to increase pending current review |
| Severn Estuary SAMMS | £521.95 per dwelling |
| Dorset Heaths | Flats £269 - £277, Houses £394 - £406 |
| New Forest SAMM | Introducing a new tariff per authority area ranging from £100 - £2,700 per new dwelling |
| Thames Basin Heaths | Ranging between £606 (1 bedroom dwelling) - £1772 (5 bedroom dwelling) |

3.5.4.6 A transitional period for implementing the updated tariff has been agreed with Natural England (**APPENDIX 4**):

- For planning applications submitted between 1 April and 31 July 2026, the tariff applicable is the current tariff of £175.55.
- Where planning applications are still awaiting final determination on 31 July 2026, the tariff applicable is the rate in force at the time of submission of the planning application to the LPA.
- Where permission is granted at appeal and RAMS has not been paid, the tariff applicable is the rate in force on the date of the appeal being allowed.
- For planning applications submitted on or after 1 August 2026, the new RAMS tariff applies. For MDC, this is £500 including a 5% admin fee.

3.5.5 Updated table of developments required to pay the tariff

3.5.5.1 The tariff will be applied to all net new dwellings, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), Gypsy and Traveller pitches and caravan sites. It will be applied to residential institutions on a case-by-case basis dependent on the nature of the use. This is consistent with the current RAMS, the only difference being it now relates to all caravan sites including holiday parks, whereas this was previously excluded. This is set out on page 47, Table 4 of **APPENDIX 1**.

3.5.5.2 Whilst residential development represents the main source of recreational pressure, other land uses can also create significant impacts on designated habitat sites, particularly those including overnight accommodation, high visitor turnover or public recreational use. It is accepted that there may be instances of development types outside the scope of RAMS that require bespoke mitigation. This would be dealt with through planning applications, in consultation with Natural England.

3.6 Revoking and replacing the SPD with a Technical Advice Note (TAN)

- 3.6.1 The current RAMS was adopted by MDC in 2020, alongside an SPD that sets out how the RAMS should be implemented within the Planning System.
- 3.6.2 As part of the national plan-making reforms⁷, the ability to create and adopt new SPDs has been removed. Current SPDs will remain in force until MDC has adopted a Local Plan in the new system. It is noted that the content of the current RAMS SPD is no longer fully aligned with the updated RAMS 2026. It would therefore need to be reviewed and updated as it will be outdated when the updated RAMS is adopted.
- 3.6.3 As part of the transitional arrangements for the planning reforms, the government have set a deadline for adopting new SPDs of the 30 June 2026. This means that reviewing, updating and adopting a new RAMS SPD will not be possible before the June deadline.
- 3.6.4 Through discussions with the RAMS Steering Group, Natural England and Chief Planning Officers across Essex, it has been agreed a TAN will be produced in place of an SPD to provide guidance to developers and Planners on how to implement RAMS in practice. This will be agreed by the RAMS Steering Group, Natural England and Chief Planning Officers.
- 3.6.5 Given that the current RAMS SPD is no longer fully aligned with the updated RAMS, it is recommended that it is revoked.
- 3.6.6 The TAN will not be introducing new requirements; it will provide guidance on RAMS implementation. Therefore, it is recommended that authority is delegated to the Director of Place, Planning and Growth to agree and publish the TAN, in consultation with Planning Policy Working Group.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 There is a legal requirement for LPAs to comply with the Habitat Regulations. RAMS is a clear and effective mechanism for compliance through planning applications. It has a proven record of delivering mitigation measures since its adoption in 2020 through Bird Aware Essex, contributing to the protection of designated habitat sites along the Essex coast. Maldon District benefits from the significant level of mitigation (site visits, communication and engagement activities) that takes place along the District coastline.
- 4.2 It is clear that the RAMS need to be reviewed and updated due to increased future housing growth and the subsequent need for increased mitigation. The updated RAMS takes these factors in account and clearly sets out a robust new mitigation package totalling £72,594,500 which equates to a tariff cost of £500 (inclusive of a 5% admin fee for MDC) from the 1 August. It is recommended the current RAMS SPD is revoked as it does not align with the updated RAMS. Further guidance on RAMS implementation will be produced in a TAN later this year. Updating the RAMS is essential to ensure mitigation measures remain robust, up-to-date and responsive to the evolving planning context.

⁷ The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026

5. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2025 - 2028

5.1 Investing in our District

- 5.1.1 A significant proportion of the tariff collected from new developments within the Zol in Essex is spent on mitigation measures and community engagement along the Maldon district coastline.

5.2 Protecting our environment

- 5.2.1 RAMS ensures the impact of new development on the natural environment and protected habitats is mitigated. It provides a mechanism for MDC to comply with the Habitat Regulations 2017.

5.3 Delivering good quality services

- 5.3.1 RAMS provides a clear and effective mechanism for developers to comply with the Habitat Regulations 2017 when submitting planning applications.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – RAMS provides a clear and effective mechanism for developers to comply with the Habitat Regulations 2017 when submitting planning applications.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken which concludes the RAMS meets the duties of the Equality Act 2010 (**APPENDIX 3**).
- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including Fraud implications)** – RAMS supports MDC to comply with its legal duties as a Competent Authority under the Habitat Regulations to ensure that plans, projects and developments do not adversely affect the integrity of protected sites. If the updated RAMS is not adopted, this will lead to delays in determining planning applications. Key fraud risks are likely to be in the area of appropriate costing of contributions based on planning applications, and then proper collection of contributions. These will be supported through development of software to help support and manage all developer contributions.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – RAMS includes the collection of the tariff for every eligible planning application. The proposed revised tariff ensures the full cost of mitigation is funded through developer contributions. It is proposed to charge a 5% admin fee to cover costs of managing and monitoring payments. Funds are held by CCC on behalf of the Essex signatory bodies. The revised tariff is based on the revised funding requirement, based on a new estimate of eligible properties in the area (approximately 2 x the previous estimate) and an extension of the applicable duration of the funding.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – RAMS provides a simple, clear and effective mechanism for Planners to ensure compliance with the Habitat Regulations through the determination of planning applications.
- (vi) **Impact on Devolution / Local Government Reorganisation** - RAMS supports collaborative working and positions MDC for alignment with

emerging governance arrangements. It is likely the next RAMS review will be undertaken by future unitary authorities.

Background Papers:

- Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy - [Essex Coast RAMS SPD | Maldon District Council](#)
- Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy SPD - [Essex Coast RAMS SPD | Maldon District Council](#)
- Bird Aware Essex - [Home - Bird Aware Essex](#)

Appendices:

APPENDIX 1 – Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy 2026

APPENDIX 2 – Essex Visitor Survey Report Final

APPENDIX 3 – MDC RAMS Equality Impact Assessment

APPENDIX 4 – Natural England letter to LPAs 2026

Enquiries to: Louise Staplehurst, Planning Policy Manager.

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Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS)

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Summary

This avoidance and mitigation strategy ('the RAMS') sets out the mitigation requirements relating to impacts from recreation and the cumulative effects of new housing and tourism development on the Essex coastline. The strategy covers the internationally important nature conservation sites along the Essex coast, from the Stour Estuary to the Thames Estuary. This section of coast is protected through a range of designations (including Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar listing) that afford strict legal protection. The RAMS ensures the relevant local authorities meet legislative requirements and adequately protect these European sites when permitting development. It enables housing growth while ensuring the exceptional importance of the Essex coast for biodiversity is not undermined.

Residential development brings additional people to live in the area and an increased demand for recreation. In addition, increases in the number of tourists and visitors from further afield adds to the people visiting the coast. Access to the countryside is important to many, it brings economic and health benefits to society and is a legal right yet can be difficult to balance with nature conservation. High levels of recreation can result in impacts to the nature conservation interest for example through trampling damage, disturbance or increased fire risk.

This strategy replaces and updates the original strategy established in 2018. Just under 150,000 new dwellings are now planned within the established Zone of Influence within future plan periods (extending to around 2042).

Mitigation measures, set out in detail within the strategy, comprise SAMM (Strategic Access Management and Monitoring) and cover measures on and around the European sites. These measures are to address the in-combination effects of new development and include increased ranger time, signage, interpretation, screening and changes to parking. Monitoring is incorporated to help target the mitigation to the right locations. The level of mitigation is appropriate to the significant level of growth now anticipated and is secured in-perpetuity.

Off-site infrastructure and SANG ('Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace') provide additional scope to mitigate the alone impacts of particular development and deflect visitors away from the European sites (for example providing locations that welcome dog walking). Detailed guidance on SANG is however outside the remit of this strategy.

The RAMS will be updated on a rolling basis approximately every 5 years, providing the opportunity to check the mitigation, scale of growth and update any costs. As such the strategy provides a long-term solution to impacts from recreation. By addressing risks up front, the strategy provides a proactive, cross-boundary solution that ensures cumulative impacts of growth across a wide area are taken into account. The strategy ensures necessary resources and costs are identified and provides clarity for developers when bringing forward sites for development within a defined Zone of Influence.

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Acknowledgements

This strategy has been commissioned by Chelmsford City Council on behalf of a partnership primarily comprising Basildon Borough Council, Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Castle Point Borough Council, Chelmsford City Council, Colchester City Council, Maldon District Council, Rochford District Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council, Tendring District Council, Thurrock Borough Council and Uttlesford District Council, alongside Essex County Council, Natural England, Essex Wildlife Trust, and the RSPB. We are grateful to Leanne Brisland for overseeing the commission.

Cover photo © Goldhanger Creek by Footprint Ecology.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This strategy sets out the mitigation requirements relating to the impacts from increased recreation (linked to the in-combination effects of housing growth and tourist development across the county) on important nature conservation sites on the Essex coast. It replaces a previous strategy and relates to the 12 relevant Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) that comprise the greater part of the Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) Partnership¹. The RAMS ensures these authorities are adequately protecting the relevant wildlife sites from the impacts of recreation, while mitigating the impacts of new housing in a timely manner. The strategy also provides clarity for developers when bringing forward sites for development within a defined Zone of Influence.
- 1.2 The Essex coast is of exceptional nature conservation importance, with a suite of sites along the coast that are covered by international designations, which afford strict protection for the biodiversity and habitats present. These sites ('European sites') stretch between the Stour Estuary in the north and the Thames Estuary in the south.
- 1.3 New housing growth in the various towns and villages near the coast, and tourism development in the area, has the potential to result in more people visiting the designated coastal sites. Increasing recreation use brings particular risks - this strategy addresses those risks, ensuring LPAs meet legislative requirements when permitting relevant development. By addressing risks up front, the strategy provides a proactive, cross-boundary, solution that ensures cumulative impacts of growth are taken into account and that the necessary resources and costs are identified.
- 1.4 A strategic and plan led approach to protecting sites from the cumulative impact of additional recreation is now widely recognised as being more effective than dealing with such impacts on a development-by-development basis. A strategic approach has been in place for the Essex coast since 2018 and similar approaches have been established around the country (for

¹ The 12 Local Planning Authorities that make up the majority of the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership include Basildon Borough Council, Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Castle Point Borough Council, Chelmsford City Council, Colchester City Council, Maldon District Council, Rochford District Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council, Tendring District Council, Thurrock Borough Council, and Uttlesford District Council. The partnership also includes Essex County Council, Natural England, Essex Wildlife Trust, and the RSPB.

example on the Suffolk Coast, the Dorset Heaths, the Thames Basin Heaths and the Solent).

- 1.5 Recreation pressure is complex, as the way visitors use a site can change with time and the distribution of the qualifying features can also change. Furthermore, to ensure effectiveness, mitigation needs to include a package of measures that work in an integrated way. For example, educating visitors, reinforcing messages with site-based staff, and providing the right infrastructure to meet visitor needs and influence visitor behaviour could all fit together as part of a mitigation package, but cannot be delivered in a piecemeal way, if implemented by individual developments on a case-by-case basis.
- 1.6 Collective funding is essential for on-site measures, and these can then in turn be supported by the provision of the right alternative green infrastructure, i.e. a positive step to create more space for recreation and make a meaningful reduction in visits to the European sites. A strategic approach also ensures that mitigation can be secured in a way to maximise benefits for local communities and wildlife, ensuring a positive approach that provides for recreation use and ensures long-term protection for the European sites.
- 1.7 The original strategic mitigation scheme (which this replaces) was developed in partnership by the relevant LPAs, with input from a number of other organisations (for more information see Place Services / Essex County Council, 2018).
- 1.8 The strategy established a Zone of Influence (i.e. the zone within which it is deemed that mitigation measures are required) and a series of mitigation measures that work together to provide robust protection for the various European sites. Mitigation measures have been funded by developer contributions. The mitigation included Strategic Access Management and Monitoring measures ('SAMM'), that were targeted towards the European sites and included measures such as rangers.
- 1.9 This RAMS document replaces and updates the previous strategy. It has been produced following visitor surveys and a structured programme of workshops and formal meetings involving a wide range of stakeholders. The update is necessary to provide continued protection for the relevant European sites, to account for changing recreational use of the European sites and to ensure the strategy is appropriate to the level of growth coming

forward in the respective Local Plans, with mitigation secured in-perpetuity for the duration of the impact.

2. Background and wider context

- 2.1 This section sets out the background to the relevant legislation and provides wider context in terms of countryside access, nature recovery and changes to planning and local government that may be relevant.

Legislative context

- 2.2 This strategy has been produced in order to meet particular legislative requirements. European sites are those afforded the highest level of legislative protection for biodiversity. Public bodies, including LPAs, have specific duties in terms of avoiding deterioration of habitats and species for which sites are designated or classified, and stringent tests have to be met before plans and projects can be permitted. Importantly, the combined effects of individual plans or projects must be taken into account. For LPAs, this means that the combined effect of individual development proposals must be assessed collectively for their cumulative impact.
- 2.3 The designation, protection and restoration of European sites is embedded in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended, which are commonly referred to as the 'Habitats Regulations'. They include Special Protection Areas (SPAs) classified under the 1979 Birds Directive and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the 1992 Habitats Directive. Collectively, these sites are sometimes referred to as Habitats sites. Ramsar sites were afforded the same level of statutory protection in England through the Planning and Infrastructure Act (2025). In this strategy we use the term 'European site' to refer to SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites.
- 2.4 European sites are the cornerstone of UK nature conservation policy. They form part of a 'national network' of sites that are afforded the highest degree of protection in domestic policy and law. Public bodies are referred to as 'competent authorities' within the legislation. The duties set out within the Habitats Regulations, in relation to the consideration of plans and projects, are applicable in situations where the competent authority is undertaking or implementing a plan or project, or authorising others to do so.
- 2.5 The legislation is founded on the 'precautionary principle' and it is necessary to rule out harm, rather than demonstrate impacts. Assessment (Habitats Regulations Assessment) requires consideration of effects either alone or in-combination, and this strategy therefore relates to the cumulative effects of plan-led development across the relevant local planning authority areas.

- 2.6 The strategy is therefore necessary to allow the LPAs, as competent authorities under the Habitats Regulations, to rule out adverse effects on integrity for relevant European sites, as a result of recreation linked to future housing growth. The strategy is therefore focussed on future risk and being able to have the necessary certainty, under the Habitats Regulations, that harm can be ruled out and impacts not exacerbated by further development.

Planning and Infrastructure Act

- 2.7 The UK government has set ambitious targets for house building over the current parliament. The Planning and Infrastructure Act (2025) aims to speed up and streamline the delivery of new homes, with a focus on strategic mitigation to enable development. The Act includes provision for a delivery body (Natural England) to be responsible for the production of Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs), determining standardised levels of environmental mitigation needed for certain types and scales of development in a specific area. Where an EDP exists, developers will have the option to pay into a new 'Nature Restoration Fund', which the delivery body will use to fund appropriate mitigations, including by pooling contributions from multiple developers. It is proposed that contributions to the Nature Restoration Fund will mean that Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs) will not need to assess the implications of a particular development in respect to the particular impact pathway the EDP is addressing. The first EDPs will cover issues such as nutrient neutrality but it is possible that they may cover impacts from recreation in certain areas at some point in the future.
- 2.8 It is important to ensure mechanisms are in place for strategic mitigation to be delivered in the absence of any alternative. As such this RAMS is intended to run as long as necessary to ensure continued mitigation and compliance with the relevant legislation. Regular reviews will be undertaken to ensure the strategy remains aligned with any legislative changes or new regulatory requirements.

Additional context

The importance of access to the countryside and the new England Coast Path

- 2.9 It is now increasingly recognised that access to the countryside is crucial to the long-term success of nature conservation projects, for example through

enforcing pro-environmental behaviours and instilling a greater respect for the world around us (Richardson et al., 2016). Access also brings wider benefits to society that include benefits to mental/physical health (Bragg and Atkins, 2016; Kondo et al., 2020; Lee and Maheswaran, 2011) and economic benefits (Bateman et al., 2014; Dasgupta, 2021; Day, 2020). In recent years there have been shifts in government policy and debate around enhancing access to the countryside.

- 2.10 Changes include the King Charles III England Coast Path, which will create a continuous walking route around the England Coast. The Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) provides for the establishment of the England Coast Path and, usually, the right of accesses over the associated coastal margin. The right of Coastal Access includes 'roll back' such that if a section of coast erodes, the path will move back accordingly.
- 2.11 The King Charles III England Coast Path is being rolled out in sections, with sections 32-40 covering the Essex coast. Some sections are fully open while other sections are approved (or partly approved) but not yet open, with establishment works planned or in progress. The path will ensure a clearly marked National Trail running along the coast and around the estuaries. While it is not for this strategy to provide mitigation for the Coast Path, it is important to understand its context as the path may influence how people access and use different areas of the coast.

Nature Recovery and the LNRS

- 2.12 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) support the establishment of a national Nature Recovery Network (NRN) and aim to identify opportunities and priorities for nature restoration at a local level. Essex's LNRS² highlights recreation as a pressure for many habitats and areas. The LNRS also maps areas of particular importance for biodiversity and sets out the priority species and habitats. The LNRS provides context to the RAMS in highlighting the wider importance and role of land outside European sites and collaborative working to facilitate nature recovery.

² See <https://www.essex.gov.uk/about-council/plans-and-strategies/environment-and-planning/local-nature-recovery-strategy>

Devolution

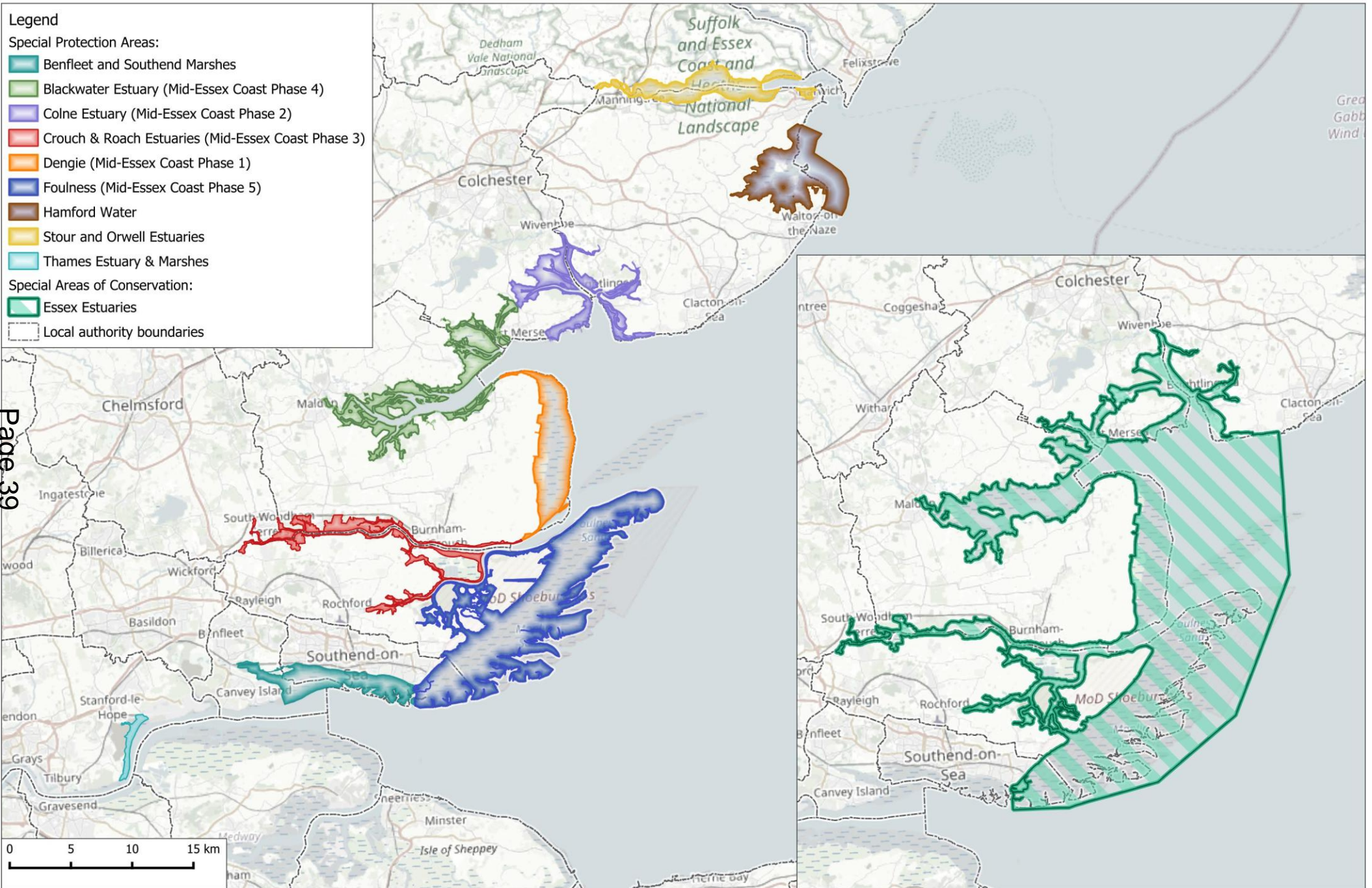
- 2.13 Greater Essex are part of the Government's Devolution Priority Programme. This involves the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) for the local government areas of Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council. This proposed body would operate above the existing county, unitary, city, district and borough councils across Greater Essex.
- 2.14 In parallel, the Government is progressing Local Government Reform, which focuses on reshaping the structure of local authorities. Under current proposals, all 15 councils in Essex (including the county council, Southend and Thurrock) would be replaced by 5 unitary authorities.
- 2.15 In late March 2026, Government confirmed that they are 'minded to' approve a model of five new unitary authorities for Essex to replace the existing local authorities as well as Essex County Council.
- 2.16 As part of the behind-the-scenes work to align services, systems and ways of working, in preparation for the new unitary authorities coming into existence on 1 April 2028, consideration will need to be given to the future oversight, governance and coordination arrangements of RAMS.

3. Relevant European Sites

- 3.1 The European sites covered by the strategy are shown in Map 1, with their qualifying features listed in Table 1. This selection is the same as the previous strategy and it can be seen there is one SAC (the Essex Coast SAC), 9 SPAs and 9 Ramsar sites. The SPA and Ramsar sites are similar and the boundaries largely identical, so for simplicity only the SPAs are shown in Map 1. Hamford Water is the one SPA where the boundary is markedly different from the Ramsar of the same name, with the SPA extending to cover a wider area to the east.
- 3.2 It should be noted that the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA/Ramsar sites lies to the north of the area and the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA/Ramsar to the south and for both these European sites there are areas outside Essex that are not included in the strategy and not shown in Map 1. For the Stour and Orwell Estuaries, the Orwell component and the northern shore of the Stour lies within Suffolk and is covered by the Suffolk RAMS. For the Thames Estuary only the Mucking Flats (near Tilbury) component of the SPA/Ramsar is included. The rest of the SPA/Ramsar lies on the north Kent shore and is covered by Birdwise Kent and a similar mitigation scheme.
- 3.3 While Map 1 shows the designated site boundaries and Table 1 lists the particular features for each site, it is important to note that many of the qualifying features of the sites will move between sites. Birds may move from one estuary to another and as such the Essex coast potentially functions more as a single unit rather than multiple separate sites. Furthermore there will be areas outside the site boundaries that play a supporting role and will be functionally-linked (see Chapman and Tyldesley, 2016 for definitions and further background). The strategy encompasses such functionally linked land in that the birds using those areas could still be vulnerable to disturbance and mitigation measures may be relevant. These considerations are relevant for both breeding (e.g. Little Tern taking advantage of new areas of shingle) and wintering (e.g. use of fields and grazing marsh by wildfowl and waders).
- 3.4 It is also important to note that there are European sites in the area that are not covered by the RAMS. These include Hamford Water SAC, which qualifies solely for its population of Fisher's Estuarine Moth. This SAC is excluded from further consideration as the moth population (and the Hog's Fennel foodplant upon which it relies) is mostly restricted to islands within Hamford

Water (i.e. within areas largely inaccessible to recreation activity). In line with the previous version of the strategy, Abberton Reservoir SPA/Ramsar and Epping Forest SAC are also excluded.

- 3.5 Map 2 shows the combined area of the European sites in context with the 12 local planning authorities that collect RAMS contributions and intersect the Zone of Influence.



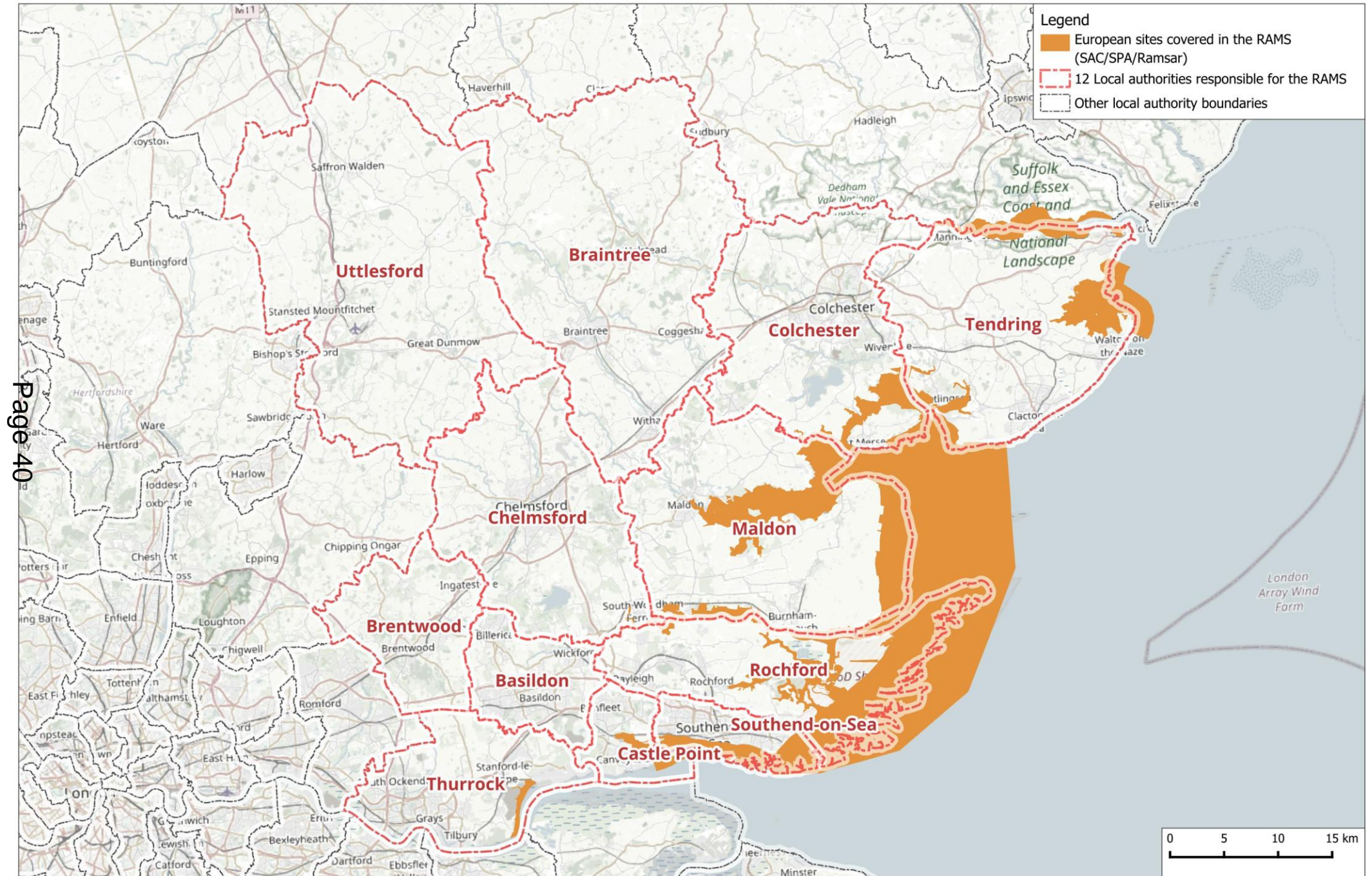


Table 1: European sites and qualifying features. Links cross-reference to the Natural England designated site page, which provides further background and the relevant conservation objectives, etc. For the waterbird assemblage underscoring refers to non-breeding only, and 'P' refers to passage only for other species.

| European site | Habitats | | | | | | Assemblages | | | Non-breeding birds | | | | | | | | | | Breeding birds | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|-----------------|---------------------------------|--|-------------|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------|-------------|------|---------------|----------|---------------|--------------------------|----------------|----------|------|-------------|--------|---------------|---------|-------------|-------------|---------------|--|
| | Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time | Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide | Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand | Spartina swards | Atlantic salt meadows/saltmarsh | Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs | Waterbird | Wetland invertebrate | Wetland plant | Avocet | Bar-tailed Godwit | Black-tailed Godwit | Dunlin | Grey Plover | Knot | Oystercatcher | Redshank | Ringed Plover | Dark-bellied Brent Goose | Pintail | Shelduck | Teal | Hen Harrier | Avocet | Ringed Plover | Pochard | Common Tern | Little Tern | Sandwich Tern | |
| Essex Estuaries SAC | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Hamford Water SPA | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Hamford Water Ramsar | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Stour and Orwell Estuaries Ramsar | | | | | | | < | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| Colne Estuary SPA | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| Colne Estuary Ramsar | | | | | ✓ | | < | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Blackwater Estuary SPA | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| Blackwater Estuary Ramsar | | | | | ✓ | | < | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Dengie SPA | | | | | | | < | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Dengie Ramsar | | | | | ✓ | | < | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Crouch and Roach Estuaries SPA | | | | | | | < | | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |

| European site | Habitats | | | | | | Assemblages | | | Non-breeding birds | | | | | | | | | | Breeding birds | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|-----------------|---------------------------------|--|-------------|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------|-------------|------|---------------|----------|---------------|--------------------------|----------------|----------|------|-------------|--------|---------------|---------|-------------|-------------|---------------|---|
| | Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time | Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide | Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand | Spartina swards | Atlantic salt meadows/saltmarsh | Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs | Waterbird | Wetland invertebrate | Wetland plant | Avocet | Bar-tailed Godwit | Black-tailed Godwit | Dunlin | Grey Plover | Knot | Oystercatcher | Redshank | Ringed Plover | Dark-bellied Brent Goose | Pintail | Shelduck | Teal | Hen Harrier | Avocet | Ringed Plover | Pochard | Common Tern | Little Tern | Sandwich Tern | |
| Crouch and Roach Estuaries Ramsar | | | | | | | < | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Folness SPA | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Folness Ramsar | | | | | ✓ | | < | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Benfleet and Southend Marshes SPA | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Benfleet and Southend Marshes Ramsar | | | | | | | < | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA | | | | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Thames Estuary and Marshes Ramsar | | | | | | | < | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | P | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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Recreational use

- 3.6 Work commissioned by Natural England to inform the England coast path route and HRA work (Panter and Liley, 2016) noted the presence of at least 210 car parks within 1 km of the European sites relevant to the RAMS; these providing around 18,000 parking spaces. They also recorded nearly 2,000km of paths within the same area and mapped 143 jetties, 146 slipways and 40 marinas on the relevant shorelines. As such there are numerous opportunities across a wide area for recreational access.
- 3.7 Visitor surveys (Rush et al., 2025) commissioned alongside this strategy³ involved surveys at 26 locations and 1,793 interviews were conducted with visitors. Most interviewees (93%) were visiting directly from home, however 7% were staying away from home, either on holiday (4% of all interviewees) or staying with friends and family in the area (3%).
- 3.8 The survey results show the main activities to the Essex Coast to be dog walking (45% of interviewees) or walking (35%). Visits were typically relatively short (averaging around 102 minutes in the summer and 75 minutes in the winter) and on average interviewees visited 2.3 times per week.
- 3.9 Close to home was the most common reason for choosing to visit the coast, reflected by the median distance (home postcode to interview location) of just under 5km. The survey results also highlighted the impacts of local facilities on visitor behaviour. In total, 16% of interviewees gave visiting a café, restaurant or pub as one of the activities they had undertaken (or planned to undertake) on the day interviewed. 4% of interviewees indicated that the presence of a café, restaurant or pub was the specific reason behind the choice of where to visit on the day they were interviewed.
- 3.10 The average route length was 3km although this differed between activities undertaken on site.
- 3.11 The results suggest that the Essex Coast was busy all year round, with 60% of interviewees indicating that they tended to visit all year round. For those survey points that were surveyed in both the summer and winter period, there were more people counted during the winter than the summer.

³ Report available to download on the [Footprint Ecology website](#)

3.12 Benfleet and Southend Marshes appeared both the busiest and had the most local cohort of visitors, compared to the Crouch and Roach (quietest) and the Dengie and Hamford Water which each had a wider draw for visitors.

Impacts of recreation

3.13 Drawing from the general literature (Harris, 2023; Liley et al., 2010; e.g. Lowen et al., 2008; Marion et al., 2016), impacts associated with recreation to coastal sites include:

- Damage (trampling and wear);
- Contamination;
- Increased fire risk;
- Disturbance to breeding birds;
- Disturbance to wintering birds;
- Difficulties with land management; and,
- Damage to infrastructure, etc.

3.14 These are considered in turn below. It should also be noted that nutrient enrichment from dog fouling can also pose a particular issue (De Frenne et al., 2022) that is most relevant to low nutrient habitats. In coastal areas such habitats would comprise vegetated shingle or unimproved grassland. These habitats are largely absent from the area covered by the RAMS however, and do not comprise qualifying features of the relevant European Sites; this impact pathway is therefore considered no further.

Damage (trampling and wear)

3.15 Trampling damage relates to footfall and ground pressure from wheels (bikes, buggies etc.). Erosion and wear are also linked to boat use, including the scouring from the bottom of boats as well as the wake from fast moving boats and damage linked to anchors/moorings.

3.16 Mechanical damage to plant tissue causes a loss of vegetation cover, changes in the plant composition of the vegetation and loss of species and a reduction in plant height. Trampling can cause damage to root systems and increase water run-off, soil erosion and compaction with consequences for decomposition, nutrient cycling and water quality. Compaction can also cause a reduction in organic matter, affecting fertility and the water infiltration capacity of the soil. Compaction can also impact on mycorrhizal fungi, affecting plant uptake of nutrients from the soil. Other effects of

human trampling include the widening of paths and path erosion, particularly on slopes.

- 3.17 Particularly sensitive habitats include seagrass beds, saltmarsh (including those dominated by *Spartina*), Atlantic salt meadow, and halophilous scrub. There may also be knock-on consequences for species – not only birds but also habitat specialist invertebrate species. Species such as the wolf spider *Arctosa fulvolineata*, the striped Horsefly, Big-spotted Cleg, and Ground Lackey moth are reliant upon upper saltmarsh habitats where footfall is most likely.
- 3.18 Seagrass beds are present within the European sites and recreation is identified as a threat⁴. Saltmarsh and halophilous scrub are also widely distributed within the RAMS area, however given the difficulty in accessing some areas, damage is considered likely to be localised within proximity to urban areas and access infrastructure such as car parks.
- 3.19 While trampling is not highlighted as a major concern in the Site Improvement Plans (SIPs) for any of the European Sites under discussion, visual appraisal of aerial imagery nevertheless shows that (localised) evidence of such damage is readily apparent (see Figure 1).

⁴ See <https://www.essexwt.org.uk/what-we-do/protecting-wildlife/projects/seagrass> for background.

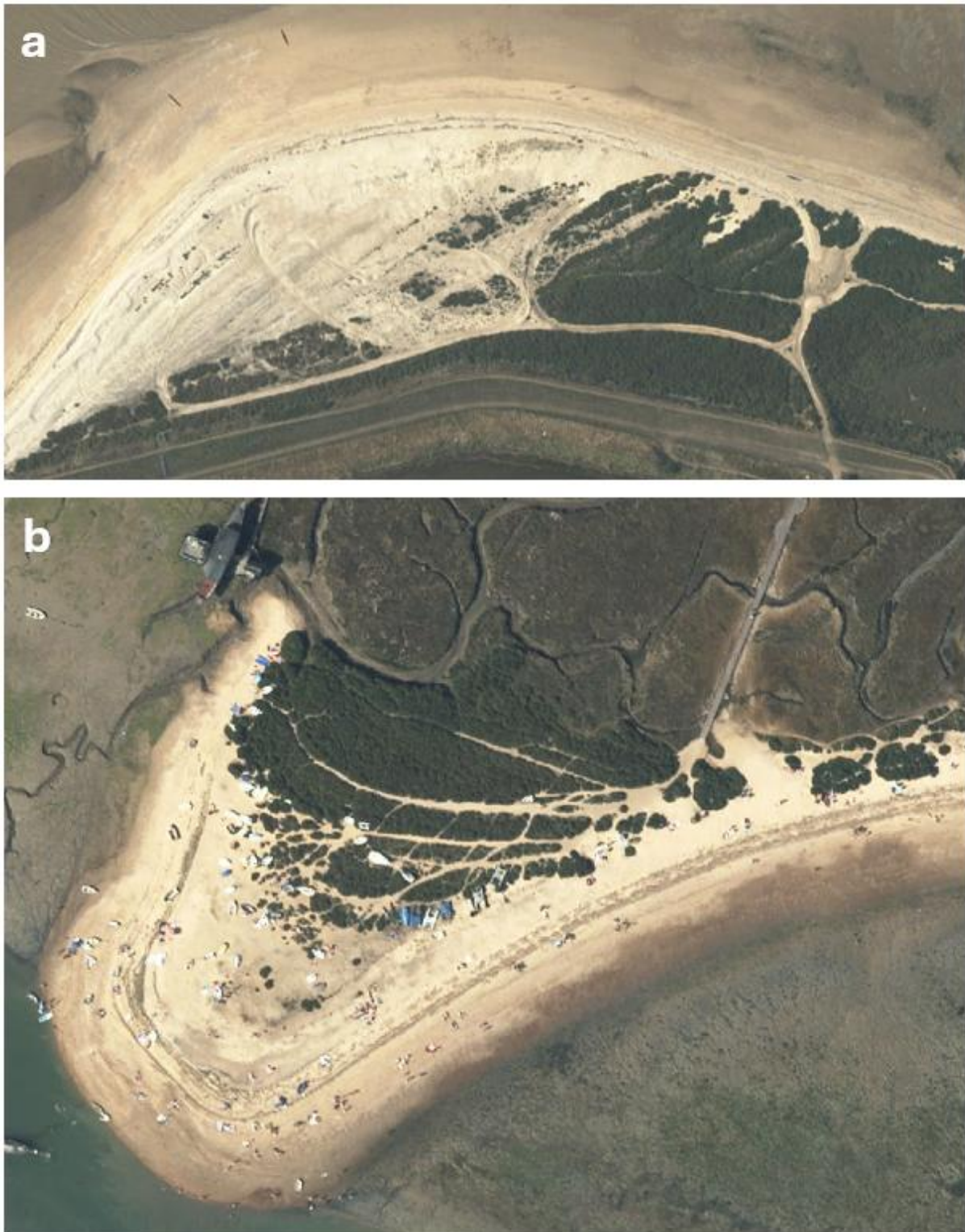


Figure 1: Aerial images depicting examples of trampling damage/wear in areas of halophilous shrub and bordering saltmarsh at: (a) Bradwell-on-Sea (within the Essex Coast SAC/Dengie Ramsar); and (b) West Mersea (within the Essex Coast SAC/Blackwater Estuary Ramsar). Images © National Coastal Monitoring <https://coastalmonitoring.org/>.

Contamination

- 3.20 Ponds and small water bodies are often popular with dogs and dog walkers will often seek such features out, particularly in hot weather. Heavy use by dogs leads to turbid water, an impoverished invertebrate flora and a loss of vegetation (Denton and Groome, 2017; Groome et al., 2018).
- 3.21 Shampoos, wormer, tick and flea treatments are a further concern (Groome et al., 2018; Harris, 2023). There is growing evidence of contamination by pesticides including flea treatments such as fipronil and imidacloprid in watercourses (Perkins et al., 2024, 2021, 2020). Preliminary studies of waterbodies at four locations in the New Forest where dogs are known to regularly enter the water revealed the presence of imidacloprid and at one site levels were nearly double the internationally agreed toxicity threshold for aquatic invertebrates⁵. Testing of waterbodies in sand dune systems in the Sefton Coast area has found similar levels of contamination (Denning et al., 2024).
- 3.22 Dogs may also act as vectors for non-native invasive plant species, such as New Zealand Pygmyweed *Crassula helmsii* (Groome et al., 2018) and the trampling impacts around the edge of the waterbody may lead to a loss of surrounding vegetation, exacerbating impacts.
- 3.23 These issues are potentially relevant to aquatic, wetland and coastal habitats (such as ditches and borrow dykes) and the specialist plant and invertebrate species that they support. Such species include the Scarce Emerald Damselfly, which is found across several of the European Sites.
- 3.24 Contamination is also potentially relevant in terms of litter. While discarded rubbish, waste etc. is unsightly it may not always be directly damaging to the qualifying features. However, discarded fishing line can entangle birds, food waste may encourage predators (such as foxes, gulls etc) and certain products such as plastics are a widespread and recognised concern (Sutherland et al., 2012; Wilcox et al., 2015).

⁵ Reported by the BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-68400630>

Increased fire risk

- 3.25 Fire incidence is directly associated with recreation use (Anderson, 1986; Miller and Miles, 1984; Tantram et al., 1999) for example through discarded cigarettes, sparks from a campfire, barbeques and even deliberate arson.
- 3.26 Fires can have major impacts on the soil, vegetation and fauna present, and recovery can take many years. Fire can change water filtration within soils and result in loss of nutrients (Mallik et al., 1984). Burning can also cause erosion through the exposure of soils – charred peat surfaces are particularly vulnerable (e.g. Maltby et al., 1990). Vegetation recovery may depend on the intensity of the fire and whether litter (protecting rootstock and seeds) is burnt (Alchin, 1997).
- 3.27 Climate strongly influences wildfire risk and climate change is likely to increase the risks of wildfire and the types of habitat affected (Jolly et al., 2015). The incidence of forest fires globally has doubled since 1984 as a result of global warming (Mansoor et al., 2022). It is likely that wildfire incidence will occur in situations and vegetation communities where it has previously been rare or very limited (anon, 2017) and increasingly site managers will have to take active measures to minimise risks on sites.
- 3.28 While fire risk is therefore perhaps low for many of the habitats within the sites covered by the RAMS, this may well change. Most at risk will be upper saltmarsh and reedbed areas, particularly where these are relatively dry. A large fire on the Dee Estuary in 2022 destroyed reedbed habitat within the SPA there, and while outside the area covered by the RAMS, highlights that coastal areas can still be vulnerable.

Disturbance to birds

- 3.29 Disturbance occurs where human activity influences an animal's behaviour or survival. By far the majority of the literature (and there are thousands of studies), focuses on birds (Brawn et al., 2001; Hill et al., 1997; for a general review see Hockin et al., 1992; Lowen et al., 2008; Showler, 2010; Steven et al., 2011; Whitfield et al., 2008). Disturbance can also affect mammals, herptiles (see Edgar, 2002 for a review), and invertebrates.
- 3.30 Disturbance can have a range of different impacts, potentially affecting distribution, breeding success and health. Impacts can be chronic, for example otherwise suitable nesting habitat being completely avoided (e.g. Liley & Sutherland, 2007) or more short-term in nature, for example birds

becoming alert and then resuming the initial activity (Fernandez-Juricic et al., 2001).

- 3.31 Impacts can also include direct mortality of birds. There are studies showing increased predation rates when birds are disturbed, for example predators taking advantage of the change in behaviour caused by the disturbance (e.g. Brambilla et al., 2004). There are also examples of pet dogs preying on birds, for example both Ringed Plover adults and chicks have been witnessed predated by dogs (Liley et al., 2021; Pienkowski, 1984). Some studies document direct trampling of nests/eggs of ground-nesting species, where the eggs are so well camouflaged people are unaware of the damage they cause (Liley and Sutherland, 2007).
- 3.32 These impacts from disturbance can result from a wide range of activities. For example Steven *et al.* (2011), in their review of disturbance impacts to birds, listed the following activities and research findings:
- Standing/observing: 15 studies, 14 showing negative effects of disturbance;
 - Touring/walking/hiking: 51 studies, 45 showing negative effects of disturbance;
 - Running: 6 studies, 6 showing negative effects of disturbance
 - Cycling/Mountain bike riding: 3 studies, 3 showing negative effects of disturbance;
 - Canoeing: 3 studies, 3 showing negative effects of disturbance; and
 - Dog walking: 11 studies, 11 showing negative effects of disturbance.
- 3.33 It is of course often difficult to separate different types of activities as at many sites multiple activities tend to overlap in space and time and impacts may be cumulative. Nonetheless, dog walking is widely recognised as a particular threat (Bavin et al., 2025; Harris, 2023) that has a disproportionate effect compared to other activities (Banks and Bryant, 2007; Cavalli et al., 2016; Gómez-Serrano, 2021; Lafferty, 2002; Taylor et al., 2007). Dogs are likely to be perceived as a greater threat, will actively chase birds and are able to access areas such as intertidal habitats that people on foot may avoid.

Breeding bird interest

- 3.34 Breeding birds are vulnerable to disturbance, with good evidence from the UK for a range of relevant species. For example disturbance has been shown to affect population size for Ringed Plover (Liley and Sutherland, 2007) and there are a range of studies showing disturbance effects for Little Tern (Medeiros et al., 2007; Ratcliffe et al., 2008; Rowell, 2020; Tratalos et al., 2021). Disturbance can lead to areas of suitable habitat being avoided entirely. In areas where they do nest, breeding birds are tied to a specific nest location, and there are particular energetic costs associated with egg laying, incubating, and raising chicks which can be exacerbated by disturbance.
- 3.35 The issues for breeding birds vary. Ringed Plover tend to nest on shingle and gravelly areas close to suitable intertidal foraging habitat. They are also territorial, meaning that territories/nests can be distributed along the beach. Terns are typically colonial nesters, with a more clumped distribution. Little Terns tend to nest in smaller, scattered, colonies spread across a range of beaches – typically the same sandy, open beaches favoured by people visiting the coast for recreation (D. Liley et al., 2023). The single remaining colony on the Essex Coast is at Hamford Water.
- 3.36 Sandwich Terns, by contrast, tend to nest in a smaller number of much larger, colonies. These colonies are susceptible to individual disturbance events, with the disturbance implicated in the abandonment of multiple colonies around the UK coastline (Brown and Grice, 2005; Tavener, 1965). The species' propensity to nest in a very small number of large colonies, and the potential for rapid abandonment makes it particularly vulnerable to human disturbance (Bourne and Smith, 1974; Garthe and Flore, 2007).
- 3.37 Common Terns will also nest colonially, with colony size varying across locations. The species will breed coastal shingle, beaches, saltmarsh, and offshore islands making it susceptible to coastal recreation (Brown and Grice, 2005), as well as inland lakes, reservoirs, and gravel pits.
- 3.38 Avocets breed colonially on a range of shallow, coastal, wetlands, including saltmarshes and saline/brackish lagoons (Brown and Grice, 2005). The majority of saline/brackish lagoons that are used are those created within reserves such as Wallasea Island where protective measures (such as fences) are in place and therefore disturbance is potentially less of a concern. Saltmarsh areas are perhaps more at risk from disturbance for example

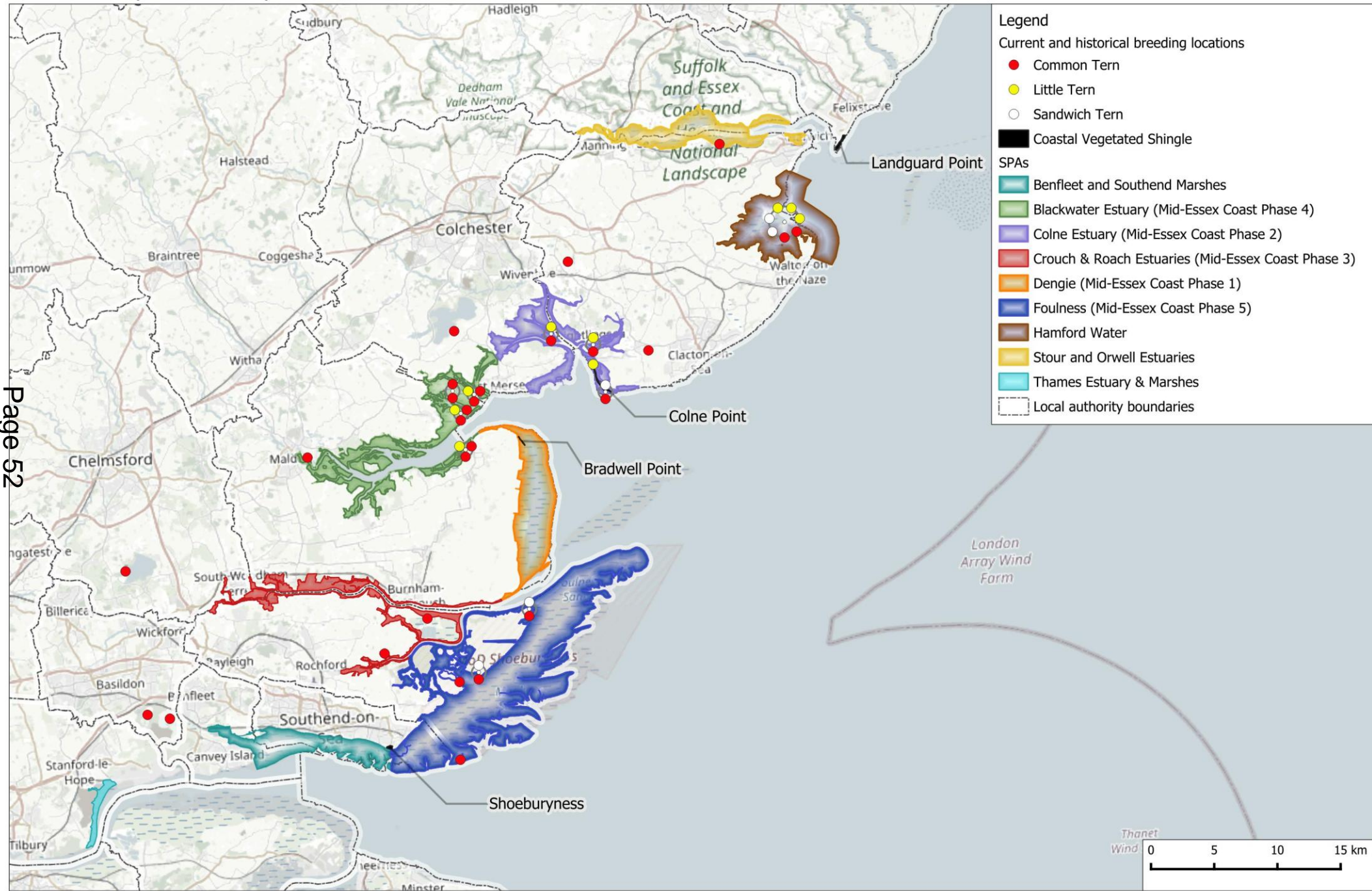
from dogs off lead or paddleboarders/kayaks accessing from the water. Such disturbance could also potentially affect other breeding waders that use saltmarsh, such as Redshank. Pochard generally breed on a range of sheltered/undisturbed inland waters, surrounded by dense vegetation, although they will also utilise brackish areas on the coast. As a breeding species they are potentially less susceptible to disturbance than the other breeding bird species.

- 3.39 Map 3 depicts records of breeding terns/tern colonies within Essex since 2000, alongside expanses of coastal vegetated shingle. The latter is shown as a proxy for additional/potential future breeding locations for Ringed Plover and Little Tern in particular. The bird data comes from a range of sources previously synthesised by Panter & Liley (2016), including the Essex Bird Report and Natural England, as well as more recent information from the Seabird Monitoring Programme⁶.

⁶ <https://app.bto.org/seabirds/public/data.jsp>

Map 3: Historical (post-2000) and current breeding locations for a selection of the SPA-qualifying bird species, shown alongside relevant European site and local authority boundaries. Areas of coastal vegetated shingle are labelled and shown as a proxy for potential/future Little Tern and Ringed Plover breeding locations. Note that overlapping points are displaced around a central point to aid interpretation

APPENDIX 1

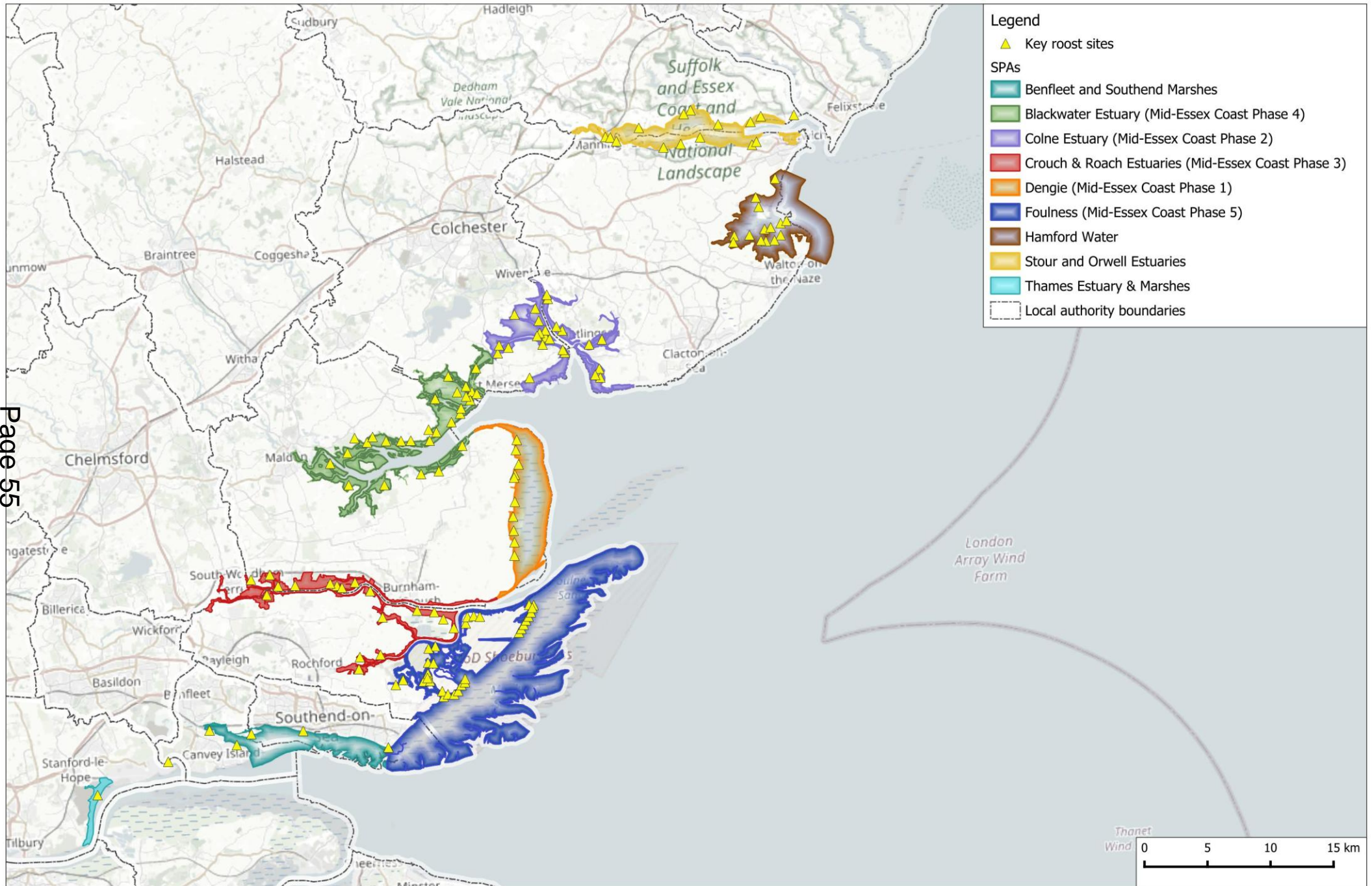


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Non-breeding bird interest

- 3.40 The various estuaries and wetland habitats along the Essex Coast support very large numbers of non-breeding bird species, including waders and wildfowl. The relevant SPAs are classified for a range of species individually and also the wintering waterbird assemblage, reflecting the wide range of species and large numbers of birds that can be present around the whole coastline.
- 3.41 While overall numbers tend to peak during the winter, the coast is important for these non-breeding species for much of the year, with non-breeding birds present from July through to May. Different species will use different areas at different times of year and numbers fluctuate, and multiple populations from different breeding sites can be involved. For example, the local breeding Ringed Plovers are likely to move to southern areas of the UK and France and be replaced by birds from the Baltic and Scotland over the winter. In May, Ringed Plovers from more northern populations, even as far north as Greenland and Canada may pass through on passage.
- 3.42 Disturbance for these wintering waterbirds can lead to areas of habitat being avoided (van der Kolk et al., 2022) and there can be energetic costs as a result of repeated flushing, which can be particularly damaging when food supplies or environmental conditions change (Goss-Custard et al., 2006).
- 3.43 Bird disturbance studies on the Orwell and Stour (Ravenscroft et al., 2008) over three winters found the Orwell to be much busier than the Stour, but birds tended to respond more to the presence of people on the Stour, potentially because the Stour held larger numbers of birds and there were more alternative areas available for the birds to switch to. Shoreline activities caused most disturbance at high tide while those occurring in the estuary caused the most disturbance at low tide. The authors suggested disturbance was having an impact on the populations of birds on the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA.
- 3.44 All intertidal mudflat habitat, when exposed, has the potential to be used by the non-breeding bird interest. Exposure will vary with the tidal cycle. In addition, birds will often gather over high tide and roost sites may support large numbers of birds at a given time. Use of roosts will vary according to prevailing weather conditions, habitat etc. and roosts can be avoided as a result of disturbance (Peters and Otis, 2007; van der Kolk et al., 2022). Map 4 overlays the relevant SPA boundaries with the locations of key wader and

waterbird roost sites, as identified in Panter & Liley (2016), with additional information synthesised from the previous Essex RAMS and informed by the RSPB (Place Services / Essex County Council, 2018). These data are not comprehensive but provide an indication of the distribution of roosts and highlight how roost sites are present within all the SPA sites.



Difficulties with land management

- 3.45 High recreational use can lead to challenges for land managers, with staff time and resources directed towards litter collection, emptying bins, managing parking and dealing with any problems (such as lost pets, gates left open etc.). Furthermore, high levels of recreation use can potentially lead to demand for facilities and infrastructure, creating additional pressure for those managing sites. Local residents can also be a strong voice in opposition to any change, potentially meaning additional consultation and community dialogue required prior to any changes or high-profile interventions.
- 3.46 Dog attacks on livestock have led to challenges with grazing some sites. Essex Wildlife Trust have stopped grazing sheep at some locations due to dog attacks. Where grazing and dog walking co-exist there is often a need for greater staff presence, extra secure fencing and very clear messaging to visitors with dogs.

Overview and additional context

- 3.47 The impacts caused by recreational activities are varied, and some impact pathways are more relevant to some features than others. As such, the risks for each European site on the Essex coast are slightly different. Based on the qualifying features for each site and other information available, we summarise which impact pathways are potentially relevant to each European site in Table 2. We have not tried to assign a degree of risk or ranked issues for different sites; a tick in the table simply indicates the potential for risk.
- 3.48 While we have summarised the risks separately, they also interact, for example a saltmarsh fire would reduce the available habitat for birds, with the potential to exacerbate risks of disturbance. In addition, many of the features are quite mobile and change in distribution over time, this is particularly the case with species such as Little Tern.

Additional context

- 3.49 Climate change will impact the distribution of the qualifying features, exacerbate risks such as fire incidence, change recreation patterns and fundamentally change the coast and surrounding habitats. Rising sea levels, coastal squeeze and more storm surges lead to a loss of habitat such as saltmarsh than mean there is less space for both recreation and for wildlife.

- 3.50 Recreation use will shift over time in response to trends, social media and a range of social factors and as such there is some complexity and inevitable uncertainty around the scale of future risk.
- 3.51 Dog ownership increased markedly during Covid (Morgan et al., 2020). Wild swimming (Bates and Moles, 2022), paddleboarding (Baker et al., 2021), drones (Rebolo-Ifrán et al., 2019) and e-bikes (Rérat, 2021) are becoming increasingly popular while improvements in wetsuit materials and technology can allow people to spend more time in the water, leading to changes in participation in activities such as kite surfing, jet skis, windsurfing and swimming. Tourism trends are also changing, with for example an increase in campervans, mobile homes and short-trip vacations to countryside destinations (e.g. Sommer, 2020). Campervans also provide opportunities for life-style choices with some people choosing to live 'off-grid'.
- 3.52 Such changes in the types of activity and how recreation takes place may mean people access sites in novel ways, for example paddleboards can be launched anywhere and are easily portable, meaning access to the water may not be focussed around slipways. Changing patterns of access may mean people access the coast at different times of day or different weather conditions, further exacerbating the existing level of recreational disturbance.

Table 2: Summary of risks to the relevant European sites from recreation.

| European site | Damage (trampling and wear) | Contamination | Increased fire risk | Disturbance to breeding birds | Disturbance to non-breeding waterbirds | Difficulties with land management | Notes and reasons for ticks where further information necessary |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| Essex Estuaries SAC | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | Habitats such as saltmarsh, seagrass and halophilous scrub potentially vulnerable to damage and increased fire risk |
| Hamford Water SPA | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Hamford Water Ramsar | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Breeding Avocet an SPA feature and the supplementary conservation advice indicates Avocet have bred at Cattawade (as well as Trimley on the Orwell) |
| Stour and Orwell Estuaries Ramsar | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | Ramsar listing includes a range of saltmarsh plants and eelgrasses potentially vulnerable to trampling |
| Colne Estuary SPA | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Colne Estuary Ramsar | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | Wetland invertebrate and plant interest potentially vulnerable to damage, contamination and increased fire risk |
| Blackwater Estuary SPA | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Blackwater Estuary Ramsar | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | Wetland invertebrate and plant interest potentially vulnerable to damage, contamination and increased fire risk |
| Dengie SPA | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Dengie Ramsar | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | Wetland invertebrate and plant interest potentially vulnerable to damage, contamination and increased fire risk |
| Crouch and Roach Estuaries SPA | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |

| European site | Damage (trampling and wear) | Contamination | Increased fire risk | Disturbance to breeding birds | Disturbance to non-breeding waterbirds | Difficulties with land management | Notes and reasons for ticks where further information necessary |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| Crouch and Roach Estuaries Ramsar | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | Wetland invertebrate and plant interest potentially vulnerable to damage, contamination and increased fire risk |
| Foulness SPA | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Foulness Ramsar | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Penfleet and Southend Marshes SPA | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Penfleet and Southend Marshes Ramsar | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Thames Estuary and Marshes Ramsar | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | Wetland invertebrate and plant interest potentially vulnerable to damage, contamination and increased fire risk |

4. SAMM ('Strategic Access Management and Monitoring')

4.1 SAMM measures form the basis of all strategic mitigation schemes (see Beveridge et al., 2024 for overview). SAMM comprise measures aimed at behaviour change or encouraging responsible access and are targeted at or around the European sites. Measures include signage, interpretation, ranger provision etc and extend to include monitoring linked to mitigation delivery to ensure the mitigation is targeted appropriately.

Mitigation delivery to date

4.2 Developer contributions have been used to fund the mitigation work set out in the original strategy (Place Services / Essex County Council, 2018), which at the time was designed to address impacts from 72,907 dwellings that (at the time) were anticipated to come forward in the period to 2038. The mitigation measures included:

- Recruitment of a full-time Delivery Manager (appointed in 2021) with role to oversee delivery and liaise with stakeholders;
- Adoption of the "Bird Aware" brand originally developed by Bird Aware Solent⁷;
- Recruitment of a team of rangers to work on the ground to reduce disturbance by influencing the behaviour of visitors (team size of 4 full-time posts in 2024/25, including a lead ranger)
- Ranger attendance at a variety of prominent local events, raising awareness of Bird Aware Essex Coast and it's guidance;
- Development of initiatives to encourage responsible dog walking and encourage dog owners to go to less sensitive parts of the coast;
- Dedicated Bird Aware Essex Coast website⁸ and social media channels, with content around responsible recreation, the ranger team, events, and general awareness raising;
- Production of an informative Bird Aware Essex Coast leaflet, about the habitats and the birds of the coast, that has been distributed widely throughout Essex;
- Habitat based measures, such as interpretation, fencing, waymarking, screening, access and habitat improvement; and,

⁷ <https://birdaware.org/solent/>

⁸ <https://birdaware.org/essex/>

- Institution of a monitoring scheme to track the implementation of mitigation measures and to assess their effectiveness.

4.3 The ranger team has grown over time and coverage across the area is not uniform, with effort targeted by the Bird Aware team. The team has identified at least 85 sites across the coast that require some sort of ranger presence and the level of provision at each is varied according to the ease with which it is possible to intercept and engage with visitors, presence of vulnerable features in areas that people might access, levels of recreation use and then effort is further refined according to tide, weather etc.

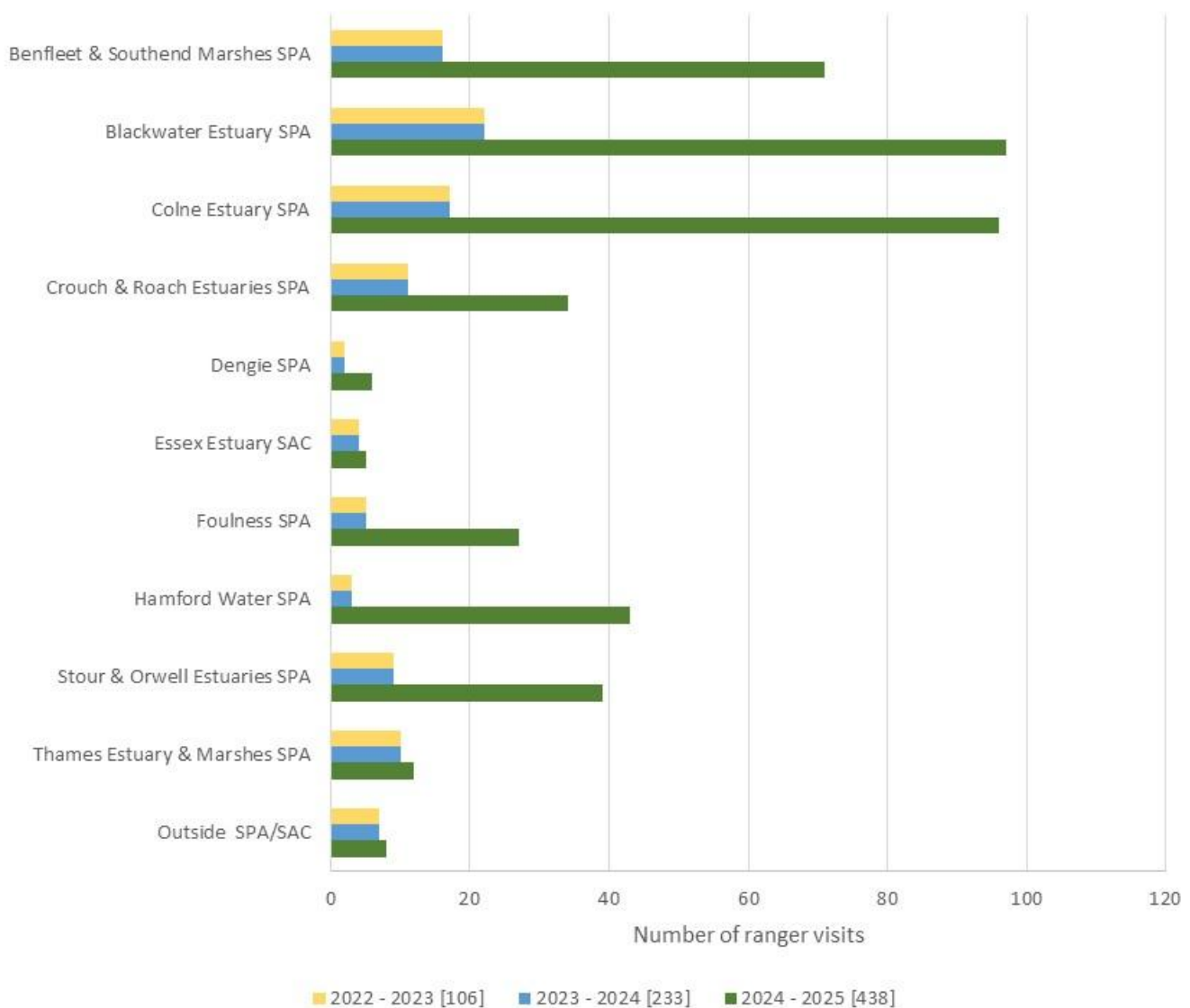


Figure 2: Ranger visits by year and European site. Data extracted from schedule provided by Bird Aware Essex team (note 24/25 data is the number of planned visits rather than actual visits).

SAMM measures in this strategy

4.4 SAMM measures include education, engagement with recreational users to influence their behaviour, raising awareness about the Essex coast and its biodiversity, access management and monitoring. The measures are focussed around the European sites and extend to cover functionally-linked land in the vicinity. Measures are summarised below and itemised in Table 3 (at the end of this section). The measures have been carefully considered to build on the existing mitigation work achieved to date and further increase the level of mitigation provision to ensure it is sufficient to address the level of housing growth now planned.

Measures relevant to all sites

4.5 The delivery manager will oversee the implementation of the mitigation, with their role having strategic oversight of the mitigation, including the delivery of the strategy and partnership governance. The role ensures the budget and finances are appropriately managed, setting out the financial responsibilities, monitoring financial contributions, financial forecasting, RAMS reserves and in-perpetuity funds etc as appropriate. The delivery manager will also oversee the reporting and provide the point of contact for planning officers, other local authority staff, conservation organisations and other stakeholders etc.

4.6 The ranger team is fundamental to the mitigation delivery. It is proposed to have two ranger teams, one covering sites from the northern side of Blackwater north to the Stour estuary and one covering from the southern side of the Blackwater south to the Thames Estuary. Each team will have 1 lead ranger and 3 coastal rangers. Both teams will be supported by up to 3 seasonal ranger roles which will be flexible on the sites they support based on whether there are beach nesting birds that require specific support during the breeding season, providing flexible ranger support in the winter and for weekend working, and complimented by the dog officer and education and engagement officer roles. The overall ranger team size is therefore 9.5 full-time equivalent (fte) posts (including team leaders and 3 seasonal posts, each of 6 months).

4.7 This will essentially provide the following coverage, although each team will have the flexibility to place ranger resource where it is needed:

- 1 ranger covering the Stour Estuary and Hamford Water – supported by 1 seasonal ranger.

- 1 ranger covering the Colne Estuary – supported by 1 seasonal ranger.
- 2 rangers covering the Blackwater Estuary – supported by 1 seasonal ranger.
- 1 ranger covering Dengie and Crouch and Roach Estuary.
- 1 ranger covering Foulness, Thames Estuary and Southend and Benfleet Marshes – supported by 1 or 2 seasonal rangers.
- 2 lead rangers, one for each team (i.e. 1 for Black-water – Stour and 1 for Blackwater – Thames).

4.8 This team size is necessary as in some locations/times there is a need for two rangers to be out together, due to health & safety concerns, effectiveness or for confidence building. The work is demanding and approaching strangers in relatively remote areas can be difficult; the larger team size ensures team morale and sufficient cover to ensure sickness, holidays etc will not compromise delivery. It may take some time for sufficient contributions to be collected to allow the team to reach this size and as the team builds it may be necessary for a different geographic breakdown.

4.9 The total length of coast covered by the ranger team is nearly 500km⁹, giving around 53km per ranger (based team size of 9.5). This is a relatively large area for each staff member to cover and the physical difficulties in moving around the Essex Coast make this even more ambitious. The 500km estimate includes areas such as Foulness that are largely inaccessible to the public and some sections of shoreline are remote and seldom visited. Nonetheless, the extent of ranger coverage remains low or similar compared to other mitigation strategies. For example, the Severn Estuary has a level of provision of around 26km per ranger, the Solent (in 2022) around 36km per ranger and the Northumberland Coast around 37km per ranger (see Liley and Caals, 2024). A strategic review of mitigation provision on the Solent (D Liley et al., 2023) found rangers could speak to around 5-7 groups per hour on-site, depending on how busy the location was and the level of provision equated to around 30 minutes ranger time per new dwelling per winter. This was deemed low in the review.

⁹ this is an approximate figure, derived using the shoreline within SPA boundaries (including islands with land above mean high water mark) and defined as the edge of selected habitats. The measurement reflects the shoreline rather than including any portions at sea or open water. The figure was derived from GIS layers used in the work of Ross *et al.* (2014).

4.10 Alongside the ranger team and delivery manager, the strategy includes provision for four further posts:

- A dog project officer, full time to run dog walker engagement at particular locations and provide resources/engagement material for dog walkers, in-line with projects elsewhere in the country¹⁰. The role will complement the ranger teams by working as a specialist ranger as required;
- A communications officer (part-time) responsible for leading campaigns (e.g. dogs on leads) and work around specific activities and audiences (e.g. watersports), supporting the delivery manager and ranger team with social media, press releases etc and overseeing the website content.
- An education/community engagement lead (full time) undertaking work with schools, leading site visits/school trips.
- A monitoring and data lead, this being a part time role responsible for overseeing the data collected by the rangers, collating data from other sources (such as bird data) and producing regular reports.

4.11 Specific work areas for the various staff in the team and that apply across the whole geographic area will include:

- Maintain and update updating the Bird Aware Essex website and general information provision raising awareness of the coast, its importance for nature conservation and risks from recreation use.
- Undertake dedicated work on watersports and water-based recreation, raising issues of disturbance and trampling damage to sensitive habitat. Potential to produce generic guidance for whole coast as to where to launch, where to go, how to behave (including speed limits) and this supported on the ground/water with signs and buoys. This should include activities that are growing in popularity such as wild swimming, paddleboarding etc).
- Gather evidence on particular activities and events to provide information that could support/assist enforcement action if the need arises (enforcement by relevant authority/police etc).
- Contact holiday parks (with static caravans, lodges, mobile homes etc) and exploring opportunities for outreach, including interpretation, signage, information on slipways and other information for residents. Potential for an information pack or

¹⁰ such as Dorset Dogs <https://www.dorsetdogs.org.uk/>, Devon Loves Dogs <https://www.devonlovesdogs.co.uk/> and Coast & Country Canines <https://coastandcountrycanines.org/>

similar to be distributed to residents at key sites and dog-focussed projects.¹¹

- Develop work around education resources and work with children to raise awareness of disturbance issues and the wildlife interest of the coast – including education packs, lesson plans and budget to fund children visiting sites.
- Complete the parking audit and use it to identify and prioritise locations where changes necessary (such as formalising parking, reducing parking spaces, need for height restriction barriers or other infrastructure) and inform dialogue/consultation with relevant parties over parking charges, car park design etc;
- Log bird use in nearby areas outside the boundary of European sites where disturbance issues may be relevant, for example fields adjacent to footpaths. This information will provide scope to target rangers or other mitigation to such areas as necessary.
- Undertake dedicated work around wildlife photography to promote best practice. Options could include supporting professional photographers or keen amateurs to act as ambassadors at popular locations, production of a code of conduct, social media and other publicity around the issues.
- Undertake some dedicated awareness raising and communications around drone use.
- Establish a jet ski working group with remit to develop joint working to manage growing issue and oversight of co-ordination/support for measures at a coast wide level.
- Clear messaging around where to walk dogs, sites where dogs are welcomed off lead and effective information and engagement coast wide around dogs. This will mean the dog project officer, rangers, communications officer and education work all highlight issues around dogs off-lead and responsible dog walking.
- Produce of a monitoring strategy (with budget for consultancy input) to ensure data officer has clear guidance and monitoring data are effectively integrated into mitigation delivery.
- Check the condition of relevant people counters and other monitoring equipment, replacing baterries and overseeing repair/replacement as required.
- Collect and review of monitoring data as relevant and to inform mitigation delivery.

¹¹ The visitor survey results indicated that those staying away from home accounted for a high proportion of visitors at certain locations. Data from other parts of the country indicate those the number of recreational visits made to European sites per unit of accommodation were as high or higher for holiday accommodation when compared to residential units (Panter and Liley, 2017)

- Link up with neighbouring mitigation strategies (Suffolk and North Kent) to ensure no gaps in coverage and consistency of approach where any overlap or work in close proximity. Scope for joint messaging and campaigns on some issues (e.g. around jet skis).
- Link up with other mitigation strategies and visitor management/engagement projects around the country to share best practice, expertise and learn from others.

Measures specific to particular locations

4.12 Alongside the coast-wide measures set out above, there will be a need for a range of site specific and more local projects. These will include (but are not limited to):

- Changes to individual car parks to make them work better, perhaps reducing parking provision in some places or creating new parking in more robust locations;
- Fencing or screening to keep people/dogs on paths;
- Path work to create new routes or improve paths to improve access while ensuring impacts reduced (e.g. creating routes that provide options for people to walk away from the shoreline);
- New/replacement signage;
- New/replacement interpretation;
- Changes to slipways and access points to the water to make them work better or restrict particular types of user (e.g. provision of barriers and gated access);
- Infrastructure to restrict or limit access by off-road vehicles and motorbikes where a persistent problem;
- Funding to support existing work and projects that have responsibilities for visitor management or engagement;
- Zoning or ways to redistribute access, for example creating areas where access is discouraged or not promoted or areas where particular activities are encouraged/promoted such as dedicated spaces for watersports;
- Buoys or other measures to inform those on the water when approaching sensitive locations;
- Support for site based staff/projects involved in managing access, particularly those with a focus on waterbased activities (e.g. around enforcement of speed restrictions on the water);
- Projects with marinas, holiday parks or other locations where high density of users and boat activity in particular locations;
- Projects to improve visitor facilities at sites – particularly those aimed at providing for local recreational use (e.g. dog walking, exercise) – where they can absorb more visitors without recreation

impacts. Examples could include litter bins, viewpoints, dog bins, dog washing stations, off-lead exercising facilities, etc.

- Roost protection measures;
- Breeding bird protection measures (fencing, signage etc).

- 4.13 Most of these kinds of projects will need to be undertaken by relevant landowners and site managers. Many will be relatively opportunistic in that they might depend on circumstance. For example, flooding or storm events may result in the need to replace infrastructure (fencing, paths etc) and this could provide scope to upgrade some elements. Changes in ownership or in staff may lead to different management options. Other funding sources may lead to new projects and drive change, creating opportunities for additional measures that have a mitigation benefit. One key driver for change will be the Beneficial Use of Dredged Sediments (BUDS) and also managed realignments which will create new areas of habitat that have potential to draw birds and people.
- 4.14 It is therefore not possible to define a complete list of local projects within this strategy that can be relied on as mitigation. Appendix 1 provides an overview of local project ideas and opportunities around the Essex coast. These are indicative ideas only that were generated during a series of workshops in September 2025, with locally based staff (from a range of organisations) working around the Essex coast, including Bird Aware Essex staff. The appendix is not exhaustive and some of the projects and ideas may not necessarily be feasible or work as mitigation.
- 4.15 As the ranger team spends time on the ground and the project builds momentum with partners, the project list can be refined and specific proposals developed. The strategy provides funding on an annual basis for locally based projects. This funding will provide the flexibility and scope to allow relevant stakeholders and organisations to be able to bid for funds for small scale projects that have a clear mitigation benefit and fit with the strategy. Equally it will be possible for the Bird Aware Essex team to work with local parties on the ground to assist in developing ideas and implementing work on the ground.
- 4.16 The governance and detail of any such funding to stakeholders would need to be set out and agreed by the RAMS Steering Group and Project Board to ensure funds are appropriately authorised. This will also ensure that the funding does provide mitigation benefit and ensure good geographic

coverage. Strategic oversight will also ensure necessary monitoring is in place.

Evolution of SAMM and monitoring

- 4.17 The SAMM measures are able to shift and adapt with time, which is essential given likely changes at the sites, for example with respect to climate change. Ranger time can be focussed as appropriate and project funds can be directed to where they are needed through the locally-based projects. Engagement, for example through social media, provides further opportunity to reinforce messaging and influence behaviour in a targeted and dynamic way.
- 4.18 Monitoring will play an important role in supporting the strategy and mitigation delivery (ensuring mitigation is sufficient and keeping pace with housing growth). Data will be important to highlight changes in access, pick-up emerging trends and flag where new issues emerge. Mitigation delivery in terms of ranger time, levels of engagement and some ecological data will be important to inform future updates to the strategy. Some monitoring data will be useful to show how measures have worked, providing case studies and examples of successful interventions and best practice for others to adopt. Sharing these successes will be important to capacity building and the long-term success of the mitigation. Given the wide range of sites, range of issues and types of access, consistent and systematic data gathering will be a challenge. A monitoring strategy is therefore necessary (and costed within the SAMM measures) to ensure monitoring is integrated into mitigation delivery and the right data are collected to inform action on the ground.
- 4.19 Looking to the future, working with volunteers provides an opportunity to expand the work of the ranger team. Volunteers could act as ambassadors and potentially undertake tasks such as showing people birds, handing out information and so on. Some other bird disturbance mitigation projects involve extensive use of volunteers (e.g. Plovers in Peril on the Norfolk coast), where volunteers help with both engagement and with monitoring. By involving volunteers in monitoring there is the potential to raise understanding and appreciation of the bird interest among local people, which can then feed through into the engagement with other visitors.
- 4.20 There are also some clear risks to working with volunteers; influencing people's behaviour is difficult and the ranger team are carefully selected and receive considerable training. Any volunteer network would require

considerable effort to build, maintain and support, with training, rotas, equipment, transport and similar – meaning a need for greater staff input (e.g. a volunteer coordinator) to make sure it works. There may be a need to vet volunteers to minimise risks of reputational damage. As such, the potential use and role of volunteers requires careful review, consideration and resourcing. Volunteers certainly do not provide a cheap panacea and alternative to dedicated rangers. As such it is best that the ranger team is the focus in the short term and the role of volunteers is reviewed, with the scope to incorporate them into the mitigation delivery in the medium term.

- 4.21 Close working with relevant stakeholders and other mitigation schemes around the country will also be important. This will ensure the Bird Aware Essex team are aware of local issues, familiar with best practice, aware of the latest research, able to learn from others and share information across organisations.

Table 3: Overview of SAMM measures

| Mitigation measure | Description | Justification | Notes |
|--|---|---|---|
| Delivery Manager | Full time post managing ranger team and providing overall steer for mitigation delivery and link to partners, stakeholders, planners etc. Role also proving strategic links and wider policy work/liaison | Manager post key to ensuring smooth delivery and oversight of implementation | Already established and post extended to cover in-perpetuity |
| Ranger team leaders (2 posts) | Ranger team leader post with responsibility for co-ordinating team, oversight of rotas, ensuring cover for holidays, sickness etc., health & safety oversight, transport logistics etc. Two posts to allow for a northern team and southern team. | Rangers are a cornerstone of the mitigation. Leaders necessary to ensure coverage and co-ordinate work | Ranger team already established. Expansion necessary |
| Rangers (6 full-time, 3 seasonal) | Ranger team expanded and key function is patrolling on the European sites and directly engaging with visitors to those sites. | Rangers are a cornerstone of the mitigation. | Ranger team already established. Expansion necessary |
| Vehicles and other resources for rangers | Running costs for vehicle and any other travel costs, plus resources to cover equipment needed by team (trail cameras for nest monitoring, temporary signage etc.) | Budget required for transport and operational work. A dedicated vehicle has benefit in providing additional branding. | Bird Aware Essex branding necessary to ensure vehicle is eye-catching |
| Dog project staffing costs | 1 post, fte | Staff costs to build project. Dog walkers main user group to influence and one with biggest impact | Post would be a dog specialist ranger post |
| Dog project resources | Running costs for events etc | Budget required for transport and operational work | |
| Communications Officer staffing costs | Mitigation relies on effective behaviour change through communication of key messages - focused, specialist work on | Budget required for operational work, targeted comms planning, campaigns, | |

| Mitigation measure | Description | Justification | Notes |
|--|---|--|---|
| | social media, press, newsletters. Running campaigns relating to wildlife photography, drones, watersports etc. | social media, newsletter and promotional/networking opportunities. | |
| Comms costs | Costs to cover resources for comms post in terms of campaign material, images, expenses etc | Comms work may need to buy in specialist design and support, for example graphics, images etc. Budget also covers campaign launches, printing and updates to the website | |
| Production of monitoring strategy & monitoring support | Consultancy support to work with the BA team and stakeholders to design monitoring programme and recording to cover data collection by ranger team, other relevant data (e.g. volunteer surveys), reporting protocols and report production | Will ensure monitoring is conducted efficiently and data available to feed into mitigation delivery | |
| Monitoring and data staffing costs | Budget for dedicated staff member to implement monitoring strategy, potentially covering targeted ecological monitoring, regular vehicle counts across area, automated counters, data collection by rangers while on site etc | Data important to help hone mitigation, target resources and pick up any changes/emerging trends | Will cover resources to collate data from a range of different sources, including surveys and automated counters. |
| Monitoring resources | Budget to cover commission of specific surveys where needed (e.g. vehicle counts) and purchase of equipment (automated visitor counters) etc. Dependent on monitoring strategy | Data important to help hone mitigation, target resources and pick up any changes/emerging trends | |
| Visitor survey | Visitor survey to cover all European sites and surrounding GI (SANGs etc) at 5 year intervals | Provides data on changing use patterns, demographics, visitor numbers and visitor origins. | Repeat surveys of a selection of locations in line with work undertaken in 2024. Details to be set out in monitoring strategy |

| Mitigation measure | Description | Justification | Notes |
|--|---|--|---|
| Education/community engagement officer | Full-time post undertaking work with schools including schools visits and attending events | Education lead able to go into schools and community events (fetes etc), working directly with children in local communities to raise awareness with young people | |
| Resources for schools and events | Budget to cover resources for education work | Education/community engagement officer will need props and resources when visiting schools etc | |
| Engagement material for holiday parks etc. | Project targeting holiday parks, caravan sites etc with resources to develop material such as packs, leaflets, signage designs etc. | Wide range of holiday parks around coast, many providing cabins etc available for use all year round. Some with slip ways, boat storage etc. | Project could initially start by working with small group of sites to understand what might work. Potential for incentives such as help gaining environmental certifications or accreditation alongside promotion of wildlife around coast, responsible access etc. |
| Site-specific projects | Flexible funding for range of local and site specific projects | Workshops identified a wide range of possible projects that would have significant mitigation benefit but need to be subject to more detailed proposals and costings | Potential to create a small project fund to help deliver mitigation. Delivery manager and Bird Aware team would work with local partners to develop ideas and suggest opportunities |

5. Off-site green infrastructure & SANG

- 5.1 Off-site green infrastructure and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG) relate to additional greenspace, aimed at deflecting visitors away from the European sites (for example providing locations that welcome dog walking). These are widely used around the country to provide mitigation alongside SAMM measures and are positive measures in that they provide additional space for recreation. In many areas, such as around Ashdown Forest, the Exe Estuary, the Dorset Heaths and the Thames Basin Heaths SANGs have become popular destinations in their own right providing a popular and well-used resource for local communities. SANG, where applicable, can also fulfil a range of other functions, including biodiversity net gain and flood management.
- 5.2 There is a growing evidence base on the effectiveness of SANGs in coastal locations (e.g. Caals, Panter and Liley, 2022) and looking ahead there is a need to provide greater clarity about the level of SANG provision required from different developments in Essex and clear guidance on what SANG should look like and how it should work.
- 5.3 Development proposals within the Zone of Influence are required to contribute to the Essex Coast RAMS to address the in combination recreational impacts arising from growth across the region. However, applicants should also be aware that some schemes may give rise to alone impacts on designated European sites that are not fully addressed through the strategic RAMS measures. Where project level assessment identifies the potential for significant effects in isolation, additional, bespoke mitigation may be necessary to ensure compliance with the Habitats Regulations. In such cases, the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) or other targeted mitigation should be considered to avoid adverse effects on site integrity.
- 5.4 Broadly, developments that are 500+ dwellings are most likely to have alone impacts on the European sites, however development proposals for far fewer dwellings in close proximity to the designated site boundary will also pose particular risks. Any development that has impacts alone may be required to provide additional mitigation through the provision of SANG and will need to consult with Natural England.

- 5.5 Additional information about SANGs in Essex will be set out in an additional planning guidance note that will supplement this strategy. The additional guidance will cover the role of SANG in addition to a RAMS contribution, when SANGs might be required and how SANGs fit with the RAMS. Developers should consult this guide in addition to this strategy to ensure they are meeting their planning obligations.

6. Implementation

Types of development covered

- 6.1 This strategy applies to any future development that results in a net increase in residential units (i.e. Use Class C3) located within the identified Zone of Influence (ZOI).
- 6.2 Although primarily focussed on C3 residential development, this strategy also applies to other residential or overnight accommodation, that may give rise to recreational impacts on European Sites and therefore trigger Likely Significant Effects (LSEs). Table 4 lists the development types where LSEs are expected, or may be expected.
- 6.3 For the development types listed in Table 4, this strategy provides a consistent and effective mechanism to secure mitigation for in-combination recreational impacts arising from net new development within the ZOI. Where appropriate, and supported by project level HRA, the RAMS tariff may also be applied to other forms of development beyond C3 dwellings, to ensure recreational impacts are fully addressed.
- 6.4 Developments not listed in the table, but which may also trigger likely significant effects include, but are not limited to:
- Hotels (C1) – including boarding and guest houses;
 - Tourism attractions (F1, Sui Generis).

Table 4: Relevant types of development

| Use Type/Class | Likely Significant Effect | Mitigation requirements |
|---|--|--|
| Dwelling Houses (C3) including live work units <i>This applies to net new dwellings and excludes like for like replacement dwellings.</i> | Yes | Contribution per dwelling |
| Houses in Multiple Occupation (C4/Sui Generis) | Yes | Contribution per bedroom (based on C3 per dwelling contribution)* |
| Residential Institutions (C2/C2A) Sheltered accommodation, extra-care, nursing homes, hospitals and secure institutions. | Possibly, will be considered on a case-by-case basis dependant on mobility/independence of residents and proximity to European Sites. This generally excludes high dependency and end of life care. | Contribution per dwelling or justified reduced rate based on bedspaces (2.46 bedspaces = 1 dwelling) |
| Residential Institutions (C2/ Sui Generis) Schools, colleges or training centres and Student Accommodation | Possibly, will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If a training centre or college has associated adult accommodation where residents/occupants can visit the European Sites. | Contribution based on bedspaces (2.46 bedspaces = 1 dwelling)* |
| Gypsy and Traveller Pitches / Plots (Sui Generis) Net new temporary or permanent pitches | Yes | Contribution per pitch/plot |
| Caravan, chalet, touring and static holiday sites (Sui Generis) | Likely LSE, especially where located within 1.5 km of the coast | Contribution per unit/pitch (equivalent to per-dwelling rate) |

* Some Local Planning Authorities apply a discounted rate, and it is advised to check with local guidance and the Supplementary Planning Guidance for more information

- 6.6 While residential development represents the primary source of recreational pressure, other land uses can also create significant impacts on European sites - particularly those involving overnight accommodation, high visitor turnover, or public recreational use. Any type of new overnight accommodation within 1.5 km (approximately a 15 minute walk) of the Essex coast, for example, is likely to give rise to recreational disturbance and therefore require mitigation.
- 6.7 For C3 residential development, contributions will be calculated on a per-unit basis. However, this approach may not be directly applicable to other forms of development, such as tourist accommodation or visitor attractions.
- 6.8 For development types not falling within the standard per dwelling tariff model, the potential for LSEs must be assessed through project level

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and advice sought from Natural England where necessary, and any required mitigation confirmed through appropriate assessment. Where recreational impacts cannot be ruled out, the RAMS tariff may be used as an appropriate and proportionate mitigation measure for 'in-combination' impacts, including for hotels, holiday parks, other overnight accommodation and tourist attractions. Proposals that are deemed to have 'alone' impacts will require additional bespoke mitigation. In such cases, payment of the RAMS tariff covers residual impacts.

- 6.9 Project-level HRA for tourist attraction and hotel related proposals will need to take into account both the type of use and its proximity to European sites. For example, a business focused hotel in Chelmsford city centre is unlikely to generate the same recreational pressure as dog friendly holiday accommodation located adjacent to a designated site. Each proposal will therefore need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis to determine whether LSEs are likely and whether additional mitigation is required to address 'alone' impacts.
- 6.10 Further detail on development types covered and the application of tariffs and bedspace calculations will be provided within Supplementary Planning Guidance. Developers should refer to this guidance, alongside the Essex Coast RAMS, to ensure all planning obligations and HRA requirements are fully met.

Zone of Influence and the area covered by the strategy

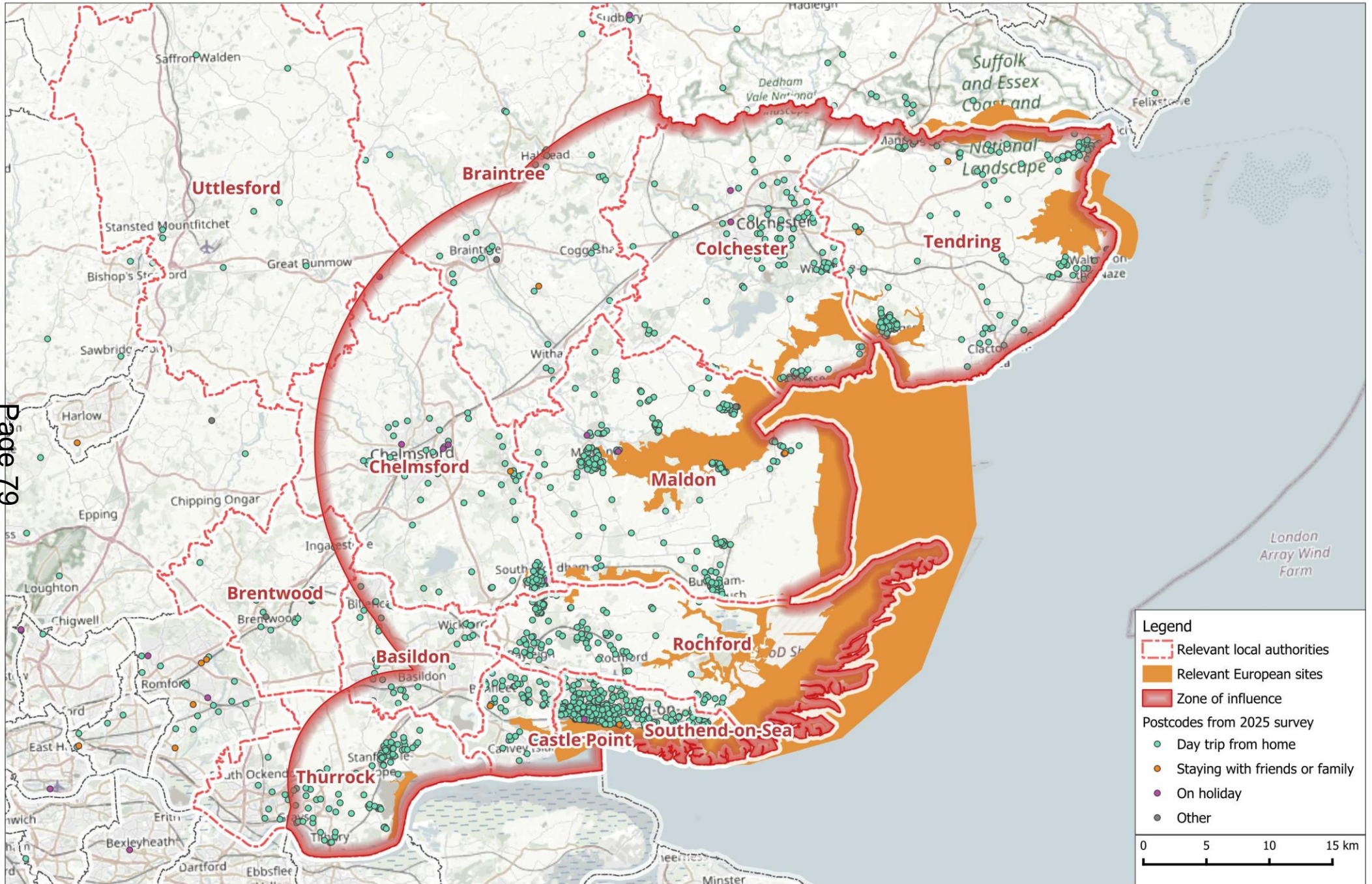
- 6.11 The Zone of Influence is shown in Map 5. This is the established Zone of Influence, which was originally derived separately for each SPA and then merged, with values for each separate SPA ranging from 4.5 to 22km (see Table 4.4 in Place Services / Essex County Council, 2018). Recent postcode data from the 2025 visitor survey (Rush et al., 2025) is included on the map for context and demonstrates that the zone works to capture the majority of visitors and remains fit for purpose.

HRA matters and other assessment considerations

- 6.12 This strategy does not replace the requirement for HRA in relation to recreational impacts at plan or project level. Instead, it provides a mechanism to provide mitigation to support appropriate assessment and addresses the cumulative effects of recreation across a wide area. For most development types and locations, conformity with the strategy will

potentially allow a conclusion of no adverse effect on site integrity in respect of recreational pressure. In some cases, the strategic mitigation delivered through the RAMS may not however be sufficient. Developments in particularly sensitive locations—such as those immediately adjacent to European sites—may require additional, bespoke mitigation measures beyond the RAMS tariff. These will need to be identified and secured through project level HRA. As such the strategy does not remove the need to consider whether individual developments may also give rise to impacts alone.

- 6.13 It should also be noted that the strategy does not address other potential impact pathways, such as air quality or water quality, which must be considered separately where relevant to European sites. It should also be noted that recreation impacts to SSSI features may not necessarily be covered by the mitigation strategy (if those features are not qualifying features of the European sites). These may warrant separate consideration and mitigation in their own right.



Scale of future development

- 6.14 Around 148,309 new dwellings have been estimated as coming forward in future local authority plans and requiring mitigation. This total is broken down by authority in Table 5. The estimates take into account each authority's local plan housing requirement and discounts a proportion of the homes which are unlikely to make a fee contribution to the RAMS. This step removes homes which are already permitted or would be complete by the base date (April 2026). To keep the calculation simple, no discount was made for non-qualifying types of residential or lapse rates. Full details of how the different totals have been derived are provided in Appendix 2.
- 6.15 The estimates are therefore intended as an approximate guide and derived as a snapshot at a particular point in time. They may not necessarily be an accurate representation of future development. They are however sufficient to determine the scale of mitigation likely to be required and therefore to allow a tariff to be set.
- 6.16 In 2025 there were approximately 609,786¹² residential dwellings within the Zone of Influence shown in Map 5. The estimate of 148,309 new dwellings would therefore represent a 24% increase in the amount of housing within the Zone of Influence.

Table 5: Summary of housing growth potentially requiring mitigation, by authority (see Appendix 2 for further details). Note stage of plan preparation reflects a snapshot at the time of writing

| LPA | Stage of Plan Preparation | Plan Period | Potential housing requiring mitigation |
|--------------|---|-------------------|--|
| Basildon | Reg 18 Local Plan | 2023-2043 | 21,667 |
| Braintree | Reg 18 Local Plan Review – March 2026 | 2026-2041 | 11,493 |
| Brentwood | Adopted 2022, Call for sites - Reg 18 2026 | 2026-2042 | 3,060 |
| Castle Point | Plan was submitted for Examination in January 2026 | 2026-2043 | 5,457 |
| Chelmsford | Reg 19 Local Plan Review, Submission 2026 | 2022-2041 | 19,755 |
| Colchester | Reg 18 Local Plan Review - December 25 | 2026-2042 | 16,435 |
| Maldon | Exploring options to transition into the new plan-making system in 2026 | 2023-2043 | 9,521 |
| Rochford | Reg 18 consultation February – March 2026 | 2023/24 - 2042/43 | 12,456 |

¹² Total extracted from national postcode data and relates to the residential delivery points per postcode within the Zone of Influence.

| LPA | Stage of Plan Preparation | Plan Period | Potential housing requiring mitigation |
|--------------|--|-------------|--|
| Southend | Preferred Approach Consultation 2025, Reg 18 summer 2025 | 2025-2050 | 25,444 |
| Tendring | Reg 18 Preferred Options consultation | 2025 – 2042 | 12,851 |
| Thurrock | Local Plan Initial Proposals, Reg 19 2026 | 2024-2044 | 10,170 |
| Uttlesford | Full Council in March 2026 to be invited to adopt the Local Plan | 2021-2041 | 0 |
| Total | | | 148,309 |

Costs per new dwelling

6.17 The total cost of SAMM measures is estimated to be £72,594,500 (see Appendix 3 for details). Per dwelling costs are set out below, calculated using the housing growth figures from Table 5. Costs for SAMM will be adjusted to take into account any reserves held by the partnership at the point at which the new strategy supersedes the previous one, giving a cost per new dwelling of £475.70.

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Total cost SAMM: | £72,594,500 |
| Approx. RAMS monies held by accountable body ¹³ : | £2,043,416.31 |
| Estimate of number of houses needing mitigation: | 148,309 |
| Cost per new dwelling: | £475.70 |

6.18 The tariff will be further adjusted on an annual basis to take into account RPI Index linked inflation, any administrative costs and any other adjustments necessary. Housing growth will also be monitored and taken into account as part of future adjustments.

¹³ This figure includes RAMS tariff held by the Accountable Body, and the interest accrued on held funds to date

Long term delivery and in-perpetuity costs

- 6.19 Mitigation is secured for the duration of the impact, and it is assumed the implementation of the mitigation will run for as long as it is required, with money set aside to provide long-term stability and in-perpetuity delivery. The strategy will operate on a rolling basis into the future, adjusting as necessary to changing levels of house building and impacts arising. The inclusion of in-perpetuity costs is one of the factors behind the increase in tariff compared to the previous strategy.
- 6.20 Some measures in this strategy are short-term, one-off measures while others need to run for many years, often extending well outside the Plan period. Changes to access infrastructure, the provision of any SANGs (which are secured indefinitely) alongside the increased awareness raising and education work should ensure that the need and annual cost for SAMM can decrease with time. As behaviour change (such as responsible dog ownership) is more widely accepted, high levels of ranger time may no longer be so relevant. It will be important for regular review and revision of costs as necessary to adjust the amount set aside for long term funding of mitigation measures. As such, SAMM is unlikely to need to be constant over time. The measures have been costed for in perpetuity (taken to be a minimum of 80 years, see Appendix 3). Costs and timing can however be reviewed and adjusted on a 5 yearly basis, allowing resources to be targeted different as necessary. Where measures are short-term or one-off, such as small infrastructure projects, it is anticipated that further short-term or one-off measures in different locations around the coast would come forward in later years of the strategy and the costs are therefore spread over an 80 year period.

Governance

- 6.21 There is already an established approach to the governance and implementation of the Essex Coast RAMS via the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership, which consists of local authorities, Essex County Council, conservation organisations, landowners and statutory bodies. The partnership is governed by a project board and the RAMS steering group whose activities are underpinned by a Partnership Agreement. The Essex Coastal Forum (ECF) a members led forum that discuss and recommend action on coastal issues provides democratic oversight on the project. In addition, one of the partner authorities is nominated as the Accountable

Body for the project and are responsible for holding the RAMS funds from developments that have commenced across Essex and for providing the financial procedures and protocols in its management. They also act as the Lead Institution and employ the RAMS Delivery Manager and project rangers, the 'Bird Aware Essex Team', who are responsible for co-ordinating and delivering the mitigation on the ground.

- 6.22 Figure 3 sets out the governance roles and arrangements of the Essex Coast RAMS implementation and its Partnership.
- 6.23 There is flexibility in the structure to allow for additional working groups to be established to support the implementation of the Essex coast RAMS, such as the RAMS Delivery and Technical Group, a group of landowners and land managers, technical and specialist people that provide relevant coastal expertise, knowledge, experience and on the ground direction / support to the Bird Aware Essex Coast team.
- 6.24 It will be important, looking forward, that there is flexibility and regular review as to how the contributions are spent and to assess the scope and nature of any necessary future mitigation projects. It will be essential that the mitigation delivery can respond to change and shifting priorities. There is uncertainty as to how priorities might need to change in the future, and such uncertainty can only be addressed through good monitoring, adaptive mitigation and regular review.
- 6.25 The need for flexibility will relate to the changing coastline and the impact of extreme weather events which could affect the qualifying features, visitor behaviour and the coastline itself. The King Charles III England Coast Path will also provide new opportunities for access and may change how people use the coast. Changes in housing delivery may affect how much mitigation revenue is collected and the scale of mitigation required.
- 6.26 Certain elements within the mitigation package have the scope to adapt and flex as conditions and priorities change. Furthermore, it is possible that additional opportunities may arise, for example as a result of changing land ownership. It is important therefore that the governance is responsive enough to enable developer contributions to be shifted to different components of the strategy easily. Annual reviews of budgets and the ability for the Delivery Manager to adjust finances as appropriate will be key.
- 6.27 The partnership also highlight the importance of the various delivery partners, for example site managers and other staff in the RSPB, Essex

Wildlife Trust, the National Trust, Essex County Council and Natural England. It is essential for the RAMS Delivery Manager to work with such organisations on the Essex coast RAMS delivery.

- 6.28 Additional flexibility could be accommodated within the structure for relevant stakeholders and organisations to bid for small amounts of money for particular projects that have a clear mitigation benefit and fit with the strategy. The governance and detail of such an arrangement would need to be set out and agreed by the RAMS Steering Group and Project Board to ensure proper governance arrangements are put in place beforehand.

Review and timing

- 6.29 The strategy will operate indefinitely on a rolling basis, with this version running to around 2031. The strategy has, however, been written in the context of local plans and the likely levels of growth to around 2045. The strategy will need to be reviewed and updated approximately every 5 years, with these reviews checking housing numbers, delivery, costs and mitigation priorities. The reviews will inform the 1 year and 5-year business plan that underpins the work of the partnership and their staff.

Essex Coast RAMS Governance

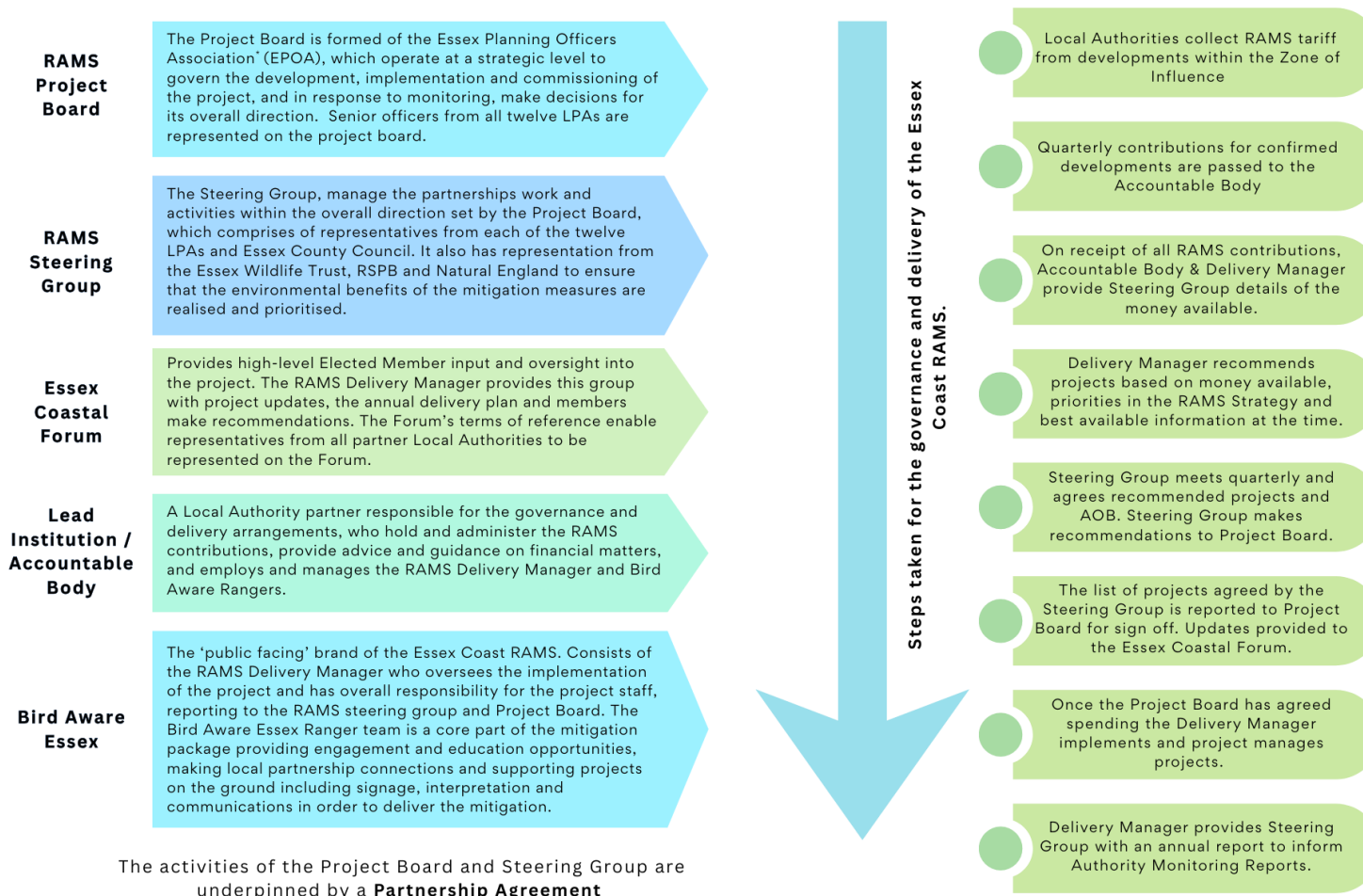


Figure 3: Summary of governance structure

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Glossary

Competent authority: A body authorising, permitting or giving consent. This can include a public body that decides to give a licence, permit, consent or other permission for work to happen, adopt a plan or carry out work for itself;; a statutory undertaker carrying out its work; a minister or department of government, or anyone holding public office, such as a planning inspector, ombudsman or commissioner.

EiP: Examination in Public. the final independent assessment of a local council's development plan before it can be formally adopted.

European site: A site protected by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended (known as the Habitats Regulations).

Green infrastructure: A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.

Habitats Site: Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites.

HRA: Habitats Regulations Assessment. A legal assessment process conducted by a competent authority to determine if a plan or project will adversely affect the integrity of a protected European site

LNRS: Local Nature Recovery Strategy. A statutory system of 48 spatial strategies covering the entire region of England, designed to reverse biodiversity decline.

Local plan: A plan for the future development of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community, under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. A local plan can consist of either strategic or nonstrategic policies, or a combination of the two.

MCCA: Mayoral Combined County Authority

RAMS: Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy

Ramsar site: Wetlands of international importance, designated under the 1971 Ramsar Convention.

Reg 18: Regulation 18 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 is the initial statutory stage of public consultation in the local plan-making process.

Reg 19: Regulation 19 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 defines the pre-submission stage of a Local Plan, where the final proposed plan is published for public consultation before submission to the Secretary of State.

SAC: Special Area of Conservation. Areas defined by regulation 3 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 which have been given special protection as important conservation sites.

SANG: Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace. New or enhanced greenspace, aimed at deflecting visitors away from the European sites and creating more space for recreation

SAMM: Strategic Access Management and Monitoring measures. Mitigation measures targeting behaviour change and visitor management measures on and around a European site.

SPA: Special Protection Area. Areas classified under regulation 15 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 which have been identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds.

SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest. Sites designated by Natural England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Sui Generis: buildings that do not fall within any particular use class for the purposes of planning permission

Zone of Influence: Area within which likely significant effects are triggered by new development and mitigation therefore required.

Appendix 1: Potential opportunities for site specific projects and opportunities

Potential opportunities for more site-specific projects were identified in a series of workshops hosted in September 2025. Opportunities are listed below and the numbers cross-reference to the corresponding map (see Maps 6 - 9 at the end of this Appendix). The opportunities listed are not intended to be exhaustive and neither do they reflect any specific commitment or firm proposal for any location. Many are suggestions only and will require further work by partners and Bird Aware Essex before the level of mitigation benefit can be confirmed.

Stour Estuary and Hamford Water

1 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement at launch points (note that point falls within Suffolk and has already been identified as a potential Suffolk Coast RAMS project location by Wildlife Wise).

2 - Potential to monitor EWT Hogmarsh Island for water users and disturbance.

3 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement on the Manningtree seawall – busy location used by dog walkers. Additional scope for signage & engagement in the nearby library and town, including installation of a leaflet box.

4 - Potential to enhance existing signage near Mistley at Manningtree Beach bathing area and engage with water-based activities in this area. Note that Wildlife Wise have also identified this location as a launch site for paddleboards and kayaks within the Suffolk Coast RAMS and have suggested the implementation of a range of signage/interpretation and/or guidance.

5 - Scope for continued ranger focus and engagement at Hopping point and where Mistley Walls road runs parallel to the estuary. The Mistley walls frontage towards Manningtree (from point 4) is a key engagement location, with dog focussed engagement also warranted here.

6 - Scope for engagement with pop-up camp site.

7 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement at private access/launch point. Raised by NE that they are concerned about disturbance from watercraft. Note that Wildlife Wise have also identified this location as a launch site for windsurfers and paddleboards within the Suffolk Coast RAMS and have suggested the implementation of a range of signage/interpretation and/or guidance.

8 & 9 - Scope for screening installation and signage between the two points to protect small roost, although note steps for beach hut access. Clarification of land ownership along this stretch of beach would also be beneficial. A people counter is already in place at Wrabness but may need upgrading at some point.

10 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement with land/business owners and holidaymakers/beach hut occupiers between Stone Point and Wrabness Point. Note also identified as such by Wildlife Wise in the Suffolk Coast RAMS.

11 - Potential to increase ranger coverage and update interpretation signage at Wrabness Nature Reserve, working with EWT. Also scope to undertake bird disturbance study to inform mitigation.

12 - Scope for engagement/promotional material targeting holidaymakers Wrabness Community Shop (by station): opportunity to engage with tourists/promotional material.

13 - Scope for (infrequent) dog-focussed pop-up events at Stour Woods. Site is part of a circular walking route, has a public car park, and is currently leafleted. Maybe also SANG potential (although note SSSI status).

14 - Potentially update RSPB signage at Copperas Creek and target ranger focus/engagement with kayakers and small boat users.

15 - Scope for engagement with seal boat trip operators running from Ha'penny Pier and with those undertaking the ferry crossing. The latter would benefit from a joined-up approach with Wildlife Wise on the Suffolk coast and the National Landscapes team.

16 - Scope for engagement with training providers on boating lake.

17 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement at public launch ramp used by jet skis.

18 - Scope for ranger focus, engagement, and increased signage at West End Lane car park (main access point).

19 - Compensatory habitat creation (via BUDS¹⁴?) already planned near Dovercourt. Comprises a good launch point and would benefit from increased ranger focus/engagement.

20 - Potential to install/update existing signage, carry out engagement, and install screening at Dovercourt Holiday Park, targeting unofficial access routes across

¹⁴ Beneficial Use of Dredged Sediment project

saltmarsh. Note current concerns around Planning Consent conditions placed on the caravan site not being adhered to.

21 - Already a proposed compensatory habitat location and location of a new (lowered below seawall) Public Right of Way around inland of site. Also scope for signage and temporary (breeding season) fencing between points 18 and 19, which would require permission from the wildfowlers.

22 - Scope for continued ranger focus and engagement, or ideally signage and closing of access, at breeding/roost locations at the sensitive Irlam's Beach. Note that this is a very controversial area linked to proposed compensatory habitat at Bathside Bay.

23 - Scope for long-term support for water-based engagement/presence at Hamford Water, building on existing relationships, which would require boat access (currently provided via Tendring water officer)

24 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement at Beaumont Quay car park; sea wall facilitates access to rest of the coast.

25 - Potential to monitor EWT Skipper Island for water users and disturbance: an important roost site.

26 - Scope to ensure longevity of safe roost areas on Horsey Island via the use of BUDS.

27 - Potential ranger support/funding for summer wardens at Horsey Island Little Tern colony and ranger focus/engagement in winter at the important high tide roost.

28 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement (and signage?) at Stone Point.

29 - Scope to ensure longevity of safe roosting and breeding areas at Stone Point via the use of BUDS.

30 - Potential for fencing and engagement around entire spit area to protect breeding birds whilst maintaining access for local people.

31 - The Naze: key area for engagement across the day (car park, three cafes, etc). Also scope to work with schools or education groups and EWT, potentially including production of a dedicated education pack.

32 - Scope for engagement/ranger focus at Titchmarsh Marina, including with seal boat trip operators.

33 - Scope for engagement/ranger focus/signage at key access points for kite surfers along Island Lane and paralleling Quay Lane in Kirkby-le-Soken.

Blackwater and Colne Estuaries

34 & 35 - Circular walk around Howlands Marsh NR - currently inaccessible and protected for birds but with new UK Coast Path this area will be accessible during the summer. Will also include St Osyth Creek – scope to benefit from better engagement with Bird Aware ranger presence from the beginning. Shrangri-la Caravan Park is now designated for homes so potential for increased disturbance in this area – would benefit from advance signage and liaison with Essex Highways re: access. Also, an important opportunity to undertake monitoring before housing is built/progressed and before the coast path is opened, to measure the impact of both and target subsequent management.

36 - Designated water ski area up Brightlingsea Creek (past Cindery Island) towards Flag Creek; scope for engagement with private club.

37 - Colne Point seawall/Lee-over-Sands; disturbance from antisocial behaviour, quad bikes, and scramblers on the nature reserve. Suggestion that concrete bollards are being installed by resident's group, but Bird Aware influence may also be needed in the future.

38 - Brightlingsea Creek; Share our Shore signs have been effective here and closed one of the desire lines (would be great to replicate elsewhere) alongside ranger provision. Colchester City Council has jurisdiction on the River Colne rather than the Brightlingsea Harbour Master (who only manages Brightlingsea Creek).

39 - Scope for engagement with the caravan parks.

40 - Disturbance by people walking across to Sandy Point; a very popular area with watersports. The creek is silting up, giving bridging access from Point Clear – a future concern calling for wider discussion and engagement with landowners to de-silt or identify other options to manage access. Scope to continue ranger presence on site for detailed beach-nesting bird monitoring, visitor engagement, and recreational disturbance reductions.

41 - Sandy Point (Colne Point) has the largest Ringed Plover and beach-nesting Oystercatcher populations – previous Bird Aware presence/signage at Point Clear was effective. The site is nearly joining up with Point Clear as a result of sediment deposition. Scope to continue the Share Our Shores project, with seasonal support, volunteers during the breeding season, better signage, improved fencing, and disturbance monitoring. Site would also potentially benefit from the zonation of seasonal access.

42 - Popular location for people to drop anchor and access the beaches, swim, etc. Existing signs advise not to stray to other areas, but need to be more obvious. Scope for 'interactive maps' – directing people to good places/encouraged for activities and identifying areas to avoid.

43 - Scope to work with the harbour master around speed restrictions and enforcement on the water. Could include buoys and engagement on the water, alongside potential resourcing of enforcement teams.

44 - Ferry Landing; watersports access point, although many people also access from the adjacent holiday park. Potential for summer signage about nesting birds and/or temporary fencing on the spit guiding walkers along a particular route to avoid nesting birds.

45 - Desire line here down to the salting/shoreline by existing sign. Opportunity to close it off.

46 - Scope to update signage by railway line (replace damaged Natural England signs).

47 - Scope to update signage in this area.

48 - Place services grant fund in place to excavate a Tudor fort – would benefit from discussion around timing and reducing disturbance. EA are also doing repairs in this area. Opportunity for future engagement, either when the works are finished or whilst it's happening (could include a story trail linked in with Bird aware, engagement alongside the Country Park, and signage across the site). Scope also for improved paths and dog-focussed engagement.

49 - Scope for targeted engagement with commercial dog walkers at Cudmore Grove Country Park. The second car park is also used by dog walkers and could benefit from engagement and signage (potentially including a community noticeboard). Also potential to identify circular routes to draw people away from certain areas at different times of year around Cudmore Grove Country Park, deflecting them from the beach/sea wall.

50 - Scope for engagement with the caravan park. Also, a launch point, so potential to target watersports too.

51 - Arlesford Lodge; water and beach access points, beach access would benefit from increased signage and ranger presence.

52 - Scope to increase buoys and signage (e.g. speed limited) for boats and other watercraft near Arlesford Creek, potentially working with the Harbour Master, as most of the disturbance in this area is water-based.

53 - Wivenhoe down to Arlesford Creek; launch points and jet ski's – scope for increased signage and ranger presence.

54 - Potential for signage and engagement at footpath by Wivenhoe Sailing Club.

55 - Potential for signage and engagement at moorings at Rowhedge.

56 - Potential for signage for jet skis/watercraft at managed realignment at Fingringhoe Wick EWT Reserve.

57 - Pyefleet Channel; seals loafing at the saltmarsh at this point (towards the Strood), with boats travelling to see them from Brightlingsea and elsewhere – scope for water-based engagement (limited onshore access).

58 - Waldegraves Farm Caravan Park; water sports launch point. Scope for signage, as well as engagement with the caravan park and watersports community.

59 - Shingle island located 200m offshore from Waldegraves Holiday Park is important for waders and gulls, terns, etc. It's currently a handy point to paddle out to from the holiday park. Scope to reduce landing and disturbance to the birds using the island via engagement and signage.

60 - Drones and kite surfers launch from West Mersea and cause disturbance around Old Hall Marshes and Tollesbury Wick; scope for engagement. Also scope to add bird information to Bathing Water signage at West Mersea Beach.

61 - Tom & Teds dog walking area on the Strood greenspace; scope for engagement with dog walkers/owners.

62 & 72 - (Route runs between) Feldy Marshes; there will be increased access via the coast path when it opens, running all the way to Salcott - opportunity for engagement. Would potentially be beneficial to include Bird Aware messaging on coast path signage/interpretation.

63 - Hammerhead Jetty is owned by Colchester City Council and is a public launch point; scope for engagement/signage.

64 - West Mersea Yacht Club owns/operates the moorings; opportunity for engagement/communications.

65- Packing Shed Marsh Trust; scope to provide continued support and engagement opportunities (note that this would require water-based access).

66 - Cob Marshes; good population of breeding waders and winter roost site. Scope for continued support and engagement opportunities.

67 - Old Hall Marshes; scope to extend and continue the work already being undertaken by Bird Aware (potentially with additional volunteer support), with planned work for next autumn. Seasonal ranger roles work well, but accessibility routes need to be considered. The combination of Share our Shores messaging, habitat creation, and the work of Bird Aware have all led to increases in on-site Ringed Plover activity and lowered levels of disturbance. Note that access across the site may require the use of an off-road vehicle, with associated time/costs associated with purchase/hire and staff training (one off cost per ranger renewed every 3 years).

68 - Copt Hall (National Trust); scope for Bird Aware Essex Coast to work with the Trust, potentially via signage and dog-focussed engagement in the site car park.

69 - Scope for engagement along seawall. Would potentially be beneficial to include Bird Aware messaging on coast path signage/interpretation. Potential to support current and future BUDS island creation in this area and provide dedicated ranger time.

70 - Disturbance from boats landing, anglers, low helicopters. Opportunity for a water-based ranger (or water-based access for the Bird Aware Essex Coast team) and scope to identify refuge areas. All islands within the Blackwater (e.g. Little Cob, Great Cob, etc.) have many roosting/wintering birds and monitoring would be beneficial here. A new BUDS location is also planned in the vicinity, with advance engagement with water users (concerning the importance of the new habitat for birds and requests not to land there) potentially also proving beneficial.

71 - Abbotts Hall Farm Nature Reserve will have an access point resulting from the opening of the UK Coast Path. It's likely that there will be no dog access into the farm, but the coast path will allow dogs – scope for ranger presence and visitor management, including signage and interpretation. A people counter is already in place here but may need upgrading at some point.

73 - Kayaks, stand-up paddleboards, and drones visit Old Hall Creek, although it's unclear where they are launching from. The whole area is important for birds, as it's usually relatively quiet. Also scope for engagement in the nearby Tollesbury Marina.

74 - Lauriston Farm and Goldhanger Creek area: potentially key location for engagement with both landowners and site users, and also important for birds. Scope for signage and targeted engagement with dog walkers on sea wall, with some potential scope for screening (although at a difficult location).

75 - Goldhanger pub; scope for engagement and important for birds.

76 - Osea Seawall also an important roost site towards Goldhanger, with scope for ranger stationing and patrols.

77 - Possible launch point; scope for ranger present and signage, etc.

78 - Osea Road Caravan Park & Heybridge Basin; scope for engagement at both. Note that the park is being extended which may lead to an increase in people accessing the seawall and estuary – need to consider future engagement.

79 - New BUDS project by roost at Northey Island. Would benefit from working alongside the National Trust to undertake monitoring and/or engagement with people on the water, with potential to enforce no landings.

80 - Planned enlargement at Osea Caravan Park; may affect Osea Island roost.

81 - Heybridge Basin and Gravel Pits likely comprise functionally linked land; scope for engagement with landowners about usage (although noted to be potentially contentious) and update of existing interpretation materials.

82 - Maldon Council funds the role of River Bailiff on the Blackwater. Scope for Bird Aware to support the service, which would be beneficial in the event of BUDS-related habitat creation.

83 - Promenade Park: key engagement location with potential for improved interpretation and dog-focused engagement.

84 - Northey Causeway; scope for renewed engagement and signage (although issues with vandalism) on access to the causeway, in partnership with the National Trust. Focus on Promenade Park also, as the main access point towards the causeway.

85 - Maylandsea is a popular site for boat and watercraft launches; scope for engagement. A people counter is already in place here but may need upgrading at some point.

86 - Steeple Point; popular for boat launching and watercraft – scope for engagement. Jet ski access from the slipway is also an issue which may benefit from targeted interventions, including partnering with the caravan park and council, alongside enforcement.

87 - St Lawrence supports intertidal seagrass (an SAC feature) subject to restoration activities; opportunity to ensure ongoing protection.

88 - Caravan park is subject to ongoing restoration works and will likely be busier in the future – would benefit from comms links, engagement, and partnership working. The location is an important access point for water-based activities, with scope for targeted visitor and landowner engagement.

89 - The slipway near the caravan park is likely to be more frequently used in the future. Also scope for engagement at rejuvenating saltmarsh area alongside Promenade Way.

90 - Opportunity for engagement with marina.

91 - Scope for engagement with Outdoor Essex at Bradwell Marina, alongside signage for paddlecraft at slipways, etc.

Dengie & Crouch and Roach Estuaries

92 - Scope for signage/ranger point at public car park near Bradwell Power Station.

93 - Opportunity to check for antisocial behaviour (e.g. off-road bikes), install barriers, or support landowners/liase with police.

94 - Scope for signage to deter people walking out to the wader roost. Protection also of breeding birds, potentially including temporary fencing. Some monitoring along this stretch may also prove beneficial to allow for adaptive management/adjustment of the site-based approach.

95 - Potential for engagement with the Church of England and community settlement to the north re: info about birds/disturbance at St Peter's Chapel, with scope to install signage at the latter.

96 - Scope to install a new people counter at St Peter's Chapel car park and update the existing signage.

97 - Scope to reduce promotion/deter cyclists along the Dengie coastline – cyclists are not legally allowed along sea wall/public footpaths in this area already.

98 - Shell Bank; nesting site for Little Tern – scope for signage and additional monitoring.

99 - Potential paddlecraft launch point; scope for engagement with the landowner, alongside possible ranger presence and signage.

100 - Potential to work with local websites/operators to promote certain routes (hiking is currently promoted near Montsale).

101 - Potential paddlecraft launch point & angling location; scope to engage with the landowner, alongside possible ranger deployment and signage.

102 - Scope to engage with local landowners about access to the east of Burnham-on-Crouch.

- 103 - Scope for engagement with the new owners of the Wallasea Island foot ferry (potentially signage/info on ferry).
- 104 - Riverside Park; scope for engagement with dog walkers, with an aspiration to keep use within the park and off the intertidal area – possible SANG potential also.
- 105 - Scope for engagement with yacht clubs/marina at Burnham-on-Crouch.
- 106 - Creeksea launch area with road access; potential engagement point/liaison with landowners.
- 107 - Marina south of Althorne station; scope for community engagement and leafleting/engagement with visitors to the Crouch vineyards.
- 108 - Scope for engagement with the Bridgemarsh Island Trust (wildfowlers) and Crouch Harbour Master re: jet skis in the creeks.
- 109 - Blue House Farm; scope for providing information for dog walkers, including keeping out of waterbodies, reedbeds, and important bird areas.
- 110 - Blue House Farm; scope to engage in monitoring of low tide access, in terms of disturbance risk. Would also likely prove useful at a couple of other locations along the Crouch.
- 111 - Blue House Farm; potential to support grazing and lambing and roll out engagement alongside robust fencing to target dog attacks and related disturbance. Also scope for volunteer involvement seasonal support potential.
- 112 - Scope for engagement with yacht haven/marina/sailing club near Stow Creek.
- 113 - Stow Creek high tide roost; potential to maintain a watching brief.
- 114 - Potential for interpretation boards and bird hide in the future at Marsh Farm Country Park along footpath near the roost area.
- 115 - Opportunity to protect islands around wader roost (Clements Green Creek – Marsh Farm Country Park).
- 116 - Scope to institute speed restrictions/signage around Clements Green Creek for water-based access.
- 117 - Kayak/paddleboard launch point directly from housing near to Clements Green Creek; scope for engagement/signage.
- 118 - Opportunities for fencing to protect fields from access at Marsh Farm Country Park, particularly during winter months.

- 119 - Scope to support Marsh Farm Country Park with engagement and signage, particularly around dogs.
- 120 - Scope for (ongoing) engagement with local community and the Town Council at South Woodham Ferrers.
- 121 - Potential to engage with the Harbour Master/water police/community to reduce issues with jet skis.
- 122 - Scope for engagement alongside greenspace area.
- 123 - Two yacht clubs and water ski club at South Woodham Ferrers; potential engagement opportunity.
- 124 - Scope for engagement with Eyott Sailing Club.
- 125 - Woodham Fen wader roost; opportunity to reinstate people counter. A pressure point with Open Access, which adds to its vulnerability. Scope to support EWT here, potentially including increased ranger focus and access infrastructure.
- 126 - Scope for engagement with Hayes Country Park; residential access directly to the sea wall.
- 127 - West of Hullbridge and Kendal Park; opportunity to discourage dog access onto the saltmarsh via signage, screening, and engagement.
- 128 - Hullbridge; potential to upgrade people counter in Kendal Park. Also scope for engagement, signage, and interpretation.
- 129 - Scope for engagement at jet ski launch site near Hullbridge.
- 130 - Scope for engagement with the caravan park.
- 131 - East of Brandy Hole; key area for potential monitoring, as access may change in the future. Also, a (potentially occasional) jet ski launch point, which requires monitoring to confirm.
- 132 - East of Hullbridge; low levels of use from kayaks etc. Scope to maintain a watching brief.
- 133 - Lion Creek; narrow with a high risk of disturbance. Scope for ranger provision, screening, and/or signage to reduce disturbance here.
- 134 - Opportunity to run pop-ups at Wallasea Island with the RSPB, as necessary.

135 - Purdeys Industrial Estate; scope for ranger presence/engagement. There is a large boatyard here that may contain residential and visiting pleasure boats

Benfleet & Southend Marshes, Thames Estuary and Marshes, & Foulness

136 - Likely changes in access to Potton Island (MOD disposing of it); opportunity to maintain a watching brief.

137 - Likely changes in access to Rushley Island (MOD disposing of it); opportunity to maintain a watching brief. Scope to provide site-specific engagement and signage around seagrass with respect to trampling and mooring damage.

138 - Wakering Stairs; roosting waders, but recreational access to the saltmarsh - potential location for Ranger engagement, signage and leaflets. Scope to provide site-specific engagement and signage around seagrass with respect to trampling and mooring damage. There are popular guided walking tours to Foulness island via the Broomway from Wakering Stairs. Also note need for continued engagement with MOD over protection of Foulness SPA.

139 - Scope for engagement with kite surfing community on mudflats by East Beach. Scope to provide site-specific engagement and signage around seagrass with respect to trampling and mooring damage.

140 - Opportunity to produce a visitor management strategy for East Beach and Gunners Park, including focus on dog walkers, kite surfing, bait digging, and cockle digging, whilst ensuring engagement with local stakeholders (such as Coastwatch and Southend Association of Voluntary Services). Scope to provide site-specific engagement and signage around seagrass with respect to trampling and mooring damage.

141 - Increase in tourism (possibly from London) at East Beach via the train station; scope for engagement at the station and with other travel providers (e.g. C2C) and the bus stops around the site.

142 - Opportunity to enhance marker buoys around the accessible area of East Beach.

143 - Scope for additional resources, in terms of council (Bird Aware?) presence along Southend Foreshore.

144 - Near Gog's Berth; scope for jetty engagement with bait diggers, alongside signage and access management.

145 - Scope for engagement with Thorpe Bay Yacht Club.

- 146 - The car park behind Uncle Tom's Cabin is a key access point and engagement location, including with the members of the kite surfing club and beach hut group.
- 147 - Opportunities for engagement with organised events (fireworks in winter, runs in summer (e.g. RNLI September fun run), etc).
- 148 - Mullberry Harbour; running and other groups run over sea grass at low tide, accessing from Thorpe Bay Beach.
- 149 - Scope to stop the trampling of Eel Grass beds; potential to institute a voluntary non-anchoring zone?
- 150 - Southend Pier; huge scope for visitor engagement.
- 151 - Scope for discussions with commercial watersport providers around the entire Southend area.
- 152 - Scope for engagement with watersports enthusiasts and updated interpretation along Southend foreshore.
- 153 - Chalkwell/Leigh-on-sea area: scope for general ranger-led engagement and updating of signage, particularly at water sports launch points near café.
- 154 - Opportunity to support messaging and resources concerning dogs entering the water at Two Tree Island.
- 155 - Scope to collect data from the foraging community about their access and what they are gathering, with people accessing the saltmarsh. Also scope for signage.
- 156 - Two Tree Island; opportunity to provide better protection for the borrow dyke, with dogs and people currently entering the water.
- 157 - Two Tree Island; potential to institute a voluntary non-anchoring zone to protect the sea grass, alongside engagement and provision of better mooring options that don't damage the seabed.
- 158 - Scope to support EWT and the local authority with signage identifying Two Tree Island as a nature reserve before people access it.
- 159 - Scope for a redesign of parking to influence visitor movements, alongside a targeted reduction in antisocial behaviour.
- 160 - Scope for engagement, awareness raising, and signage at Two Tree Island.
- 161 - Scope for engagement with model aircraft operators flying at Two Tree Island.

- 162 - Potential to create a visitor management strategy for Two Tree Island.
- 163 - Scope for a redesign of parking to influence visitor movements, alongside a targeted reduction in antisocial behaviour.
- 164 - Paddlecraft, swimming and water entry point on slipway; opportunity for guidance, engagement, and signage.
- 165 - Canvey Point; access point to historical roost site. Opportunity to limit access, allow roost to re-establish, and carry out monitoring. The area down towards the seawall at the bottom of the point is also busy and has potential for engagement.
- 166 - Scope for improved signage and engagement (including leaflet boxes) at Canvey Heights Country Park.
- 167 - Jet skis and motorcraft an issue at Hadley Ray Creek; scope to work with the marine police to find the launch point.
- 168 - Scope for a watching brief, make sure the barriers to the lagoon are effective. Monty's Lookout also comprises a potentially useful engagement location.
- 169 - Hadleigh Country Park; scope for engagement with paddleboarders and also potential to create circular routes and SANG.
- 170 - Opportunity for information board (long walks from here to Two Tree Island). A people counter is already in place here but may need upgrading at some point.
- 171 - Opportunity for signage on community buildings and businesses near Thorney Bay.
- 172 - Scope for engagement and ranger focus at Thorney Bay.
- 173 - Scope for engagement with dog walkers and cyclists at Bowers Marsh, alongside installation of a people counter. A key roosting and feeding area at which it may be possible to provide support to the RSPB.
- 174 - Jet skis activity linked to Hadley Ray Creek; opportunity for speeding restrictions and limiting use.
- 175 - Slipway for jet skis at Wat Tyler Park; scope for engagement and signage.
- 176 - Bikes accessing seawall at Fobbing; opportunity to support actions to stop antisocial behaviour.
- 177 - Bikes accessing seawall at Fobbing; opportunity to support actions to stop antisocial behaviour.

178 - Functionally linked land near Great Garlands Farm; opportunity to protect it from development.

179 - Stanford Wharf; scope to restrict off-road vehicle access and raise awareness around nature conservation issues, support improved or additional signage across the site and at access points, and to jointly identify engagement opportunities with the landowner.

180 - Scope to introduce more barriers at Stanford-le-Hope Marshes.

181 - Stanford Wharf; scope to restrict off-road vehicle access and raise awareness around nature conservation issues, support improved or additional signage across the site and at access points, and to jointly identify engagement opportunities with the landowner.

182 - Illegal fishing occurs on the spit onto Mucking Flats; opportunity to control antisocial behaviour.

183 - Thameside Nature Reserve Car Park; potential engagement point for rangers. The second car park at the entrance to the reserve connects with the walking route from Coalhouse Fort and would potentially benefit from engagement, signage, etc.

184 - Opportunity to maintain a watching brief for bird use as the landfill near Mucking Flats is decommissioned.

185 - Scope to support reductions in antisocial behaviour (fires, etc.) near the lake.

186 - Scope to create, promote, and maintain a circular route between Coalhouse Fort and Thameside.

187 - Lagoon; opportunity for engagement and signage.

188 - Scope for ranger focus at Coalhouse Fort, with potential for signage (although issues with permissions due to sensitive nature of the site). Also, a potential engagement location here (in association with the public car park), with on-site facilities, café, etc. and potential scope for dog-focussed activities. Important to note that Council Ranger resources have been reduced on site.

Additional sites and opportunities added after workshop

189 – Hullbridge, potential for signage at access point to the PROW (Dengie & Crouch and Roach Estuaries).

190 – Scope for engagement at Kingsman Point, Brandy Hole Yacht Club and Riverside Café (Dengie & Crouch and Roach Estuaries).

191 - Potential for signage at access point to the PROW to the river, potential for engagement with South Fambridge residents (Dengie & Crouch and Roach Estuaries).

192 - Signage and leaflets at Riverside Village (Dengie & Crouch and Roach Estuaries).

193 - Baltic Wharf Industry Estate and Essex Marina - increased monitoring and potential for engagement here (Dengie & Crouch and Roach Estuaries). Note - There is also a large boatyard here and may contain residential and visiting pleasure boats.

194 – Scope for engagement at Eastend, Paglesham. Visitors to local pub likely to travel down the River Roach (Dengie & Crouch and Roach).

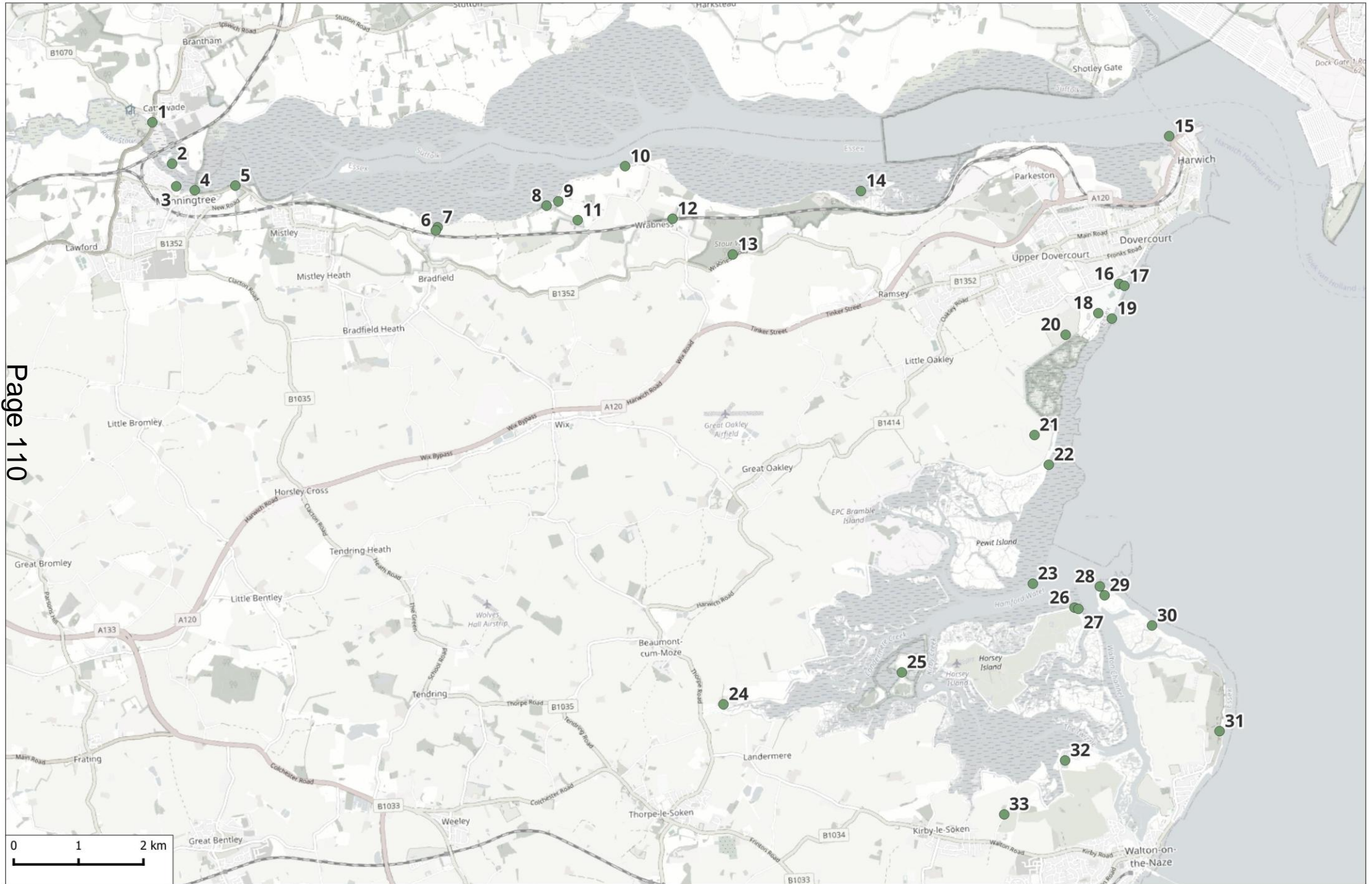
195 - Scope for engagement at Churchend, Paglesham. Visitors to local pub likely to travel down the River Roach (Dengie & Crouch and Roach).

196 - Scope for monitoring at Stannets Creek Reservoir (Dengie & Crouch and Roach).

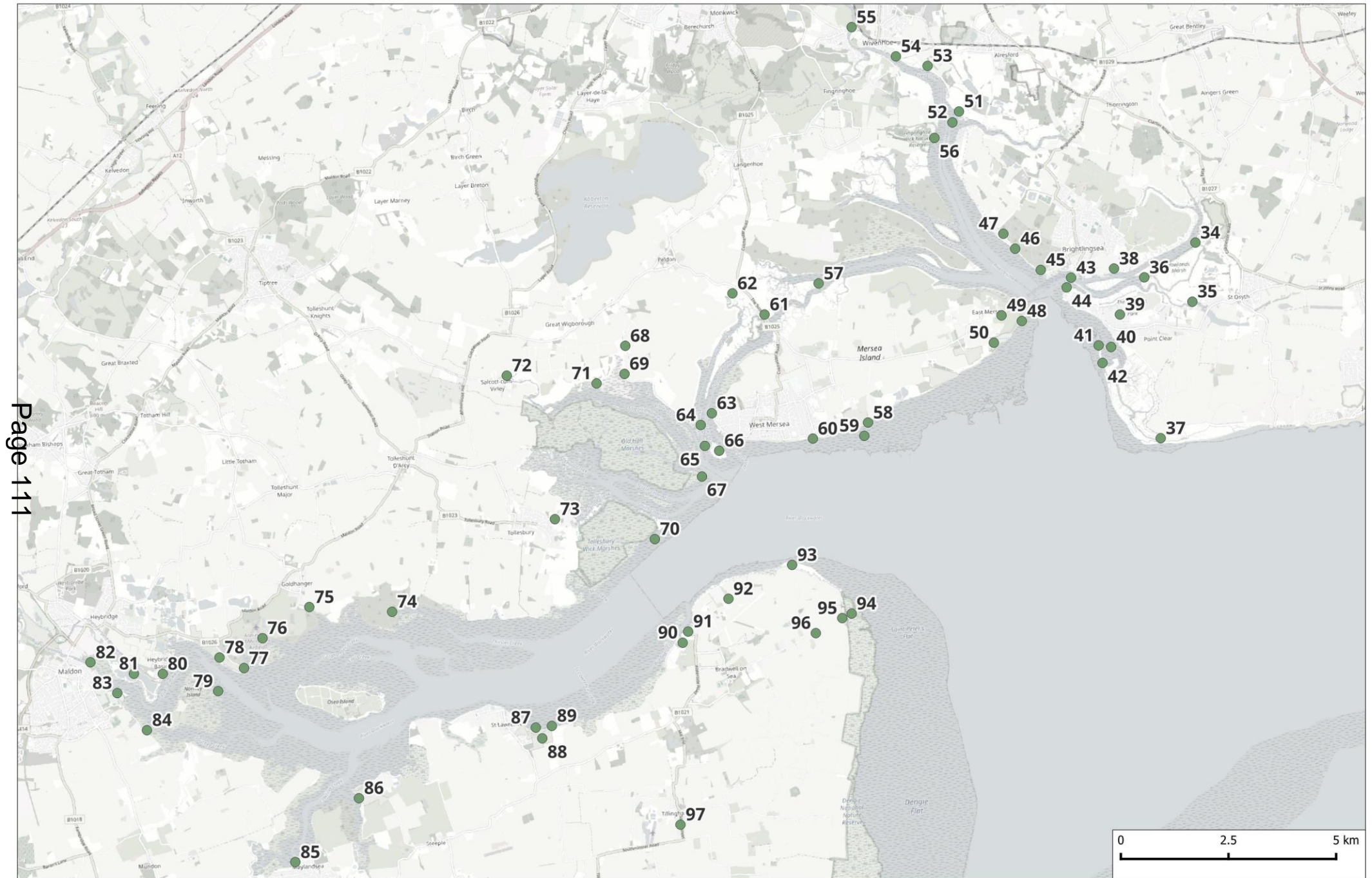
197 - Scope for ranger presence/engagement and signage/leaflets at Barling Magna Wildlife Reserve (Dengie & Crouch and Roach).

198 – Scope for engagement at Little Wakering / Barling (Dengie & Crouch and Roach).

Map 6: Stour and Orwell Estuaries & Hamford Water workshop output (note the Orwell Estuary is dealt with under the Suffolk RAMS) APPENDIX 1

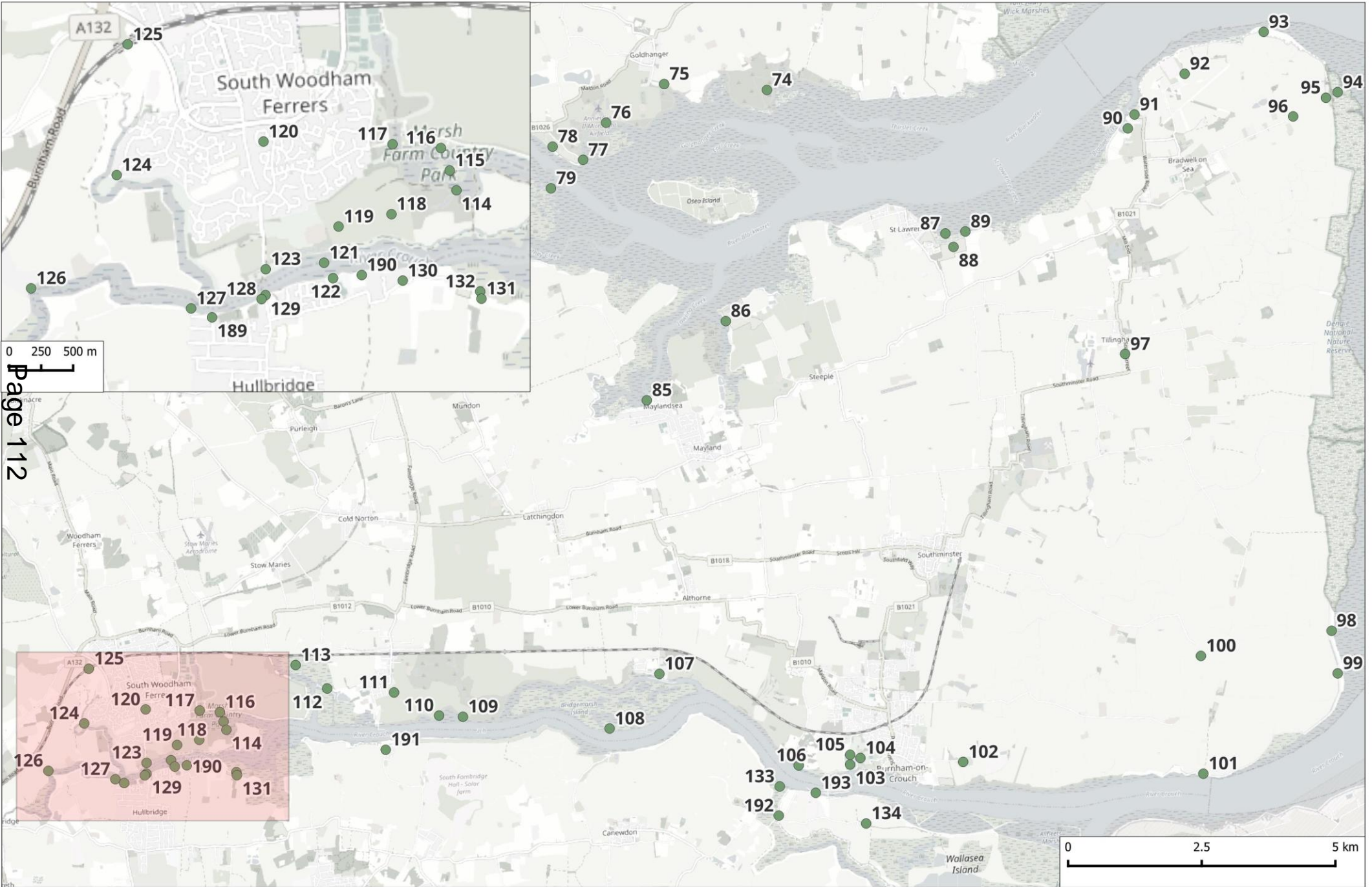


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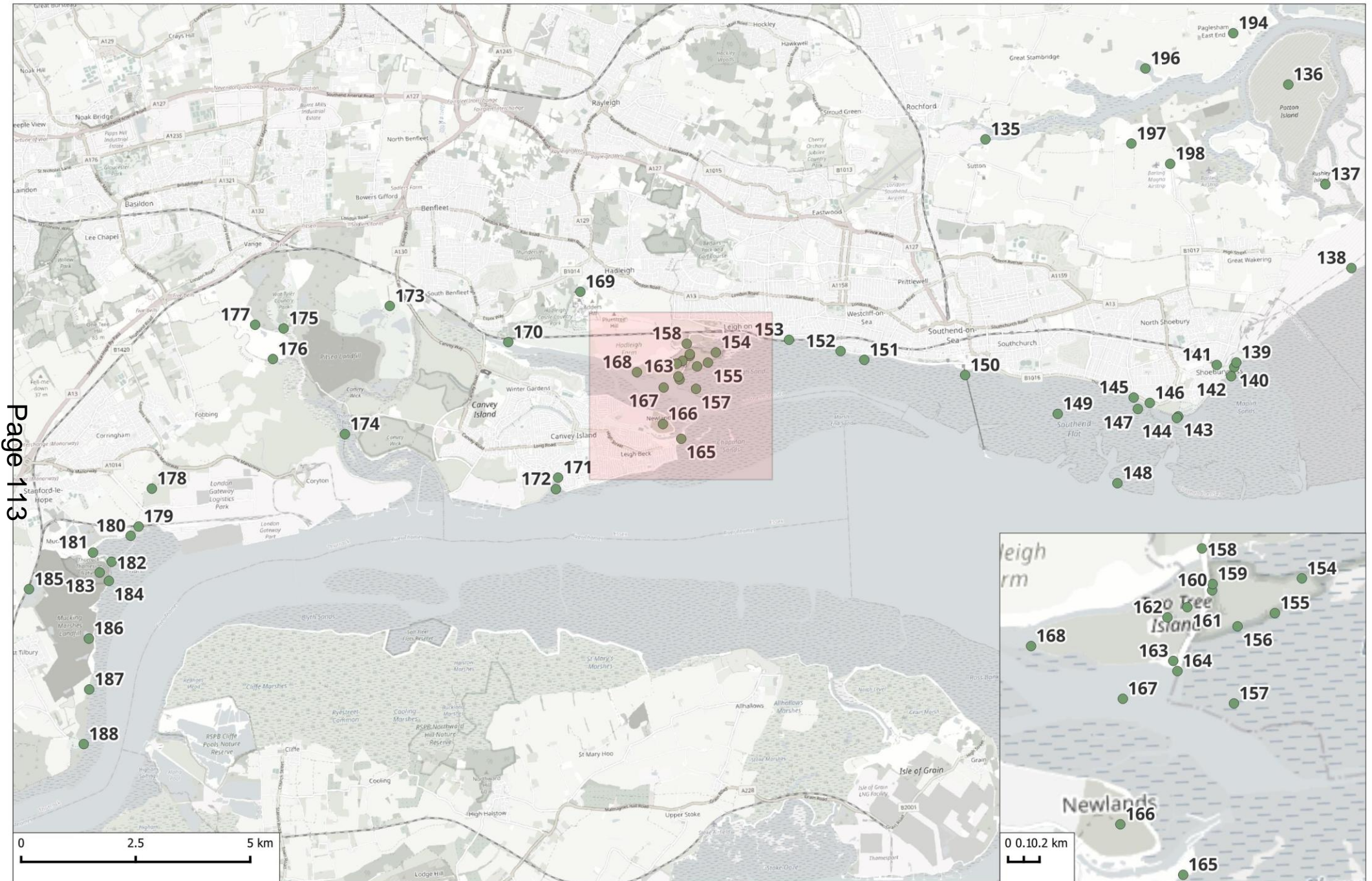


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Map 8: Crouch and Roach Estuary & Dengie workshop output (inset refers to red shaded area on main map) - note that point 135 is shown on Map 9 (Benfleet and Southend Marshes, Thames Estuary and Marshes, & Foulness workshop output)



Map 9: Benfleet and Southend Marshes, Thames Estuary and Marshes, & Foulness workshop output (inset refers to red shaded area on main map) - note that point 135 is an output from the Crouch and Roach Estuary & Dengie workshop
APPENDIX 1



Appendix 2: Estimates of housing growth potentially requiring mitigation

This appendix provides background on how the figures in Table 5 were derived. Notes on each column are provided after the table.

The basic formula applied for each authority is: (Local Plan Housing Requirement - Sites with PP and Completions) × % in RAMS ZOI

| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I |
|--------------|---|-------------------|------------------------------|---|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| LPA | Stage of Plan Preparation | Plan Period | SM/Published Target per year | Housing Requirement for Plan Period (stated/calculated) | Sites with PP (April 2026) | and completions before 2026 | % in RAMS ZOI | Result (E - F - G) * H |
| Basildon | Reg 18 Local Plan | 2023-2043 | 1,400 | 28,005 | 3,342 | 589 | 90 | 21,667 |
| Brentree | Reg 18 Local Plan Review – March 2026 | 2026-2042 | 1,115 | 17,840 | 5,070 | 0 | 90 | 11,493 |
| Brentwood | Adopted 2022, Call for sites - reg 18 2026 | 2026-2042 | 456 | 7,752 | 1,632 | 0 | 50 | 3,060 |
| Castle Point | Plan was submitted for Examination in January 2026 | 2026-2043 | 701 | 6,196 | 739 | 0 | 100 | 5,457 |
| Chelmsford | Reg 19 Local Plan Review, Submission 2026 | 2022-2041 | 1,437 | 24,915 | 2,510 | 2650 | 100 | 19,755 |
| Colchester | Reg 18 Local Plan Review - December 25 | 2026-2042 | 1,300 | 20,800 | 4,365 | 0 | 100 | 16,435 |
| Maldon | Exploring options to transition into the new plan-making system in 2026 | 2023-2043 | 583 | 11,660 | 1,736 | 403 | 100 | 9,521 |
| Rochford | Reg 18 consultation February – March 2026 | 2023/24 - 2042/43 | 689 | 14,469 | 2,013 | 0 | 100 | 12,456 |
| Southend | Preferred Approach Consultation 2025, reg 18 summer 2025 | 2025-2050 | 1,181 | 29,525 | 4,081 | 0 | 100 | 25,444 |
| Tendring | Reg 18 Preferred Options consultation | 2025 – 2042 | 1,063 | 18,071 | 4,541 | 679 | 100 | 12,851 |
| Thurrock | Local Plan Initial Proposals, reg 19 2026 | 2024-2044 | 1,077 | 21,540 | 1,200 | 0 | 50 | 10,170 |
| Uttlesford | Full Council in March 2026 to be invited to adopt the Local Plan. | 2021-2041 | 785 | 13,500 | 9,247 | 0 | Minimal | 0 |

Notes

B. Stage of Plan Preparation: The further away an LPA is from publishing a Local Plan (Regulation 18 or 19), the less certainty.

C. Plan period: while the plan period ends circa 2041 for most LPAs, there is one exception (Southend) which extends 10 years beyond until 2050.

E: Housing requirement figure (column D): In agreement with Natural England, the preferred approach was sourced from the Local Plan housing target. In some cases, a published figure is not available so a Standard Method calculation (annual SM x 15) is used. The final figure was confirmed with the LPA in most cases, with the exception of Thurrock.

- Additional note: Some LPAs will have published figures which are below SM, this means there could be some additional uncertainty until the Local Plan is examined. Some LPAs have stepped trajectories, meaning that delivery of housing is later in the plan period, for simplicity no adjustment was made to account for this.

F: Sites with planning permission: as of April 2026.

- Additional note: for simplicity no discount is made for lapse rates.

G: Completions that occurred before 2026: This cannot yet be calculated but an adjustment can be made later.

H: RAMS Zone of Influence (ZOI) Adjustment: percentage of the LPA's area within the RAMS ZOI.

- Student, care homes and specialist housing are accounted for in accordance with the Local Plan for simplicity. It is understood that each LPA will deliver these forms of housing which may attract a discount RAMS rate.

I: Result: Final Calculation

- (Local Plan Housing Requirement - Sites with PP and Completions) × % in RAMS ZOI

- $(E - (F + G)) * H$
- For Uttlesford, only a tiny area is within the Zone of Influence and no growth is anticipated within this area.

Appendix 3: SAMM costs

The table below summarises the mitigation measures as set out in the strategy and the relevant costs for each. These have been used to calculate the overall cost of mitigation. Costs are estimates only and intended to provide the overall level to set tariff, costs to be reviewed and updated as strategy implemented, and budgets adjusted according to housing growth. Where staff posts are referred to, 'fte' refers to full-time equivalent.

| Mitigation measure | One-off/ Capital cost | Rolling cost | Multiplier for rolling cost | Total cost | Notes on how cost calculated |
|--|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|-------------|---|
| Delivery Manager | | £69,800 | 80 | £5,584,000 | £48000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, equipment etc). |
| Ranger team leaders (2 posts) | | £104,500 | 80 | £8,360,000 | 2 fte posts, each with £35000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, personal equipment etc). |
| Rangers (6 full-time, 3 seasonal) | | £341,250 | 80 | £27,300,000 | 7.5 fte, each with £30000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, personal equipment etc). |
| Vehicles and other resources for rangers | | £55,000 | 80 | £4,400,000 | 4 vehicles, costed at: £450 per month to lease per vehicle, £1500 for livery, £2000 p.a. insurance, 15000 miles p.a. at 0.25p per mile running costs/charging. £2000 annual budget for team equipment. Rounded up to £55,000 to cover sundries (including parking charges) and personal mileage (some of which will still be required). |
| Dog project staffing costs | | £52,250 | 80 | £4,180,000 | £35000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, equipment etc). Costed in-perpetuity |
| Dog project resources | | £8,000 | 80 | £640,000 | Travel costs at 5000 miles p.a. and 0.45p per mile. Assumes use of own vehicle or wider project vehicles. Additional costs of £5000 to cover resources and equipment. Rounded up to cover sundry expenses, parking etc. |
| Communications Officer staffing costs | | £31,350 | 80 | £2,508,000 | £35000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, equipment etc). Costed in-perpetuity, part time (0.6 fte). |
| Comms costs | | £11,000 | 80 | £880,000 | Costs provide budget for printing, design, image sourcing, events etc as required. |
| Production of monitoring strategy & monitoring support | £17,500 | | | £17,500 | Initial budget to cover commission of a monitoring strategy and support to ranger team and delivery officer to ensure robust monitoring protocol and recording forms |
| Monitoring and data staffing costs | | £28,625 | 80 | £2,290,000 | £35000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, equipment etc). Part time (0.5 fte). Costed in-perpetuity |

| Mitigation measure | One-off/ Capital cost | Rolling cost | Multiplier for rolling cost | Total cost | Notes on how cost calculated |
|--|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|-------------|---|
| Monitoring resources | | £15,000 | 80 | £1,200,000 | Indicative budget providing resources for purchasing and replacing equipment and commissioning surveys. Costs likely to vary between years and will be set out in monitoring strategy |
| Visitor survey | | £35,000 | 16 | £560,000 | Cost allows for 16 repeat surveys - potentially one survey every 5 years for 80 years. |
| Education/community engagement officer | | £52,250 | 80 | £4,180,000 | £35000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, equipment etc). Costed in-perpetuity |
| Resources for schools and events | | £6,000 | 80 | £480,000 | Indicative budget providing resources to get material printed, develop school packs, teaching resources etc. Budget small but should be possible to work with other mitigation projects to borrow content, ideas and material etc |
| Engagement material for holiday parks etc. | £15,000 | | | £15,000 | One off cost to cover bringing in specialist help to contact parks and develop material. Delivery and further work as necessary by comms post. |
| Site specific projects | | £125,000 | 80 | £10,000,000 | There are 9 SPA/Ramsar sites and the budget therefore provides around £13,888 per annum per site. This is an indicative sum intended as a guide only, potentially sufficient to fund 1-3 small projects at each site. No requirement to ensure projects at each site each year and scope to deliver larger one-off projects at a single location if substantial mitigation benefit. Annual budget with scope for amount to flex between years depending on housing delivery and available funds. Projects such as creating new routes/paths or changes to car parks likely to be one-off and simply require money in a single year. 80 year time period provides scope for scattering of small projects around coast in a given year. |



Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025

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FOOTPRINT ECOLOGY

Footprint Ecology is a small ecological consultancy with an ethical focus. Founded in 2004 and based in Purbeck, Dorset we are catalysts for change, collaborating with organisations that share our commitment to sustainability and social responsibility. We create practical solutions to complex ecological challenges across a diverse portfolio including nature conservation, outdoor recreation and associated strategic planning.

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Summary

This report has been commissioned by Chelmsford City Council on behalf of the local authorities within the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership. It presents the results of visitor surveys undertaken across the Essex Coast, during the winter and summer 2025. Surveyors conducted face-to-face interviews with a random sample of visitors and also kept a tally count of everyone passing the surveyor. Interviews and tally counts were conducted over two days (16 hours) at 25 locations throughout the winter, and 16 survey locations during the summer – a total of 26 different locations were surveyed.

The aim of the survey was to better understand recreational use of the Essex Coast, as part of an update to the evidence base to inform the ongoing Essex Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) review. It follows on from previous visitor surveys to support the Essex Coast RAMS implementation in 2011-2013.

A summary of the survey results is provided below.

Tally counts:

- A total of 9,899 groups were recorded entering, leaving or passing a survey point.
- These groups contained 18,509 people, of which 2,371 were minors (under 18).
- A small percentage (448 people, 2%) were cycling / mountain biking.
- There was an average of 1 dog for every 2 people.
- From these figures, the mean group size was 1.9 people (of which 0.4 were minors).
- The number of people visiting on a weekend was often more than double those visiting on a weekday.
- Water-based activities (via a separate vantage point count) were recorded at 16 survey locations. These activities included boating (sailing or rowing), kayaking, paddleboarding and wind or kite surfing.

Interview data:

- A total of 1,793 interviews were conducted.
- Of these, 1,225 were conducted in winter and 568 during the summer.
- The majority of interviewees (93%) were on a day trip or had travelled directly from home. A further 4% were staying away from home or on holiday and 3% were staying with friends and family in the area.
- The most common activities undertaken by interviewees were dog walking (45%) and walking (35%).
- Over half of all interviewees stated that they visit the survey location at least once a week (56%) and of these 18% are visiting daily.
- Visits were relatively short, with approximately half (54%) of all interviewees spending less than an hour visiting the survey location. People tended to visit longer in the summer (typical visit duration around 102 minutes) compared to the winter (75 minutes).

- Most interviewees didn't show a preference in the time of day that they visited; of those that did show a preference, 22% said they would prefer to visit before 9am.
- Almost two-thirds of interviewees (60%) stated that they tend to visit all year round and 75% of dog walkers said the same. A further 19% of interviewees said that they would visit more during the summer months (June-August).
- Most interviewees arrived either by car (58%) or on foot (38%). The main mode of transport varied between survey points, for example all interviewees arrived by car at Blue House Farm while at St Lawrence and Kirby Quay most interviewees (83% and 75% respectively) arrived on foot.
- Close to home was the most commonly cited reason (39% of interviewees) for visiting the survey location on the day of the interview. Other reasons given included the scenery and views (20%), being good for the dog (11%) and for the rural feel/wild landscape features (7%).
- Routes were mapped as part of the interview, and of the 1,759 routes recorded, the median length of route taken on site was 3.0 km.
- The longest route was recorded by an interviewee who was sailing (34.2 km), there were also notably long routes mapped for a cyclist (32.3 km) and a walker (30.1 km).
- Interviewees provided 340 unique alternative locations that they also visit for their activity. These locations included Belfairs (including Park, Woods and Nature Reserve) given by 8% of interviewees, Maldon (3%) and Frinton (3%).
- 46% of interviewees could name a species or habitat present that were special to the area they had visited.
- Almost half of all interviewees were unsure how the area they had visited was protected for wildlife (48%). Of those that said they were aware of any protection in place for wildlife, 18% suggested there was a nature reserve, 8% suggested that the area was a SSSI and 7% mentioned the RSPB.
- Improvements that interviewees would like to see at the interview sites included better paths and surfacing (7%), more bins / less litter (6%) and more dog waste bins (6%).
- Factors that would encourage interviewees to visit a new park or greenspace in their area included creating spaces that were more natural / wild (16%), provision of an area to let dogs off lead (13%) and presence of a café (13%). A small proportion of interviewees (17%) said that they wouldn't change their visiting habits or indicated that nothing would make them visit a new park or greenspace.
- A total of 1,688 interviewees provided their full UK home postcode. The majority (89%) came from within Essex and a further 11% were visiting from outside the county.
- The median straight-line distance from home postcode to survey location was 3.2 km and the 75th percentile distance was 12.9 km.

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Survey work was coordinated by Fenella Lewin and undertaken by Joe Costley, Jain Davidson, Mark Ison, Jo Loman, Manuela Naprta, Marcus Turley and Phillip Precey. These data were entered by Manuela Naprta.

Cover photo © St Lawrence by Emily Rush.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the results of a visitor survey along the Essex Coast during winter (February and March) and summer (June and July) 2025. The visitor survey has been commissioned by Chelmsford City Council, acting as the commissioning body for the Local Planning Authorities within the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership. These surveys provide evidence to support the update to the Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS).

The Essex Coast

- 1.2 The Essex Coast comprises an extensive complex of estuaries and intertidal sand and silt flats, including several islands, shingle and shell beaches and extensive areas of saltmarsh. The coastline spans nearly 500 km¹, and is adjacent in part to settlements such as Harwich, Walton-on-the-Naze, Clacton-on-Sea in the north of the county and Southend and Shoeburyness to the south.
- 1.3 The nature conservation importance of the coast is reflected in a series of national and international designations. These include a series of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) classified for a diverse range of birds, a single Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a number of Ramsar sites. The following European sites² form the network of protected sites along the Essex Coast and are shown in Map 1 below:
- Stour & Orwell Estuaries SPA/Ramsar (only the southern shore of the Stour falls within Essex)
 - Hamford Water SPA/Ramsar
 - Colne Estuary (Mid Essex Coast Phase 2) SPA/Ramsar
 - Dengie (Mid Essex Coast Phase 1) SPA/Ramsar
 - Blackwater Estuary (Mid Essex Coast Phase 4) SPA/Ramsar
 - Crouch & Roach Estuaries (Mid Essex Coast Phase 3) SPA/Ramsar
 - Foulness (Mid Essex Coast Phase 5) SPA/Ramsar

¹ This is an approximate figure, derived using the shoreline within SPA boundaries (including islands with land above mean high water mark) and defined as the edge of selected habitats. The measurement reflects the shoreline rather than including any portions at sea or open water. The figure was derived from GIS layers used in the work of Ross *et al.* (2014).

² We use the term 'European site' to refer to both Habitats sites (those afforded statutory protection under the Habitats Regulations) and Ramsar sites (which are afforded similar protection through government policy).

- Benfleet & Southend Marshes SPA/Ramsar
- Thames Estuary & Marshes SPA/Ramsar (Essex part – Mucking Flats & Marshes SSSI only)
- Essex Estuaries SAC (comprising the Colne Estuary, Blackwater Estuary, Dengie, Crouch and Roach Estuaries and Foulness)

1.4 The designation, protection and restoration of European wildlife sites, such as those along the Essex Coast, is embedded in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended, which are commonly referred to as the ‘Habitat Regulations’. Importantly, amendments (the Conservation of Habitats and Species (amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019³) take account of the UK’s departure from the EU.

Recreation

1.5 The Essex Coast provides a strong draw for a range of recreational activities such as walking, sailing, paddle and wind sports, birdwatching, jet skiing, dog walking and fishing. Panter & Liley (2016) noted the presence of at least 210 car parks within 1 km of the relevant European sites providing around 18,000 parking spaces. They also recorded nearly 2,000 km of paths within the same area and mapped 143 jetties, 146 slipways and 40 marinas on the relevant shorelines. As such there are numerous opportunities across a wide area for recreational access.

1.6 Visits to the natural environment have shown a significant increase in England as a result of the increase in population and a trend to visit the countryside more (O’Neill, 2019). The issues are particularly acute in southern England, where population density is highest and the Covid-19 pandemic has changed access; there was a marked increase in recreation use during the pandemic (Burnett et al., 2021).

1.7 There is a strong body of evidence showing how increasing levels of access can have negative impacts on wildlife. Issues are varied and include disturbance, increased fire risk, contamination and damage (Harris, 2023; Liley et al., 2010; for general reviews see: Lowen et al., 2008; Marion et al., 2016).

³ The amending regulations generally seek to retain the requirements of the 2017 Regulations but with adjustments for the UK’s exit from the European Union. See Regulation 4, which also confirms that the interpretation of these Regulations as they had effect, or any guidance as it applied, before exit day, shall continue to do so.

- 1.8 However, it is now increasingly recognised that access to the countryside is crucial to the long-term success of nature conservation projects, enforcing pro-environmental behaviours and a greater respect for the natural world (Richardson et al., 2016). Access also brings wider benefits to society that include benefits to mental/physical health (Keniger et al., 2013; Lee and Maheswaran, 2011; Pretty et al., 2005) and economic benefits (ICF GHK, 2013; ICRT, 2011; Keniger et al., 2013; The Land Trust, 2018). There is therefore a challenge to address the considerable overlap between nature conservation and recreation, responding to the increasing demand for public access without compromising the integrity of protected wildlife sites.

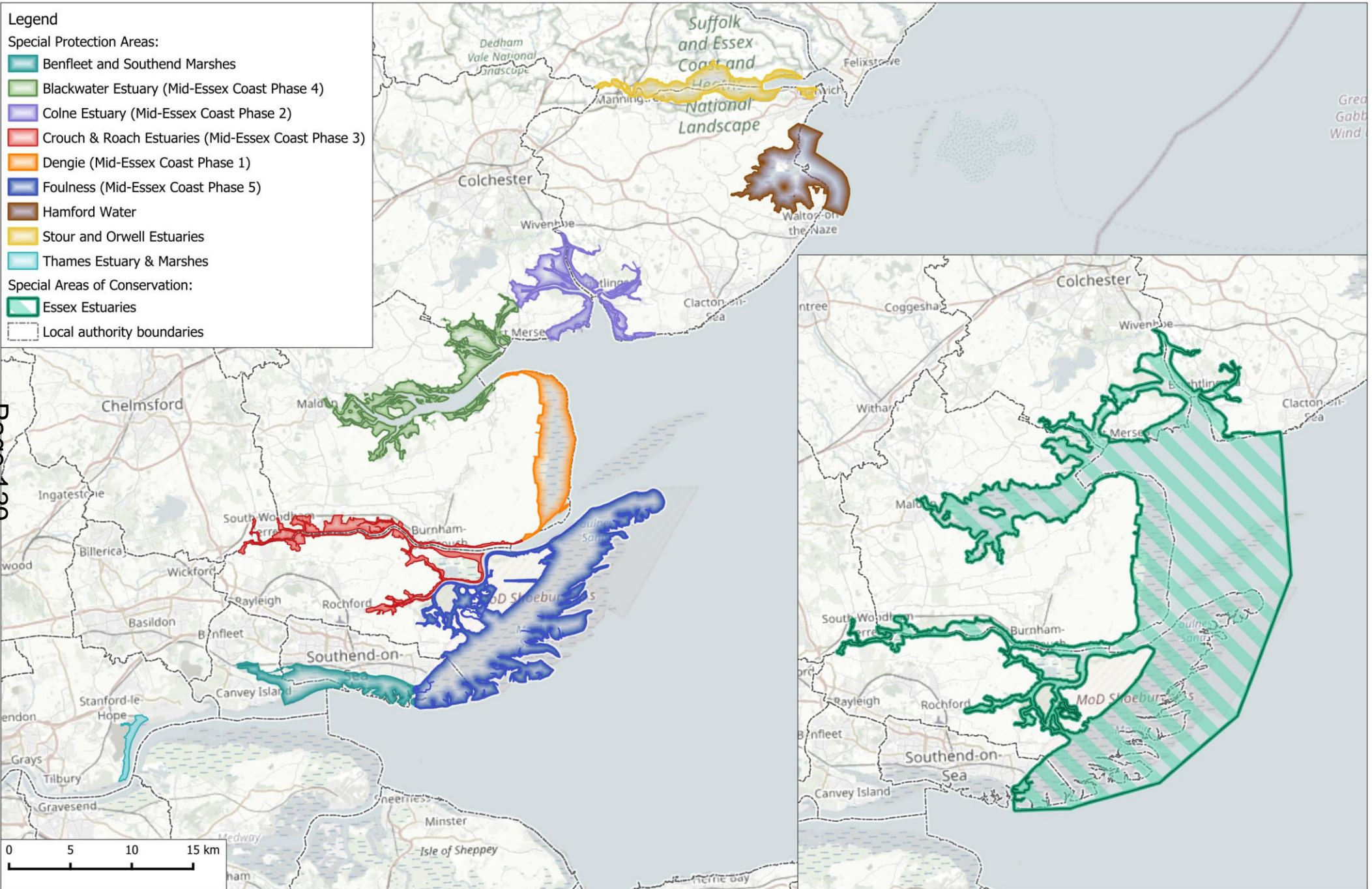
Essex Coast RAMS

- 1.9 In recognition of the issues relating to the in-combination effects of increased recreation from local housing growth and impacts to the Essex Coast, relevant local planning authorities (12 local planning authority partners) have established a strategic approach to mitigation, the Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) in 2019 (Essex County Council, 2018). An Essex Coast RAMS Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) followed in 2020. The RAMS is similar to a number of other strategic mitigation schemes around the country and sets out long-term strategic and proactive mitigation, ensuring relevant local planning authorities can deliver housing growth while meeting their statutory duties.

RAMS update and need for this survey

- 1.10 The RAMS will be updated in 2025/26 and this visitor survey was commissioned to help inform the evidence base underpinning the RAMS. Visitor data are relevant to:
- Identify current patterns of recreational use;
 - Pick-up any changes in use, such as different types of recreation since the previous surveys;
 - Provide information to inform design of mitigation, such as which types of access to target, how people behave;
 - Gather information on where people come from and the links between local housing and recreation use.
- 1.11 In addition, the results will provide baseline information to allow future surveys to be able to explore how mitigation delivery has influenced visitor use, how awareness of the importance of the coast for nature conservation

has changed and where any future gaps may occur. This will facilitate any further reviews and updates.



2. Methods

Overview

- 2.1 Visitor surveys involved face-to-face interviews with a random sample of people on the coast and direct counts of the overall number of people at the same locations. The data provides a snapshot of use from a sample of access points across the coast and cover both the summer and winter period. The survey approach matches the standard approach used by Footprint Ecology across the country and the evidence used to support mitigation strategies at multiple other European sites.

Survey locations

- 2.2 Visitor surveys took place at 26 survey locations across the Essex Coast (see Map 2 and Table 1). These were selected to include a representative range of access points including main car parks, pedestrian access points and also to ensure a good geographical spread. The locations were selected following a review of GIS information, discussion with the RAMS project manager, a review of previous visitor surveys and extensive site visits.
- 2.3 Previous surveys were undertaken by Colchester City Council on behalf of North Essex authorities between 2010 and 2013 and by Southend City Council in 2018 (see the RAMs -Essex County Council, 2018 - for further detail). Of the 21 locations used in the previous visitor survey work, 15 have been retained, and two further locations moved but within a similar area. Nine new survey locations have also been added.
- 2.4 Survey work took place in two pulses, to capture visitor use relevant to the SPA qualifying features (which for some sites include both breeding and non-breeding birds). A total of 25 survey locations were surveyed in the winter (when the non-breeding bird interest is present) and 16 locations (15 of which were also surveyed during the winter) were surveyed in the summer – see Map 2 for locations.

Interviews

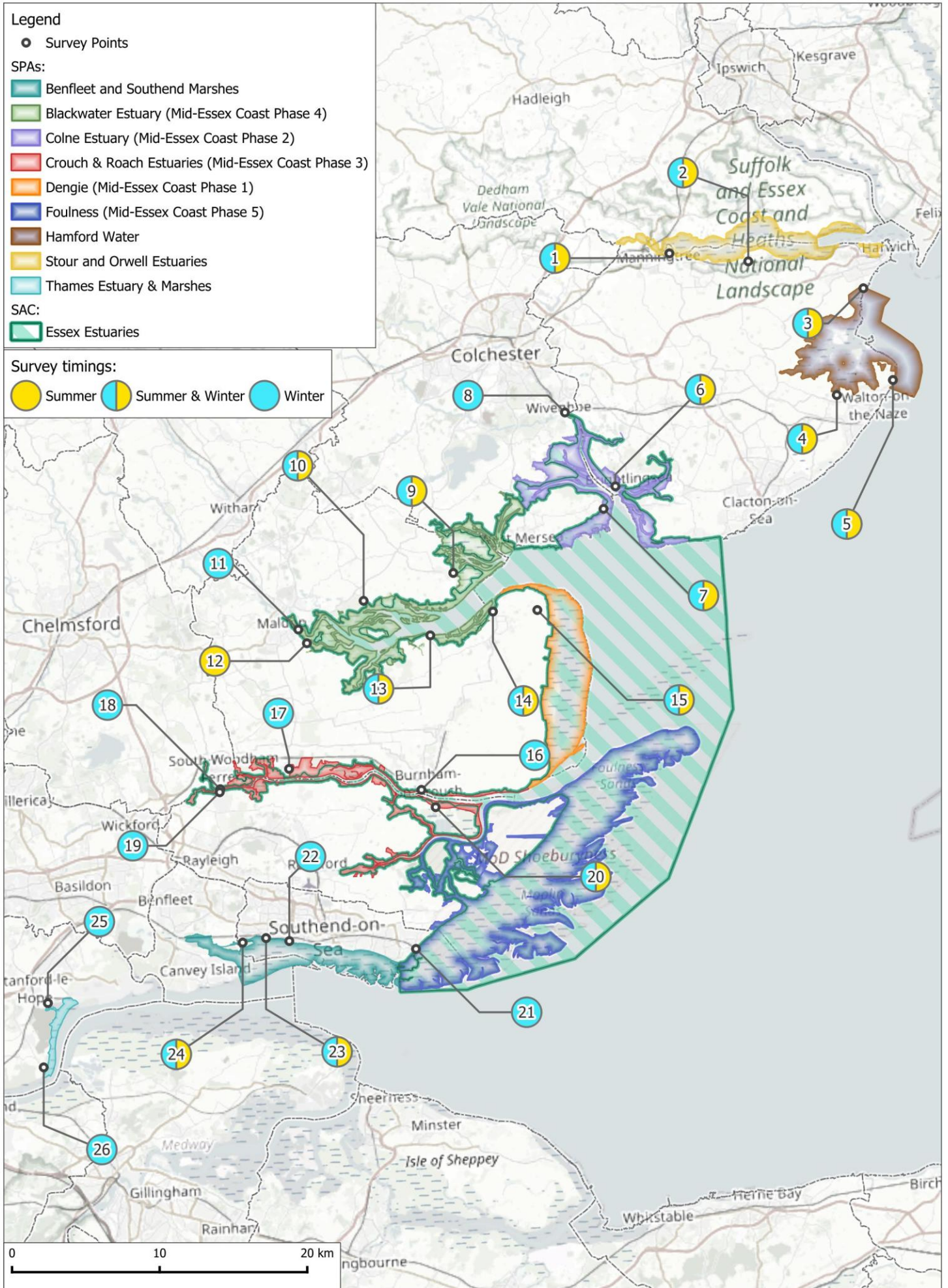
- 2.5 Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a random sample of visitors, by the surveyor approaching the next person they saw after completing the

- previous interview. Only one person was interviewed per group and no minors (under 18s) were approached or interviewed.
- 2.6 The surveyor kept a record of the number of visitors who were approached for interview but declined to take part or were unable to take part for whatever reason. They also recorded the number of people who were approached but had already been interviewed, so that they were not re-interviewed.
- 2.7 The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was designed using Snap XMP survey software and was conducted using tablets running the Snap Offline Interviewer app. The app enables interviews to be conducted offline and then uploaded when the device is next connected to the internet.
- 2.8 It is important to note that some of the questions had pre-determined categories to facilitate data capture, however these were not shown to the interviewee or read out loud, in order to avoid any bias. Responses were categorised by the surveyor on the tablet as part of the interview process.
- 2.9 As part of the interview, visitors were asked to describe the route that they had taken on site (or were planning to take). This was captured by the surveyor on a paper map, using a unique reference number to match it to the corresponding questionnaire data, and these routes were subsequently digitised into GIS for analysis.
- 2.10 After each interview, the surveyor recorded additional information about the number of people in each interviewed group and the number of dogs that they had with them.

Visitor Counts

- 2.11 Alongside the interview data, surveyors maintained a tally of all people seen passing them, recording the number of groups (of any size), individuals (total headcount), minors, dogs and cyclists. These counts allow a comparison across survey points in terms of visitor volume/footfall and indicate the proportion of visitors that were interviewed at each location.
- 2.12 In addition to tally counts, surveyors were asked to keep a record of all activity on the water during each session. This includes people accessing the foreshore for bait digging for example, as well as any watercraft, paddlecraft or surfing activities observed. This was not possible in all locations, as not all

survey points overlook the water, and for Two Tree Island this took place at the end of the session as a single snapshot count from the lower slipway.



Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025

Table 1: Details of the survey locations across the Essex Coast.

| ID | Location name | Grid reference | Description | Relevant SPA | Original RAMS Survey | Winter 2025 | Summer 2025 |
|----------|----------------------------|----------------|---|----------------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 | Mistley Walls | TM11377320 | Located to the side of the pedestrian path next to the estuary and bridge. | Stour and Orwell Estuaries | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2 | Wrabness Nature Reserve | TM16722314 | At the entrance to the nature reserve, by gate and signage. | Stour and Orwell Estuaries | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 3 | Irlams Beach | TM24522296 | On coastal path by steps leading down to Irlams Beach. | Hamford Water | x | ✓ | ✓ |
| Page 134 | Kirby Quay | TM22723224 | At path intersection towards the end of Quay Lane. | Hamford Water | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | The Naze | TM26522234 | Within the bounds of the car park, at the top of steps that lead down to beach/sea wall, by signage. | Hamford Water | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Brightlingsea Marsh | TM07721162 | Located on slipway near Bateman's Café. | Colne Estuary | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 7 | Cudmore Grove Country Park | TM06916147 | Located on coast path within country park, at the top of slipway leading down to the beach (path intersection). | Colne Estuary | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 8 | Wivenhoe Barrier | TM04302212 | Located near signage and bench in front of Wivenhoe Sailing Club. | Colne Estuary | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| 9 | Tollesbury Wick (EWT) | TL96736103 | Survey point is located through the gate behind the Harbour View Bistro. | Blackwater Estuary | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025

| ID | Location name | Grid reference | Description | Relevant SPA | Original RAMS Survey | Winter 2025 | Summer 2025 |
|----|-----------------------------------|----------------|---|----------------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 10 | Goldhanger Creek | TL90658084 | At path intersection on the coast path, behind the Goldhanger Parish Field. | Blackwater Estuary | x | ✓ | ✓ |
| 11 | Promenade Park | TL86234065 | Within the park, located next to the gazebo by the 'boating lake' on the sea wall. | Blackwater Estuary | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| 12 | Northey Island Causeway | TL86818056 | At base of causeway. | Blackwater Estuary | x | x | ✓ |
| 13 | St Lawrence | TL95473054 | Survey point is located by steps leading to the beach, access from the road and coast path. | Blackwater Estuary | x | ✓ | ✓ |
| 14 | Bradwell Marina | TL99421077 | Stand at the top of the slipway and intercept anyone passing. | Blackwater Estuary | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 15 | St Peter's Chapel | TM02428078 | Survey point at the end of car park by main gate and access point to nature reserve. | Dengie | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 16 | Riverside Park, Burnham on Crouch | TQ94579956 | Survey point at path intersection along sea wall, within Riverside Park. | Crouch and Roach Estuaries | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| 17 | Blue House Farm (EWT) | TQ85609970 | Tallies and interviews within the bounds of the car park, roaming survey point. | Crouch and Roach Estuaries | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| 18 | Marsh Farm Country Park | TQ80947957 | On edge of car park, next to signage along sea wall / coast path. | Crouch and Roach Estuaries | x | ✓ | x |

Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025

| ID | Location name | Grid reference | Description | Relevant SPA | Original RAMS Survey | Winter 2025 | Summer 2025 |
|----|------------------------|----------------|--|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 19 | Kendal Park | TQ80909955 | Located at the path intersection along the estuary, near the entrance to Kendal Park. | Crouch and Roach Estuaries | x | ✓ | x |
| 20 | Wallasea Island (RSPB) | TQ95542944 | At edge of car park by shelter, roaming where necessary. | Crouch and Roach Estuaries | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 21 | East Beach | TQ94209848 | Stand on edge of grassy area near signage and access onto beach. | Foulness | x | ✓ | x |
| 22 | Chalkwell Beach | TQ85625854 | Survey point along sea wall, near beach access and bowling green. | Benfleet and Southend Marshes | x | ✓ | x |
| 23 | Cinder Path | TQ84048856 | Located at the beginning of sea wall, adjacent to access onto Bell Wharf Beach. | Benfleet and Southend Marshes | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 24 | Two Tree Island | TQ82465853 | Located at entrance to nature reserve, opposite first car park on the island. | Benfleet and Southend Marshes | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 25 | Stanford Wharf (RSPB) | TQ69267812 | Survey point along Wharf Road, at road intersection where vehicle access to estuary is restricted. | Thames Estuary and Marshes | x | ✓ | x |
| 26 | Coalhouse Fort | TQ68983768 | Survey point on edge of car park, at entrance to fort complex and path intersection. | Thames Estuary and Marshes | ✓ | ✓ | x |

Survey timings

- 2.13 Surveys took place between 1st February and 28th March (winter pulse) and 1st June and 20th July (summer pulse) 2025. Two survey days were spent at each survey location during each survey pulse, comprising of one weekday and one weekend day. Each survey day comprised eight hours of survey effort, split into two-hour sessions to provide breaks for the surveyors and to cover daylight hours. This ensures comparable survey windows across all locations. The session timings were adjusted through the survey to fit with daylight, such that:
- Winter: 07:00-09:00, 09:30-11:30, 12:30-14:30 and 15:00-17:00 (February) or 07:00-09:00, 10:00-12:00, 13:00-15:00, 16:00-18:00 (March).
 - Summer: 07:00-09:00, 10:30-12:30, 14:00-16:00 and 17:00-19:00.
- 2.14 A total of (652.25) hours of survey effort were undertaken, with one session abandoned due to heavy rain and thunderstorms, and a further 1 hour 45 minutes lost across survey points due to access issues and inclement weather. During the winter surveys, days were generally dry and cold, with little rainfall (16% of sessions). Conditions varied during the summer surveys, with slightly more inclement weather (17% sessions with some rainfall) as well as some days with very high temperatures (up to 30 degrees) and dry, sunny weather. A summary of weather and total hours by survey point is provided in Appendix 2.
- 2.15 Bank holidays, large sporting events and other circumstances where visitor behaviour may be atypical were avoided.

3. Results: Tally counts

Overview of data

- 3.1 Tally data are summarised in Table 2. In total, 9,899 groups were recorded entering, leaving or passing the surveyor. These groups contained a total of 18,509 people (of which 2,371 were minors) and 448 of these people were on bikes. A total of 4,804 dogs were recorded with groups. From these figures, the mean group size was 1.9 people (of which 0.4 were minors) and 0.5 dogs. There was an average of 1 dog per every 2 people. Overall, 13% of the total people counted were minors (under 18s) and cyclists made up 2% of the people counted.
- 3.2 Few cyclists were recorded, accounting for 2% of people overall. However, cyclists were notable at Wivenhoe Barrier, and at St Lawrence, where they accounted for 14% of people counted.
- 3.3 Cinder Path was the busiest location, with almost 4,500 people passing the surveyor during the survey period (32 hours total). Chalkwell Beach was the second busiest (124.3 people per hour, 1,988 total people passing the surveyor) followed by Promenade Park (68.5 people per hour). Surveyors recorded the most minors present at The Naze, where 33% of people present were under 18, followed by Irlams Beach (26% were minors) and Kendal Park (17% were minors).

Winter and summer comparison

- 3.4 There was some variation in tallies between seasons. Whilst overall it appears that survey points were busier in winter (7,045 groups compared to 2,854 in summer), this is likely accounted for by the greater survey effort and different survey points. When compared by the average people per hour, survey locations in winter were busier, with an average of 32.1 people per hour compared to 22.5 people per hour in the summer, with the exception of The Naze and Brightlingsea Marsh which were notably busier in the summer compared to the winter. Group size was marginally larger, during the summer (2.0 vs. 1.8 in the winter) and there were also a greater proportion of minors present in the summer (16% vs. 11% in the winter).

Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025

Table 2: Summary of tally data by survey location. This includes all people and dogs passing the surveyor in any direction. 'Groups' includes lone individuals. 'People' is a total headcount, including minors (under 18s) and anyone using a bicycle. The highest three values in each column are highlighted in red. A total of 16 hours were spent at locations surveyed in only one season, 32 hours at locations surveyed in both summer and winter (see Table 1 for details).

| Survey location | Groups | People | Dogs | Minors | Bicycles | People per group | Dogs per group | % minors | % on bicycles | People per hour: Winter | People per hour: Summer |
|------------------------------|------------|--------------|------|------------|-----------|------------------|----------------|------------|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 - Mistley Walls | 175 | 311 | 65 | 33 | 7 | 1.8 | 0.4 | 11% | 2% | 10.6 | 8.8 |
| 2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve | 158 | 283 | 156 | 27 | 4 | 1.8 | 1.0 | 10% | 1% | 12.1 | 5.6 |
| 3 - Irlams Beach | 130 | 286 | 106 | 73 | 1 | 2.2 | 0.8 | 26% | 0% | 9.1 | 8.8 |
| 4 - Kirby Quay | 60 | 100 | 45 | 10 | 1 | 1.7 | 0.8 | 10% | 1% | 4.1 | 2.5 |
| 5 - The Naze | 532 | 1,366 | 201 | 447 | 9 | 2.6 | 0.4 | 33% | 1% | 32.1 | 53.3 |
| 6 - Brightlingsea Marsh | 737 | 1,197 | 233 | 151 | 39 | 1.6 | 0.3 | 13% | 3% | 35.2 | 39.6 |
| 7 - Cudmore Grove Country | 394 | 892 | 339 | 128 | 8 | 2.3 | 0.9 | 14% | 1% | 23.1 | 34.1 |
| 8 - Wivenhoe Barrier | 192 | 284 | 72 | 26 | 41 | 1.5 | 0.4 | 9% | 14% | 17.8 | - |
| 9 - Tollesbury Wick (EWT) | 116 | 197 | 73 | 10 | 9 | 1.7 | 0.6 | 5% | 5% | 7 | 5.3 |
| 10 - Goldhanger Creek | 251 | 472 | 188 | 39 | 22 | 1.9 | 0.7 | 8% | 5% | 16.2 | 13.3 |
| 11 - Promenade Park | 551 | 1,096 | 288 | 143 | 22 | 2.0 | 0.5 | 13% | 2% | 68.5 | - |
| 12 - Northey Island Causeway | 115 | 203 | 68 | 10 | 12 | 1.8 | 0.6 | 5% | 6% | - | 12.7 |
| 13 - St Lawrence | 108 | 140 | 72 | 18 | 19 | 1.3 | 0.7 | 13% | 14% | 4.8 | 3.9 |
| 14 - Bradwell Marina | 130 | 223 | 44 | 26 | 2 | 1.7 | 0.3 | 12% | 1% | 3.6 | 10.4 |
| 15 - St Peter's Chapel | 124 | 242 | 72 | 18 | 26 | 2.0 | 0.6 | 7% | 11% | 6.4 | 8.7 |
| 16 - Riverside Park | 248 | 401 | 115 | 33 | 13 | 1.6 | 0.5 | 8% | 3% | 25.1 | - |
| 17 - Blue House Farm (EWT) | 23 | 29 | 14 | 1 | 0 | 1.3 | 0.6 | 3% | 0% | 1.8 | - |

Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025

| Survey location | Groups | People | Dogs | Minors | Bicycles | People per group | Dogs per group | % minors | % on bicycles | People per hour: Winter | People per hour: Summer |
|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|------------|------------------|----------------|------------|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 18 - Marsh Farm Country | 399 | 923 | 209 | 76 | 24 | 2.3 | 0.5 | 8% | 3% | 57.7 | - |
| 19 - Kendal Park | 377 | 712 | 198 | 118 | 8 | 1.9 | 0.5 | 17% | 1% | 44.5 | - |
| 20 - Wallasea Island (RSPB) | 257 | 431 | 67 | 18 | 2 | 1.7 | 0.3 | 4% | 0% | 23.2 | 4.4 |
| 21 - East Beach | 384 | 616 | 231 | 58 | 37 | 1.6 | 0.6 | 9% | 6% | 38.5 | - |
| 22 - Chalkwell Beach | 1,188 | 1,988 | 387 | 174 | 27 | 1.7 | 0.3 | 9% | 1% | 124.3 | - |
| 23 - Cinder Path | 2,305 | 4,497 | 669 | 578 | 58 | 2.0 | 0.3 | 13% | 1% | 152.3 | 128.8 |
| 24 - Two Tree Island | 471 | 709 | 547 | 31 | 13 | 1.5 | 1.2 | 4% | 2% | 27.5 | 16.8 |
| 25 - Stanford Wharf | 121 | 189 | 115 | 13 | 12 | 1.6 | 1.0 | 7% | 6% | 11.8 | - |
| 26 - Coalhouse Fort | 353 | 722 | 230 | 112 | 32 | 2.0 | 0.7 | 16% | 4% | 45.1 | - |
| Winter tallies | 7,045 | 12,801 | 3,628 | 1,460 | 296 | 1.8 | 0.5 | 11% | 2% | - | - |
| Summer tallies | 2,854 | 5,708 | 1,176 | 911 | 152 | 2 | 0.4 | 16% | 3% | - | - |
| Total tallies | 9,899 | 18,509 | 4,804 | 2,371 | 448 | 1.9 | 0.5 | 13% | 2% | 32.1 | 22.5 |

Weekend and weekday comparison

- 3.5 Visitor numbers tended to be higher at weekends compared to weekdays. Overall, across all survey locations and both pulses of survey effort there were 65% of visitors counted on a weekend compared to 35% on a weekday. Visitor numbers were higher at weekends than weekdays at 23 of the 25 locations surveyed in the winter and 13 of the 15 locations surveyed in the summer (see Figure 1). Brightlingsea and East Beach were notable in having more visitors on weekdays than weekends during the winter and the same could be said of Cudmore Grove CP in the summer.

Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025

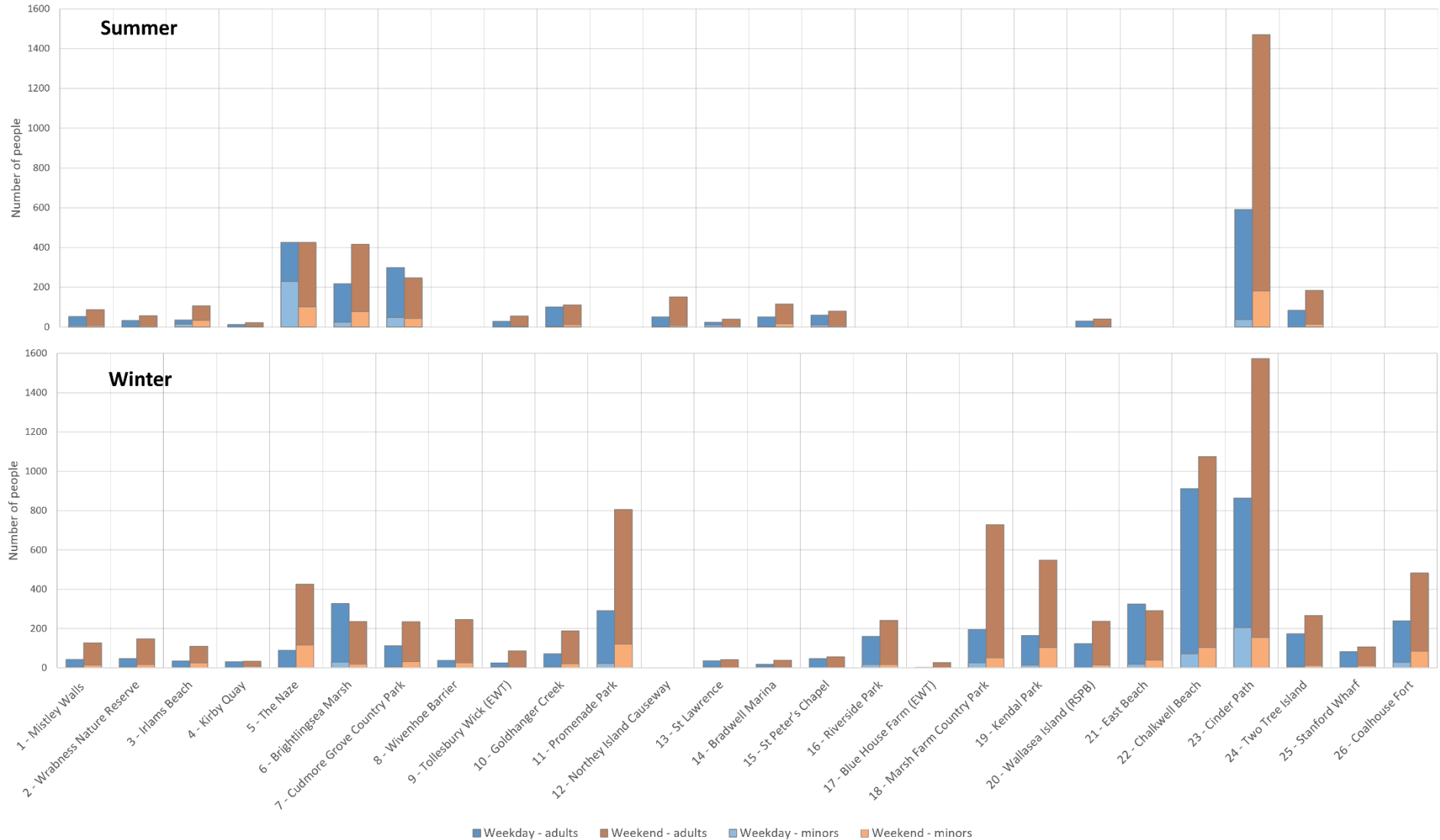


Figure 1: Number of people (adults and minors) counted at each survey location on weekdays and weekends. Note that Cinder Path total tallies were 3,043 people at the weekend and therefore was considerably busier than other sites (bar off scale).

Water Activity counts:

- 3.6 Where possible, surveyors kept a record of any activities taking place on the water. This was only feasible at 18 survey locations, as some did not directly overlook the water, e.g. Wallasea Island. At Two Tree Island the surveyor undertook a count from the slipway at the end of the survey session (i.e. moved location) whereas at the other survey points the counts were done from the interview location during the survey (and therefore are only approximate given the challenge of watching a wide area while interviewing).
- 3.7 These additional counts at the selected locations included any boats, watercraft, wind or kite surfing and activity along the foreshore. The data are summarised in Figure 2 below and in more detail in Appendix 3.
- 3.8 Water-based activities were noted most frequently at Two Tree Island, with activities present during 69% of sessions, and also at Chalkwell Beach (63% of sessions) and The Naze (44% of sessions).
- 3.9 Across all survey points, the data combined comprised:
- 39 observations of boats (either sailing – 16, rowing – 6 or otherwise undetermined);
 - 10 kayakers;
 - 9 paddleboarders;
 - 5 wind or kite surfing; and
 - 3 people accessing the mudflats for bait digging or metal detecting.

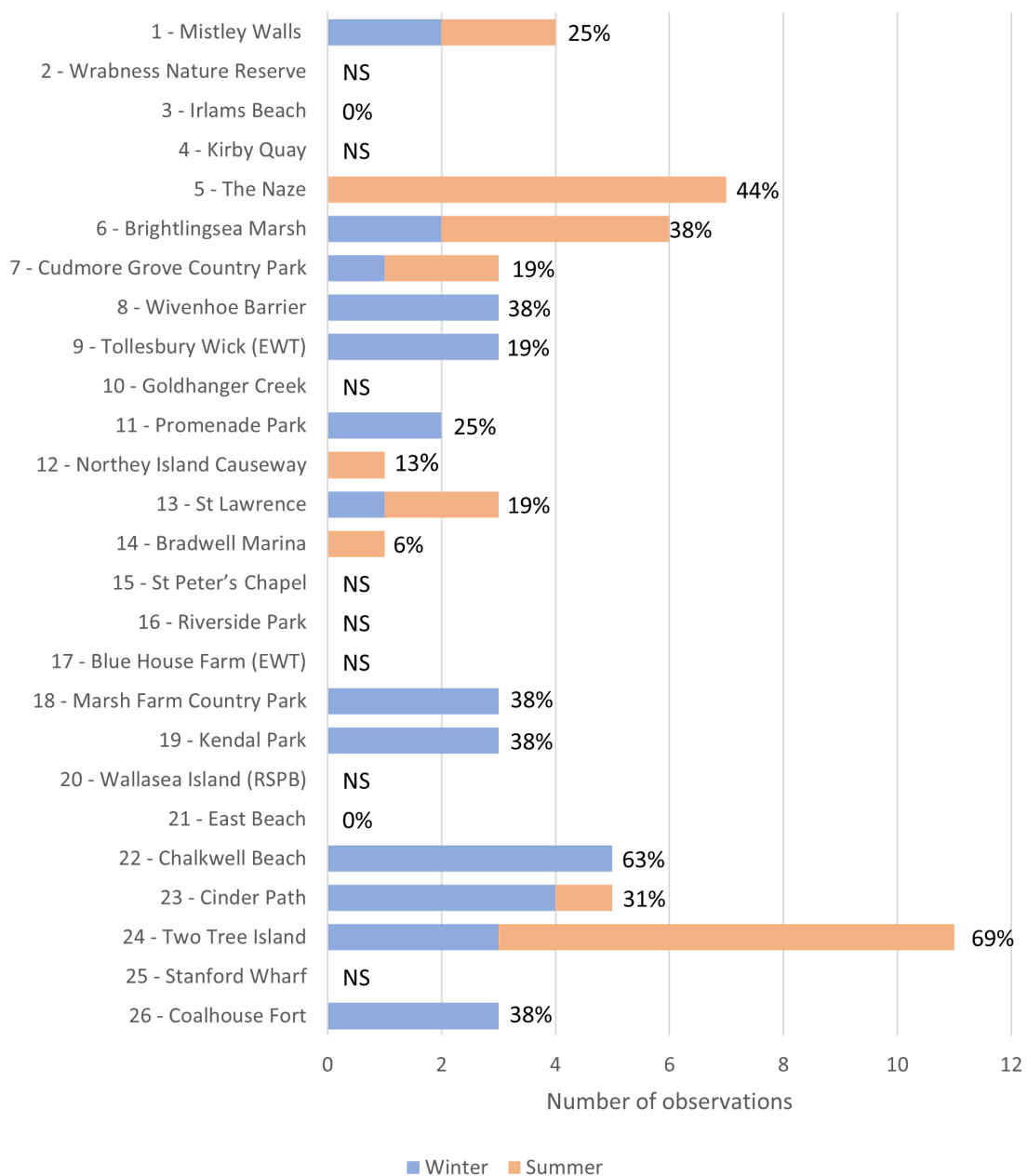


Figure 2: Summary of water activities recorded by survey location. Observations refer to individuals (including individual boats, kayaks etc). Percentages show the proportion of sessions during which water activities were observed (number of sessions differed per survey point). 'NS' is used where it was not possible to observe any water activities and therefore the survey point was 'Not Surveyed'.

4. Results: Interviews

Overview

- 4.1 A total of 1,793 interviews were conducted, with 1,225 in the winter and a further 568 in the summer. Of these 44% (796 interviews) took place on weekdays and 56% (997 interviews) on weekends (see Table 3). The median interview time was just over 6 minutes per interview.
- 4.2 Most interviewees were on their own (845 interviewees, 47%) or with one other person (722 interviewees, 40%). Most remaining groups were of between 3 and 14 people, with a notable exception of a school group of 130 people visiting at Cinder Path. The mean group size (including those on their own) was 1.8, and 165 groups had minors with them.
- 4.3 846 interviewees had 1 or more dogs with them, with a total of 1,092 dogs, roughly 0.6 dogs per interviewee (across all interviewees). At least 380 (35%) of the dogs were noted by the surveyor as off the lead at the time of interview.
- 4.4 A further 1,106 (36%) were approached for interview but declined for a variety of reasons. These included 386 runners/joggers/walkers (31%) who weren't prepared to stop, 332 individuals (26%) who said they had very little time and 159 (13%) who said they were not interested. A further 129 individuals (10%) cited other reasons for not participating in the survey and for 59 individuals (5%) the reasons for refusal were unclear. A number of people also cited the weather (e.g. being too hot, cold, rainy) for their reason of being unable to participate (41 individuals, 3%).
- 4.5 There were also 25 individuals who were approached for interviews, who stated that there was a language barrier which meant they felt unable to participate (1%) and a further 131 individuals who were approached for an interview but had already participated (4%).
- 4.6 Of those who did not participate, 450 (36%) were walking without a dog, 394 people (31%) were dog walking, 281 people (22%) were jogging, and a small number were either cycling (39 people) or appeared to be commuting (23 people).

Table 3: Summary of total interviews and refusals by survey location. Shading indicates survey season, blue for locations surveyed in winter only, orange indicates locations surveyed in summer only and unshaded (green styling) indicates locations surveyed in both seasons.

| Survey Point | Weekday | Weekend | Total interviews | Already interviewed | Language issues | Refusals |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1 - Mistley Walls | 14 | 21 | 35 | 0 | 6 | 57 |
| 2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve | 18 | 27 | 45 | 4 | 1 | 20 |
| 3 - Irlams Beach | 12 | 21 | 33 | 3 | 3 | 30 |
| 4 - Kirby Quay | 10 | 14 | 24 | 2 | 0 | 15 |
| 5 - The Naze | 29 | 55 | 84 | 9 | 1 | 55 |
| 6 - Brightlingsea Marsh | 46 | 44 | 90 | 8 | 3 | 78 |
| 7 - Cudmore Grove | 55 | 53 | 108 | 1 | 0 | 39 |
| 8 - Wivenhoe Barrier | 13 | 26 | 39 | 4 | 2 | 29 |
| 9 - Tollesbury Wick | 22 | 31 | 53 | 2 | 0 | 26 |
| 10 - Goldhanger Creek | 35 | 46 | 81 | 24 | 0 | 30 |
| 11 - Promenade Park | 22 | 20 | 42 | 1 | 0 | 58 |
| 12 - Northey Island Causeway | 15 | 24 | 39 | 3 | 0 | 14 |
| 13 - St Lawrence | 17 | 29 | 46 | 11 | 3 | 26 |
| 14 - Bradwell Marina | 21 | 30 | 51 | 1 | 0 | 28 |
| 15 - St Peter's Chapel | 27 | 38 | 65 | 1 | 0 | 19 |
| 16 - Riverside Park | 30 | 32 | 62 | 3 | 0 | 33 |
| 17 - Blue House Farm | 1 | 13 | 14 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 18 - Marsh Farm Country Park | 34 | 48 | 82 | 1 | 0 | 18 |
| 19 - Kendal Park | 33 | 45 | 78 | 1 | 0 | 27 |
| 20 - Wallasea Island | 40 | 53 | 93 | 5 | 0 | 12 |
| 21 - East Beach | 40 | 47 | 87 | 2 | 1 | 62 |
| 22 - Chalkwell Beach | 44 | 38 | 82 | 0 | 1 | 156 |
| 23 - Cinder Path | 98 | 102 | 200 | 2 | 2 | 194 |
| 24 - Two Tree Island | 58 | 85 | 143 | 31 | 0 | 26 |
| 25 - Stanford Wharf | 25 | 21 | 46 | 10 | 0 | 26 |
| 26 - Coalhouse Fort | 37 | 34 | 71 | 1 | 2 | 26 |
| Total | 796 | 997 | 1,793 | 131 | 25 | 1,106 |

Type of visit (Q1)

4.7 Most interviewees (1,665 interviewees, 93%) were on a day trip or had travelled directly from their home (Table 4). A further 70 interviewees (4%) were staying away from home (e.g. static caravan, mobile home) or on holiday in the area and a further 47 interviewees (3%) were staying with friends or family. A few interviewees (11, <1%) didn't fit into any of these categories. Interviewees on holiday accounted for a greater proportion of visitors in the summer compared to the winter. Locations where tourists accounted for a particularly high percentage of visitors in the summer were St Peter's Chapel (34% of visitors staying away from home), Irlams Beach (33%), St Lawrence (26%) and Cudmore Grove (25%).

Table 4: Numbers (%) of visitors by type of visit and season

| Type of visit | Summer | Winter | Total |
|--|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| On a day trip/short visit and travelled directly from home | 490 (86) | 1,175 (96) | 1,665 (93) |
| Staying away from home, e.g. static caravan, mobile home or on holiday | 54 (10) | 16 (1) | 70 (4) |
| Short trip/short visit & staying away from home with friends or family | 19 (3) | 28 (2) | 47 (3) |
| None of the above | 5 (1) | 6 (0) | 11 (1) |
| Total | 568 (100) | 1,225 (100) | 1,793 (100) |

Main activity (Q2)

4.8 The main activities interviewees stated they were undertaking (see Figure 3) were dog walking (800 interviewees⁴, 45%) and walking (619 interviewees, 35%).

4.9 There was some variation between seasons, with 50% (616 interviewees) stating that they were dog walking in the winter compared to 32% (184 interviewees) in the summer (across all survey points). More interviewees stated that they were visiting for photography during the winter (22 interviewees, 2% in the winter and only one interviewee (<1%) in the summer). More interviewees stated they were undertaking water-based activities in the summer, including sailing/accessing boat (22 interviewees,

⁴ Note that 846 interviewees had dogs with them at the time of the interview – 46 of these stated that their main activity wasn't dog walking but some other activity instead.

4% in summer vs 6 interviewees, <1% in winter) and swimming (10 interviewees, 2% in summer vs. 3 interviewees, <1% in winter).

4.10 Some interviewees stated 'other' activities which did not fit into pre-determined categories. These included 'Visiting the chapel' (12 interviewees, <1%) which occurred almost exclusively at St Peter's Chapel, feeding the birds (13 interviewees, <1%), fossil hunting (11 interviewees, <1%) as well as exercising, admiring the scenery and accessing the beach.

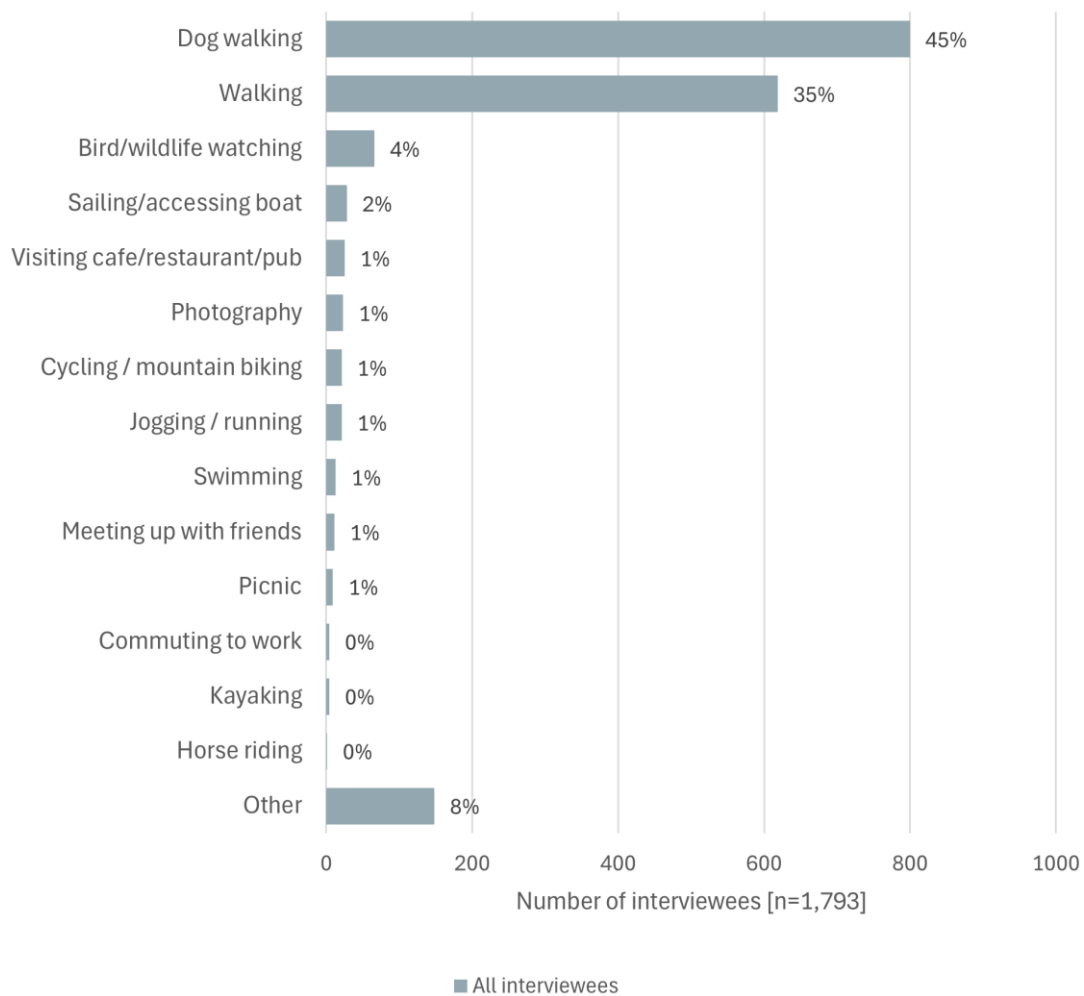
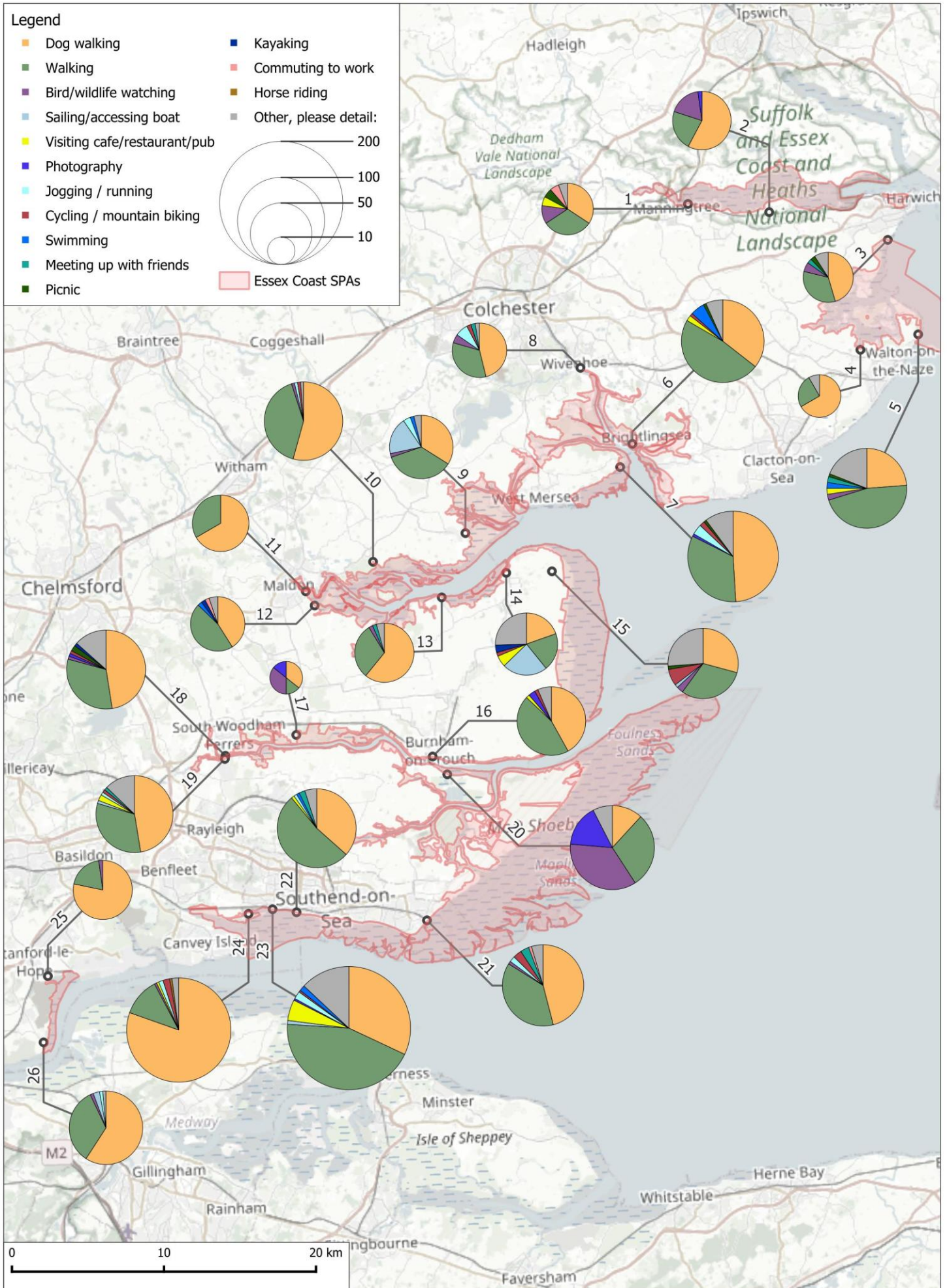


Figure 3: Main activity given by interviewees. Data from all seasons and all survey points combined.

4.11 There was variation between locations in the relative proportions of different activities (see Map 3 and Appendix 3). While dog walking and walking were typically the most frequently given activities, dog walkers accounted for a higher percentage at Two Tree Island (where dog walkers accounted for 80%

of interviewees) and Stanford Wharf (78%). Walkers accounted for a high proportion at Chalkwell Beach (52%) and Brightlingsea Marsh (48%). At Wallasea Island many interviewees were bird/wildlife watching or visiting for photography (35% and 16% respectively). Blue House Farm and Wrabness Nature Reserve were also popular locations for bird/wildlife watching (36% and 18% respectively). Cycling was more popular at St Peter's Chapel (8% of interviewees) than any other location, and Bradwell Marina was notable for the number of interviewees going sailing or accessing their boat (24% of interviewees).

Map 3: Main activity undertaken at each survey point by interviewees



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- 4.12 Interviewees were also asked to consider any secondary activities undertaken on their visit or by other members of the group (Q3). Of the 897 (50%) that said they were undertaking a second activity, 270 interviewees (30%) stated that they were also visiting a café/restaurant, 209 interviewees (23%) were also walking and 106 interviewees stated that they were also bird/wildlife watching (12%).

Temporal visit patterns

Frequency of visit (Q4)

- 4.13 Across all survey points and seasons, over half of all interviewees stated that they visited the location where interviewed at least once a week (1,004 interviewees, 56%). Of these, 329 interviewees (18%) were daily visitors. A number of interviewees were also on their first visit (218 interviewees, 12%).
- 4.14 Responses varied by season (Figure 4), with daily visitors accounting for a higher proportion of interviewees in the winter (258 interviewees, 21%) compared to the summer (71 interviewees, 13% visiting daily). By contrast, the proportion of those on their first visit was higher in the summer (111 interviewees, 20%) compared to the winter (107 interviewees, 9%).
- 4.15 The frequency with which interviewees visited also varied by survey location (see Figure 4). Locations such as Riverside Park (52 interviewees, 84%), St Lawrence (38 interviewees, 83%) and Wivenhoe Barrier (30 interviewees, 77%) attracted a higher proportion of at least weekly visitors in contrast to St Peter's Chapel (8 interviewees, 12%) and Wallasea Island (16 interviewees, 17%). Both these less frequently visited locations also attracted a higher proportion of first-time visitors (35 interviewees, 54% and 23 interviewees, 25% respectively) as did The Naze (23 interviewees, 27%).
- 4.16 Based on the categorical responses relating to visit frequency, interviewees had visited the interview location around 122 times on average over the past year, equivalent to roughly 2.3 visits per week⁵.

⁵ 'Daily' = 350 visits; 'Most days' = 200 visits; '1 to 3 times a week' = 110 visits; '2 to 3 times per month' = 27.5 visits; 'Once a month' = 10.5 visits; 'Less than once a month' = 3 visits; 'First visit' = 1 visit. Typical visit frequency is then the average based on the number of interviewees that gave each of the above categories.

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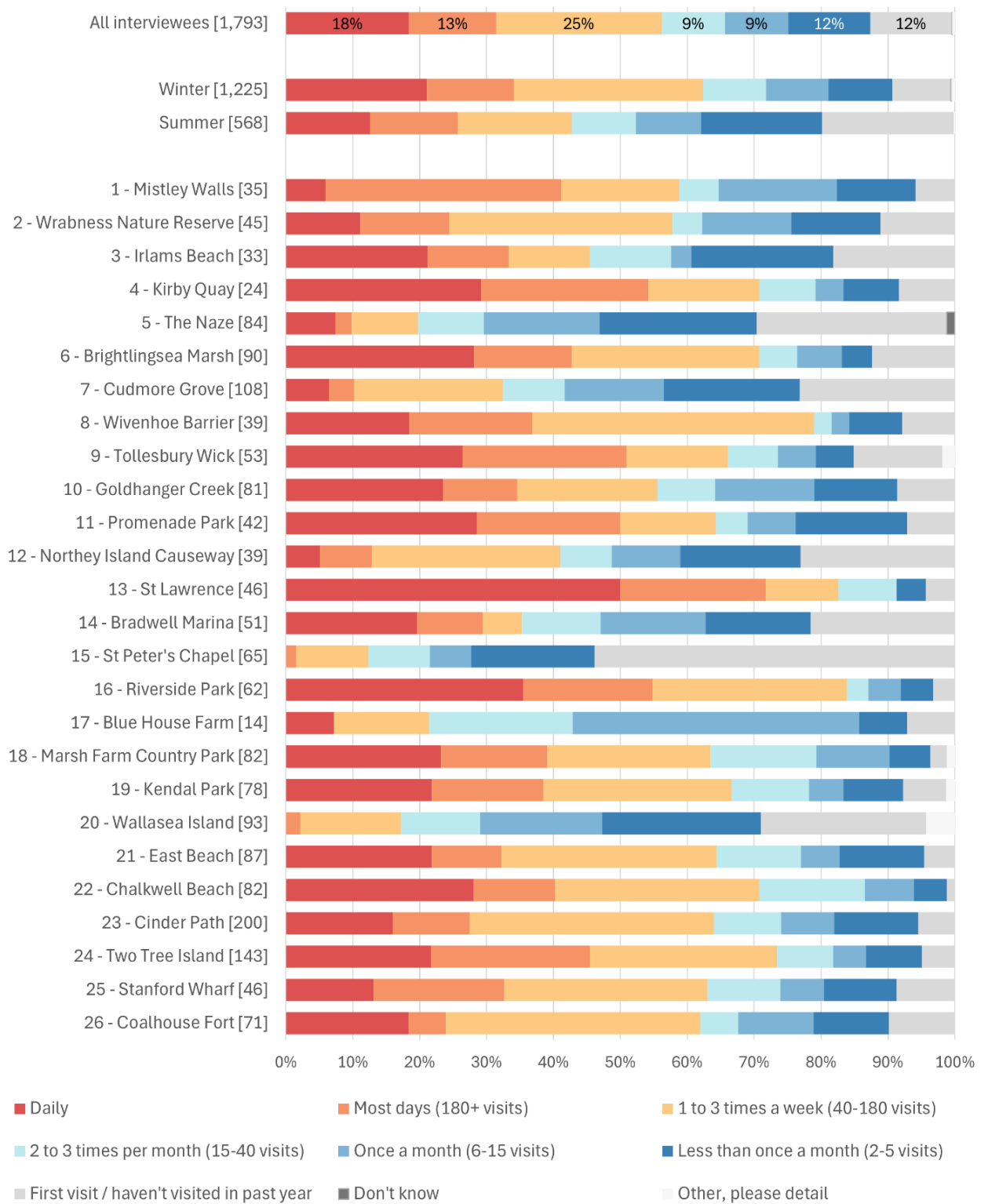


Figure 4: Visit frequency for all data combined and also by season and survey location.

4.17 There was some variation in visit frequency comparing those undertaking different main activities. Dog walkers tended to visit the sites where

interviewed frequently, with 238 interviewees who were dog walking (30% of dog walkers) visiting daily and 595 (74%) visiting at least weekly. Interviewees who were visiting for bird/wildlife watching were more likely to be visiting for the first time (19 interviewees, 29%).

Visit duration (Q5)

- 4.18 Visit duration is shown by season and survey location in Figure 5.
- 4.19 Approximately half of all interviewees had spent (or intended to spend) less than an hour visiting the location where they were interviewed, with most visitors spending between 30 minutes and one hour on site (719 interviewees, 41%). The visit duration varied between the seasons, with the tendency for longer visits in the summer. For example, 96 interviewees (6%) were visiting for 3 hours or more in the winter compared to 74 interviewees (17%) in the summer.
- 4.20 Survey locations where many interviewees were only visiting for a short period (up to an hour) included: Kendal Park (66 interviewees, 85% visiting for up to an hour), Two Tree Island (115 interviewees, 80%) and Mistley Walls (27 interviewees, 77%). In contrast, 26 interviewees (51%) at Bradwell Marina stated that they would spend over 4 hours on site. Interviewees at The Naze were also inclined to visit for longer, with 23 interviewees (27%) stating that they would visit for over 3 hours.
- 4.21 Based on the categorical responses relating to visit duration the typical visit duration to the Essex Coast across all seasons and survey points is around 83 minutes⁶. Those interviewed in the summer tended to visit for around 102 minutes compared to an average of 75 minutes for those interviewed in the winter.

⁶ Less than 30 minutes = 20 mins; 30 minutes to 1 hour = 45 mins; 1 to 2 hours = 90 mins; 2 to 3 hours = 150 mins; 3 to 4 hours = 210 mins and more than 4 hours = 300 mins. Typical visit duration is then the average based on the number of interviewees that gave each of the above categories.

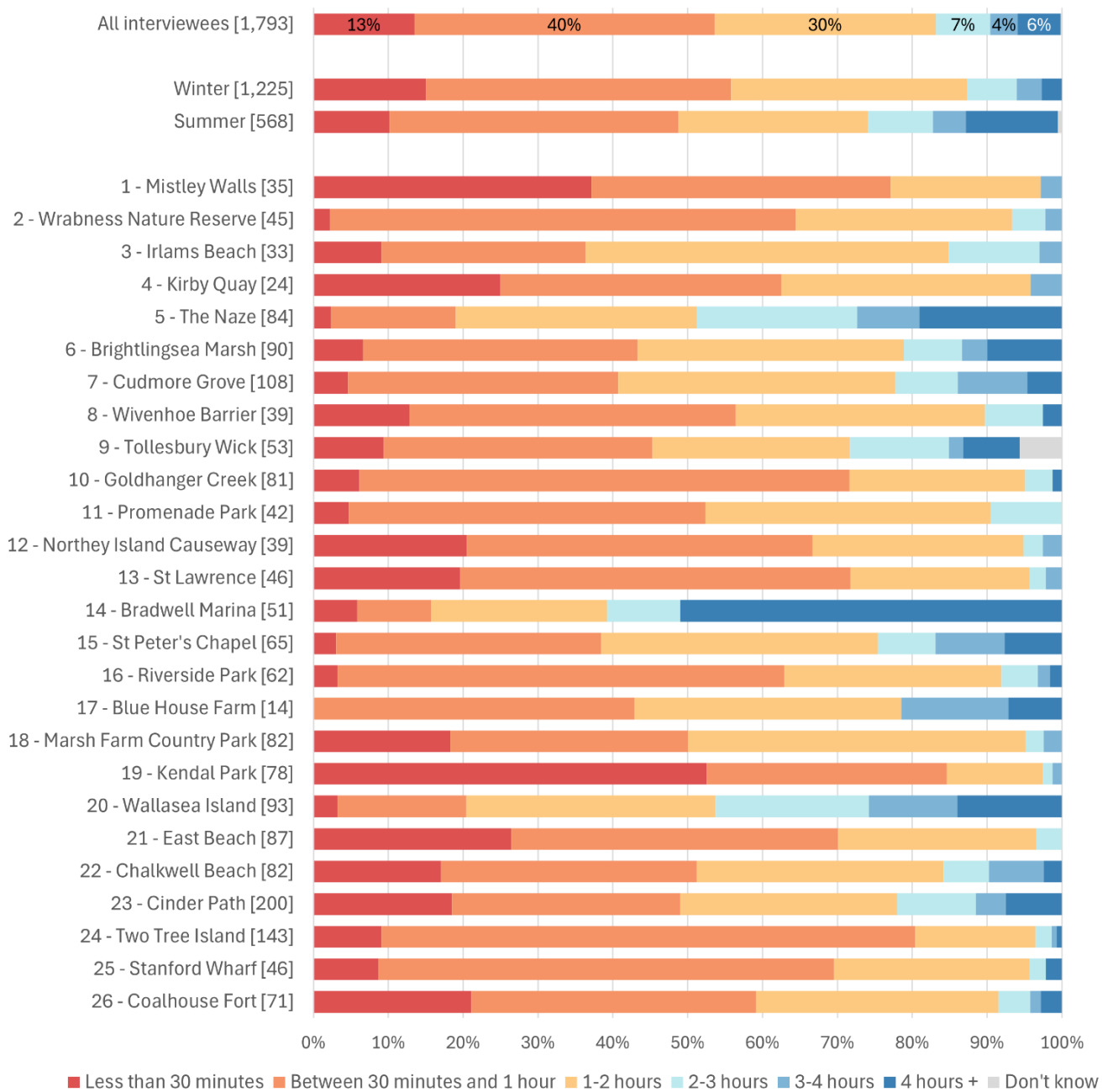


Figure 5: Comparison of duration of visit by interviewees, by survey location and season.

4.22 Visit duration varied between activities, with those interviewees who said they were commuting or horse riding all spending less than 30 minutes on site. Dog walkers (542 interviewees, 68%) and interviewees who were running/jogging (16 interviewees, 76%) both tended to visit for short periods, with 542 interviewees (68%) of dog walkers and 16 of those running/jogging (76%) spending less than an hour at the location at which they were

interviewed. In contrast, three interviewees who were kayaking (75% of those kayaking) said they would spend over 3 hours on site, as did 18 interviewees (64%) of those who were sailing or accessing their boat.

Time of day (Q6)

- 4.23 Most interviewees (671 interviewees, 37%) did not tend to visit at a particular time of day and said that the time at which they usually visit varies. Of those that did show a preference, approximately a fifth (403 interviewees, 22%) said they preferred to visit before 9am.
- 4.24 There was little seasonal variation in the time of day interviewees tended to visit. However, there were some patterns evident when comparing between activities, A high proportion of those dog walking (270 interviewees, 34%), indicated they were more likely to visit before 9am and people sailing or accessing their boat was much more evenly spread throughout the day than any other activity. This even spread is also reflected at Bradwell Marina where a greater proportion of interviewees were sailing compared to other sites.
- 4.25 Of the interviewees that showed a preference, there was some difference between survey locations (see Table 5). Early morning was the most commonly given response at Marsh Farm Country Park (where given by 31 interviewees, 38%) and Stanford Wharf (16 interviewees, 35%) while at Promenade Park later morning was the most common response (given by 12 interviewees, 29%). At Wallasea Island there was a preference for late afternoon visits (24 interviewees, 26%), perhaps reflecting those wildlife watching or taking photographs timing their visit to coincide with the bird interest (raptors and owls) while at Bradwell Marina there was a relatively even spread across the day, potentially linked to the high proportion of people sailing and accessing boats at this location.

Table 5: Number (%) of interviewees by survey point and the time of day interviewees tended to visit. Note that interviewees could provide multiple responses so percentages will not add up to 100. The highest value in each row is highlighted in **dark red and the second highest value highlighted in **a lighter red**.**

| Survey location [number of interviews] | Early morning | Late morning | Early afternoon | Late afternoon | Evening | Varies / Don't know | First visit |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1 - Mistley Walls [35] | 9 (26%) | 5 (14%) | 5 (14%) | 2 (6%) | 1 (3%) | 13 (37%) | 2 (6%) |
| 2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve [45] | 12 (27%) | 5 (11%) | 1 (2%) | 6 (13%) | 2 (4%) | 21 (47%) | 5 (11%) |
| 3 - Irlams Beach [33] | 6 (18%) | 7 (21%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (9%) | 14 (42%) | 6 (18%) |
| 4 - Kirby Quay [24] | 5 (21%) | 7 (29%) | 0 (0%) | 4 (17%) | 1 (4%) | 10 (42%) | 2 (8%) |
| 5 - The Naze [84] | 10 (12%) | 5 (6%) | 1 (1%) | 4 (5%) | 0 (0%) | 39 (46%) | 25 (30%) |
| 6 - Brightlingsea Marsh [90] | 21 (23%) | 11 (12%) | 2 (2%) | 5 (6%) | 4 (4%) | 37 (41%) | 11 (12%) |
| 7 - Cudmore Grove [108] | 24 (22%) | 19 (18%) | 13 (12%) | 8 (7%) | 8 (7%) | 35 (32%) | 25 (23%) |
| 8 - Wivenhoe Barrier [39] | 12 (31%) | 3 (8%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (3%) | 3 (8%) | 17 (44%) | 4 (10%) |
| 9 - Tollesbury Wick [53] | 16 (30%) | 5 (9%) | 2 (4%) | 2 (4%) | 7 (13%) | 24 (45%) | 7 (13%) |
| 10 - Goldhanger Creek [81] | 24 (30%) | 17 (21%) | 9 (11%) | 9 (11%) | 17 (21%) | 25 (31%) | 7 (9%) |
| 11 - Promenade Park [42] | 10 (24%) | 12 (29%) | 2 (5%) | 3 (7%) | 9 (21%) | 12 (29%) | 3 (7%) |
| 12 - Northey Island Causeway [39] | 6 (15%) | 3 (8%) | 1 (3%) | 0 (0%) | 4 (10%) | 19 (49%) | 9 (23%) |
| 13 - St Lawrence [46] | 7 (15%) | 4 (9%) | 2 (4%) | 7 (15%) | 5 (11%) | 26 (57%) | 2 (4%) |
| 14 - Bradwell Marina [51] | 10 (20%) | 12 (24%) | 11 (22%) | 11 (22%) | 9 (18%) | 20 (39%) | 11 (22%) |
| 15 - St Peter's Chapel [65] | 8 (12%) | 6 (9%) | 2 (3%) | 4 (6%) | 0 (0%) | 16 (25%) | 35 (54%) |

| Survey location [number of interviews] | Early morning | Late morning | Early afternoon | Late afternoon | Evening | Varies / Don't know | First visit |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 16 - Riverside Park [62] | 8 (13%) | 5 (8%) | 5 (8%) | 4 (6%) | 3 (5%) | 41 (66%) | 2 (3%) |
| 17 - Blue House Farm [14] | 5 (36%) | 2 (14%) | 1 (7%) | 1 (7%) | 0 (0%) | 7 (50%) | 1 (7%) |
| 18 - Marsh Farm Country Park [82] | 31 (38%) | 19 (23%) | 8 (10%) | 9 (11%) | 14 (17%) | 25 (30%) | 2 (2%) |
| 19 - Kendal Park [78] | 10 (13%) | 19 (24%) | 8 (10%) | 12 (15%) | 3 (4%) | 28 (36%) | 5 (6%) |
| 20 - Wallasea Island [93] | 19 (20%) | 15 (16%) | 11 (12%) | 24 (26%) | 20 (22%) | 22 (24%) | 23 (25%) |
| 21 - East Beach [87] | 16 (18%) | 16 (18%) | 8 (9%) | 11 (13%) | 2 (2%) | 33 (38%) | 4 (5%) |
| 22 - Chalkwell Beach [82] | 20 (24%) | 20 (24%) | 4 (5%) | 9 (11%) | 5 (6%) | 33 (40%) | 1 (1%) |
| 23 - Cinder Path [200] | 44 (22%) | 37 (19%) | 16 (8%) | 13 (7%) | 21 (11%) | 80 (40%) | 11 (6%) |
| 24 - Two Tree Island [143] | 42 (29%) | 35 (24%) | 14 (10%) | 10 (7%) | 19 (13%) | 43 (30%) | 7 (5%) |
| 25 - Stanford Wharf [46] | 16 (35%) | 7 (15%) | 7 (15%) | 5 (11%) | 9 (20%) | 8 (17%) | 4 (9%) |
| 26 - Coalhouse Fort [71] | 12 (17%) | 16 (23%) | 10 (14%) | 12 (17%) | 4 (6%) | 23 (32%) | 7 (10%) |
| All interviewees [1,793] | 403 (22%) | 312 (17%) | 143 (8%) | 176 (10%) | 173 (10%) | 671 (37%) | 221 (12%) |

Time of year (Q7)

4.26 Most interviewees (1,078 interviewees, 60%) stated that they tended to visit the location where interviewed equally all year round. Of those that did show a preference, 332 interviewees (19%) said that they tended to visit more in the summer (June – August). A further 220 interviewees (12%) were on a first visit and therefore did not show a preference.

- 4.27 A relatively high proportion of interviewees who were dog walking stated they tended to visit equally all year round (600 interviewees, 75%) compared to all other activities. Interviewees who were bird/wildlife watching showed the greatest preference for visiting in the winter (14 interviewees, 21%) and interviewees going sailing or accessing their boat preferred to visit in the summer (15 interviewees, 56%).

Mode of Transport (Q8)

- 4.28 Overall, most interviewees arrived at the survey point either by car (1,058 interviewees, 58%) or on foot (676 interviewees, 38%). A small percentage arrived by bicycle (28 interviewees, 2%) and train (23 interviewees, 1%), while the remaining interviewees arrived by bus, motorbike, mobility scooter, sailing boat or ferry (all approximately 1% of interviewees).
- 4.29 Mode of transport differed slightly between survey points (see Figure 6 below). At Blue House Farm (14 interviewees, 100%) all arrived by car/van, while the majority of interviewees had arrived on foot at St Lawrence (38 interviewees, 83%), Kirby Quay (18 interviewees, 75%) and Wivenhoe Barrier (29 interviewees, 74%).

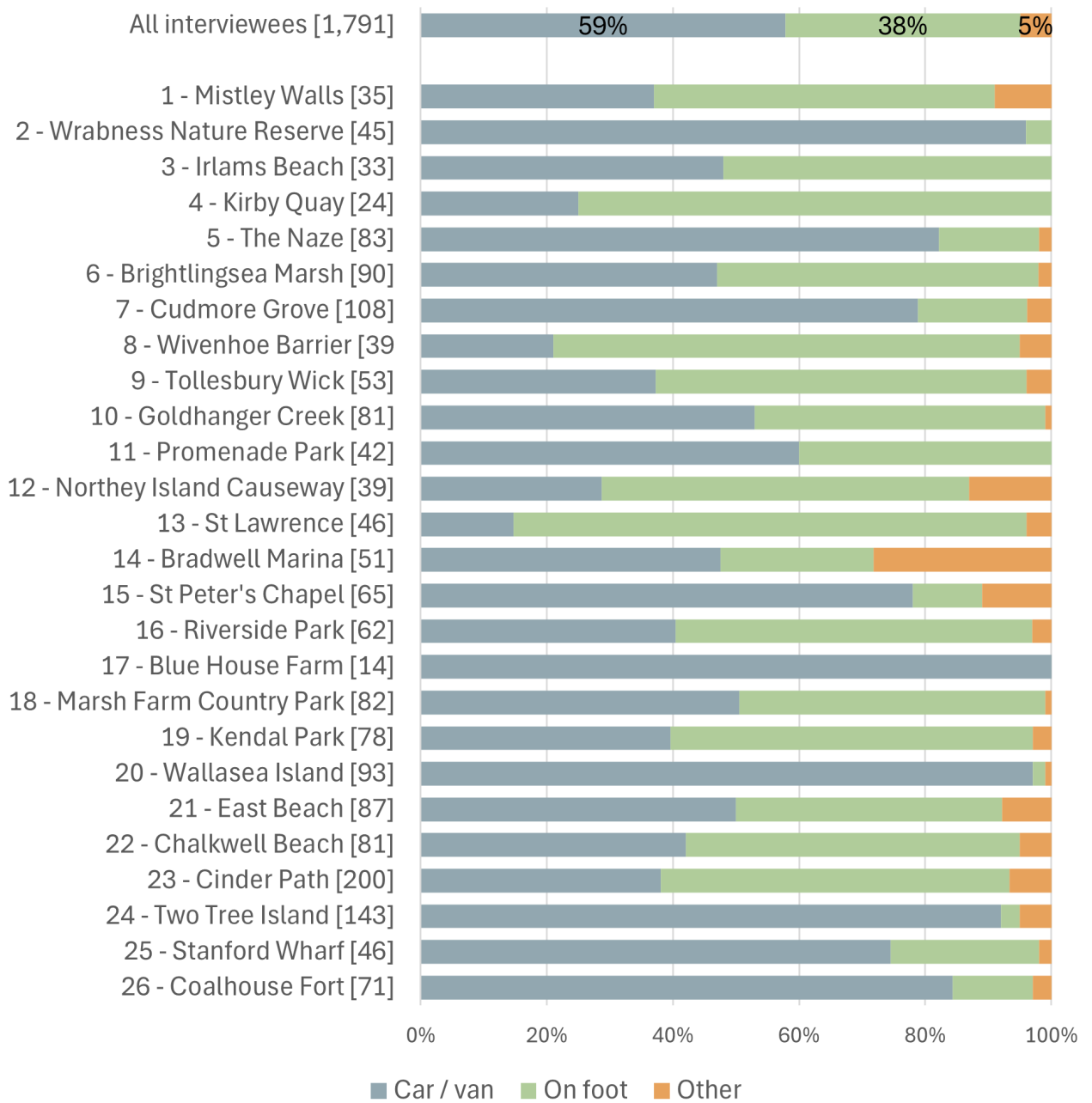


Figure 6: Mode of transport used by survey point. Numbers in square brackets reflect sample size.

Choice of location (Q9 & Q10)

- 4.30 Interviewees gave a variety of reasons for choosing to visit the location where they were interviewed, rather than another site (Figure 7). Some interviewees gave multiple reasons for their choice and where more than one reason was given, interviewees were also asked to select a single main reason (Q10). Being 'close to home' was by far the most common reason (both overall and as the main reason), given by over a third of interviewees (695, 39%). Other common responses included the scenery/variety of views (356, 20%) and the location being good for the dog or the dog enjoys it (190 interviewees, 11%).
- 4.31 A total of 470 interviewees (26%) gave 'other' reasons outside of the pre-determined categories, for example seeing family, being by the water, visiting the beach and being quiet or peaceful to visit.

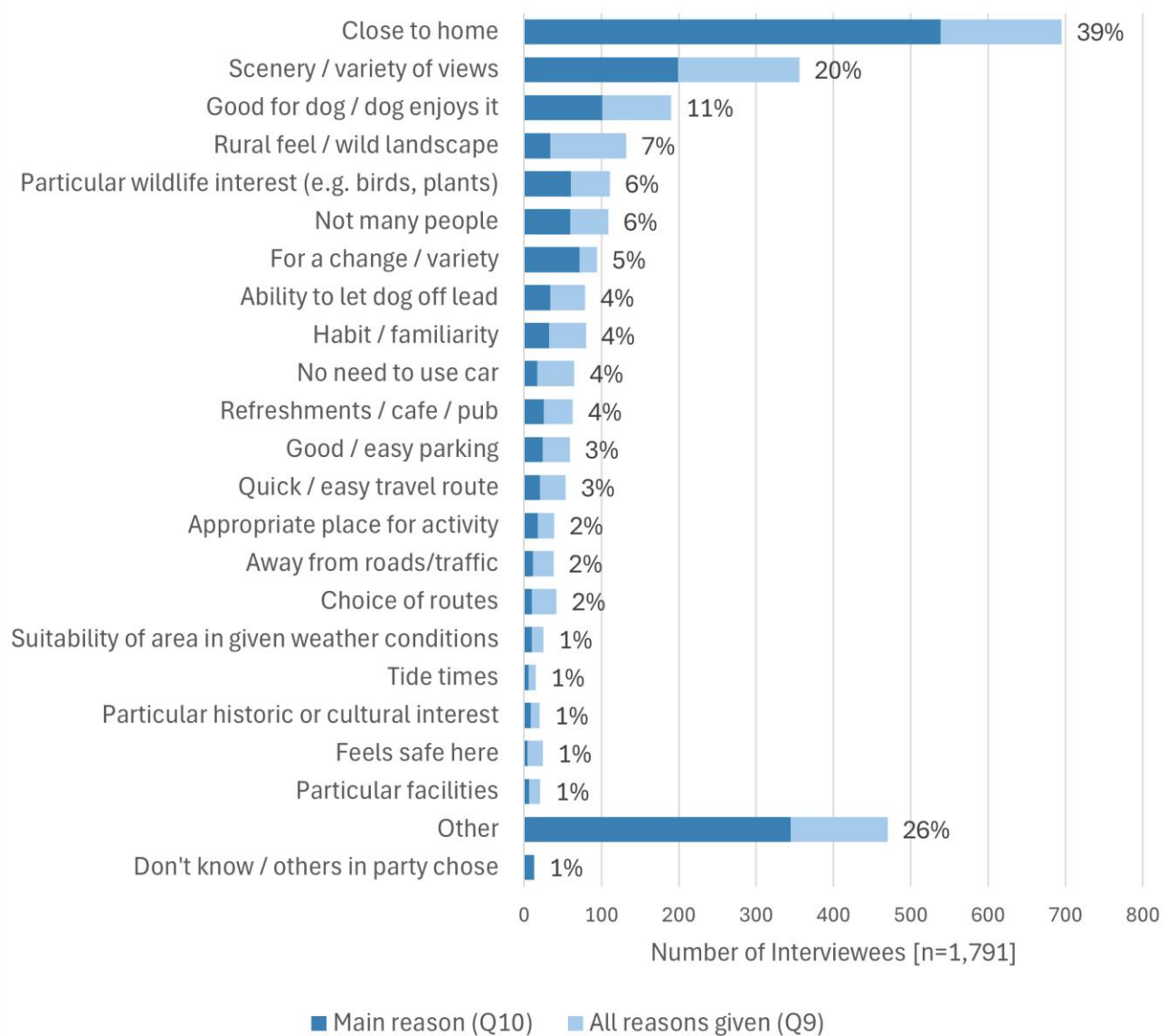


Figure 7: Reasons for visiting the specific location where interviewed that day rather than somewhere else. Interviewees were asked for one main reason and could give multiple other reasons. Responses categorised by surveyor and additional categories added following a review of free text responses. Value labels give the percentage of all interviewees who cited the reason (main or other).

4.32 In Figure 8 dog walkers are compared with all other activity types and it can be seen that for dog walkers proximity to home, being good for the dog and the ability to let the dog off the lead is of particular importance for site choice compared to all other interviewees.

Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025

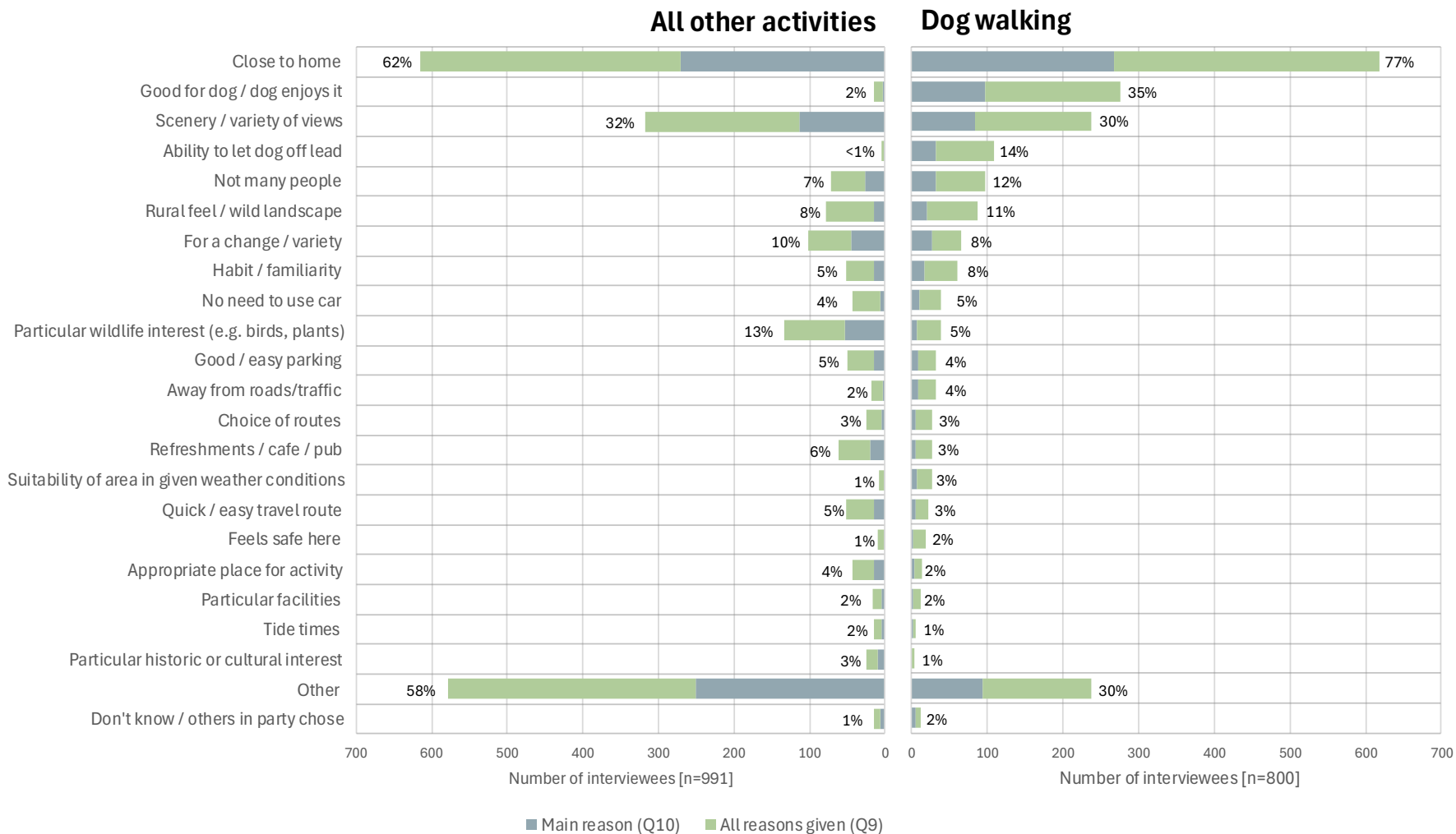
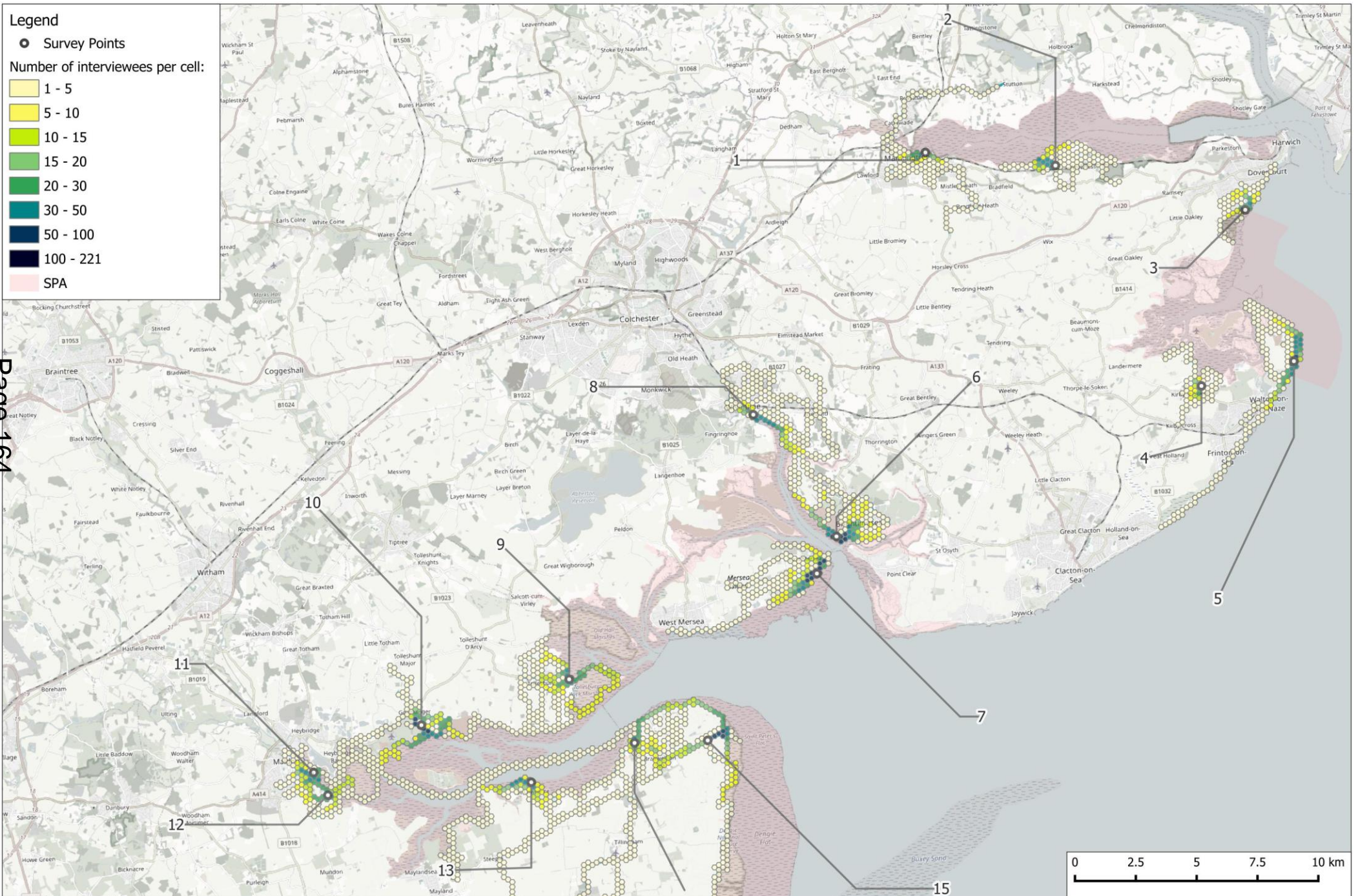


Figure 8: Reasons for visiting the specific location where interviewed that day rather than somewhere else comparing dog walkers and interviewees undertaking all other activities on site. Interviewees were asked for one main reason and could give multiple other reasons. Responses categorised by surveyor and additional categories added following a review of free text responses. Value labels give the percentage of all interviewees who cited the reason (main or other).

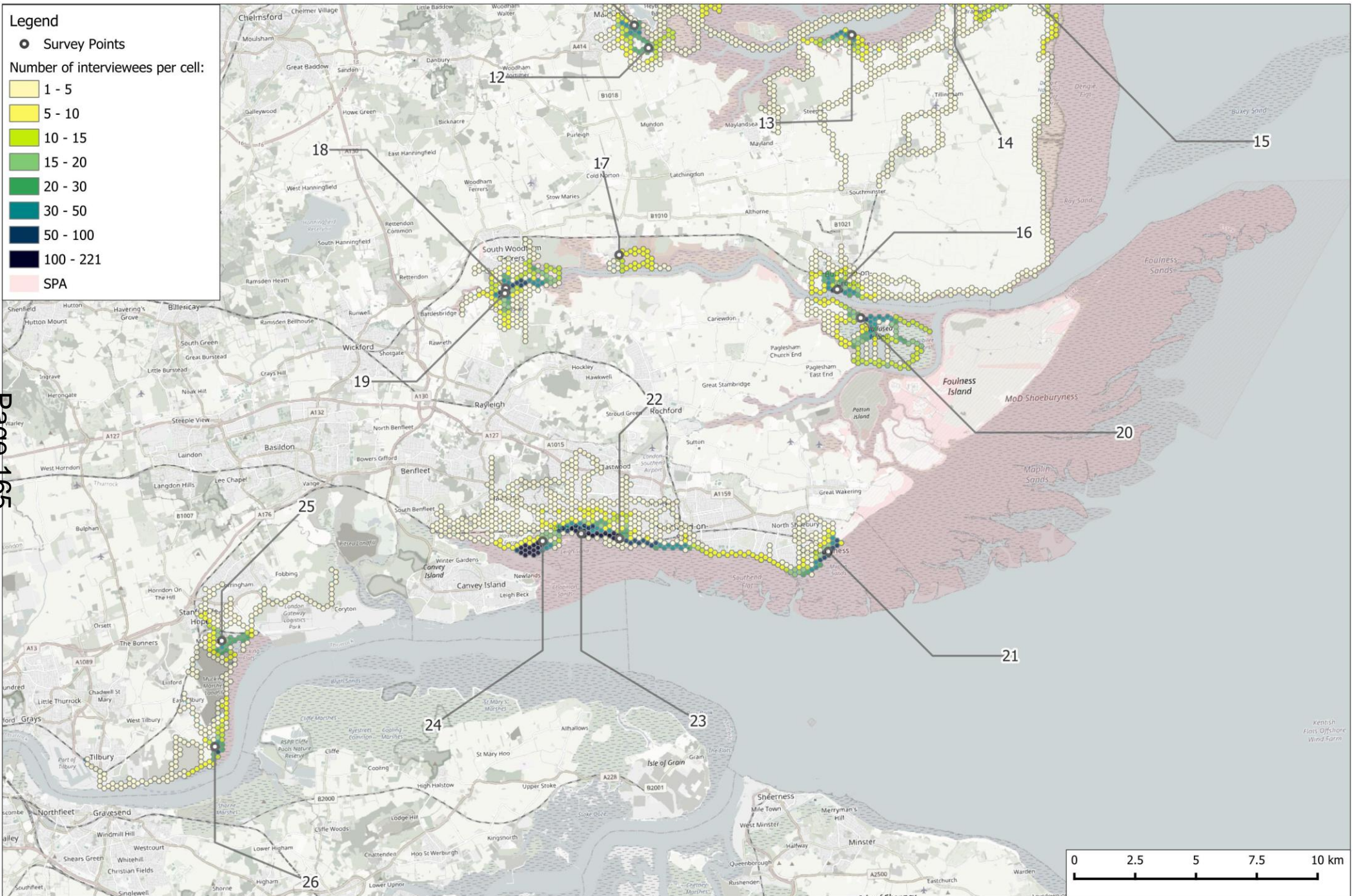
Routes taken on site (Q11 -13)

- 4.33 Routes were drawn on a paper map by surveyors during the interview and then later digitised, with the length calculated in GIS. A total of 1,759 routes were mapped (see Map 4 and 5). As can be seen from the data, many routes extend along considerable lengths of shore and include areas outside the European sites. Some routes extend well inland.
- 4.34 The median route length across all 1,759 interviewees was 2.96km, indicating that 50% of visitors tend to cover around 3km or more.
- 4.35 There was some variation between survey points (see Maps 4 and 5, and Figure 9). The median route length was highest at Northey Island Causeway (5.07km) and lowest at Bradwell Marina (1.24km).
- 4.36 Values for particular activities (Figure 10) indicate that cyclists/mountain bikers tend to cover the longest distances (13.86km median distance) and while the longest route was taken by someone sailing (34.2km), interviewees who were sailing/accessing their boat tend to cover shorter distances (0.98km median distance).
- 4.37 Most interviewees (1,115 interviewees, 71%) said that the route they had taken was typical of their usual visit, and of a similar length. A small proportion said that the route taken that day was much shorter than normal (226 interviewees, 14%) or longer than normal (196 interviewees, 13%).

Map 4: Interviewee routes shown using a 100m grid categorised by the number of routes per cell



Map 5: Interviewee routes shown using a 100m grid categorised by the number of routes per cell



Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025

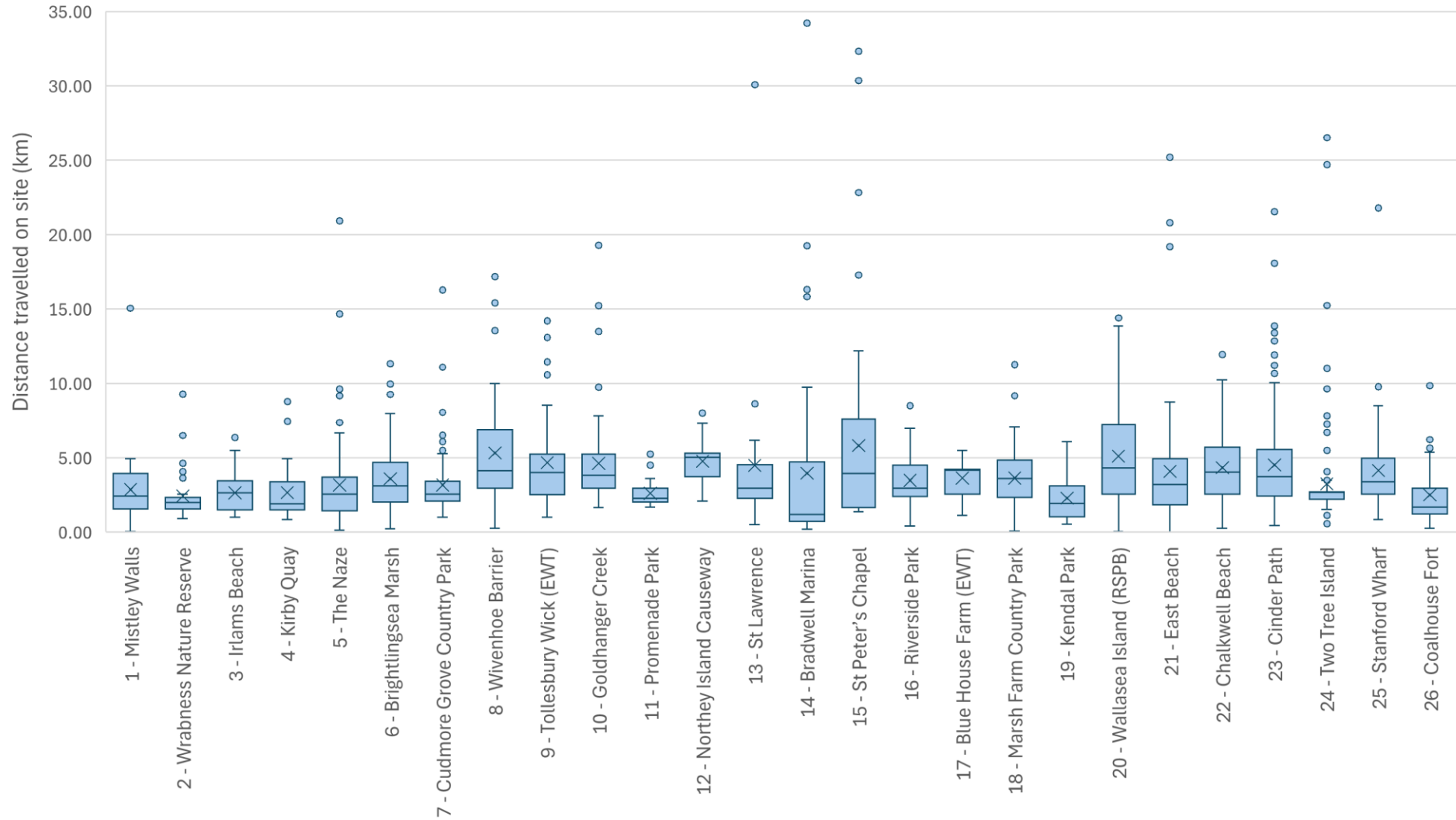


Figure 9: Box and whisker plot showing route length by survey point. Horizontal lines show the median, the 'x' shows the mean, boxes show the interquartile range, and the lines (or whiskers) are the maximum and minimum values. Dots represent any outliers.

Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025

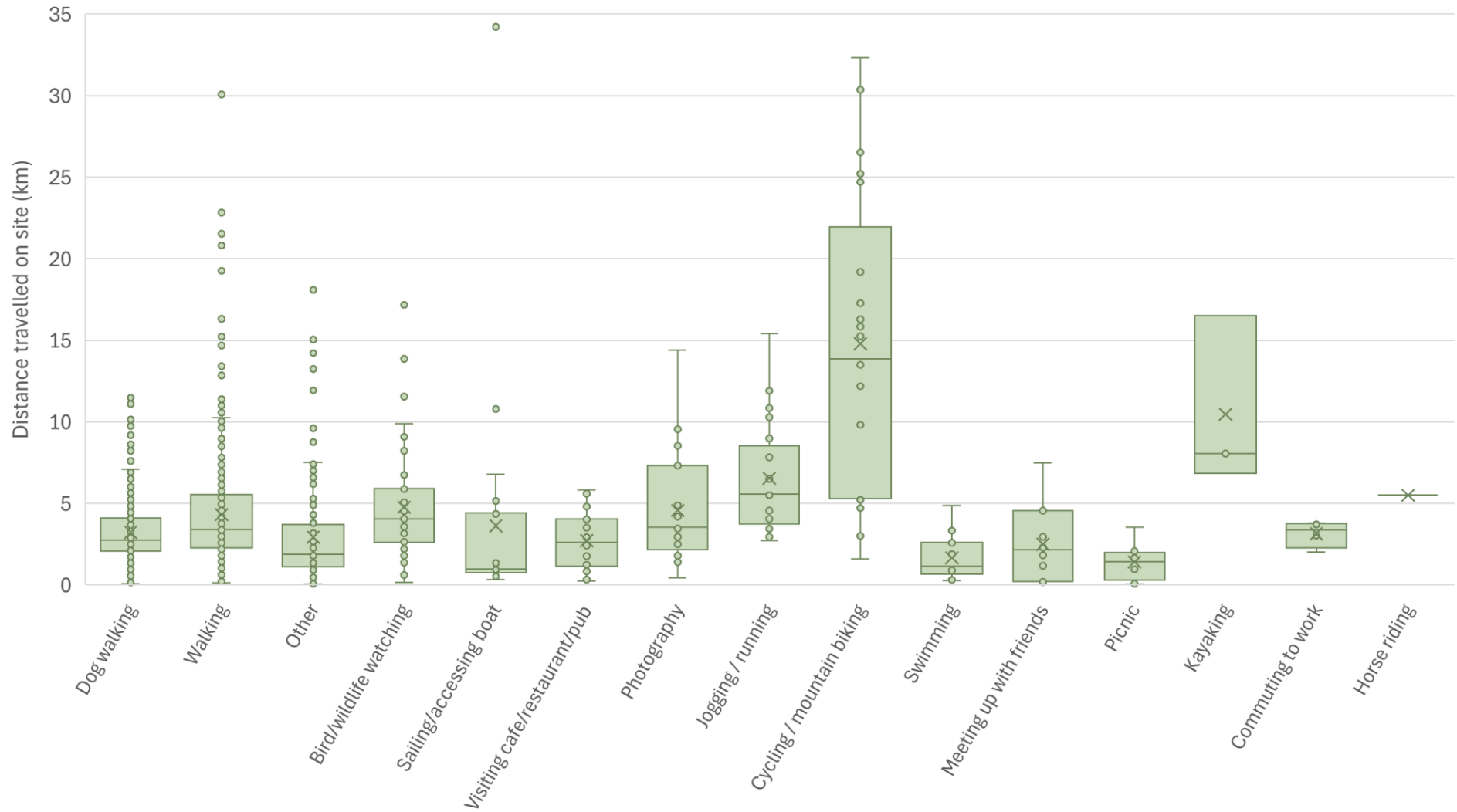


Figure 10: Box and whisker plot showing route length by main activity on site. Horizontal lines show the median, the 'x' shows the mean, boxes show the interquartile range, and the lines (or whiskers) are the maximum and minimum values. Dots represent any outliers.

4.38 When asked if anything had influenced their choice of route, approximately a third (588 interviewees, 34%) said that it was habit or their usual route. A further 15% (264 interviewees) said the weather affected their route (e.g. being too hot, cold, windy etc) followed by a small proportion (166 interviewees, 11%) who said that time was a limiting factor.

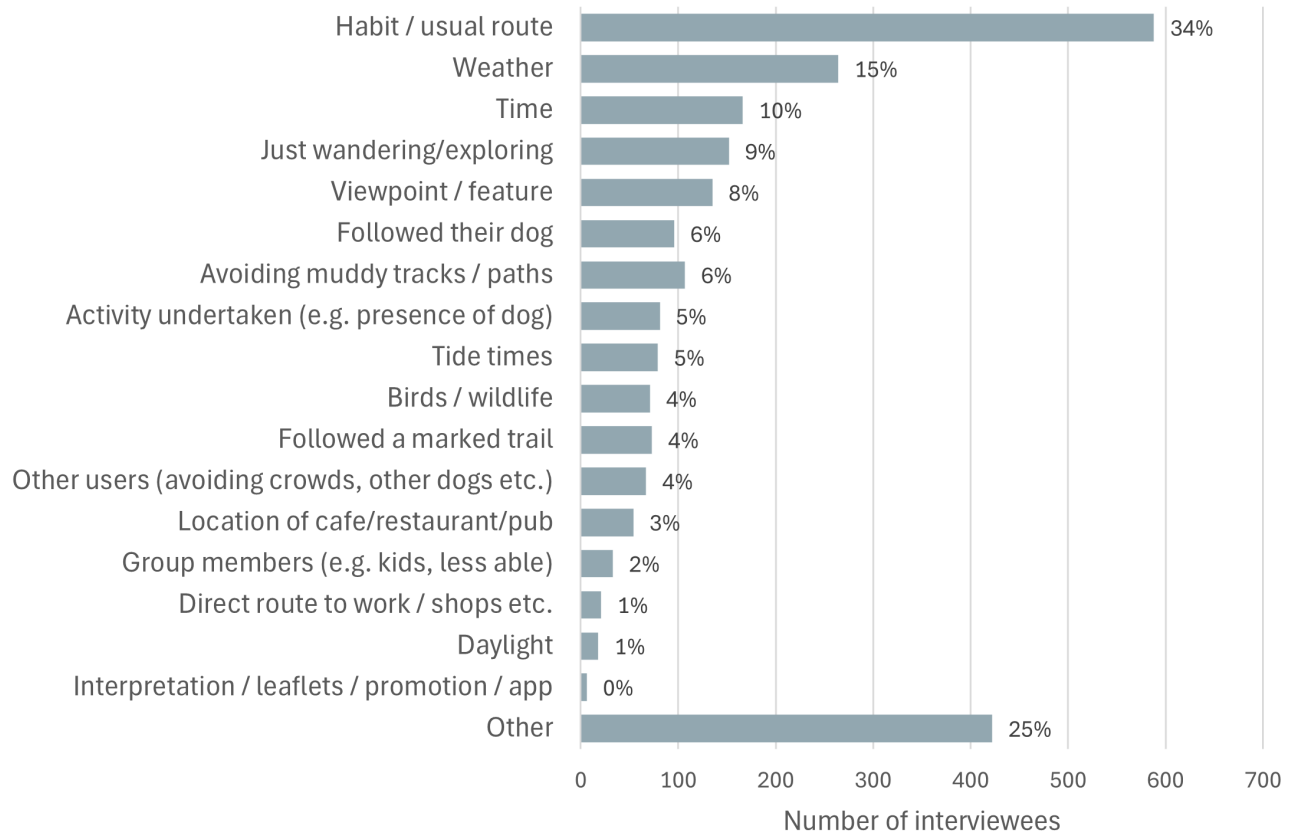


Figure 11: Summary of factors affecting choice of route by interviewees (Q13). Percentages show the total interviewees who gave that response.

4.39 There was limited variation between seasons regarding choice of route with the exception of more interviewees changing their route to avoid muddy paths/ tracks in the winter (102 interviewees, 9%) compared to the summer (5 interviewees, 1%).

Alternative sites (Q14-15)

4.40 When asked to name one location aside from the interview location that they would have visited that day if they had not visited the Essex Coast, 334 interviewees (19%) stated that they would not have gone anywhere else and

a further 108 interviewees (6%) were not sure or didn't know. In total, 1,351 interviewees (75%) named an alternative location.

- 4.41 The list of alternatives, as given by interviewees, was reviewed and standardised to give a specific site where possible. For example, some responses were clearly the same location but given different names – for example “Belfairs” and “Belfairs Park” or “Belfairs Nature Reserve” and therefore have been grouped as such. For some locations, such as “further along the coast”, “seafront” or “local” no specific site was assigned. The standardised locations (given by at least 15 interviewees) are summarised in Figure 12.
- 4.42 Belfairs (which included the Park, Woods and Nature Reserve) appeared the most popular named alternative site given by interviewees (177 interviewees, 6%) followed by Maldon (77 interviewees, 3%). A total of 340 unique alternative sites were given in responses.

Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025

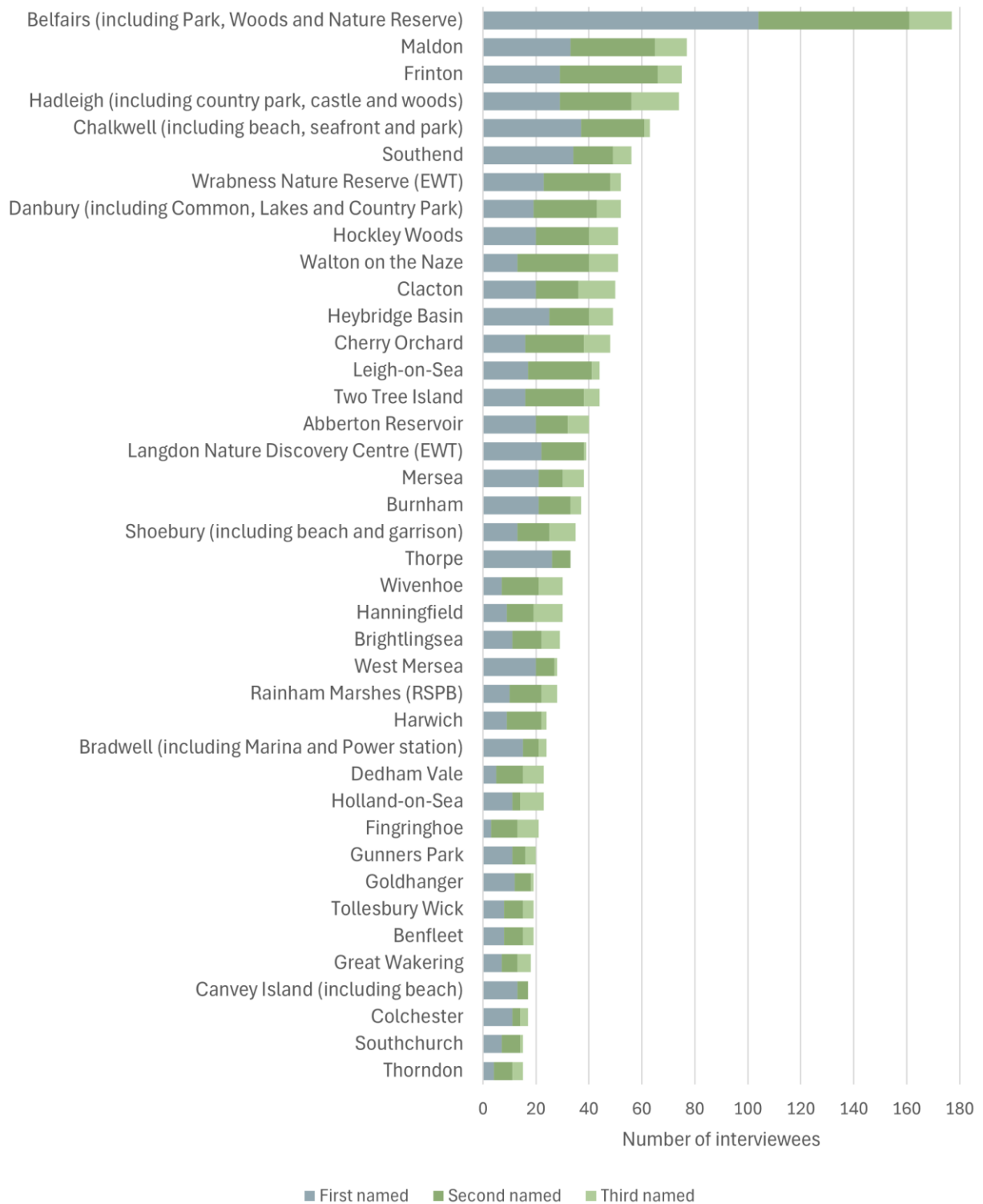


Figure 12: Summary of alternative site names given by interviewee. All locations given by at least 15 interviewees are shown.

Awareness of nature conservation (Q16-17)

- 4.43 Interviewees were asked whether they knew of species or habitats that were special to the area they visited, as a proxy to gauge visitor's awareness of the nature conservation importance of the site. They could give multiple responses for species or habitats. Responses were coded by the surveyor and just under half of all interviewees (819 interviewees, 46%) could name a species or a habitat (Figure 13). A further 714 (40%) made a general mention of wintering or breeding birds or habitats and 489 interviewees (27%) were not aware of any at all. Some responses (549 interviewees, 31%) were categorised as 'other' reflecting species such as 'squirrel' that aren't necessarily relevant to the coast.
- 4.44 A relatively high proportion of interviewees at The Naze (45 interviewees, 45% of responses) stated that were not aware of the any species or habitats that were special (Figure 13). In contrast, at Wrabness Nature Reserve, Kirby Quay and Wallasea Island a greater proportion of interviewees were likely to name specific habitats or species special to the area (all over 50%).

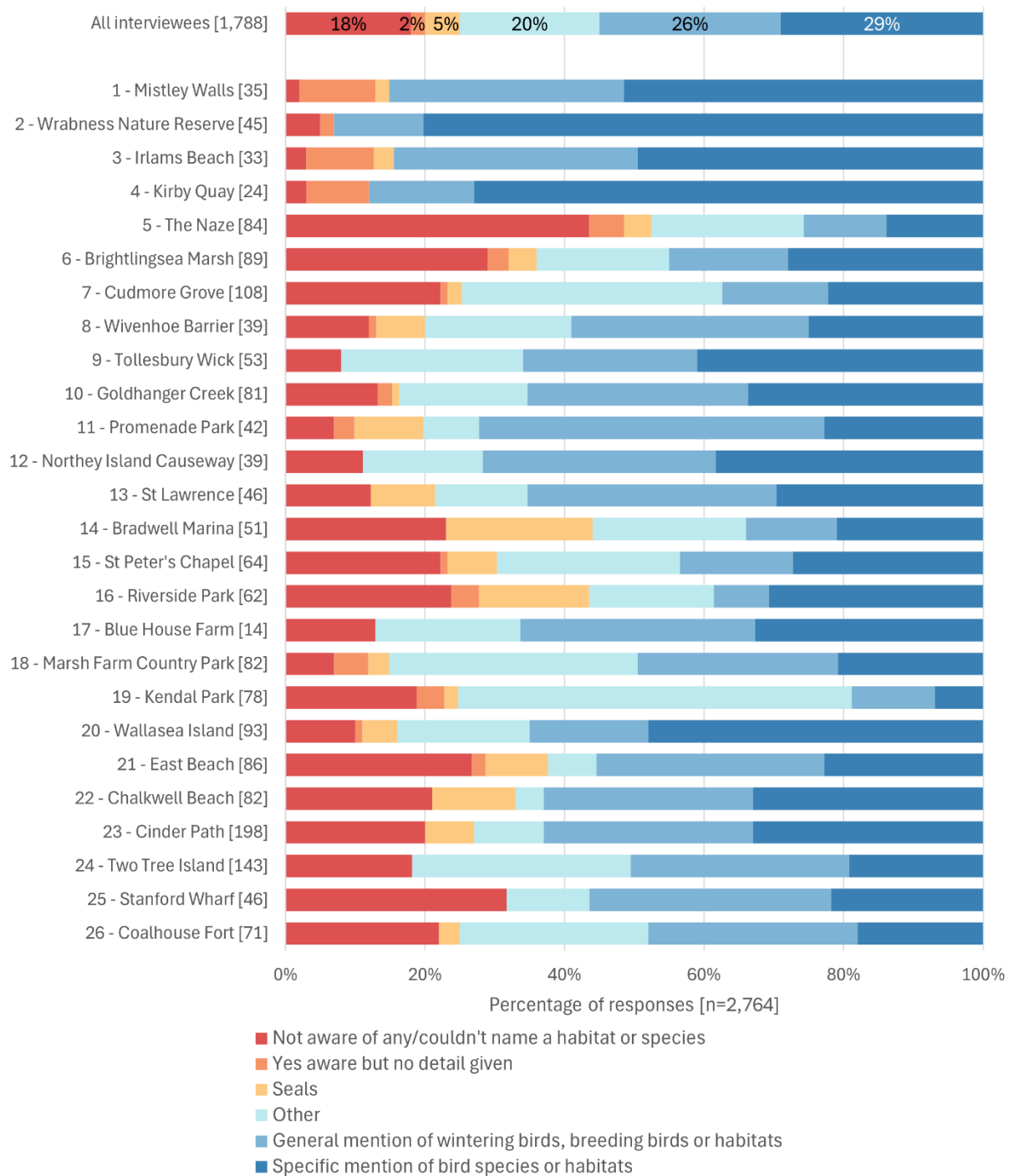


Figure 13: Percentage of interviewees and awareness of habitats or species special to the area (Q16), by survey point. Note that interviewees could give multiple responses and these have been grouped for the purposes of this graph, therefore percentages will not always add up to 100%.

4.45 Overall, almost half of all interviewees were unaware of ways in which the survey location was protected for wildlife (852 interviewees, 48%), see Figure

14. Of those that were aware of protection in place for wildlife, 18% suggested that there was a nature reserve (316 interviewees), 8% (141 interviewees) suggested the survey location was a SSSI and a total of 217 interviewees mentioned the RSPB (7%) or the Wildlife Trusts (6%) in general.

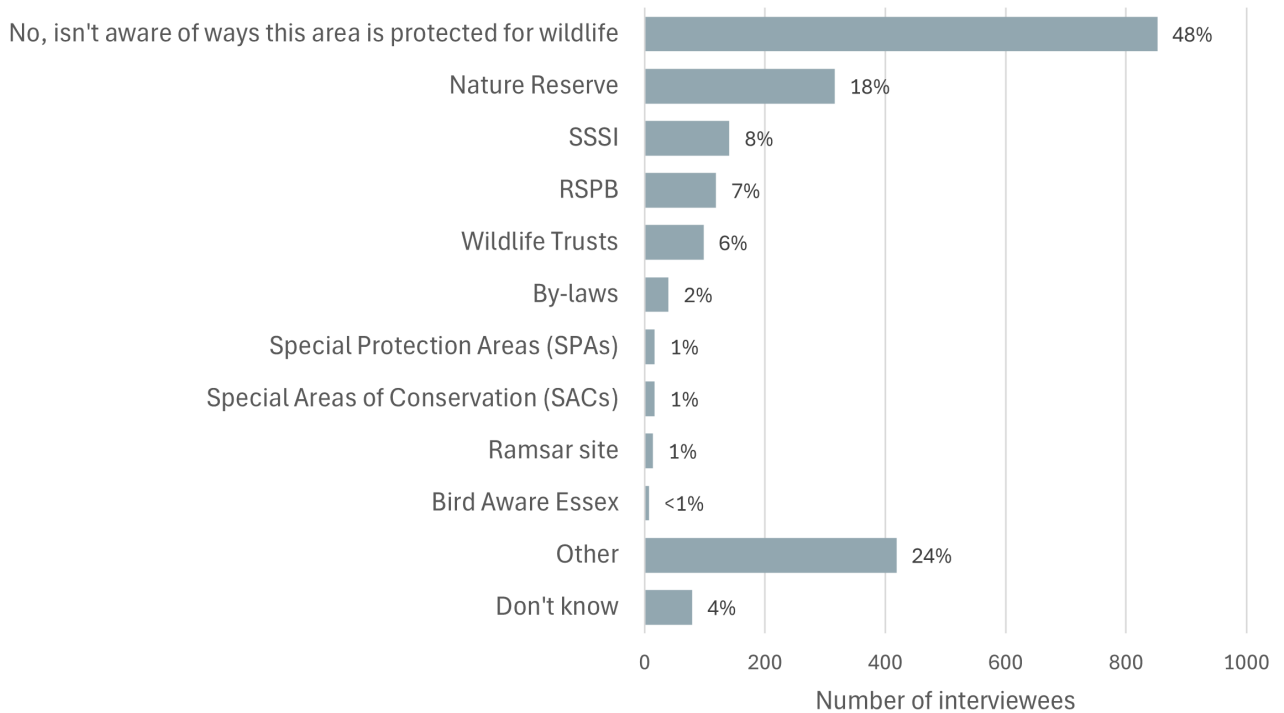


Figure 14: Interviewee responses to ways in which the survey location is protected for wildlife. Interviewees could provide multiple responses and answers were coded by the surveyor.

Site improvements (Q18)

4.46 Almost half of all interviewees (850 interviewees, 48%) stated that there were no changes or improvements they would like to see with respect to how the site (where the interview took place) is managed for access. Of the interviewees that did make a suggestion, 120 interviewees wanted better paths or surfacing on paths (7%), 111 interviewees would like to see less litter or more bins available (6%) and more dog bins available (101 interviewees, 6%), and 5% wanted to see more controls on dogs (such as dogs on lead/restrictions in when dogs can access the beach) or dog fouling (85 interviewees). A further 552 interviewees (31%) made suggestions which fell outside of pre-determined categories within the questionnaire. These included suggestions like 'cutting back vegetation along paths' and 'fixing

access road’ and ‘less anti-social behaviour’. Some interviewees were complementary and simply commented how ‘lovely’ or ‘clean’ the site was.

4.47 Interviewees could provide multiple responses, and as with previous questions, they were not prompted by the surveyor. Responses regarding how the area is managed for access is shown in Figure 15.

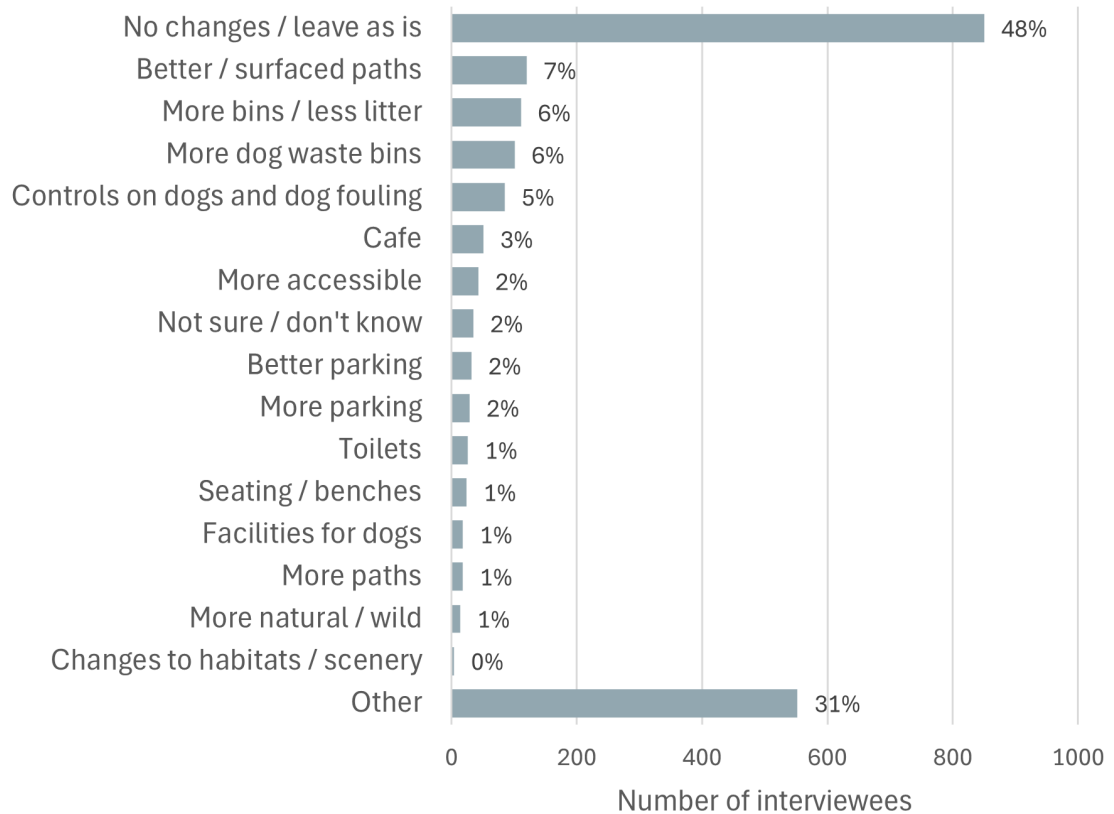


Figure 15: Summary of responses by interviewees regarding improvements in how the area is managed for access. Percentage of interviewees is shown [n=1,784].

New Greenspace (Q19)

4.48 When asked what factors would make the interviewee want to visit a new greenspace or park in their area, 295 interviewees (17%) stated that no changes were relevant, many commenting that a new park or greenspace wouldn't replace walking by the coast. Some said they would visit a new greenspace or park if it was more natural / wild (285 interviewees, 16%), while 226 interviewees (13%) would visit if there was a dog off lead area and (225 interviewees, 13%) if there was a café. A further 26% of interviewees

gave 'other' responses which did not fit the pre-determined categories. Interviewee responses are summarised in Figure 16.

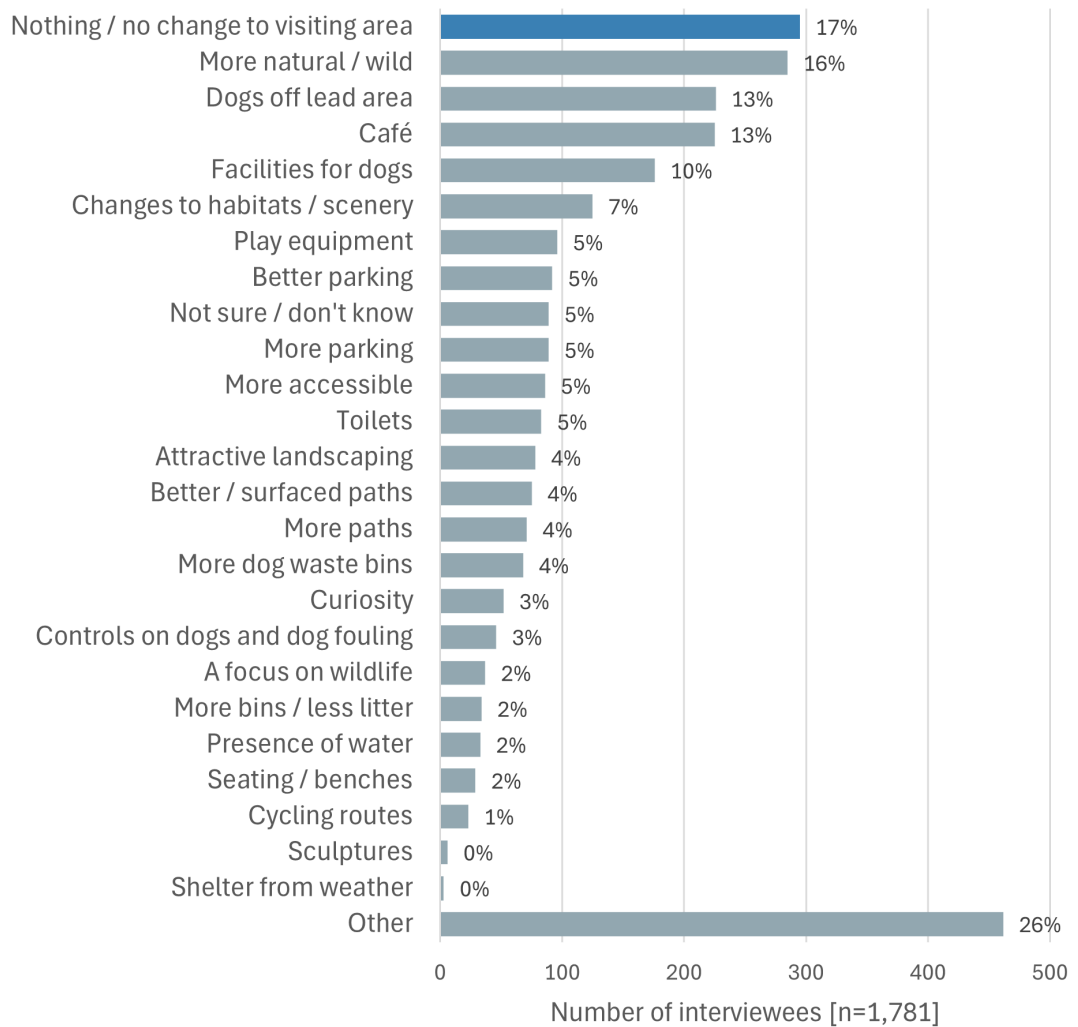


Figure 16: Factors that would affect the interviewees likelihood to visit a new park or greenspace. Interviewees could give more than one response and percentages reflect percentage of interviewees.

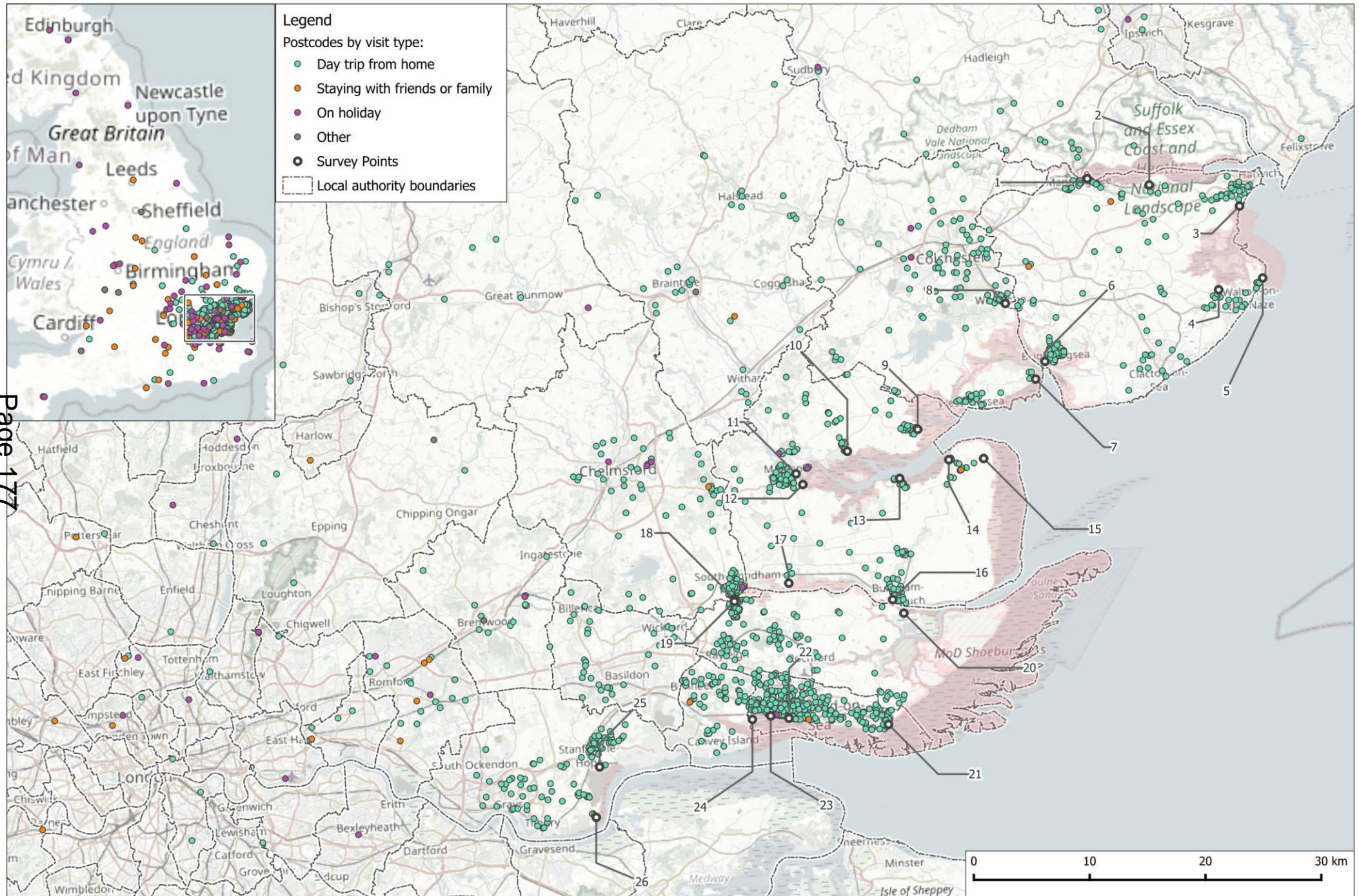
Home postcodes of interviewees (Q25)

- 4.49 1,688 interviewees provided a full, valid UK home postcode that could be matched with the national database and therefore the location determined in GIS. These postcodes are shown by visit type in Map 6, by season in Map 7 and 8 and by season in Map 9. For each map it is important to note that postcodes will overlap, particularly near urban areas.
- 4.50 The majority of interviewees were from within Essex (1,508 interviewees, 89%). Interviewees came from 103 different local authority areas, with the top 15 shown in Table 6. The top three were Southend-on-Sea, Maldon and Tendring, which accounted for just over half of all interviewees. Map 10 shows the proportion of each SPA visited by local authority, relative to the number of interviewees.

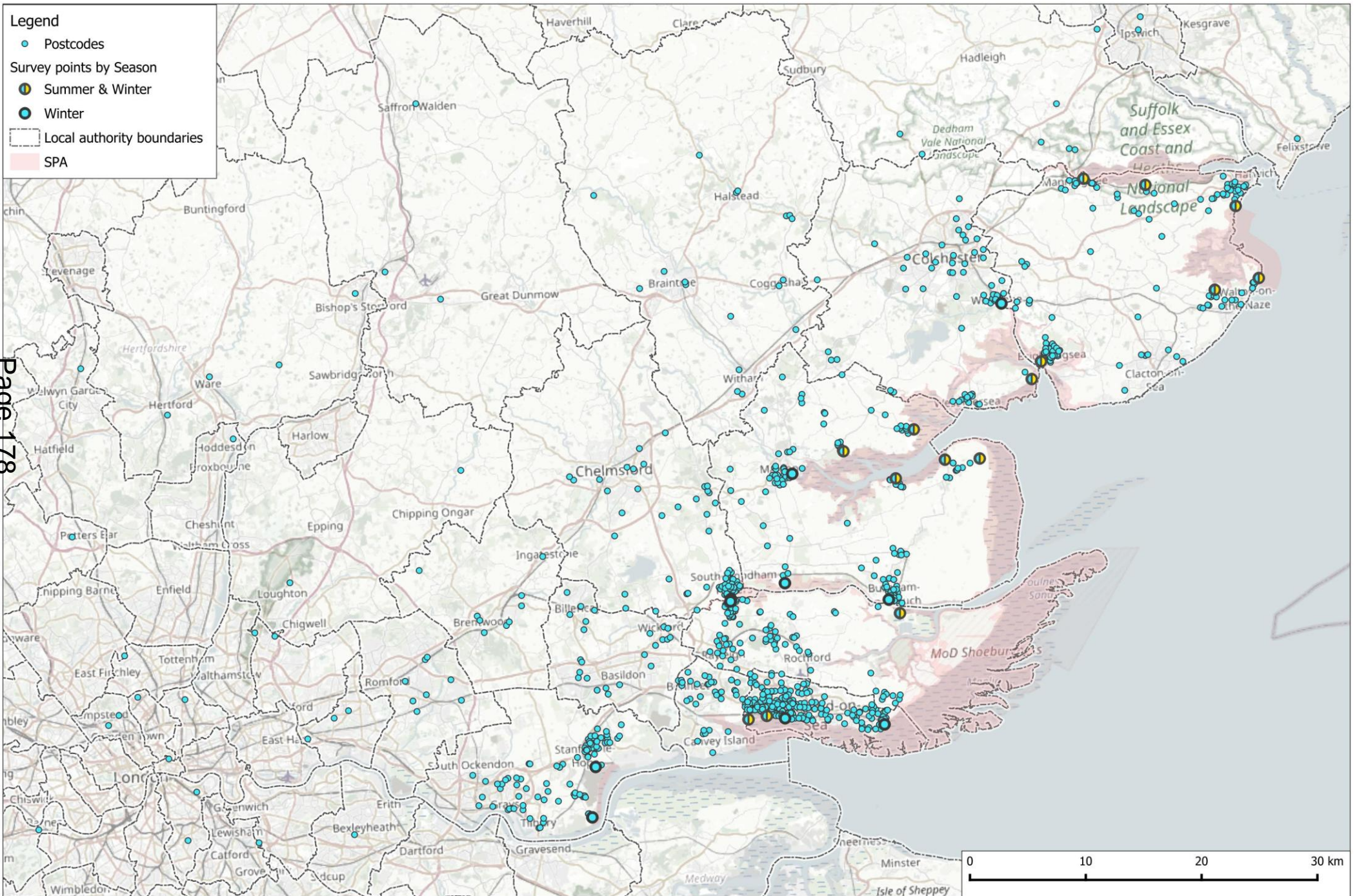
Table 6: Number (%) of interviewees by local authority area. Postcode data covered 103 different local authorities, however only those with at least 5 interviewees listed (these data also shown in Map 10).

| Local authority | Number of interviewees (%) |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Southend-on-Sea | 410 (24.3%) |
| Maldon | 278 (16.5%) |
| Tendring | 203 (12.0%) |
| Rochford | 130 (7.7%) |
| Colchester | 117 (6.9%) |
| Chelmsford | 113 (6.7%) |
| Thurrock | 109 (6.5%) |
| Castle Point | 50 (3%) |
| Basildon | 34 (2%) |
| Braintree | 34 (2%) |
| Havering | 20 (1.2%) |
| Babergh | 17 (1%) |
| Brentwood | 15 (0.9%) |
| Uttlesford | 9 (0.5%) |
| East Hertfordshire | 8 (0.5%) |
| Buckinghamshire | 5 (0.3%) |
| Epping Forest | 5 (0.3%) |
| Barking and Dagenham | 5 (0.3%) |

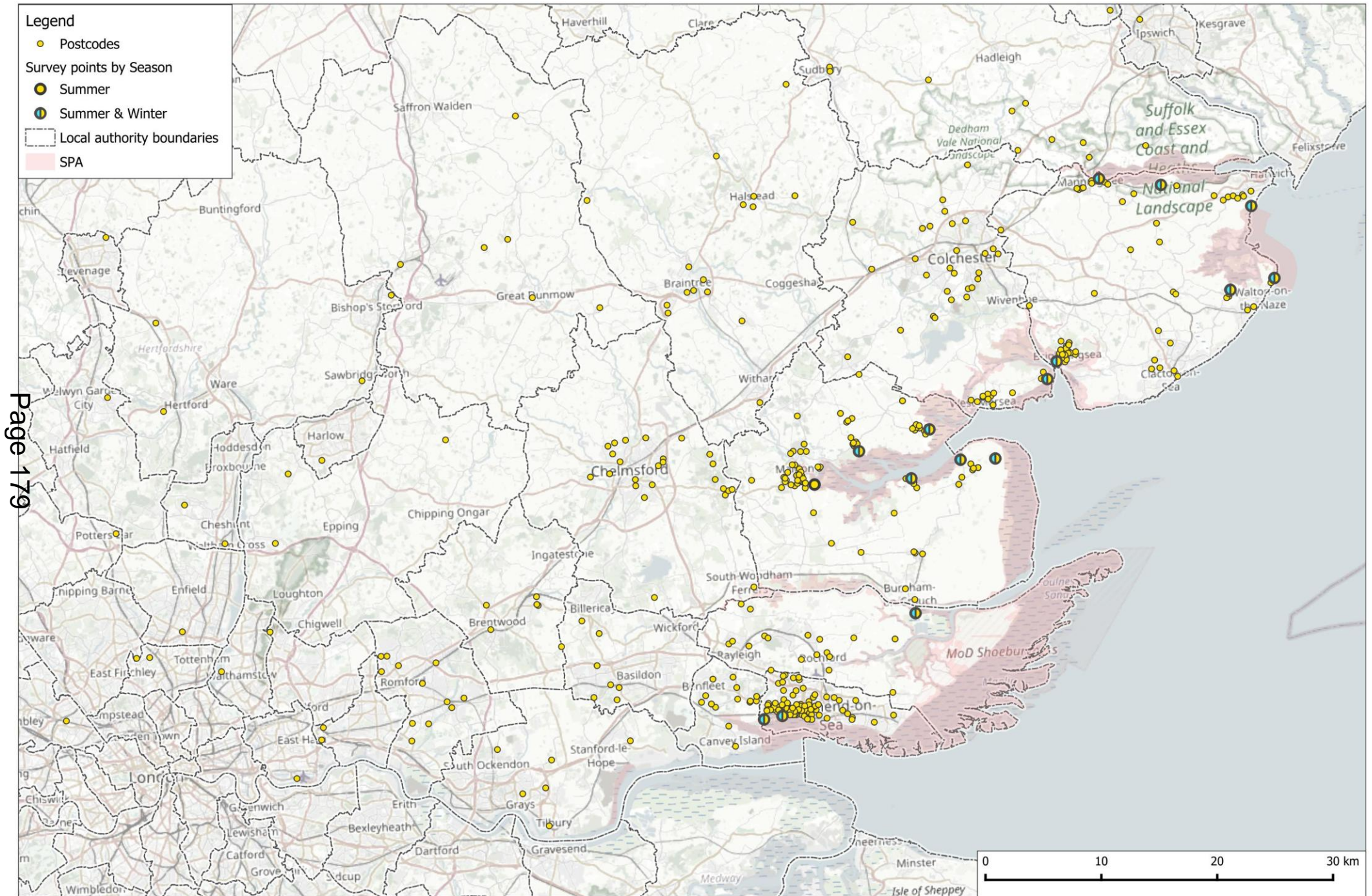
Map 6: Interviewee home postcodes categorised by visit type



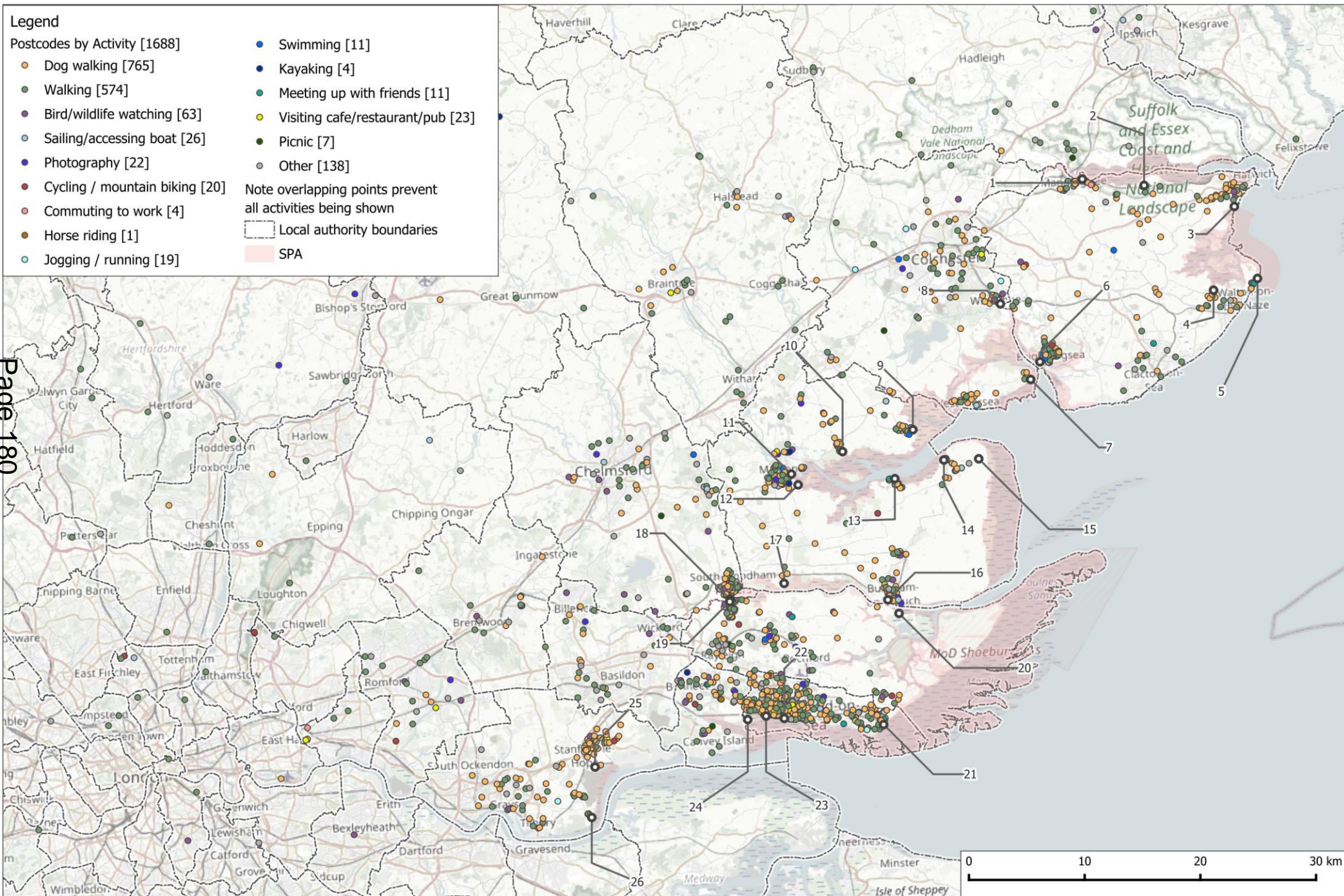
Map 7: Interviewee home postcodes from the winter surveys

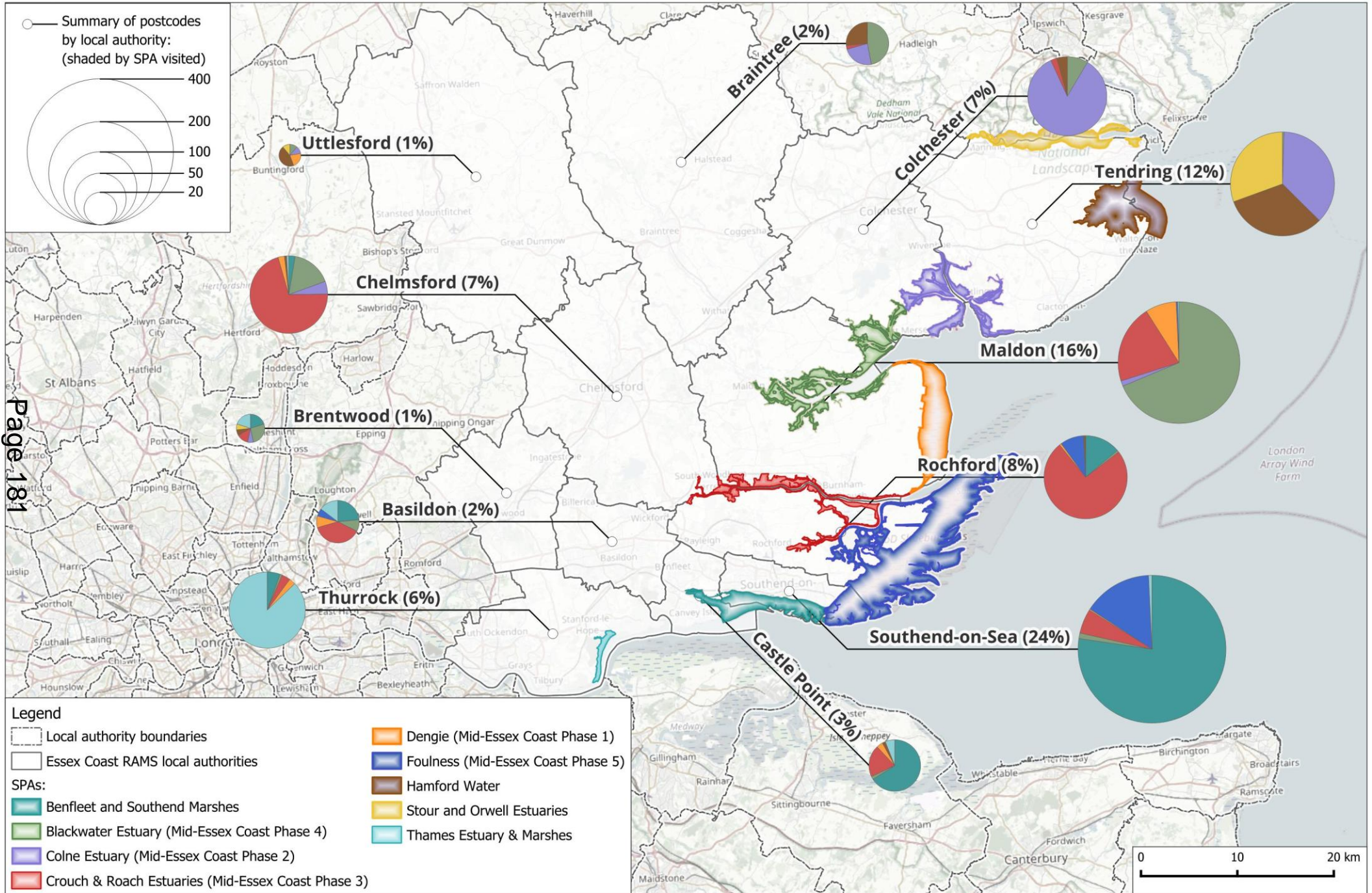


Map 8: Interviewee home postcodes from the summer surveys



Map 9: Interviewee home postcodes categorised by visitor activity





4.51 For each interviewee postcode the linear distance (from the home postcode to the survey point at which the interview took place) was calculated in GIS. Data are summarised for different types of visitors in Table 7 and by survey location in Appendix 3. The distances ranged from 30 m to 570 km, with around half of all interviewees giving home postcodes within just over 3 km of the survey location and around 75% originating within 13 km. Taking just those on a short visit directly from home, around half came from within 3 km and around 75% within 10 km.

Table 7: Summary statistics for the straight-line distance (km) from interviewee home postcodes to survey location, by different categories of interviewee.

| Category | | N | Mean (\pm SE) | Range | Median | Q3 |
|--|----------------------------|-------|---------------------|--------------|--------|------|
| All interviewees | | 1,688 | 17.32 (\pm 1.06) | 0.03 - 571.3 | 3.2 | 12.9 |
| <i>Winter</i> | | 1,165 | 12.45 (\pm 1.01) | 0.09 - 535.6 | 2.4 | 9.2 |
| <i>Summer</i> | | 523 | 28.18 (\pm 2.52) | 0.03 - 571.3 | 6.7 | 28.4 |
| Day trip/short visit from home | | 1,575 | 9.93 (\pm 0.49) | 0.03 - 245.3 | 2.8 | 9.9 |
| Main activity (all interviewees) | Dog walking | 765 | 7.86 (\pm 0.86) | 0.03 - 343.3 | 2.1 | 5.7 |
| | Walking | 574 | 21.48 (\pm 2.13) | 0.11 - 535.6 | 5.0 | 17.9 |
| | Bird/wildlife watching | 63 | 36.4 (\pm 7.03) | 0.19 - 279.6 | 16.2 | 36.5 |
| | Sailing / accessing boat | 26 | 34.82 (\pm 9.82) | 0.06 - 211.4 | 13.2 | 45.4 |
| | Visiting café / restaurant | 23 | 30.6 (\pm 11.2) | 0.7 - 184.3 | 3.7 | 27.7 |
| | Other | 237 | 29.55 (\pm 3.79) | 0.06 - 571.3 | 9.3 | 33.2 |

5. Discussion

Key findings

- 5.1 Visitor survey results show the Essex Coast is primarily visited by dog walkers and walkers (without a dog), these two activity types accounting for around 80% of interviewees. Visitors tend to visit frequently making on average around 122 visits per year, and visits are typically short (53% visiting for an hour or less than an hour). Almost all interviewees (93%) were visiting directly from their home, and the majority of interviewees (around 75%) lived within 15 km of the survey point. Most interviewees either arrived by car (58%) or on-foot (38%) with only a small number using public transport to access the coast. The coastal sites were typically chosen by interviewees because they were close to home (39%), because of the scenery and variety of views (20%) or because the location was perceived to be good for the dog (11%).
- 5.2 The awareness of nature conservation, in terms of the interviewee's awareness of habitats or species that were special to the area or in naming protections in place for nature conservation varied. Many interviewees (46%) could specifically name a habitat or species present (although note that these weren't necessarily those the Essex Coast is designated for) or provide a general mention of wintering birds, waders or habitats (40%). Fewer interviewees could name how the area was protected for nature conservation, with almost half stating that they didn't know or were unaware of any protections (48%).

Limitations

- 5.3 The data provides an overview and a snapshot in time and space. Access patterns will change and can vary markedly according to weather, local conditions and a suite of other factors that the survey design inevitably cannot comprehensively cover. The data are intended to provide a strategic overview rather than comprehensive data from all access points, across all tide conditions and times of year.
- 5.4 It should be noted that some types of access may be hard to capture in the interviews, for example runners, cyclists and horse riders can be difficult to intercept and may be reluctant to pause to be interviewed. Activities that take place on the water may be highly visible and have particular impacts in

terms of disturbance to birds etc. yet again may be under-represented in the data. For example, someone on a jet ski or a kayak may travel many kilometres and be out on the water for an extended time, but the only likelihood of capturing interview data for such activities is to intercept the user at the launch point or when they land. Where specific information is required from such users, then a targeted survey approach is likely to be necessary.

- 5.5 We have provided counts of water-based activities made by the surveyors, however these were only possible where the survey point provided a good vantage point across open water. The data therefore are a simple snapshot of water-based activities and numbers are likely to vary markedly according to tide, wind and other weather conditions. A large number of counts are likely to be necessary to get accurate count data where there is lots of variability in the levels and types of use. Again, targeted surveys may be necessary if such information is required.

Differences between seasons

- 5.6 There were some difference between seasons with those interviewed in the winter visiting more regularly (e.g. 21% visiting daily compared to 13% in the summer), tending to live closer to the survey point (median distance from postcode to survey point of 2.5km in the winter compared to 6.7km in the summer) and making shorter visits (typical duration 75 minutes in the winter and 102 minutes in the summer).
- 5.7 It is important to note that the above figures are drawn from all the summer data compared to all the winter data. Throughout the report we have presented all the data in this way rather than limit the comparison to the 15 survey points that were surveyed in both seasons. For this reason we have refrained from detailed statistical analysis comparing the summer and winter data as different survey points were covered in each season. For completeness key metrics are summarised in Table 8 below, with the data filtered to the 15 survey points covered in each season and therefore directly comparable. The totals indicate higher visitor numbers in the winter and people coming from further afield in the summer.

Table 8: Summary of key metrics by season, across the 15 comparable survey points.

| Metric | Winter 2025 | Summer 2025 |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Total people counted (from tally data) | 5,841 | 5,505 |
| Number of interviews | 622 | 529 |

| Metric | Winter 2025 | Summer 2025 |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Number of interviews (home only) | 585 | 452 |
| Average group size (interview data, home only) | 1.9 | 1.8 |
| % of interviewees visiting on their own | 289 | 208 |
| % dog walking stated main activity (home only) | 52% | 35% |
| % walking stated main activity (home only) | 28% | 38% |
| % visiting daily (home only) | 20% | 15% |
| % visiting at least weekly (home only) | 61% | 49% |
| % on first visit (home only) | 10% | 12% |
| % arriving by car (home only) | 63% | 64% |
| Median route length (km) | 3.2 | 2.9 |
| % stating close to home main reason for site choice (home only) | 26% | 22% |
| Median distance survey point to home postcode (km) (home only) | 1.8 | 2.0 |
| 75th percentile survey point to home postcode (km) (home only) | 6.1 | 20.1 |

Differences between survey locations

- 5.8 The level of busyness and visitor profile varied by survey location and are summarised in Table 9. While locations around Southend-on-Sea were largely the busiest (4,500 people passed the surveyor at Cinder Path and a further 1,988 people at Chalkwell Beach) other busy locations were well known coastal destination sites such as The Naze Tower and Promenade Park. The Naze also provided a location for 'family' type visits, with 33% of minors (under 18s) recorded with groups. Irlams Beach to the north and Kendal Park were also popular with groups with minors. As above, weekends were often busier than weekdays, with the exception of Kirby Quay, Brightlingsea, Cudmore Grove Country Park and Stanford Wharf where visits were more evenly distributed between weekdays and weekends. East Beach was the only location where weekdays were busier than weekends.
- 5.9 Dog walking as an activity was particularly popular at Two Tree Island and Stanford Wharf, with walking (without a dog) popular also at many locations, although Brightlingsea and Chalkwell Beach in particular. Perhaps as expected, sites that are associated with nature conservation such as Wrabness Nature Reserve, Wallasea Island (RSPB) and Blue House Farm (EWT) were popular with interviewees who were bird/wildlife watching or doing photography. Although only a small proportion of interviewees arrived

on a bike (2% overall), cycling was a popular activity undertaken at St Peters Chapel. The same could be said of those who were sailing or accessing their boat, with Bradwell Marina and Tollesbury Wick locations where this activity was often encountered (both have marinas and/or boat storage).

- 5.10 Visit frequency varied by survey location, with regular weekly visitors attracted to Riverside Park, St Lawrence and Wivenhoe Barrier and spending less than an hour on site. In contrast, locations such as Wallasea Island and St Peter's Chapel had a small proportion of weekly visitors, but interviewees spent longer at these locations. Interviewees preferred an early morning visit to Stanford Wharf and Marsh Farm Country Park, while Wallasea Island was more often visited in the late afternoon. The longest routes were over 30km and were recorded at Bradwell Marina, St Peters Chapel and St Lawrence. On average across all sites however, half of all routes taken on site were less than 3km (median). At Northey Island half of all routes were often longer than this (5.07 km median value) and often shorter at Bradwell Marina (1.24 km median) and Coalhouse Fort (1.6km median value).
- 5.11 Awareness of nature conservation at survey locations varied, however the most northern survey locations (Mistley Walls, Wrabness Nature Reserve, Irlams Beach and Kirby Quay) all had less than 3% of interviewees who said that they couldn't name any habitats or species that were special to that area. In contrast, interviewees at The Naze (45%) were the most likely to say they didn't know of any habitats or species. Specific habitats or species were most mentioned at Wallasesa Island, Tollesbury Wick and Blue House Farm as well as the four most northern sites previously mentioned.
- 5.12 Overall, 75% of all visitors originated from within 12.9 km of the survey point. This increased significantly at The Naze where 75% originated from within 81.5 km, Irlams Beach (77.9 km), St Peter's Chapel (74.2 km) and Bradwell Marina (48.8 km). Each of these sites had a greater proportion of visitors who were not visiting directly from home. When considering those visiting from home only (see Table 13 in Appendix 3), the 75th percentile for each of those four sites decreases to 60.3 km (The Naze), 8.46 km (Irlams Beach), 41.8 km (St Peter's Chapel) and 41.8 km (Bradwell Marina) respectively. More locally used sites (with a shorter 75th percentile distance from home) across all interviewee data appear to be St Lawrence (0.95 km), Kirby Quay (2.7 km), Stanford Wharf (3.14 km), Kendal Park (3.94 km) and Two Tree Island (4.12 km).

Comparison across SPAs

5.13 A summary of the key metrics across the different SPAs is provided in Table 9 below. The number of survey points per SPA is small and as such meaningful comparison at an estuary level is challenging. The Benfleet and Southend Marshes survey points were by far the busiest (89.9 people visiting per hour, more than double any other SPA), likely due to the survey locations proximity to Southend. In contrast, the survey points on the Crouch and Roach Estuaries appear the quietest with approximately 26 people visiting per hour. Walking (without a dog) was popular near the Hamford Water SPA, the Colne Estuary and at Foulness, whilst dog walking appeared the most popular activity undertaken near the Thames Estuary and Marshes (again likely due to its popularity as an activity at Two Tree Island and Coalhouse Fort). People choosing to visit the Stour and Orwell Estuary SPA (survey points all on the south side of the Stour) were doing so because it was close to home (51%), more so than near any other SPA. The Dengie and Hamford Water SPAs appeared to have the largest draw for people visiting, with the data showing 75% of all interviewees originating from beyond 70km from the survey points (and 75% of those who had travelled directly from home living 41-42km away, see Table 9). Benfleet and Southend Marshes in contrast appeared to have the most local draw, with 75% of all visitors originating from within approximately 4.5km.

Comparison to previous surveys

5.14 Previous surveys were undertaken by Colchester City Council on behalf of the North Essex authorities (2010-2013) and by Southend City Council (2018) to form the baseline study underpinning the RAMS strategy. Results from these previous surveys are summarised in the Appendices of the original RAMS (Essex County Council, 2018). A total of 21 survey locations were used of which 15 were replicated in this study, however the survey methodology largely differs and the raw data from the previous surveys are not available. As such, caution should be taken when making direct comparisons. There is some evidence to suggest however, that the Essex Coast is busier in 2025 compared to the original surveys, for example in the number of people or groups passing the survey point per hour and in the increase in people who say they visit the Essex Coast all year round.

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Table 9: Summary of selected metrics from the 2025 survey data, compared by season and by SPA. A brief summary is provided of the 2010-2013 North Essex Surveys baseline RAMS data, however, these are only a rough estimate where the raw data wasn't available. Comparisons to the 2018 survey data also were not possible due to the lack of raw data.

| Metric | 2010 – 2013 North Essex Surveys | 2025 Survey Data (All interviewees) | Winter | Summer | Benfleet & Southend Marshes | Blackwater Estuary | Colne Estuary | Crouch & Roach Estuaries | Dengie | Foulness | Hamford Water | Stour & Orwell Estuary | Thames Estuary & Marshes |
|---|------------------------------------|--|--------|--------|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------------|------------|------------|---------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Number of survey points (winter, summer) | 21 | 26 | 25 | 16 | 3 (3,2) | 6 (5,5) | 3 (3,2) | 5 (5,1) | 1 (1,1) | 1 (1,0) | 3 (3,3) | 2 (2,2) | 2 (2,0) |
| Number of interviews | 1,521 | 1,793 | 1,225 | 568 | 425 | 312 | 237 | 329 | 65 | 87 | 141 | 80 | 117 |
| Number of people counted (people per hour of survey) | 7 groups per hour | 28.4 | 32.1 | 22.5 | 89.9 | 14.6 | 30 | 26.1 | 7.6 | 38.5 | 18.7 | 9.3 | 28.5 |
| % of interviewees with main activity of dog walking | - | 45 | 50 | 32 | 49 | 46 | 43 | 36 | 29 | 46 | 36 | 48 | 67 |
| % of interviewees with main activity of walking | 107 groups, 7% of total | 35% | 33% | 38% | 35 | 35 | 39 | 33 | 31 | 38 | 40 | 26 | 28 |
| % visiting daily | - | 18% | 21% | 13% | 20 | 26 | 16 | 18 | 0 | 22 | 14 | 9 | 16 |
| % visiting all year round | 213 groups, | 60% | 66% | 48% | 66 | 65 | 51 | 55 | 31 | 66 | 51 | 74 | 70 |

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| Metric | 2010 – 2013 North Essex Surveys | 2025 Survey Data (All interviewees) | Winter | Summer | Benfleet & Southend Marshes | Blackwater Estuary | Colne Estuary | Crouch & Roach Estuaries | Dengie | Foulness | Hamford Water | Stour & Orwell Estuary | Thames Estuary & Marshes |
|---|------------------------------------|--|--------|--------|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------------|--------|----------|---------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | 14% of total | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| % arriving by car/van | - | 59% | 58% | 62% | 58 | 43 | 59 | 62 | 78 | 51 | 65 | 70 | 82 |
| % stating close to home as most important reason for site choice | - | 39% | 43% | 29% | 41 | 43 | 30 | 45 | 14 | 41 | 28 | 51 | 33 |
| Median distance from home postcode to survey point – All interviewees (km) | - | 3.2 | 2.5 | 6.7 | 2.26 | 2.49 | 5.78 | 3.76 | 38.4 | 2.09 | 17.68 | 5.54 | 3.37 |
| Median distance from home postcode to survey point – Home only (km) | - | 2.8 | 2.4 | 4.8 | 2.21 | 1.64 | 5.13 | 3.15 | 20.5 | 2 | 9.98 | 5.12 | 3.29 |
| 75th percentile distance from home postcode to survey point – All interviewees (km) | - | 12.9 | 9.1 | 28.4 | 4.49 | 17.51 | 16.79 | 12.51 | 74.2 | 7.66 | 76.48 | 7.8 | 7.86 |
| 75th percentile distance from home postcode to survey point – Home only (km) | - | 9.9 | 7.8 | 17.3 | 4.4 | 13.27 | 12.19 | 11.42 | 41.82 | 6.23 | 40.64 | 7.67 | 7.35 |
| Original Zones of Influence (km): | - | - | - | - | 4.3 | 22 | 9.7 | 4.5 | 20.8 | 13 | 8 | 13 | 8.1 |

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire



Good morning/afternoon. I am conducting a visitor survey on behalf of some local authorities in Essex, to find out how people use this area for recreation. Can you spare me a few minutes to take part in the survey please?

- Q0 Interviewee happy to take part in the survey (this will commence the survey)
 Person refuses to be interviewed (this option will allow you to log details about the refusal)

Q0a **Where a refusal... Log reason for refusal, if given or can be ascertained from behaviour**

- Already approached or participated in the survey
 Language issue
 Not prepared to stop (cyclist, jogger etc)
 Weather (e.g. rain, heat)
 In a hurry / no time
 Not interested
 Uncertain / not clear
 Other (give details):

Further details

Q0b **Where a refusal... Activity of person who refused to be interviewed. Based on your observation log the activity of the person who refused:**

- Dog walking
 Walking without a dog
 Jogging
 Cycling
 Commuting
 Other

Further details

INTERVIEW

Q1 Firstly I'd like to ask about the type of visit you are making today.

- Are you on a day trip/short visit and have travelled directly from your home today... *if no*
- Are you on a short trip/short visit & staying away from home with friends or family ... *if no*
- Are you staying away from home, e.g. static caravan, mobile home or on holiday
- If none of the above, How would you describe your visit today?

Further details

Q2 What is the main activity you are undertaking today? Tick closest answer. Do not prompt. Single response only. Record any additional activities on the next page (Q3).

- Dog walking
- Walking
- Jogging / running
- Cycling / mountain biking
- Bird/wildlife watching
- Photography
- Meeting up with friends
- Visiting cafe/restaurant/pub
- Picnic
- Horse riding
- Commuting to work
- Swimming
- Paddleboarding
- Kayaking
- Sailing/accessing boat
- Other, please detail:

Further details

Q3 Are there any other activities that you (or members of your group) are doing whilst you are here today? *Tick all that apply. Do not prompt. Leave blank if not applicable.*

- Dog walking
- Walking
- Jogging / running
- Cycling / mountain biking
- Bird/wildlife watching
- Photography
- Meeting up with friends
- Visiting cafe/restaurant/pub
- Picnic
- Horse riding
- Commuting to work
- Swimming
- Paddleboarding
- Kayaking
- Sailing/accessing boat
- Other, please detail:

Further details

Q4 Over the past year, roughly how often have you visited this location? *Tick closest answer, single response only. Only prompt if interviewee struggles.*

- Daily
- Most days (180+ visits)
- 1 to 3 times a week (40-180 visits)
- 2 to 3 times per month (15-40 visits)
- Once a month (6-15 visits)
- Less than once a month (2-5 visits)
- First visit / haven't visited in past year
- Don't know
- Other, please detail

Further details:

Q5 How long have you spent / will you spend here today? *Single response only. Do not prompt.*

- Less than 30 minutes
- Between 30 minutes and 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-3 hours
- 3-4 hours
- 4 hours +
- Don't know

Further details:

Q6 Do you tend to visit this location at a certain time of day? *Tick closest answers. Multiple answers ok. Do not prompt.*

- Early morning (before 9am)
- Late morning (between 9am and 12pm)
- Early afternoon (between 12pm and 2pm)
- Late afternoon (between 2pm and 4pm)
- Evening (after 4pm)
- Varies / Don't know
- First visit

Q7 Do you tend to visit this location more at a particular time of year for [insert given activity]? Multiple answers ok. Do not prompt.

- Spring (Mar-May)
- Summer (Jun-Aug)
- Autumn (Sept-Nov)
- Winter (Dec-Feb)
- Equally all year
- Don't know
- First visit

Q8 How did you get here today? If necessary prompt with: What forms of transport did you use? Multiple response possible - e.g. train and bicycle.

- Car / van
- On foot
- Bicycle
- Bus
- Train
- Ferry
- Motorbike
- Other, please detail

Further details:

Q9 **Why did you choose to visit this specific location today, rather than somewhere else?** *Tick all responses given. Do not prompt, tick closest answers.*

- Don't know / others in party chose
- Close to home
- No need to use car
- Quick / easy travel route
- Good / easy parking
- Particular facilities
- Refreshments / cafe / pub
- Choice of routes
- Away from roads/traffic
- Feels safe here
- Not many people
- Scenery / variety of views
- Rural feel / wild landscape
- Particular wildlife interest (e.g. birds, plants)
- Particular historic or cultural interest
- Habit / familiarity
- Good for dog / dog enjoys it
- Ability to let dog off lead
- Appropriate place for activity
- Tide times
- Suitability of area in given weather conditions
- For a change / variety
- Other, please detail

Further details:

Q10 Which of those reasons would you say had the most influence over your choice of location to visit today? *Single choice, tick their main reason only. List is based on their answers to Q9.*

- Don't know / others in party chose
- Close to home
- No need to use car
- Quick / easy travel route
- Good / easy parking
- Particular facilities
- Refreshments / cafe / pub
- Choice of routes
- Away from roads/traffic
- Feels safe here
- Not many people
- Scenery / variety of views
- Rural feel / wild landscape
- Particular wildlife interest (e.g. birds, plants)
- Particular historic or cultural interest
- Habit / familiarity
- Good for dog / dog enjoys it
- Ability to let dog off lead
- Appropriate place for activity
- Tide
- Suitability of area in given weather conditions
- For a change / variety
- Other reason (Further details:)

- Q11 **Now I'd like to ask you about your route today. Looking at the area shown on this map, can you show me where you started your visit today, the finish point and your route please.** *Probe to ensure route is accurately documented. Use **P** to indicate where the visitor parked (if applicable), **E** to indicate where they started and **X** to indicate where they finished. Mark the route with a solid line for the route already taken and a dotted line for the expected or remaining route, with arrows to indicate the direction.*

Enter the map reference below, or write 'no map' if no route map completed.

- Q12 Question only asked of those not visiting for first time **Is / was your route today the normal length when you visit here for [insert given activity]?** *Tick closest answer, do not prompt. Single response only.*

- Yes, normal
- Much longer than normal
- Much shorter than normal
- Not sure / no typical visit
- First visit

Q13 **What, if anything, influenced your choice of route here today?** *Tick closest answers, do not prompt. Multiple responses ok.*

- Weather
- Daylight
- Time
- Habit / usual route
- Tide times
- Other users (avoiding crowds, other dogs etc.)
- Group members (e.g. kids, less able)
- Avoiding muddy tracks / paths
- Followed a marked trail
- Location of cafe/restaurant/pub
- Activity undertaken (e.g. presence of dog)
- Birds / wildlife
- Followed their dog
- Interpretation / leaflets / promotion / app
- Viewpoint / feature
- Direct route to work / shops etc.
- Just wandering/exploring
- Other, please detail

Further details:

Q14 Which single location would you have visited today for [given activity] if you could not have visited here? Do not prompt. Ask for spelling if necessary.

- Nowhere / wouldn't have visited anywhere
- Not sure / don't know
- Alternative site:

Q15 Please could you tell me the name of two other locations that you also visit for [given activity]? Do not prompt. Ask for spellings if necessary.

2nd site name:

3rd site name:

Further details:

Q16 Can you name any species (plants or animals) or habitats (where they live) that are special to this area? Do not prompt. Tick all that apply.

- Not aware of any / couldn't name any species or habitats
- Yes aware but no detail given
- General mention of wintering waders / waterbirds / shorebirds / wildfowl (e.g. Geese, but not a specific species)
- General mention of breeding birds
- General mention of habitats without specifically naming any
- Specific bird species mentioned (e.g. Brent Goose, Curlew etc)
- Seals
- Specific habitat named (e.g. estuary, mudflats, saltmarsh)
- Other, give further details

Q17 **Are you aware of any ways in which this area is protected for wildlife?** *Do not prompt.*
Tick all that apply.

- No, isn't aware of ways this area is protected for wildlife
- Don't know
- SSSI
- Nature Reserve
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
- Ramsar site
- By-laws
- Mentions Wildlife Trusts
- Mentions RSPB
- Mentions Bird Aware Essex
- Other

Further details:

Q18 **Are there any changes you would like to see here with regards to how this area is managed for access?** *Do not give options or prompt. Tick closest option(s).*

- No changes / leave as is
- More parking
- Better parking
- More paths
- Better / surfaced paths
- More bins / less litter
- More dog waste bins
- Controls on dogs and dog fouling
- Facilities for dogs (e.g. training areas, washing facilities)
- More accessible
- Seating / benches
- Toilets
- Cafe
- Changes to habitats / scenery
- More natural / wild
- Not sure / don't know
- Other, please detail below

Further details:

Q19 What would make you want to visit a new park or greenspace if created in the area?
Do not give options or prompt. Tick closest option(s).

- Nothing / no change to visiting area
- More parking
- Better parking
- More paths
- Better / surfaced paths
- More bins / less litter
- More dog waste bins
- Controls on dogs and dog fouling
- Dogs of lead area
- Facilities for dogs (e.g. training areas, washing facilities)
- More accessible
- Seating / benches
- Toilets
- Cafe
- Play equipment
- Cycling routes
- Attractive landscaping
- Sculptures
- Shelter from weather
- Changes to habitats / scenery
- More natural / wild
- Not sure / don't know
- Other, please detail below

Further details:

Q20 Do you have any further comments or general feedback about your visit and access to this area?

- Q21** Finally, to identify how far people have travelled, what is your full home postcode?
This is an important piece of information, please make every effort to record correctly. If necessary, reassure them that we don't want their full address, and it will only be used to work out where people are coming from.

- Q22** *If visitor is unable or refuses to give postcode:* What is the name of the town or area where you live?

- Q23** *If visitor is on holiday ask:* Which town / area are you staying in?

- Q24** *If visitor is on holiday ask:* What type of accommodation are you staying in? Do not prompt. Tick closest

- Hotel
 B&B
 Self-catering
 Glamping
 Camping
 Other:

Further details (other accommodation type):

That is the end. Thank you very much indeed for your time.

Appendix 2: Summary of survey locations

Survey sessions were each 2hrs, with four sessions completed on a survey day. Target hours reflect the intended level of survey effort and actual hours the level of survey work actually completed. Tide state was not recorded during sessions, however we recognise that this may also influence visitor behaviour as well as the weather.

Table 10: Summary of the weather conditions during the survey period.

| Survey location | Winter | Summer | Sessions with rainfall: Winter | Average temp (°C): Winter | Sessions with rainfall: Summer | Average temp (°C): Summer | Total sessions with rainfall | Target hours | Actual hours | Notes |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--|
| 1 - Mistley Walls | ✓ | ✓ | 0 | 6.5 | 0 | 19.8 | 0 | 32 | 32 | |
| 2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve | ✓ | ✓ | 0 | 4.3 | 0 | 20.3 | 1 | 32 | 32 | |
| 3 - Irlams Beach | ✓ | ✓ | 0 | 5.4 | 1 | 19.1 | 1 | 32 | 32 | |
| 4 - Kirby Quay | ✓ | ✓ | 0 | 8.4 | 2 | 19.5 | 2 | 32 | 29.75 | Thunderstorms & one session curtailed early due to torrential rain. Other session abandoned completely due to Met Office Yellow weather warnings for storms. (Both in summer). |
| 5 - The Naze | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 5.3 | 0 | 20.5 | 2 | 32 | 32 | |
| 6 - Brightlingsea Marsh | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | 8.1 | 0 | 21.6 | 2 | 32 | 32 | |
| 7 - Cudmore Grove Country Park | ✓ | ✓ | 0 | 7.3 | 2 | 21.3 | 3 | 32 | 31 | Car park delayed opening, session started at 8am (winter). |
| 8 - Wivenhoe Barrier | ✓ | * | 2 | 6.6 | - | - | 2 | 16 | 16 | |

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| Survey location | Winter | Summer | Sessions with rainfall: Winter | Average temp (°C): Winter | Sessions with rainfall: Summer | Average temp (°C): Summer | Total sessions with rainfall | Target hours | Actual hours | Notes |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--|
| 9 - Tollesbury Wick (EWT) | ✓ | ✓ | 0 | 4.6 | 4 | 19.4 | 4 | 32 | 32 | |
| 10 - Goldhanger Creek | ✓ | ✓ | 0 | 4.5 | 0 | 19.8 | 0 | 32 | 32 | |
| 11 - Promenade Park | ✓ | ✗ | 0 | 3.5 | - | | 3 | 16 | 16 | |
| 12 - Northey Island Causeway | ✗ | ✓ | - | | 2 | 22.1 | 2 | 16 | 16 | |
| 13 - St Lawrence | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | 4.8 | 4 | 17.3 | 5 | 32 | 32 | |
| 14 - Bradwell Marina | ✓ | ✓ | 0 | - | 0 | - | 4 | 32 | 32 | |
| 15 - St Peter's Chapel | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 32 | 32 | |
| 16 - Riverside Park | ✓ | ✗ | 2 | - | - | - | 2 | 16 | 16 | |
| 17 - Blue House Farm (EWT) | ✓ | ✗ | 0 | - | - | - | 6 | 16 | 16 | |
| 18 - Marsh Farm Country Park | ✓ | ✗ | 2 | 5.6 | - | - | 0 | 16 | 16 | |
| 19 - Kendal Park | ✓ | ✗ | 0 | 10.3 | - | - | 3 | 16 | 16 | |
| 20 - Wallasea Island (RSPB) | ✓ | ✓ | 0 | 5.5 | 3 | 18.7 | 3 | 32 | 31.5 | Frost on sensors inhibited gate sensors working for the first half hour of a session (winter). |
| 21 - East Beach | ✓ | ✗ | 2 | 5.4 | - | - | 0 | 16 | 16 | |
| 22 - Chalkwell Beach | ✓ | ✗ | 0 | 8.5 | - | - | 2 | 16 | 16 | |
| 23 - Cinder Path | ✓ | ✓ | 0 | 5.0 | 1 | 18.5 | 1 | 32 | 32 | |

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| Survey location | Winter | Summer | Sessions with rainfall: Winter | Average temp (°C): Winter | Sessions with rainfall: Summer | Average temp (°C): Summer | Total sessions with rainfall | Target hours | Actual hours | Notes |
|----------------------|--------|--------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
| 24 - Two Tree Island | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | 11.3 | 0 | 24.6 | 0 | 32 | 32 | |
| 25 - Stanford Wharf | ✓ | ✗ | 0 | 12.0 | - | - | 1 | 16 | 16 | |
| 26 - Coalhouse Fort | ✓ | ✗ | 14 | 4.9 | - | - | 0 | 16 | 16 | |

Appendix 3: Supporting data tables

Water activities by survey location

Table 11: Activities observed by surveyors by survey location. A 'tick' indicates when the activity has been observed (numbers unspecified). Note that for boats, rowing/sailing/motorised craft have been ticked where specified, with boats 'ticked' to cover any instances where the type of boat observed was unspecified.

| Survey location: | Boats | Rowing | Sailing | Motorised boats | Jet skis | Kayaks | Paddleboarding | Swimming | Wind or kite surfing | Metal detecting | Bait digging | Fishing | Flying model aircraft/drones |
|--------------------------------|-------|--------|---------|-----------------|----------|--------|----------------|----------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------|------------------------------|
| 1 - Mistley Walls | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 - Irlams Beach | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 - Kirby Quay | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 - The Naze | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 6 - Brightlingsea Marsh | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 7 - Cudmore Grove Country Park | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| 8 - Wivenhoe Barrier | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 - Tollesbury Wick (EWT) | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 - Goldhanger Creek | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 - Promenade Park | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 12 - Northey Island Causeway | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 13 - St Lawrence | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | |

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| Survey location: | Boats | Rowing | Sailing | Motorised boats | Jet skis | Kayaks | Paddleboarding | Swimming | Wind or kite surfing | Metal detecting | Bait digging | Fishing | Flying model aircraft/drones |
|------------------------------|-------|--------|---------|-----------------|----------|--------|----------------|----------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------|------------------------------|
| 14 - Bradwell Marina | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 15 - St Peter's Chapel | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 16 - Riverside Park | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 17 - Blue House Farm (EWT) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18 - Marsh Farm Country Park | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 19 - Kendal Park | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 20 - Wallasea Island (RSPB) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 21 - East Beach | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 22 - Chalkwell Beach | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 23 - Cinder Path | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |
| 24 - Two Tree Island | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ |
| 25 - Stanford Wharf | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 26 - Coalhouse Fort | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | ✓ |

Main activity by survey location

Table 12: Main activity of interviewees by survey location and by season, with percentage (per location or season) given in parentheses.

| Survey location: | Dog walking | Walking | Bird/wildlife watching | Sailing/accessing boat | Visiting cafe/restaurant/pub | Photography | Jogging / running | Cycling / mountain biking | Swimming | Meeting up with friends | Picnic | Kayaking | Commuting to work | Horse riding | Other |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1 - Mistley Walls | 12 (34%) | 11 (31%) | 4 (11%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (6%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (6%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (6%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (6%) |
| 2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve | 26 (58%) | 10 (22%) | 8 (18%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| 3 - Irlams Beach | 15 (45%) | 11 (33%) | 2 (6%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (3%) | 1 (3%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (9%) |
| 4 - Kirby Quay | 16 (67%) | 6 (25%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (8%) |
| 5 - The Naze | 20 (24%) | 39 (46%) | 2 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (2%) | 2 (2%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 16 (19%) |
| 6 - Brightlingsea Marsh | 32 (36%) | 43 (48%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 5 (6%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 6 (7%) |
| 7 - Cudmore Grove | 53 (49%) | 36 (33%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 4 (4%) | 2 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 11 (10%) |
| 8 - Wivenhoe Barrier | 18 (46%) | 13 (33%) | 2 (5%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (8%) | 1 (3%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (3%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (3%) |
| 9 - Tollesbury Wick | 18 (34%) | 19 (36%) | 1 (2%) | 10 (19%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (4%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (4%) |

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| Survey location: | Dog walking | Walking | Bird/wildlife watching | Sailing/accessing boat | Visiting cafe/restaurant/pub | Photography | Jogging / running | Cycling / mountain biking | Swimming | Meeting up with friends | Picnic | Kayaking | Commuting to work | Horse riding | Other |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|--------------|-------------|
| 10 - Goldhanger Creek | 44 (54%) | 33 (41%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) |
| 11 - Promenade Park | 28 (67%) | 14 (33%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| 12 - Northey Island Causeway | 16 (41%) | 18 (46%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (3%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (3%) | 1 (3%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (5%) |
| 13 - St Lawrence | 28 (61%) | 14 (30%) | 1 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (4%) |
| 14 - Bradwell Marina | 10 (20%) | 10 (20%) | 0 (0%) | 12 (24%) | 3 (6%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (4%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 13 (25%) |
| 15 - St Peter's Chapel | 19 (29%) | 20 (31%) | 2 (3%) | 1 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 5 (8%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 17 (26%) |
| 16 - Riverside Park | 26 (42%) | 28 (45%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (2%) | 2 (3%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 4 (6%) |
| 17 - Blue House Farm | 5 (36%) | 2 (14%) | 5 (36%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (14%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| 18 - Marsh Farm Country Park | 39 (48%) | 26 (32%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (2%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 11 (13%) |
| 19 - Kendal Park | 37 (47%) | 25 (32%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 2 (3%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 10 (13%) |
| 20 - Wallasea Island | 11 (12%) | 27 (29%) | 33 (35%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 15 (16%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 7 (8%) |

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| Survey location: | Dog walking | Walking | Bird/wildlife watching | Sailing/accessing boat | Visiting cafe/restaurant/pub | Photography | Jogging / running | Cycling / mountain biking | Swimming | Meeting up with friends | Picnic | Kayaking | Commuting to work | Horse riding | Other |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 21 - East Beach | 40 (46%) | 33 (38%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (2%) | 3 (3%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (3%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 4 (5%) |
| 22 - Chalkwell Beach | 30 (37%) | 43 (52%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 2 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 4 (5%) |
| 23 - Cinder Path | 64 (32%) | 88 (44%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (1%) | 11 (6%) | 1 (1%) | 4 (2%) | 1 (1%) | 3 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 26 (13%) |
| 24 - Two Tree Island | 115 (80%) | 17 (12%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 2 (1%) | 3 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 3 (2%) |
| 25 - Stanford Wharf | 36 (78%) | 9 (20%) | 1 (2%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| 26 - Coalhouse Fort | 42 (59%) | 24 (34%) | 1 (1%) | 2 (3%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) |
| <i>Winter</i> | 616 (50%) | 401 (33%) | 55 (4%) | 6 (0%) | 12 (1%) | 22 (2%) | 11 (1%) | 10 (1%) | 3 (0%) | 7 (1%) | 2 (0%) | 1 (0%) | 2 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 77 (6%) |
| <i>Summer</i> | 184 (32%) | 218 (38%) | 11 (2%) | 22 (4%) | 13 (3%) | 1 (0%) | 10 (2%) | 11 (2%) | 10 (2%) | 4 (1%) | 7 (1%) | 3 (1%) | 2 (0%) | 1 (0%) | 71 (13%) |
| Grand Total | 800 (45%) | 619 (35%) | 66 (4%) | 28 (2%) | 25 (1%) | 23 (1%) | 21 (1%) | 21 (1%) | 13 (1%) | 11 (1%) | 9 (1%) | 4 (0%) | 4 (0%) | 1 (0%) | 148 (8%) |

Distance from home postcode to survey location

Table 13: Summary of distance to home postcodes by survey location. Note that shading reflects the relevant SPA, with colours to match those seen in Map 1.

| Category | N | Mean (\pm SE) | Range | Median | Q3 | N | Mean (\pm SE) | Range | Median | Q3 |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------|
| | All interviewees | | | | | Visiting directly from home only | | | | |
| Stour & Orwell Estuary | 75 | 11.29 (\pm2.77) | 0.17 - 153.62 | 5.54 | 7.8 | 72 | 7.14 (\pm1.28) | 0.17 - 64.89 | 5.12 | 7.67 |
| 1 - Mistley Walls | 31 | 13.83 (\pm 6.16) | 0.29 - 153.62 | 1.98 | 6.34 | 28 | 3.42 (\pm 0.9) | 0.29 - 16.43 | 1.31 | 4.36 |
| 2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve | 44 | 9.5 (\pm 1.94) | 0.17 - 64.89 | 6.76 | 7.82 | 44 | 9.5 (\pm 1.94) | 0.17 - 64.89 | 6.76 | 7.82 |
| Hamford Water | 129 | 45.42 (\pm5.27) | 0.03 - 366.07 | 17.68 | 76.48 | 105 | 24.94 (\pm3.2) | 0.03 - 150.79 | 9.98 | 40.64 |
| 3 - Irlams Beach | 28 | 45.4 (\pm 15.3) | 0.6 - 366.1 | 5.2 | 77.9 | 20 | 5.69 (\pm 1.75) | 0.58 - 29.92 | 1.75 | 8.46 |
| 4 - Kirby Quay | 22 | 18.2 (\pm 11.6) | 0 - 212.8 | 0.6 | 2.7 | 20 | 1.64 (\pm 0.62) | 0.03 - 11.8 | 0.58 | 1.67 |
| 5 - The Naze | 79 | 52.99 (\pm 5.66) | 0.5 - 233.33 | 41.06 | 81.47 | 65 | 38.04 (\pm 4.42) | 0.5 - 150.79 | 29.03 | 60.32 |
| Colne Estuary | 224 | 21.53 (\pm3.53) | 0.26 - 456.96 | 5.78 | 16.79 | 197 | 9.3 (\pm0.93) | 0.26 - 81.15 | 5.13 | 12.19 |
| 6 - Brightlingsea Marsh | 82 | 7.14 (\pm 1.48) | 0.53 - 63.18 | 1.4 | 6.68 | 79 | 5.64 (\pm 1.16) | 0.53 - 59.99 | 1.38 | 5.37 |
| 7 - Cudmore Grove Country Park | 104 | 39.32 (\pm 7.1) | 0.52 - 456.96 | 13.54 | 33.76 | 82 | 16.16 (\pm 1.65) | 0.52 - 81.15 | 11.78 | 19.79 |
| 8 - Wivenhoe Barrier | 38 | 3.93 (\pm 2.19) | 0.26 - 84.1 | 0.7 | 2.78 | 36 | 1.7 (\pm 0.35) | 0.26 - 7.34 | 0.69 | 1.82 |
| Blackwater Estuary | 284 | 17.6 (\pm2.66) | 0.06 - 535.56 | 2.49 | 17.51 | 260 | 10.68 (\pm1.29) | 0.06 - 165.94 | 1.64 | 13.27 |
| 9 - Tollesbury Wick (EWT) | 46 | 23.9 (\pm 12.5) | 0.2 - 535.6 | 1.2 | 14.3 | 41 | 7.11 (\pm 2.58) | 0.19 - 96.47 | 1.16 | 3.99 |
| 10 - Goldhanger Creek | 77 | 12.59 (\pm 3.68) | 0.28 - 236.55 | 3.8 | 11.6 | 73 | 6.67 (\pm 1.02) | 0.28 - 45.45 | 3.64 | 9.9 |
| 11 - Promenade Park | 40 | 8.79 (\pm 1.64) | 0.4 - 46.54 | 5.07 | 15.75 | 39 | 7.83 (\pm 1.36) | 0.4 - 29.53 | 5 | 15.08 |
| 12 - Northey Island Causeway | 35 | 18.47 (\pm 6.27) | 0.8 - 165.94 | 2.03 | 20.06 | 35 | 18.47 (\pm 6.27) | 0.8 - 165.94 | 2.03 | 20.06 |
| 13 - St Lawrence | 38 | 6.5 (\pm 2.73) | 0.15 - 84.85 | 0.49 | 0.95 | 35 | 2.9 (\pm 1.13) | 0.15 - 24.5 | 0.47 | 0.86 |

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| Category | N | Mean (\pm SE) | Range | Median | Q3 | N | Mean (\pm SE) | Range | Median | Q3 |
|--|------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------|
| 14 - Bradwell Marina | 48 | 35.07 (\pm 5.92) | 0.06 - 211.38 | 27.36 | 48.79 | 37 | 25.55 (\pm 4.76) | 0.06 - 116.74 | 14.47 | 41.81 |
| Dengie | 61 | 66 (\pm12.5) | 0.9 - 571.3 | 38.4 | 74.2 | 46 | 33.14 (\pm6.3) | 0.92 - 245.32 | 20.5 | 41.82 |
| 15 - St Peter's Chapel | 61 | 66 (\pm 12.5) | 0.9 - 571.3 | 38.4 | 74.2 | 46 | 33.14 (\pm 6.3) | 0.92 - 245.32 | 20.5 | 41.82 |
| Crouch & Roach | 310 | 14.41 (\pm2.16) | 0.17 - 333.92 | 3.76 | 12.51 | 300 | 10 (\pm1.19) | 0.17 - 176.48 | 3.15 | 11.42 |
| 16 - Riverside Park | 54 | 14.52 (\pm 5.85) | 0.29 - 252.18 | 1.11 | 5.58 | 51 | 9.28 (\pm 3.93) | 0.29 - 176.48 | 1.11 | 4.02 |
| 17 - Blue House Farm (EWT) | 14 | 8.95 (\pm 2.36) | 0.88 - 36.46 | 8.63 | 10.35 | 14 | 8.95 (\pm 2.36) | 0.88 - 36.46 | 8.63 | 10.35 |
| 18 - Marsh Farm Country Park | 77 | 3.37 (\pm 0.48) | 0.45 - 15.44 | 1.25 | 4.19 | 77 | 3.37 (\pm 0.48) | 0.45 - 15.44 | 1.25 | 4.19 |
| 19 - Kendal Park | 78 | 5.07 (\pm 2.24) | 0.17 - 172.92 | 0.91 | 3.94 | 77 | 4.76 (\pm 2.25) | 0.17 - 172.92 | 0.9 | 3.86 |
| 20 - Wallasea Island (RSPB) | 87 | 33.35 (\pm 6.01) | 1.97 - 333.92 | 14.94 | 29.81 | 81 | 21.92 (\pm 2.47) | 1.97 - 154.85 | 13.18 | 27.89 |
| Foulness | 82 | 8.79 (\pm2.17) | 0.2 - 106.47 | 2.09 | 7.66 | 78 | 5.83 (\pm1.43) | 0.2 - 97.76 | 2 | 6.23 |
| 21 - East Beach | 82 | 8.79 (\pm 2.17) | 0.2 - 106.47 | 2.09 | 7.66 | 78 | 5.83 (\pm 1.43) | 0.2 - 97.76 | 2 | 6.23 |
| Benfleet & Southend Marshes | 408 | 6.4 (\pm0.78) | 0.11 - 184.28 | 2.26 | 4.49 | 404 | 5.53 (\pm0.56) | 0.11 - 112.07 | 2.21 | 4.4 |
| 22 - Chalkwell Beach | 80 | 5.37 (\pm 1.16) | 0.11 - 51.2 | 1.56 | 6.05 | 80 | 5.37 (\pm 1.16) | 0.11 - 51.2 | 1.56 | 6.05 |
| 23 - Cinder Path | 189 | 7.54 (\pm 1.37) | 0.16 - 184.28 | 2.02 | 4.78 | 186 | 6.35 (\pm 0.97) | 0.16 - 112.07 | 1.96 | 4.72 |
| 24 - Two Tree Island | 139 | 5.42 (\pm 1.17) | 0.85 - 133.81 | 2.78 | 4.12 | 138 | 4.49 (\pm 0.71) | 0.85 - 69.92 | 2.78 | 4.08 |
| Thames Estuary & Marshes | 115 | 7.78 (\pm1.58) | 0.25 - 173.13 | 3.37 | 7.86 | 113 | 6.06 (\pm0.58) | 0.25 - 26.58 | 3.29 | 7.35 |
| 25 - Stanford Wharf | 46 | 7.41 (\pm 3.76) | 0.52 - 173.13 | 2.28 | 3.14 | 45 | 3.73 (\pm 0.79) | 0.52 - 26.58 | 2.26 | 3.04 |
| 26 - Coalhouse Fort | 69 | 8.02 (\pm 0.86) | 0.25 - 36.62 | 6.08 | 9.79 | 68 | 7.6 (\pm 0.76) | 0.25 - 26.04 | 6.07 | 9.72 |

75th percentile distance from home postcode to survey location by season

Table 14: Summary of 75th percentile distance to survey location and estuaries overall, compared between seasons.

| Survey location | N | Winter Q3 | Summer Q3 | Combined Q3 | N | Winter Q3 | Summer Q3 | Combined Q3 |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| | All interviewees | | | | Visiting directly from home only | | | |
| Stour & Orwell Estuary | 75 | 7.82 | 6.86 | 7.8 | 72 | 7.76 | 6.75 | 7.67 |
| 1 - Mistley Walls | 31 | 11.05 | 5.03 | 6.34 | 28 | 6.34 | 3.51 | 4.36 |
| 2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve | 44 | 7.83 | 12.1 | 7.82 | 44 | 7.83 | 12.1 | 7.82 |
| Hamford Water | 129 | 41.08 | 83.73 | 76.48 | 105 | 19.92 | 62.53 | 40.64 |
| 3 - Irlams Beach | 28 | 36.6 | 87.2 | 77.9 | 20 | 5.03 | 13.86 | 8.46 |
| 4 - Kirby Quay | 22 | 2 | 42.4 | 2.7 | 20 | 1.98 | 2.85 | 1.67 |
| 5 - The Naze | 79 | 55.49 | 89.25 | 81.47 | 65 | 41.06 | 77.26 | 60.32 |
| Colne Estuary | 224 | 9.07 | 33.41 | 16.79 | 197 | 7.37 | 20.66 | 12.19 |
| 6 - Brightlingsea Marsh | 82 | 4.96 | 14.97 | 6.68 | 79 | 3.91 | 10.07 | 5.37 |
| 7 - Cudmore Grove Country Park | 104 | 16.79 | 37.2 | 33.76 | 82 | 13.3 | 26.94 | 19.79 |
| 8 - Wivenhoe Barrier | 38 | 2.78 | - | 2.78 | 36 | 1.82 | - | 1.82 |
| Blackwater Estuary | 284 | 11.43 | 22.16 | 17.51 | 260 | 8.22 | 17.56 | 13.27 |
| 9 - Tollesbury Wick (EWT) | 46 | 3 | 17.47 | 14.3 | 41 | 1.4 | 12.35 | 3.99 |
| 10 - Goldhanger Creek | 77 | 10.21 | 13.15 | 11.6 | 73 | 8.3 | 11.98 | 9.9 |
| 11 - Promenade Park | 40 | 15.75 | - | 15.75 | 39 | 15.08 | - | 15.08 |
| 12 - Northey Island Causeway | 35 | - | 20.06 | 20.06 | 35 | - | 20.06 | 20.06 |
| 13 - St Lawrence | 38 | 2.07 | 0.83 | 0.95 | 35 | 0.86 | 0.83 | 0.86 |
| 14 - Bradwell Marina | 48 | 42.49 | 49.32 | 48.79 | 37 | 30.95 | 47.56 | 41.81 |
| Dengie | 61 | 69.4 | 78.2 | 74.2 | 46 | 39.26 | 48.3 | 41.82 |
| 15 - St Peter's Chapel | 61 | 69.4 | 78.2 | 74.2 | 46 | 39.26 | 48.3 | 41.82 |
| Crouch & Roach | 310 | 11.47 | 18.8 | 12.51 | 300 | 10.97 | 13.18 | 11.42 |
| 16 - Riverside Park | 54 | 5.58 | - | 5.58 | 51 | 4.02 | - | 4.02 |
| 17 - Blue House Farm (EWT) | 14 | 10.35 | - | 10.35 | 14 | 10.35 | - | 10.35 |
| 18 - Marsh Farm Country Park | 77 | 4.19 | - | 4.19 | 77 | 4.19 | - | 4.19 |

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| Survey location | N | Winter Q3 | Summer Q3 | Combined Q3 | N | Winter Q3 | Summer Q3 | Combined Q3 |
|--|-----|-----------|-----------|-------------|-----|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| 19 - Kendal Park | 78 | 3.94 | - | 3.94 | 77 | 3.86 | - | 3.86 |
| 20 - Wallasea Island (RSPB) | 87 | 32.21 | 18.8 | 29.81 | 81 | 30.07 | 13.18 | 27.89 |
| Foulness | 82 | 7.66 | - | 7.66 | 78 | 6.23 | - | 6.23 |
| 21 - East Beach | 82 | 7.66 | - | 7.66 | 78 | 6.23 | - | 6.23 |
| Benfleet & Southend Marshes | 408 | 3.86 | 5.73 | 4.49 | 404 | 3.86 | 5 | 4.4 |
| 22 - Chalkwell Beach | 80 | 6.05 | - | 6.05 | 80 | 6.05 | - | 6.05 |
| 23 - Cinder Path | 189 | 4.24 | 7.3 | 4.78 | 186 | 4.36 | 6.69 | 4.72 |
| 24 - Two Tree Island | 139 | 3.6 | 4.66 | 4.12 | 138 | 3.6 | 4.59 | 4.08 |
| Thames Estuary & Marshes | 115 | 7.86 | - | 7.86 | 113 | 7.35 | - | 7.35 |
| 25 - Stanford Wharf | 46 | 3.14 | - | 3.14 | 45 | 3.04 | - | 3.04 |
| 26 - Coalhouse Fort | 69 | 9.79 | - | 9.79 | 68 | 9.72 | - | 9.72 |

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Maldon District Council Equality Impact Assessment

Please complete the questions below as fully as possible - the boxes will expand to accommodate your text. Please include the document version in the footer below.

| | | |
|---|-------------------------------|---|
| <p>Title Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) – Revised Strategy 2026: update to scope, mitigation package, cost modelling and RAMS tariff.</p> | <p>Date 07/05/2026</p> | <p>Officer Preparing Leonie Alpin, Principal Policy Planner – adapted from the EqIA prepared by the RAMS Delivery Manager.</p> |
|---|-------------------------------|---|

1. Background

1.1 Description of proposal / policy / service (Including aims, outcomes and in the case of an existing service how long it has been delivered in its current format)

The Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) provides a strategic, partnership-based approach to mitigating the in-combination recreational impacts of new residential and overnight accommodation development on internationally designated European sites along the Essex coastline.

The strategy enables Local Planning Authorities, including Maldon District Council, to meet their statutory duties under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) when determining planning applications, by securing developer contributions towards a coordinated package of mitigation measures.

The Revised Essex Coast RAMS (March 2026) replaces the 2018 strategy and responds to:

- Updated visitor survey evidence (2025);
- Significant increased planned housing growth (c. 148,309 dwellings) within the Zone of Influence;
- An expanded and more intensive package of Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) measures, informed by improved understanding of recreational impacts and visitor behaviour;
- The need to secure strategic mitigation in perpetuity.

The revised strategy strengthens and expands the mitigation measures, including:

- A substantially expanded on-site ranger team to undertake wardening, monitoring and visitor engagement;
- Dedicated roles for dog engagement, education, communications and monitoring;
- Enhanced site-specific mitigation projects, including access management;
- Long-term monitoring and five-yearly strategy reviews.

To fund this enhanced and longer-term mitigation package, the RAMS tariff increases from £175.55 to £476 per net new dwelling (or qualifying unit). This figure is based on updated cost estimates and projected housing growth, and includes an allowance for in-perpetuity delivery.

The strategy enables Local Planning Authorities, including Maldon District Council, to continue determining development proposals lawfully, while ensuring no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites in accordance with the Habitats Regulations.

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Maldon District Council Equality Impact Assessment

Please complete the questions below as fully as possible - the boxes will expand to accommodate your text. Please include the document version in the footer below.

1.2 Who are the users of the proposal / policy / service (Refer to data held about the users of the service i.e. numbers of users, demographic breakdown. Having this information is important to understand which sectors of the community might be affected. If that is not available refer to the demographic data held on the intranet.)

- **Internal:** Council-wide (planning decision-making).
- **External:** Developers, the Planning Inspectorate, residents of new developments, visitors to the Essex coast, local communities and land managers.

1.3 Have users been consulted with? (Have you carried out consultation with users or stakeholders while drawing up the proposal / policy / service? For example, have you carried out a formal consultation, discussed the issue with a Friends/User Group or consulted with stakeholders? If so, outline the results and how it has informed your plans. It's also important to show whether the target audience was reached during the consultation.)

- Visitor surveys undertaken in 2025 at 26 coastal locations (1,793 interviews).
- Workshops and formal meetings with Local Planning Authorities, Natural England, Essex Wildlife Trust, the RSPB and other stakeholders.
- Ongoing engagement through the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership and Bird Aware Essex.

1.4 If the analysis is regarding an existing Service, what are users' views of that Service? (Base your view on evidence such as satisfaction surveys, levels of compliments and levels of complaints).

Key findings:

- Increased recreational pressure linked to housing growth requires more intensive mitigation.
- Ranger-led engagement and education are effective in influencing behaviour.
- A strategic, coast-wide approach is more effective and equitable than site-by-site mitigation.
- No disproportionate impacts on protected groups were identified through engagement and discussion.

Maldon District Council Equality Impact Assessment

Please complete the questions below as fully as possible - the boxes will expand to accommodate your text. Please include the document version in the footer below.

| 2. Equality Aims – consider how the proposal / policy / service meets the three Equality Aims listed in the Equality Act. | | |
|---|--|--|
| Aim | How does the proposal / policy / service meet the equality aim? | Action or addition needed in order that the proposal / policy / service meets the aim? |
| <p>To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation</p> | <p>The strategy is applied proportionately and consistently. No direct or indirect unlawful discrimination has been identified.</p> | <p>Maintain consistent implementation and monitoring across the project.</p> |
| <p>To advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (This means removing or minimising disadvantages, taking steps to meet needs of different people and encouraging participation. It can involve treating people better than others, e.g. disabled people).</p> | <p>Ranger engagement, education and community outreach promote understanding between different users of the coast, support access to nature and encourage responsible behaviour.</p> <p>The project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes education and engagement initiatives. • Improves safety and the environmental quality of public spaces through increased ranger presence. • Supports access to nature. | <p>Maintain consistent implementation and monitoring across the project.</p> |
| <p>To foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. If so, how? (This means promoting understanding between different groups and tackling prejudice)</p> | <p>Ranger engagement, education and community outreach promote understanding between different users of the coast, support access to nature and encourage responsible behaviour.</p> <p>The project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes education and engagement initiatives. • Improves safety and the environmental quality of public spaces through increased ranger presence. | <p>Maintain consistent implementation and monitoring across the project.</p> |

Maldon District Council Equality Impact Assessment

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| 2. Equality Aims – consider how the proposal / policy / service meets the three Equality Aims listed in the Equality Act. | | |
|---|--|--|
| Aim | How does the proposal / policy / service meet the equality aim? | Action or addition needed in order that the proposal / policy / service meets the aim? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports access to nature. | |

3. Equality Impacts – examine how the proposal / policy / service impacts on the community. Base the analysis on evidence. Attach additional documents if necessary.

| Impacts | Positive impact (X) | Could adversely impact (X) | No impact (X) | How different groups could be affected: Summary of impacts | Actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact |
|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--|--|
| 3.1 Age (What will the impact be on different age groups such as younger or older people?) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access management, signage, ranger presence and education initiatives benefit people of all ages. • Funding for education and engagement (including schools) provides positive intergenerational benefits. • Educational outreach supports younger people and helps build awareness from an early age. • Clear routes and well-managed sites can support safer access for families and older people. <p>The tariff applies to development proposals rather than individuals directly and does not discriminate by age.</p> | <p>Continue to use age-appropriate engagement materials.</p> <p>Maintain inclusive design standards for access infrastructure.</p> |

Maldon District Council Equality Impact Assessment

Please complete the questions below as fully as possible - the boxes will expand to accommodate your text. Please include the document version in the footer below.

3. Equality Impacts – examine how the proposal / policy / service impacts on the community. Base the analysis on evidence. Attach additional documents if necessary.

| Impacts | Positive impact (X) | Could adversely impact (X) | No impact (X) | How different groups could be affected: Summary of impacts | Actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| 3.2 Disability (Consider all disabilities such as hearing loss, dyslexia etc as well as access issues for wheelchair users where appropriate) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <p>Potential indirect impact if not carefully managed: Some site-specific mitigation measures (e.g. fencing or changes to paths) could unintentionally restrict access for disabled users if they are not designed and implemented carefully.</p> <p>The tariff increase does not directly affect disabled people; however, it could indirectly influence the type, timing or pace of development delivered.</p> <p>The RAMS strategy is written in an accessible format.</p> | <p>Apply inclusive access principles when designing site-specific mitigation. Use ranger feedback and monitoring to identify and address any access issues.</p> <p>Ensure documents meet accessibility standards and can be made available in alternative formats on request.</p> |
| 3.3 Pregnancy and Maternity (Think about pregnancy, new and breastfeeding Mums) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Improved visitor management, clearer routes and safer, better managed coastal environments benefit pregnant women and people visiting sites with young children. | Maintain consistent implementation and monitoring across the project. |
| 3.4 Marriage or Civil Partnership (Could this policy discriminate on the grounds | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Increased ranger visibility and presence may improve perceptions of safety for some users. | Continue consistent delivery across the project. |

Maldon District Council Equality Impact Assessment

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3. Equality Impacts – examine how the proposal / policy / service impacts on the community. Base the analysis on evidence. Attach additional documents if necessary.

| Impacts | Positive impact (X) | Could adversely impact (X) | No impact (X) | How different groups could be affected: Summary of impacts | Actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact |
|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| of marriage or civil partnership) | | | | | |
| 3.5 Sex (is the service used more by one gender and are the sexes given equal opportunity?) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Increased ranger visibility and presence may improve perceptions of safety for some users. | Continue consistent delivery across the project. |
| 3.6 Gender Reassignment (Is there an impact on people who are going through or who have completed Gender Reassignment?) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Increased ranger visibility and presence may improve perceptions of safety for some users. | Continue consistent delivery across the project. |
| 3.7 Religion or belief (Includes not having a religion or belief) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Increased ranger visibility and presence may improve perceptions of safety for some users. | Continue consistent delivery across the project. |
| 3.8 Sexual Orientation (What is the impact on heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual people?) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Increased ranger visibility and presence may improve perceptions of safety for some users. | Continue consistent delivery across the project. |
| 3.9 Race (Includes ethnic or national origins including Gypsies and Travellers, language barriers) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Increased ranger visibility and presence may improve perceptions of safety for some users. | Continue consistent delivery across the project. |

Maldon District Council Equality Impact Assessment

Please complete the questions below as fully as possible - the boxes will expand to accommodate your text. Please include the document version in the footer below.

3. Equality Impacts – examine how the proposal / policy / service impacts on the community. Base the analysis on evidence. Attach additional documents if necessary.

| Impacts | Positive impact (X) | Could adversely impact (X) | No impact (X) | How different groups could be affected: Summary of impacts | Actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|---|
| <p>3.10 Socio-Economic Group (Will people of any particular socio-economic group be particularly affected? Accessibility to internet, single parents, carers, domestic abuse)</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <p>Potential indirect impact on low-income, rural or digitally excluded people: The increased RAMS tariff applies to development rather than individuals, but it could indirectly influence housing delivery patterns. This may have secondary socio-economic effects, including on access to housing for some communities.</p> <p>Higher development costs could indirectly influence delivery rates or tenure mix. However, the tariff funds mitigation that protects the quality of coastal environments, which are an important free recreational resource for all.</p> <p>The strategy will be published digitally, which may disadvantage people who are digitally excluded.</p> | <p>The revised tariff reflects the full cost of the mitigation needed to support sustainable growth and, in doing so, supports long-term social and environmental wellbeing.</p> <p>The tariff is proportionate, evidence-based and subject to planning viability considerations.</p> <p>Continue to use planning viability mechanisms and monitoring to review impacts as part of future RAMS updates.</p> <p>Increased ranger visibility and presence enables face-to-face engagement and information sharing that does not rely on digital access.</p> <p>Communication materials (e.g. leaflets, information boards and the website) should remain inclusive and accessible.</p> <p>Provide the strategy in alternative formats where required.</p> |

Maldon District Council Equality Impact Assessment

Please complete the questions below as fully as possible - the boxes will expand to accommodate your text. Please include the document version in the footer below.

4. Is there a Cumulative Impact? (If the same group is the subject of many changes or reductions the overall impact is much greater. Consider what else is happening within Maldon District Council that may have an impact and also what we know is happening elsewhere (such as Essex County Council). See Guidance for further advice.)

The revised Essex Coast RAMS and increased tariff present a low risk of negative equality impacts, and any potential impacts are appropriately mitigated. The strategy supports statutory compliance, environmental protection and long-term public benefit, while meeting the Council's duties under the Equality Act 2010.

5. Outcome

5.1 Consider all the analysis and evidence above and indicate

- (1) No change needed
 (2) Change needed

5.2 Adjustments

If option (2) above is selected please detail what adjustments are needed, who is responsible and how that will be reviewed. Also outline how that will be agreed (ie Committee, CMT).

5.3 Decision Making (How will this equality analysis be taken into account during the decision making process? For example will it be included with a report to Committee/CLT? Will it be considered at department level or by a Head of Service? How will community/stakeholders views be taken into account?)

The EqIA will accompany the report on the 2026 RAMS Strategy to the Strategy and Resources Committee and Council.

6.0 Next Steps

6.1 If there was a lack of evidence or data held on which to base this assessment, how will that gap be addressed for the future?

Not applicable

The updated Strategy and EqIA are supported by:

Maldon District Council Equality Impact Assessment

Please complete the questions below as fully as possible - the boxes will expand to accommodate your text. Please include the document version in the footer below.

- Updated evidence base.
- Substantially expanded mitigation package.
- Increased tariff to reflect long term and in perpetuity mitigation costs.
- Revised governance and monitoring framework.
- Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025.
- Housing growth projections within RAMS Zone of Influence.
- Monitoring data from existing Bird Aware Essex delivery.

6.2 Summary of actions highlighted within this analysis (Include how this will be picked up within service/work plans)

Not applicable

6.3 Arrangements for future monitoring of equality impact of this proposal / policy / service

Equality impacts will continue to be monitored through future RAMS reviews and site-based feedback.

The equality implications of the RAMS tariff will be reviewed as part of future five-year strategy updates, alongside housing delivery, viability evidence and monitoring of mitigation effectiveness.

The Equality Impact Assessment will be reviewed at the next strategy review.

6.4 Approved by (Manager or Head of Service signature and date)


Mark Jaggard
Director of Place, Planning and Growth
11.05.2026

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Date: 16 April 2026

Basildon Borough Council
 Braintree District Council
 Brentwood Borough Council
 Castle Point District Council
 Chelmsford City Council
 Colchester Borough Council
 Maldon District Council
 Rochford Borough Council
 Southend-on-Sea City Council
 Tendring District Council
 Thurrock Council
 Uttlesford District Council
 cc Bird Aware Essex
 Essex County Council
 Essex Wildlife Trust



BY EMAIL ONLY

Hornbeam House
 Crewe Business Park
 Electra Way
 Crewe
 Cheshire
 CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Sir/Madam

Essex Coast RAMS Mitigation Strategy Review – NE update

This letter follows on from and supersedes, previous correspondence with the above-named Local Planning Authorities (letters dated 16 November 2017, 16 August 2018 and 5 December 2023). Our previous letters should be read in conjunction with this update.

Need for Review

The existing Essex Coast RAMS strategy is working well as a Strategic Solution to address the impacts of recreational disturbance on the Essex Coast Habitats Sites, but matters were identified by Natural England in terms of the detail of delivery, namely:

- The initial strategy was not costed in perpetuity
- The projected housing growth across all 12 LPAs is almost double that was planned at the inception of the Essex Coast RAMS strategy, due to the change in government and their new targets
- The original RAMS mitigation strategy didn't include certain elements, such as the provision of vehicles for the rangers; and,
- Not enough rangers were included to cover 500km of Essex coast effectively.

The 12 Local Planning Authority (LPA) partners agreed in early 2024 to conduct a review of the RAMS Mitigation Strategy, to ensure continued protection for the relevant Habitats Sites and compliance with the Habitats Regulations.

Outcomes of Essex Coast RAMS review

Footprint Ecology was commissioned in 2024 to conduct an update to the Visitor Survey (Footprint Ecology, 2025) and to draft an updated Mitigation Strategy (Footprint Ecology, 2026) that would be

fit for purpose for the level of growth planned across all 12 LPAs. The headline results from the updated Visitor Survey are as follows:

- A predicted 22% increase in housing thus visits to the coast between now and 2042
- An average of one dog for every 2 people
- 93% of visitors coming directly from home
- 45% dog walkers, 35% walking without a dog
- 56% weekly visits, 18% daily BUT 75% dog walkers visit at least weekly
- 60% visit equally all year round
- 58% arrived by car
- Ability to let dog off lead was an important factor in site choice for dog walkers
- Median walk length for those visiting from home was 2.9km

Natural England has assessed the measures in the updated Mitigation Strategy, and we consider that the level of mitigation that is proposed to be funded via an increased RAMS per dwelling tariff is adequate to mitigate in combination impacts of recreational disturbance on the Essex Coast Habitats Sites.

We have discussed the updated Mitigation Strategy and increased RAMS tariff with all 12 LPAs, and all outstanding concerns have been addressed. As such, the LPAs have agreed that development proposals within the Zone of Influence will be required to contribute to the updated Essex Coast RAMS Mitigation Strategy to address the in combination recreational impacts arising from growth across the region from the **start date of 1 August 2026**.

Advice on the need for Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)

Natural England further advises that, based on the results of the recent Visitor Survey, some schemes may give rise to alone impacts on designated European sites that are not fully addressed through the strategic RAMS measures. Where project level assessment identifies the potential for significant effects in isolation, additional, bespoke mitigation may be necessary to ensure compliance with the Habitats Regulations. In such cases, the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), either on- or off-site, or a combination of both, should be considered to avoid adverse effects on site integrity. The provision of SANG must comply with the [NE SANG Guidelines \(2021\)](#).

Broadly, developments that are 500+ dwellings are most likely to have alone impacts on the European sites. However, development proposals for far fewer dwellings near the designated site boundary will also pose particular risk. **Any development that has alone impacts may be required to provide additional mitigation through the provision of SANG and will need to consult with Natural England.**

Types of development covered

The Essex Coast Mitigation Strategy applies to any future development that results in a net increase in residential units (i.e. Use Class C3) located within the identified Zone of Influence (ZOI).

Although primarily focussed on C3 residential development, this strategy also applies to other residential or overnight accommodation, that may give rise to recreational impacts on European Sites and therefore trigger Likely Significant Effects (LSEs). Appendix A lists the development types where LSEs are expected or may be expected.

Next steps

It is our advice that the 12 LPAs are now able to take the updated Essex Coast Mitigation Strategy through individual LPA procedure ahead of the 1 August 2026 implementation date. The Essex Coast RAMS Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (May 2020) will be updated as a Guidance Note, to provide further guidance to Development Management Officers and developers and their agents on the implementation of the Mitigation Strategy.

We recognise that further work is needed over the coming months to adopt the revised Essex Coast Mitigation Strategy, and, in parallel, further work will be needed on SANG for larger developments as the LPAs review their Local Plans. Natural England has started this process of engagement through bespoke advice to planning authorities as part of our duty to cooperate on the production of Local Plans and we remain available for future advice as required throughout the plan-making process. We can also provide pre-application advice to developers regarding SANG provision via our [Charged Advice Service](#) (DAS).

Natural England will continue to support the strategic mitigation solution for the Essex Coast Habitats Sites via the regular partnership meetings and ad hoc advice as required, and we look forward to continuing our relationship with all 12 LPAs, Bird Aware Essex and the Essex Wildlife Trust for the benefit of the Essex Coast Habitat Sites and the bird species that these sites support.

Should you wish to discuss any of the above in more detail please do not hesitate to contact Fiona Martin via consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Martin
Senior Officer – Strategic Solutions
West Anglia Area Team - Sustainable Development
Natural England

Appendix A

Relevant types of development that will or may have LSE on the Essex Coast Habitats Sites

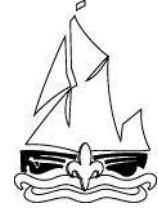
| Use Type/Class | Likely Significant Effect | Mitigation requirements |
|--|---|--|
| Dwelling Houses (C3) including live work units <i>This applies to net new dwellings and excludes like for like replacement dwellings</i> | Yes | Contribution per dwelling |
| Houses in Multiple Occupation (C4/Sui Generis) | Yes | Contribution per bedroom (based on C3 per dwelling contribution)* |
| Residential Institutions (C2/C2A) <i>Sheltered accommodation, extra care, nursing homes, hospitals and secure institutions.</i> | Possibly, will be considered on a case-by-case basis dependant on mobility/independence of residents and proximity to European Sites. This generally excludes high dependency and end of life care. | Contribution per dwelling or justified reduced rate based on bedspaces (2.46 bedspaces = 1 dwelling) |
| Residential Institutions (C2/ Sui Generis) <i>Schools, colleges or training centres and student accommodation</i> | Possibly, will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If a training centre or college has associated adult accommodation where residents / occupants can visit the European Sites. | Contribution based on bedspaces (2.46 bedspaces = 1 dwelling)* |
| Gypsy and Traveller Pitches / Plots (Sui Generis) <i>Net new temporary or permanent pitches</i> | Yes | Contribution per pitch/plot |
| Caravan, chalet, touring and static holiday sites (Sui Generis) | Likely LSE, especially where located within 1.5 km of the coast | Contribution per unit/pitch (equivalent to per-dwelling rate) |

* Some Local Planning Authorities apply a discounted rate, and it is advised to check with local guidance and the Supplementary Planning Guidance for more information.

Developments not listed in the table above, but which may also trigger likely significant effects include, but are not limited to:

- Hotels (C1) – including boarding and guest houses; and,
- Tourism attractions (F1, Sui Generis).

While residential development represents the primary source of recreational pressure, other land uses can also create significant impacts on the Essex Coast Habitats Sites - particularly those involving overnight accommodation, high visitor turnover, or public recreational use. Any type of new overnight accommodation within 1.5 km (approximately a 15-minute walk) of the Essex coast, for example, is likely to give rise to recreational disturbance and therefore require mitigation. Further information is available in the updated Essex Coast Mitigation Strategy, Chapter 6.



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES AND COMMUNITIES**

**to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
11 JUNE 2026**

REPLACEMENT OF PAY AND DISPLAY PARKING MACHINES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Members' approval to replace the Council's existing pay and display parking machines

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) that the replacement of the existing pay and display machines with fit for purpose, modern and updated alternatives be approved;
- (ii) that the rationalisation of machine provision from twenty-one (21) to twelve (12), informed by current usage data and reflecting the increasing uptake of parking app payments be approved;
- (iii) that the machines are procured via capital purchase (not leased) as the most cost-effective option and that capital funding to the value of £100,000 is approved;
- (iv) that the transition toward contactless and, where appropriate, ticketless parking operations be endorsed;
- (v) that the intention to align parking systems with wider Mid Essex arrangements be noted.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The Council generates approximately £2 million in annual revenue from the management of its car parking operations. This income is supported by effective pay and display machine provision, alongside the use of parking app's and the active recovery of debt where appropriate.
- 3.2 The Council's current pay and display machines were installed in 2018 and are now approaching the end of life. The supplier has confirmed that key components are obsolete, resulting in increased failure rates, extended repair times, and declining reliability. This is creating operational and financial pressure on the service.
- 3.3 These failures have resulted in:
- Lost income where machines are unavailable
 - Increased customer complaints and reputational impact

- Additional officer time required to manage faults and refunds

- 3.4 The Council's Car Park Strategy (June 2025) commits to improving customer experience by enhancing parking services through the use of technology, clear signage, user-friendly payment systems and well-maintained facilities, ensuring a positive experience for visitors. This will be achieved by adopting modern payment methods, including ANPR, account-based parking for regular users and parking applications.
- 3.5 A direct like-for-like replacement is not possible, as the manufacturer no longer produces these machines. Replacement options will be assessed for each car park, which may result in either a tailored provision reflecting the specific characteristics of individual sites or a standardised approach across the portfolio.
- 3.6 Car parking operations generate nearly £2 million in annual income, representing a significant and reliable revenue stream for the Council. Investing in the service will protect both machine-based and digital payment channels, ensuring income continuity as user behaviour evolves. Without this investment, a critical source of revenue would be placed at risk, potentially impacting the Council's ability to fund essential frontline services – see table below for breakdown on parking income.
- 3.7 Income – Pay and Display Machines (2025/26):

| Total Machine Income | RingGo Payments | Season Tickets | Total Income |
|----------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------------|
| £1,112,928 | £820,623 | £52,360 | £1,985,911 |

- 3.8 Car parking machine usage data demonstrates a significant shift in customer behaviour, with nearly 50% of payments now taken through digital channels. This provides an opportunity to realign machine provision with demand.

| Car Park | Spaces | Machines (Current) | % Machine Use (balance is web-based) | Spaces per Machine (Current) | Machines (Proposed) | Spaces per Machine (Proposed) |
|----------------------|--------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| | a | b | c | d = a/bxc | e | f |
| White Horse Lane | 195 | 4 | 58% | 28 | 2 | 57 |
| Butt Lane | 177 | 3 | 65% | 31 | 2 | 47 |
| Friary Fields | 59 | 2 | 55% | 13 | 1 | 26 |
| High Street East | 66 | 2 | 65% | 19 | 1 | 37 |
| Promenade Coach Park | 37 | 1 | 53% | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| Promenade Main | 750 | 8 | 50% | 47 | 6 | 63 |

- 3.9 The table above illustrates the relationship between car park capacity, current machine provision, and actual usage levels, highlighting how many spaces are effectively reliant on pay-and-display machines.
- 3.10 The data demonstrates that the current number of machines exceeds operational need when compared with actual usage levels. Across all car parks, between 50% and 65% of transactions are made via machines, meaning a significant proportion of customers are using alternative payment methods.
- 3.11 The reduction from 20 to 12 machines represents a more efficient deployment of assets, aligning supply with demonstrated demand. It ensures that machine provision

remains available for those who need it, while recognising the continued shift towards digital payment methods and reducing unnecessary maintenance, lifecycle, and replacement costs associated with underused equipment.

3.12 The proposal is to install 12 pay and display machines which are fit for purpose, modern and updated alternatives to our current pay machines. These new machines will provide the following functionality:

- **Operate on a contactless-only basis:** to improve transaction speed and reliability while reducing maintenance requirements; removing PIN pads and card readers also lowers the risk of card skimming and other fraudulent payment activity.
- **Require Vehicle Registration Number (VRN) entry:** to enable more accurate enforcement, reduce misuse of tickets, and support seamless integration with digital and back-office systems.
- **Integrate pay-by-phone systems:** to deliver a modern, flexible digital payment solution that supports multiple payment providers, improves user choice, and ensures future scalability while aligning with wider industry standards.
- **Explore pay-by-phone options available in line with the end of the RingGo contract and review adoption of the National Parking Platform (NPP):** the NPP is a not-for-profit, open-access digital platform that enables seamless interoperability between Parking Operators (e.g. Local Authorities) and a wide range of Service Providers (PayByPhone, RingGo, Just Park, etc.)
- **Enable ticketless operation:** to reduce paper use and maintenance costs, minimise machine downtime, eliminate issues with lost or failed tickets, and enable a more streamlined and user-friendly parking experience.
- **Meet rigorous accessibility and inclusivity regulations:** ensuring equitable use for individuals with varying levels of physical and visual ability, and include carefully calibrated terminal heights, angled touchscreens and colour contrasted user interfaces.

3.13 The figures below compare purchase and rental costs over five years and where the Council can achieve value for money.

| Installation of 12 Machines | Purchase Quote | Rental Quote |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Total five-year cost | £99,975 | £162,000 |
| Cost per machine (five years) | £8,331.25 | £13,500 |
| Upfront capital required | Yes | No |
| Ownership | Council owned | Supplier owned |
| Theft / vandalism risk | Council liable | Council liable |
| Banking fees | 5% transactions | 5% transactions |

3.14 Over a five-year period, the purchase option for 12 machines is £62,025 cheaper than rental and delivers better value per machine. While rental provides some short-term cashflow flexibility, it comes at a significant premium and does not remove the ongoing risk associated with asset loss. From a whole-life cost and value-for-money perspective, purchasing the machines is therefore the more economical and financially prudent option.

3.15 The introduction of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) in Council-owned car parks has been considered. A range of delivery options are available, with the

most common involving the installation of barriers and cameras at car park entrances and exits. Under this system, no physical tickets are required; users make payment at a pay station or via an app prior to exit, with cameras recognising the vehicle registration mark (VRM) and enabling barrier-free exit once payment has been confirmed.

- 3.16 Consideration would need to be given to the provision of additional weatherproofing and shelter. There would also be ongoing costs associated with the maintenance and repair of barriers and camera equipment. The introduction of ANPR would not remove the need for staffing, as personnel would still be required to ensure systems remain operational and to respond to issues such as equipment faults or barrier damage.
- 3.17 Local authorities are generally limited to using ANPR for compliance and targeted enforcement purposes. The size, location and configuration of Maldon's town centre car parks may not justify the additional investment or readily support a pay-on-foot model. Promenade Park, with a single-entry point and separate exit, may be more suitable; however, during peak periods such as summer months and events, the use of barriers could impede traffic flow. Common operational issues with ANPR systems include dirty number plates, misread registrations and errors caused by incorrectly entered vehicle details.
- 3.18 Chelmsford City Council currently owns and operates the machines under consideration for purchase, which are used across both on-street parking and off-street car parks. The same machines are also deployed within Brentwood Borough Council for on-street parking under a Service Level Agreement as part of the Southeast Parking Partnership Joint Agreement.
- 3.19 This alignment supports consistency of infrastructure and operations across neighbouring authorities and positions the Council favourably in the context of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), enabling greater opportunities for service integration, shared maintenance arrangements and potential economies of scale.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The existing pay and display machines are no longer sustainable due to age, obsolescence, and increasing maintenance issues. Without replacement, there is a growing risk to service continuity, a deterioration in customer experience and a potential impact on the Council's £2m annual parking income.
- 4.2 A replacement programme will provide a modern, reliable, and cost-effective solution which reflects current customer behaviour and supports future service integration. The capital purchase option represents the best value for money and ensures long-term financial efficiency.
- 4.3 The evidence clearly demonstrates that customer behaviour has already shifted significantly towards cashless payment methods, resulting in the current machines being underutilised. Rationalising the number of machines will better align provision with demand, increasing income per machine, reducing ongoing maintenance costs, and doing so without materially affecting accessibility.

5. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2025 - 2028

5.1 Supporting our communities

5.1.1 Maintains accessible parking options for all users, including those without access to digital payment methods.

5.2 Investing in our District

5.2.1 Provides modern infrastructure that supports town centre and visitor destinations.

5.3 Growing our economy

5.3.1 Supports local businesses and tourism through reliable parking provision.

5.4 Protecting our environment

5.4.1 Solar-powered machines and reduced reliance on ticketing support environmental objectives.

5.5 Delivering good quality services

5.5.1 Improves reliability, reduces downtime, and enhances the overall customer experience.

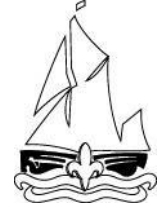
6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – Improved reliability and ease of use will enhance customer experience. Machine provision will remain in place to ensure continued accessibility for non-digital users.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – The proposal maintains inclusive access to parking services by retaining pay and display options alongside digital solutions.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including Fraud implications)** – Replacement reduces operational risk associated with failure of ageing equipment. Contactless-only systems reduce exposure to card fraud and skimming risks.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – The five-year cost of purchasing 12 machines is £99,975 compared to £162,000 for rental, representing a saving of £62,025. The proposal protects approximately £2 million annual parking income. Where income levels are currently sub-optimal due to parking machine down-time/failure, it is reasonable to expect an increase in overall income arising from new machines. Over the proposed five-year period, the investment in new machines represents approximately 1% of incomes in the same period. The initial funding of the machines can be arranged through application of surplus funds arising in the previous financial year (2025/26).
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – Reduced machine downtime will decrease officer time spent on maintenance issues, complaints, and refunds.
- (vi) **Impact on Devolution / Local Government Reorganisation** - Alignment with neighbouring authorities supports future integration within Mid Essex Council and reduces long-term operational complexity.

Background Papers:

[Maldon District Council Car Park Strategy 2025](#)

Enquiries to: Jon Sharkey, Director of Neighbourhood Services and Communities.



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND IMPROVEMENT**

**to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
11 JUNE 2026**

CULTURE AND HERITAGE STRATEGY

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Member approval to create a Culture and Heritage Strategy (the Strategy) for the Maldon District drawing on information set out at **APPENDIX 1**.
- 1.2 **APPENDIX 1** consolidates 15 briefing papers which will inform a public-facing Culture and Heritage Strategy for Maldon District, shaped by research, community surveys, and collaboration with local organisations.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That a Culture and Heritage Strategy for the Maldon District be approved, informed from the briefing papers at **APPENDIX 1**;
- (ii) That subject to approval of (i) above, Members acknowledge work will now commence to develop a costed Action Plan to be brought back to the relevant Committee later this calendar year, proposed to be September 2026.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2025-2028 priority 'investing in our district' states the Council's commitment to develop a Culture and Heritage Strategy. This would aim to delivery investment in culture, improving our offering to residents, businesses and visitors. Following a comprehensive procurement process, Cultural Engine CIC were appointed to support the development and delivery of the strategy. Since the appointment, extensive work has been carried out, with stakeholders and a continuing focus on outreach and engagement across the district as well as developing key elements of complementary strategy and projects.
- 3.2 The formation of the strategy has been a process of active engagement and research, running workshops, attending meetings and events (Parish forums, Annual General Meetings (AGMs) etc.), and proactively initiating collaborations, networks and related strategy. This work has been delivered in-person for a sustained period, and in close collaboration with the Council and many other partners. An online survey was also available. In total, 169 engagement sessions have been carried out, and 171 responses have been received to the online survey.
- 3.3 Events that have been managed by Cultural Engine CIC, and often in partnership with others, include a 'Neighbourhood and Creative Health' Event bringing together many different sectors and presentations from Essex County Council, Mid & South Essex integrated care board, Creative Lives and Maldon & District Community

Voluntary Services (CVS). This is now leading to the formation of an established network and collaboration with Public Health. The first cultural network gathering was hosted along with a similar event for festival/event organisers. The team has also played a key role in supporting the newly formed Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group (SMCTG), previously the Maldon District Tourism Group, Regenerative Tourism Event in March and are working on related Regenerative Tourism strategy.

- 3.4 Cultural Engine has produced the Expression of Interest that was required to enter the UK Town of Culture bidding process. This was a significant piece of work that offered an opportunity to reflect the importance of key cultural and heritage themes including the Battle of Maldon and explore the unique 'story' of Maldon and the wider district, whilst linking this to national themes.
- 3.5 A comprehensive and dynamic database of activities, spaces, buildings and other important cultural and heritage references has also been compiled to support the strategy and help to inform the process going forward. It is not possible to reference all projects, places, spaces and activities in the main strategy document. Rather there will be a focus on key projects, and issues around future governance and sustainability of what are predominantly grassroots movements and organisation across the district.
- 3.6 The detailed themes set out below have been grouped into a smaller number of broader strategic areas to summarises the main strategy document **APPENDIX 1**. These key areas provide a clearer overview of where future focus, partnership working and investment is needed.
- 3.7 **Governance, Leadership and Community Empowerment:** This area brings together Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), future governance arrangements, and the role of Town and Parish Councils. A consistent theme throughout the Strategy is the need to strengthen local leadership, community resilience and grassroots capacity so that culture, heritage, environment and tourism continue to have a strong voice as Maldon transitions into a new Mid Essex structure.
- 3.8 **Visitor Economy, Place and Regenerative Tourism:** This area includes Regenerative Tourism, Festivals and Events, and the contribution of local hospitality businesses such as pubs and bars. The Strategy highlights the importance of a more coordinated, sustainable visitor economy that supports local businesses, strengthens the Saltmarsh Coast identity, and ensures that tourism contributes positively to communities, heritage, culture and the natural environment.
- 3.9 **Culture, Heritage and Local Identity:** This area brings together Arts and Culture, Heritage and Libraries. The Strategy shows that Maldon District has a strong and distinctive cultural and heritage offer, much of it supported by volunteers, local organisations and community networks. Protecting and developing these services will be important not only for local identity and pride of place, but also for wider regeneration, learning, participation and destination development.
- 3.10 **Health, Wellbeing and Community Participation:** This area includes Health and Wellbeing, Volunteering and the wider role of creative, heritage and environmental participation in strengthening communities. The Strategy identifies clear opportunities to connect creative health, prevention, volunteering and local networks so that participation in culture, heritage and nature supports both individual wellbeing and stronger community infrastructure.
- 3.11 **Environment, Planning and Delivery:** This area brings together Nature and Environment, Planning, and the practical conditions needed to deliver the Strategy

over time. The document highlights the importance of environmental stewardship, planning policy, infrastructure, funding and coordinated delivery mechanisms to ensure that future investment and decision-making support sustainable growth, local distinctiveness and long-term resilience across the district.

- 3.12 From these themes, it is proposed that a costed Action Plan is produced to deliver against the Strategy. Where possible, external funding will also be sought, from sources such as Arts Council England, Public Health, Heritage funding and emerging government initiatives. This Action Plan will be brought back to the relevant Committee for approval later this year, proposed to be September 2026.
- 3.13 The Action Plan will be centred on a partnership approach. Utilising networks and working to empower community action and grassroots, together with partners and Town and Parish Councils. This prepares the networks for LGR and sets out the importance of culture, heritage and environment to the wider economy in the district.
- 3.14 The Action Plan will be a live document, and is intended to develop as related strategy, government policy, LGR and existing projects progress.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The Maldon District Culture and Heritage Strategy provides a clear and practical framework for protecting and strengthening the district's distinctive cultural, heritage and environmental assets, whilst supporting community wellbeing, regenerative tourism and economic resilience. It reflects extensive engagement, partnership working and evidence gathered across the district, and sets out a strong basis for coordinated action at a time of wider change through LGR. Approval of the Strategy will enable the Council and its partners to build on this momentum, support the production of an Action Plan and position culture and heritage as an important part of Maldon District's future prosperity and identity.

5. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2025 - 2028

5.1 Supporting our communities

- 5.1.1 The Strategy will support the Council's priority of supporting our communities by recognising the importance of creative health as part of a preventative, community-based approach to wellbeing. Evidence from Arts Council England, NHS England and the National Centre for Creative Health shows that participation in arts, culture, heritage, libraries, volunteering and creative activity in nature can help to reduce loneliness, improve mental wellbeing, support people living with long-term conditions and strengthen social connection and resilience within communities.

5.2 Investing in our District

- 5.2.1 This Corporate Plan priority clearly identifies the need to develop a culture strategy. The proposed Strategy supports this priority by providing a framework for targeted investment in the district's cultural, heritage and environmental assets, as well as the networks, partnerships and infrastructure needed to sustain them. It helps to identify where future effort and resources should be focused, strengthens the case for external funding and provides a clearer strategic context for regeneration, destination development and community-led activity.

5.3 Growing our economy

- 5.3.1 The proposed Strategy supports the Council's priority of growing our economy by recognising the contribution that culture, heritage, visitor activity and the wider environment make to local economic performance. A stronger and more coordinated cultural and heritage offer can help to increase footfall, encourage longer stays, support the hospitality and retail sectors, and strengthen Maldon District's position as a distinctive destination within Essex and the wider region.

5.4 Protecting our environment

- 5.4.1 The proposed Strategy supports the Council's priority of protecting our environment by recognising the close relationship between culture, heritage, landscape and the natural environment in shaping Maldon District's identity and quality of place. The Strategy promotes a more joined-up approach to environmental stewardship, encouraging future investment and activity to respect local distinctiveness, protect valued assets and support sustainable use of the district's coast, countryside and green spaces. It also aligns with the principles of regenerative tourism and place-based planning, helping to ensure that cultural and visitor activity contributes positively to biodiversity, local character and the long-term resilience of the environment.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – The Strategy is intended to have a positive impact on residents, visitors, community groups and partner organisations by improving coordination, visibility and access to cultural, heritage and environmental opportunities across the district. Over time, delivery of the Action Plan should help to strengthen participation, local pride, wellbeing and the overall visitor and user experience.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – The Strategy provides an opportunity to improve inclusion and accessibility by encouraging wider participation in culture, heritage and environmental activity across different communities, age groups and geographic areas. Equality considerations will need to continue to inform delivery of the Action Plan to ensure that opportunities are inclusive, accessible and responsive to local need.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including Fraud implications)** – There is a risk that, without an agreed strategy, opportunities for coordinated investment, external funding, partnership development and long-term delivery may be missed. There are no direct fraud implications arising from the approval of the Strategy itself; however, any future allocation of funding or commissioning activity will need to be managed in accordance with the Council's financial procedures, procurement requirements and governance arrangements.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Delivery of a future Action Plan will require a budget to be identified. External funding opportunities will also continue to be explored where available to support delivery, reduce pressure on Council resources and maximise the value of partnership working and investment. The cost of developing the Strategy has been £34,100.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – Delivery of the Strategy will require ongoing officer coordination, partnership working and programme oversight. The proposed approach is intended to build on existing networks, community

capacity and external collaboration, but delivery will still need to be managed alongside wider service priorities and available staff resource.

- (vi) **Impact on Devolution / Local Government Reorganisation** – The Strategy is particularly timely in the context of devolution and LGR, as it helps to articulate the importance of culture, heritage, tourism, environment and community networks within the district ahead of any future structural change. It also provides a clearer basis for local advocacy, partnership development and future governance discussions to help ensure that these priorities continue to be recognised and supported within a new Mid Essex context.

Background Papers:

[Council 26 March 2026 Culture and Heritage Update Report](#)

[Council 26 March 2026 Culture and Heritage Update Appendix 1](#)

[Council 26 March 2026 Culture and Heritage Update Report Officer Presentation](#)

Enquiries to: Leanda Cable, Director of Strategy and Improvement.

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Maldon District Culture & Heritage Strategy

Briefing and Discussion Papers – 1st June 2026

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Introduction

This document brings together fifteen discussion (or briefing) papers on each of the themes or issues that were identified and explored through the work on the Culture and Heritage Strategy. This has been informed by meetings, research and workshops as well as a community survey and discussions with strategic organisations.

The intention is for the discussion papers to be summarised into a simpler ‘public facing’ document that will become the final Culture & Heritage Strategy for the Maldon District. This provides time for review and further discussion. It also provides time to see how the UK Town of Culture Expression of Interest progresses for Maldon Town, as well as for more progress to be made on the current proposals for an Arts & Cultural Centre at Promenade Park (and associated considerations relating to the Museum).

It was not the intention to cover every event, programme, space or organisation in the papers. Rather to explore relevant themes and issues that would make a difference across the District, and improve the overall understanding, governance and flourishing of the cultural and heritage sectors. The environment is also explored given its relevance to the ‘Saltmarsh Coast’ concept and importance of nature, coast, rural and agricultural settings and spaces to the cultural and tourism profile of the area.

The reports have been produced by the Cultural Engine CIC working with Maldon District Council and many other important organisations and groups across the District. This has very much been a collaborative effort.

1 - Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

Introduction – The Relevance of Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution to the Culture & Heritage Strategy

This strategy, and indeed virtually all strategy and policy development at a District or County level in Essex, is framed to a greater extent by what is emerging through the UK Government's English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. Specifically local government reorganisation and devolution which will affect the Maldon District alongside all of the other local authorities across Greater Essex.

Of most relevant to the cultural and heritage sectors (and indeed wider community and voluntary sectors) is to ensure that their importance is recorded, contextualised and promoted as the new Mid Essex Unitary Authority develops. The point of this is the stated ambition for 'community empowerment' that is a key part of the new legislation, and the important role that local organisations and groups play in supporting this. Some are informal, others established charities, but they are all key partners in terms of supporting engagement with local issues, meaningful participation in civic life and in the advocacy they provide for their communities or communities of interest locally. There is obviously a key role for MDC and its partners including Maldon & District CVS, and this strategy aims to consider how support, representation and advocacy can best be achieved over the next few years to support 'community empowerment' at a local level long-term.

Greater Essex Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

The new Mid Essex unitary authority is a major restructuring of local government that will merge Brentwood Borough, Chelmsford City and Maldon District into a single authority (as well as taking on the responsibilities of Essex CC in this part of Essex). Confirmed in March 2026, the new body will replace the existing district councils by March 2028, with a shadow authority operating before that to align policy, budgets and governance. Work is already underway to create new, larger electoral wards and to reduce the overall number of councillors, reflecting the streamlined structure of a unitary model compared with the current three separate councils. This reorganisation sits alongside the wider move toward a Mayoral Combined County Authority for Greater Essex, which will hold devolved powers over housing, regeneration, economic growth, transport and - under recent new proposals - culture.

This gives culture a formal strategic role for the first time (under the Mayor), and the new Mid Essex authority will have responsibility for cultural development, heritage, and place-based initiatives (tourism for example). For Maldon specifically, this shift reinforces the importance of articulating its distinctiveness and cultural contribution to Mid Essex - for example its maritime heritage, Saltmarsh Coast brand, remote and biodiverse landscapes and its unique visitor offer. These must remain visible and prioritised within a larger governance system. Over the coming years, decision-making at district level will increasingly reflect the priorities of the emerging Mid Essex authority, with long-term planning focused on integration, shared services and preparing for the expanded powers and responsibilities of the new unitary structure.

Furthermore, projects or initiatives proposed at this stage in June 2026 that involve Maldon District Council will have to be considered in a way that gives due consideration to the fact that the District Council will no longer exist (at least in its current form) beyond March 2028, and prior to this will be

part of a ‘shadow’ unitary authority where the strategic mindset will very much be on integration and policy development relating to the new powers of a unitary (compared to the three tier-two local authorities that will make up Mid Essex).

Mayoral Combined Authority for Essex

The proposed Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) for Essex will bring together Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council under a single strategic body with a directly elected mayor. Under current proposals the mayor would gain devolved powers and multi-year funding for housing and regeneration, local transport, economic growth, and adult skills, along with wider responsibilities for climate action, public service reform and strategic planning. The intention is to strengthen long-term decision-making across the county, tackle infrastructure and growth challenges more coherently, and align investment more closely with priorities that emerge locally, rather than the current system where Essex CC and other tiers of local government largely respond to shorter-term central government priority programmes.

The theory is that this would give Essex a stronger and direct voice to the UK Government, and unlock additional resources to support growth, environmental improvement and nature recovery and to invest in infrastructure. There will be collaboration with the new Unitary Authorities including Mid Essex, and the Local Growth Plan that the MCA will produce will identify major projects and influence future funding for place-making, tourism, heritage, skills and transport, while opening opportunities to embed culture and the visitor economy more firmly within the strategic Essex context. The level of priority afforded to culture and heritage will depend to an extent on the elected Mayor (election scheduled under current plans for 2028). Elections for a Mayor were originally to be in 2026, but currently there is an interim management system under a Chief Executive who is working with local authorities and other partners to produce an evidence base for the Local Growth Plan.

Recent updates to the Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill introduce culture as a formal area of responsibility for Mayors and Strategic Authorities for the first time. New amendments mean combined authorities can play a key role in championing local cultural assets, support creative industries, and integrate culture into wider priorities such as regeneration, skills, placemaking and community wellbeing.

Community Empowerment and Neighbourhood Governance

Community empowerment is meant to be at the heart of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, and central to understanding the implications of local government reorganisation for the whole of Essex. For Mid Essex, new authority will serve a far larger population - around 337,000 compared with Maldon’s 66,000. This scaling-up raises the risk of decision-making becoming more distant from local communities, and this has been a concern throughout the process. The Bill therefore emphasises “neighbourhood governance” as the mechanism through which people can still shape local priorities, influence public services and protect the identity of their places. However, what constitutes a “neighbourhood” remains loosely defined, and the varying capacity of Town and Parish Councils means they cannot uniformly take on this expanded role. This uncertainty makes it essential that community-based organisations - cultural, heritage, environmental and voluntary groups - are recognised as key partners in shaping meaningful neighbourhood-level empowerment.

Maldon District offers a strong foundation for this, with deep grassroots traditions, a rich maritime and rural heritage and active cultural participation. Local heritage and environmental assets are critical to community identity, pride and sense of belonging - an argument strongly reinforced in ultimately successful Five Unitaries proposal, which highlighted heritage as a source of civic pride and “soft power,” especially in rural and coastal areas.

‘Residents feel that an understanding of local heritage helps to shape their identity and connection to place. This desire to champion local identity and connection to local areas underpins the need to ensure that LGR respects locality, maintains local representation, and promotes local civic pride.’ Page 18 – ‘Creating a Local Future for Greater Essex’

‘Mid Essex is an area rich in heritage and legend, boasting one of the oldest intact stone churches in the UK, the seventh century chapel of St-Peter-on-the-Wall at Bradwell, and the site of a 10th-century battle between the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings which was immortalised in one of the most important Old English poems, ‘The Battle of Maldon’.’ (Page 64 – Creating a Local Future for Greater Essex’).

Mid Essex’s own strategic narratives explicitly draw on Maldon’s unique assets, referencing everything from St Peter-on-the-Wall to the site of the Battle of Maldon as symbols of shared identity. These heritage anchors, alongside cultural activity and environmental stewardship, are not just ‘nice to have’; they are practical tools for community cohesion, local distinctiveness and democratic engagement.

The Bill also proposes extending powers originally established under the Localism Act 2011, offering communities greater rights to influence public services, own or manage assets of community value, shape social-value commissioning and access new funding mechanisms such as a community wealth fund. For Maldon, Brentwood and Chelmsford, this presents an opportunity to empower local groups to take a more active role in shaping the future of their communities. Given the distinctive landscapes and environmental designations within Maldon - its saltmarsh, estuaries and wild coast - environmental participation is particularly important. Cultural, heritage and environmental organisations already bring communities together and engage residents who may otherwise feel disconnected from local decision-making. These organisations can help address the challenge identified in the survey for the culture & heritage strategy: the apparent limited confidence many residents currently feel in their ability to influence change.

Finally, Maldon District Council’s work on initiatives such as the Saltmarsh Coast concept, Visit Maldon District, the Regenerative Tourism Strategy (developed as part of the work on the Culture & Heritage Strategy) and the Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival demonstrates the critical role local authorities can still play in enabling community-led action. As the District transitions into the Mid Essex unitary structure, it will be essential to preserve and strengthen this identity, especially through the work of the Saltmarsh Coast CIC, which is developing a governance and advocacy model rooted in local empowerment. Ensuring that culture, heritage and environmental participation remain central to the new governance landscape will help Mid Essex achieve genuine community empowerment, rather than a purely administrative restructuring.

The obvious challenge however is to really understand the resilience of local neighbourhoods, villages and hyper-local institutions and groups that might be expected to play a key role to inform ‘community empowerment’ processes as the Mid Essex concept develops further. Particularly the concept of ‘Neighbourhood Committees’. Prior to full scale local government reorganisation and further develop

of proposals for neighbourhood governance, MDC and its partners should seek to identify what might be needed to strengthen local resilience and therefore community's/group's ability to be proactive and represent themselves and their local assets appropriately and effectively in the near future. This would require an analysis of each parish, the resilience of its key assets (community spaces, key businesses, pubs etc.), and what might be needed to strengthen these longer-term (as well as sharing good practice). This can then feed into emerging strategic priorities for investment through Mid Essex and the MCA (heritage, culture and nature likely to feature), as well as how effective local voice and advocacy are likely to be in the new governance structures (the centres of power are likely to be in urban areas remote from many parts of Maldon District). This could be seen as a Community Empowerment Task Force for the Maldon District.

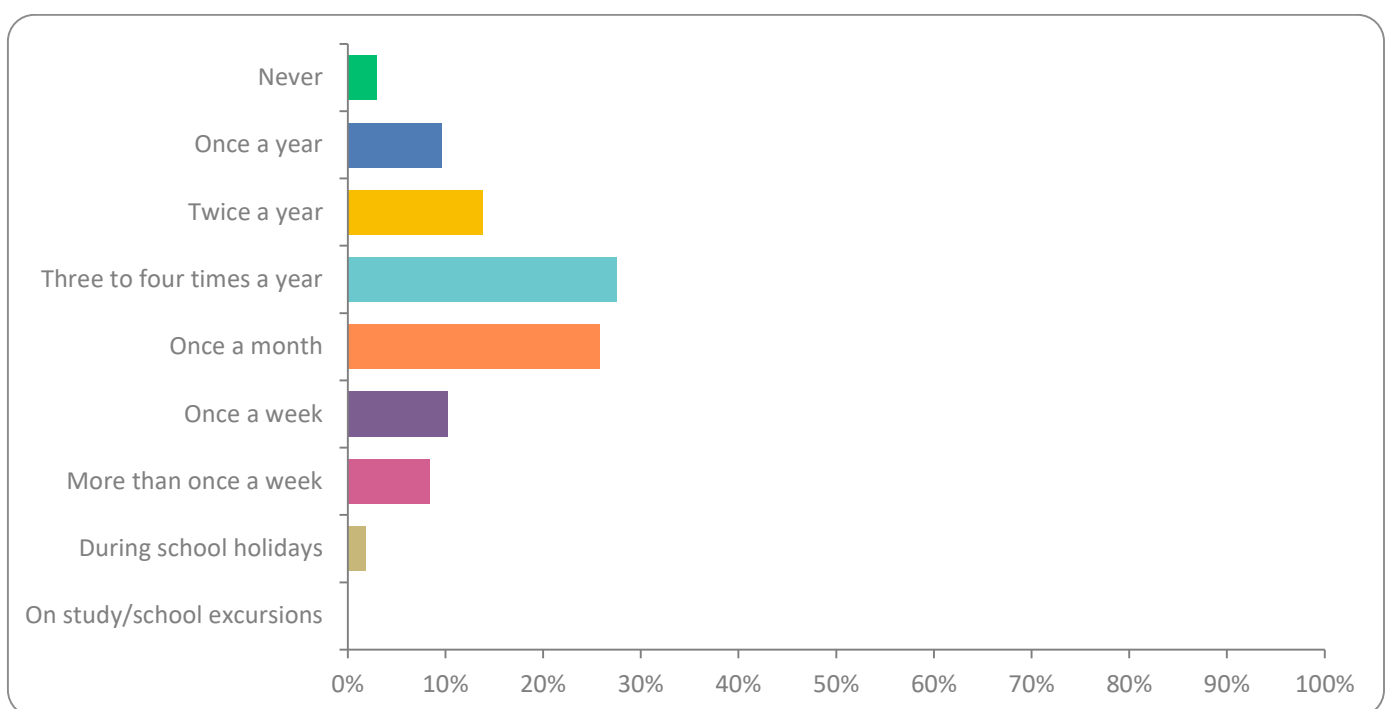
2. Culture & Heritage Strategy Community Survey Response

The community survey was opened to complement the research on the ground and wider engagement process. It was open to anyone who had something to share and in total there were 169 responses. The respondents were very much of an older age profile (the majority over 55 and over 40% over 70). The experience of engaging with organisations working across heritage in particular demonstrates that older people are far more likely to take part in activities and as volunteers – so the older age profile of the respondents would suggest they are more likely to be involved locally.

The vast majority of the respondents were from the Maldon District and therefore provide a small but useful insight into what local residents think about the heritage and cultural scene locally.

Question 2 - How often do you visit local cultural and heritage sites and spaces (i.e those in the Maldon District - for example museums, galleries etc.)?

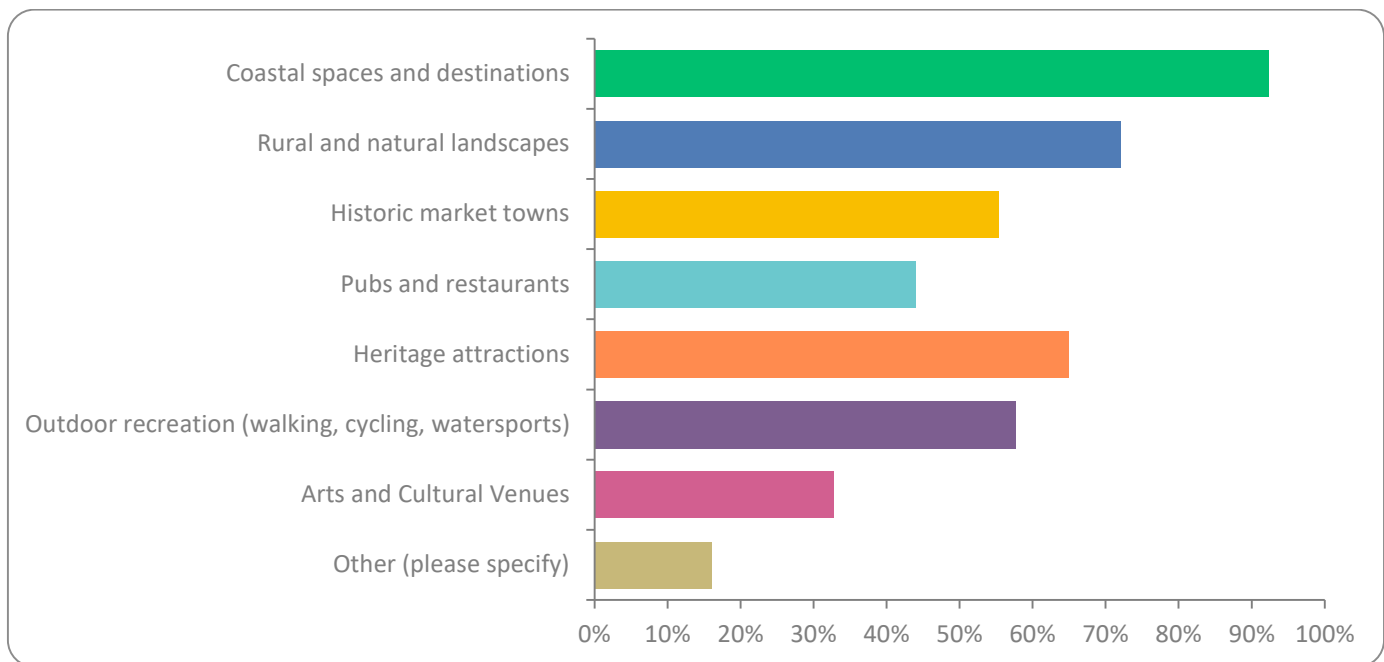
Respondents showed a reasonably high level of activity when it comes to **visiting local heritage and cultural sites** (the sites could be anything they consider to be relevant). The majority answered '3 to 4 times a year' or 'once a month', and it was a similar picture for visiting cultural and heritage sites outside of the District.



In answer to **Question 4 – ‘Do you ever attend local festivals or events? These could be in a venue or outdoors, and could be large or smaller community focused’** there was an overwhelming positive response with almost 80% indicating that ‘Regularly’ or ‘Sometimes’. This demonstrates that events throughout the year are of interest to local communities (even if these respondents are not fully representative of the wider population).

Question 5 - ‘In your opinion, what are Maldon District's best visitor, cultural and heritage assets? Tick all that apply’

The responses demonstrate a preference for the coastal and rural. This is not surprising given the nature of the District, and the lower response for 'Arts and Cultural Venues' is a reflection of the lack of obvious spaces to reference.

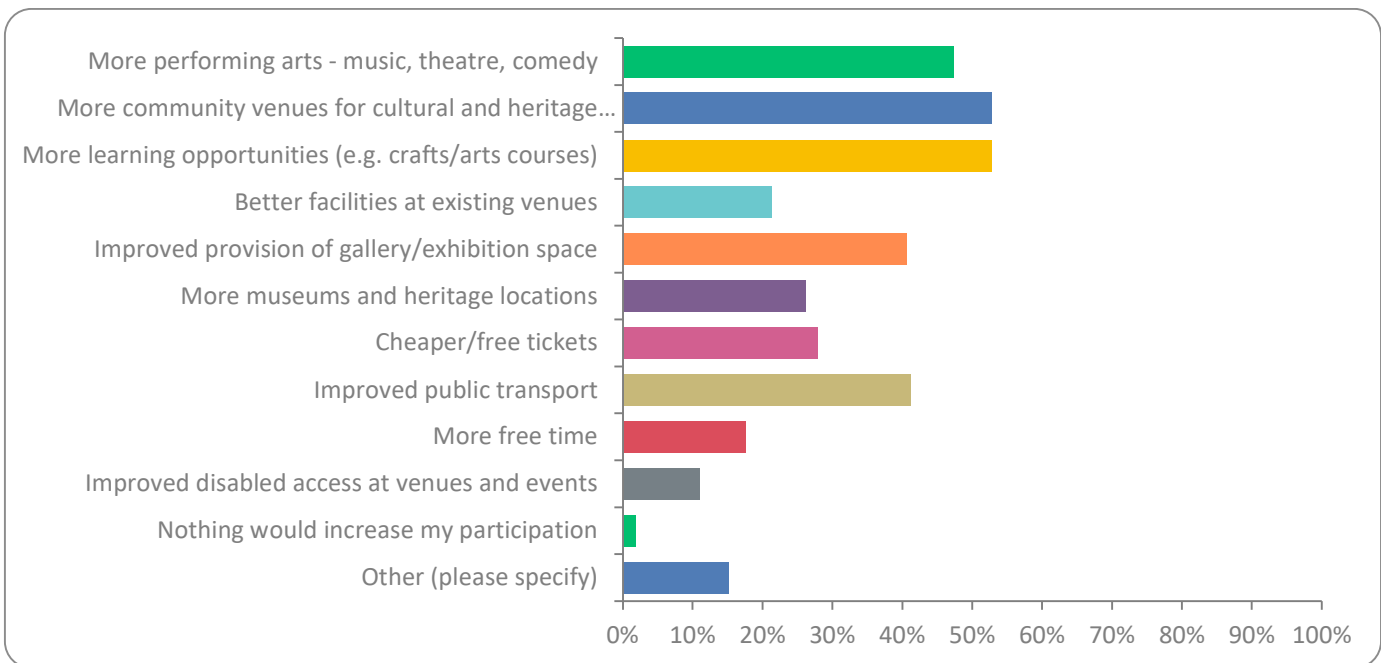


Question 6 - What would increase your participation in culture and heritage within the Maldon District?

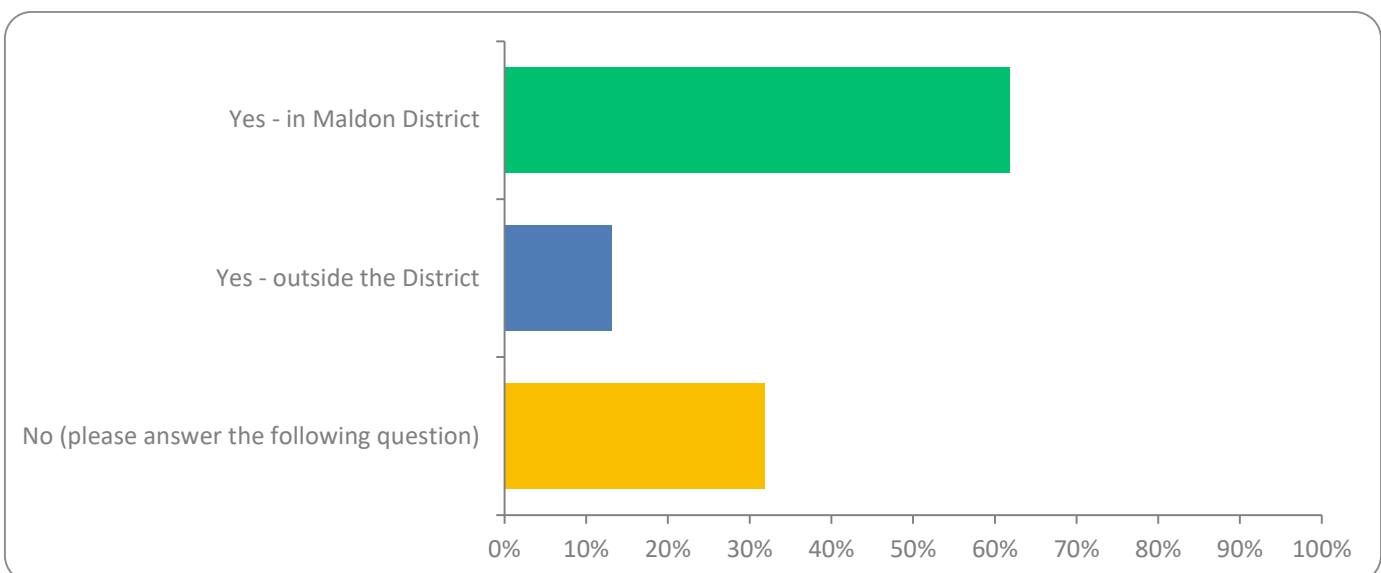
The responses reflect the desire amongst the respondents to see more spaces for cultural (and heritage) activities, with the most popular answer being 'More community venues for cultural and heritage activities' and 'More Learning Opportunities (e.g. crafts/arts courses)'. There was also interest in more performing arts space.

The responses to this question are very much in line with the wider engagement across the District (and particularly in Maldon), with a clear sense that there is a desire for new cultural space - although no clear consensus on exactly what kind of space.

The reference to a lack of public transport options to access spaces across the District is also important to note.



Question 7 – Do you currently volunteer (or work) for a cultural, heritage or community organisation or group?

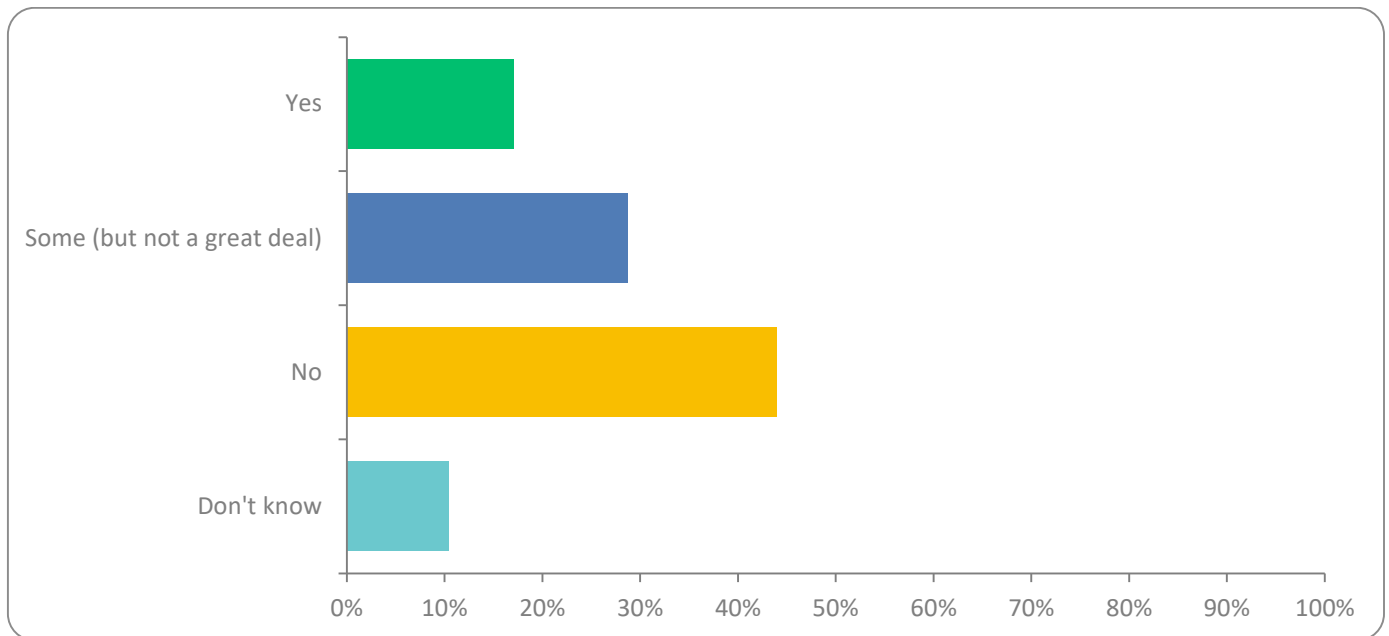


Of those that didn't volunteer at all (32%), the reason the vast majority gave was a lack of time.

Question 9 asked if respondents thought there were space or buildings that could be put to better use. Just under half that answered said 'Yes', with a wide variety of views expressed. The most popular concept was to utilise currently empty buildings (primarily in Maldon), with a number of examples given. References were also made to churches/church buildings. The Maeldune Centre is also referenced many times in terms of needing investment or being utilised more often (the two are linked). The Town Hall is mentioned a number of times as needing investment and increased use, and there are references also to the Station House building in Burnham on Crouch.

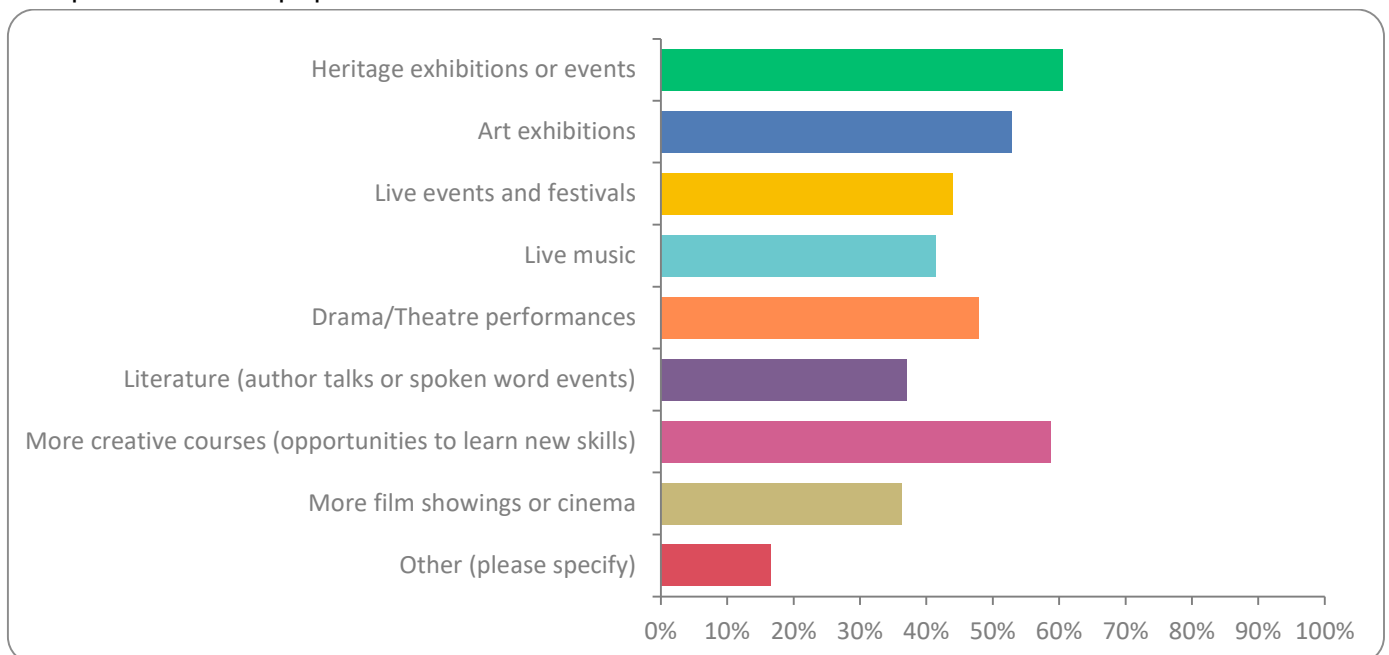
Q10: Do you feel you have the power, influence or ability to start something in your area? For example a heritage project, new organisation or cultural programme/event?

Responses to this question provide a simple snapshot of how respondents feel about their level of influence or ‘power’ within their community. It is difficult to draw significant conclusions as the reasons for answering will depend on the individual context and what kind of project they might be imagining (or actively trying to start). The majority do not appear to be particularly ‘empowered’, with some reasons reflecting the challenge of accessing advice or ‘red tape’.



Question 10 - What kinds of things would you like to see more of in your area? This could be things you are interested in, or things that would improve the area more generally. (Choose all that apply)

There is no one issue that particularly stands out from the responses to this question with most options having a fairly positive response. The most popular was ‘Heritage Exhibitions and Events’, which is unsurprising given the wealth of heritage across the District and the relative lack of interpretation. Also popular was a desire to see ‘More creative courses’



Question 12 - Do you have any ideas for projects or initiatives that you might like to share, that could improve or add something new to your area?

This was an open question for respondents to answer with any ideas they might have. The most popular response is for a new 'arts' or 'cultural' centre in Maldon for various uses. There are also references to improved interpretation space for local heritage (Vikings for example). The need for Adult education space is also mentioned a number of times.

'I would like a cultural centre that included a coffee shop, arts and crafts, gallery space, cinema and theatre and space for workshops. The Mareel in Lerwick, Shetland is a fine example of the sort of centre I mean.'

'An art hub would create a place for artists to run workshops and sell and display their work. It would be an accessible place for everyone to drop in, find out what's available and connect with artists.'

'Maldon needs a central music spot, currently everything is at the whim of pub venues, or promoters putting up the expense of using terrible town halls or community spaces. There is nowhere for someone starting out to play without great expense to themselves. Very few of the available spaces are suited to music either due to neighbour noise issues or size.'

'Viking reenactment day, Moot Hall reenactments'

3 - History and Heritage

Introduction – Why is this important to the Culture and Heritage Strategy?

Maldon District in Essex holds a particularly rich historical significance, shaped by over a millennium of recorded events and architectural heritage. The area is perhaps best known for the Battle of Maldon in 991 AD, one of the most celebrated conflicts in Anglo-Saxon history, commemorated in an Old English poem that remains a cornerstone of early English literature. The District's heritage extends through its medieval salt-making industry, its role as a prosperous trading port, and its many listed buildings, including the distinctive Moot Hall (first brick-built private residence in England) and the Chapel of St. Peter on the Wall (church still in use dating back to the 660s). This layered history contributes to local identity, tourism, and community pride.

Much of the heritage and historic context, and the organisations that support the efforts to record, discover, interpret and share, is at the all-important grassroots level. Run by people (mainly volunteers) who are dedicated to their local area and want to ensure that the varied and unique heritage of places across the District is celebrated and cared for. It is not possible to look to large organisations or the local authority for comprehensive leadership, although the District Council recognises it has an increasingly important role to play now and into local government reorganisation. With the emergence of a Mid Essex Unitary Authority in 2028, there is every opportunity to ensure that this new larger authority is able to utilise the experience from Chelmsford City Council and its museum service to support the heritage development of the Maldon District (Saltmarsh Coast), working with local partners in the process. This will require a coherent Maldon District voice on priorities and a structure for other Mid Essex partners to engage with; and there are inevitable risks associated with a larger well-established system potentially dominating. Either way, the new unitary area will need a clear and coherent 'place' narrative to support the wider place making, regeneration, economic, rural and cultural development process. Maldon District has many stories to tell that can contribute to this.

Strategic Reflection – National and Regional Context

The importance of history and heritage to places and communities is reinforced through national, regional and local policy. A strong sense of heritage is analogous to a distinctive sense of place. The events, the people, the buildings and landscapes are all part of a distinctive story of the District (and its many unique places) that is rightly taken very seriously.

In March 2026, Maldon Town made an Expression of Interest for UK Town of Culture. This opportunity was focused primarily on the strong heritage of the town and surrounding area, responding to the government's guidance that recognised the '*catalytic effect of culture and heritage to bring people together*' and its importance in '*building a sense of place and inspiring local pride.*' The TOC EOI played heavily on the heritage of the area, and in particular framed the Battle of Maldon as an opportunity to explore 'origin stories' that are framed by key historic events (and the resulting literature and art that frames them in the public imagination). The ambition for Town of Culture would be to see benefits to the whole District, recognising how Maldon's history is interlinked with the wider area.

The Government's Pride in Place programme (although not funding projects in the Maldon District) includes investment in heritage assets as an intervention and a key part of securing regeneration and improvement in high streets.

‘Strong communities love where they live and take pride in the cultural assets they share. They come together to celebrate their unique heritage and recognise their community heroes. We understand the value of recognising our places and the key role this plays in restoring dignity and instilling a shared pride in communities.’ (UK Government Pride in Place Strategy September 2025)

The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) which has funded many projects across the District over years, sets out the broad interpretation of heritage as *‘adapting to contemporary and future uses and challenges’*. This is a key point that reflects the importance of continually refreshing and updating heritage interpretation, programmes and activities, ensuring that ways in to appreciating and valuing heritage are open to all ages and supports diverse participation. NLHF funding (particularly larger projects) is focused not only of preservation and conservation, but increasingly on participation and inclusivity; recognising that for heritage to be valued and cared for into the future, more people need to be involved.

‘From the historic and natural environment to our museums, libraries and archives. From our industrial legacy to cultural traditions, stories, memories, celebrations and more. Heritage can be anything from the past that people value and want to pass on to future generations.’ (NLHF Strategy 2023-33)

There is also an increasing focus on the ‘emotional’ importance that heritage has for people, and that this plays out not only in terms of personal connections to places and historic sites, but also can feed into future place-based and economic strategy development.

This is best summarised in a 2026 Report ‘Connecting People and Place: Valuing the Felt Experiences of Historic Places’ (Arts & Humanities Research Council Place-Based Research Programme). The report argues that people’s emotional, sensory and cognitive ‘felt experiences’ of historic places are fundamental to how they form attachments, belonging and identity, and that these deep human connections have measurable impacts on wellbeing, social cohesion and economic behaviour. The report argues that historic places meet existential needs for security and continuity while also shaping everyday feelings such as pride, joy, anger or comfort, and concludes that embedding felt experience into place-based policy can unlock more effective, people-centred decision-making and stronger socio-economic outcomes. This framing of heritage has infiltrated national policy and research including ‘Levelling Up’ and ‘Pride in Place’, and is certainly a key factor across the District as evidenced by the dedication and pride shown by 100s of people involved in heritage related activities of all kinds. There is also significant pride in local heritage evidenced through the responses to the survey undertaken to support this strategy (while also reflecting the need to do more with the heritage that is associated with the District).

Relating to the importance of heritage to places, communities and the economy, the Museums Essex Advocacy Report (2025) recognises that museums ‘provide accessible spaces for residents and visitors alike to engage with local heritage, creativity, and shared stories’, and ‘contribute significantly to the visitor economy and community wellbeing - key priorities for local authorities seeking to build resilience and cohesion in times of change’. For Maldon this is relevant to all heritage spaces including established museums, and positions heritage organisations and groups as key players in terms of community engagement and resilience.

The Heritage Alliance’s ‘Backing the Bedrock’ (2025) report argues that England’s heritage sector is a major economic and social engine which contributes £44.9bn GVA, supporting over half a million jobs,

and delivering exceptional returns for public investment. It called for urgent and coordinated action by government to address the long-term decline in public funding, market failures and policy gaps. For example, creating long-term investment and capital funds, reforming tax and planning systems to favour repair and reuse, strengthening local authority capacity, securing community-ownership pathways, embedding heritage in education and skills policy, integrating it into health commissioning, and enabling net-zero delivery through retrofit and environmental schemes. The report frames heritage as essential national infrastructure that underpins growth, wellbeing, pride in place and environmental resilience, and urges government to treat it as a strategic priority rather than a discretionary amenity.

On a similar strategic trajectory is the report published in November 2025 through the Eastern Arc Heritage and Culture Network. This explores the concept of heritage as a major economic and social asset across the Eastern region, underpinning tourism, shaping local identity and contributing billions to county economies. It highlights strong public participation in heritage (in-person and digital), and demonstrates how historic sites, museums, landscapes and cultural assets drive visitor spend, support jobs and attract creative industries such as film (which is relevant to the Maldon District). The analysis reveals uneven recovery from COVID-19, gaps in data (especially for museums), and significant variation in access and engagement across socio-economic groups, ethnicities and disabilities. It concludes that heritage should be treated as essential regional infrastructure within devolution and growth planning, and calls for better data collection, stronger cross-sector collaboration, and a unified digital strategy to raise the profile and impact of the heritage economy.

Summary of Local Context

Maldon District's heritage is the district's defining asset – every bit as fundamental as its natural environment. It provides the narrative, identity and distinctiveness – a thread that runs through how the area is promoted, from the District Council's own logo to the stories told in tourism materials, local festivals and community-led initiatives. What makes it powerful is not just the age or rarity of the heritage, but the grassroots energy behind it. This can be seen through volunteers restoring chapels and barges, local historians interpreting complex archaeological finds, and community groups keeping alive the skills, memories and traditions that anchor Maldon in the national imagination. This civic stewardship is arguably the district's greatest cultural strength - an active, knowledgeable public who treat heritage as a living resource rather than a museum piece. The richness of the heritage is astonishingly varied. Place names across the district whisper fragments of the ancient past; beneath them lie layers of Iron Age settlement, Romano-British occupation, early medieval coastal trade, and the more modern histories of salt-making, maritime industry and wartime defence. Salt is Maldon's most famous export and connects these eras, a product shaped by geography, climate and centuries of human ingenuity. On the Dengie peninsula, the story deepens further: the landing of St Cedd and the establishment of the chapel at Bradwell make this one of the most significant sites for the spread of Christianity into eastern England. Few districts can claim such a continuous, multi-period landscape where archaeology, belief, industry and environment interlock so tightly.

Taken together, this makes heritage (alongside the environment) the district's most important strategic asset. It defines place identity, drives tourism, strengthens community pride, and provides a coherent story that can guide regeneration, investment and cultural programming. In Maldon, heritage is not a backdrop; it is the district's most powerful organising theme and concept.

The challenge of course – and this is not unique to the Maldon District – is to ensure that the museums, spaces, organisations and programmes are sustainable and resilient long into the future. This is particularly challenging for rural areas.

National Lottery Heritage Fund – Maldon District

Official National Lottery Heritage Fund data shows there was a total of £2,983,600 investment through grant programmes in heritage projects across the Maldon District between 2013 and 2025. The largest grant was for the Museum of Power’s ‘Powering Forward’ programme, and there has been significant investment in maritime heritage. This compares favourably (for example) with just over £350,000 for the neighbouring Rochford District and similar for the Brentwood Borough (soon to be part of Mid Essex with Maldon). It is not easy to produce a quality application to the NLHF, taking time, clarity of vision and outcomes, partnerships and experience. It is not easy to deliver them either

At the current moment there are further bids at various stages in for projects across the District, including some multi-million pound applications. There does not appear to be any coordination between organisations making applications. This perhaps is not unreasonable given the competitive nature of these kinds of funding programmes, but this could limit the potential for collaboration.

What should be noted however is the lack of alternative funds for heritage projects over the years, although some organisations/groups have been successful in attracting smaller amounts from other sources.

Challenge of Preserving and Maintaining

Maldon’s heritage organisations share a common challenge: sustaining and recruiting volunteers at a time when capacity is already stretched. Although the District’s historic environment is central to its identity, quality of life and visitor appeal, there is no local authority museum service or single strategic body providing coordinated oversight of heritage development. This brings both resilience and vulnerability. On one hand, independent organisations are insulated from potential local government funding cuts; on the other, they rely heavily on volunteers and a patchwork of fundraising, with no unified mechanism for long-term planning or shared investment.

The Maldon Town Heritage Group, supported by the Town Council, offers a valuable forum for collaboration, but its remit is necessarily limited to the Maldon town area and not District-wide. There have been collaborations including on materials (most recently a tea towel representing the architectural heritage of the town) and Heritage Open Days – but these are limited largely due to the lack of time by participating groups to consider issues outside of core functions and basic survival. The Maldon Society works hard to promote the area’s historic built environment, hosting talks and proactively engaging with the planning system. The emerging governance model proposed through the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group offers a practical route to addressing these gaps. Its steering groups - particularly the History and Heritage Steering Group - create a structure for strategic coordination, shared priorities and joint advocacy across the District. While Maldon has benefited from significant National Lottery Heritage Fund investment over the years, this alone cannot sustain the sector. A more integrated system, combining strategic leadership, diversified funding and strengthened volunteer pipelines, is essential to secure the long-term stewardship and activation of the District’s heritage.

Audiences

Locally, as explored elsewhere in this report, audiences in the Maldon District (and those within a reasonable drive time) tend to be interested in more traditional offerings and experiences. This works well with the current offer based around some core museums and a broader informal experience across both urban and rural areas (for example on Hythe Quay or in the built heritage of many villages). But increased interest through regular programming and activities drives renewed interest (and helps to attract new audiences).

There is good national and international interest in the heritage of the District, evidenced for example through the visitor profiles of Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome and the Combined Military Services Museum (both have nationally and internationally relevant collections and stories). Two thirds of the Museum of Power's visitors are from outside of the local area. Of course there is much to be gained from securing local interest and audiences (as well as visitors), and all local assets are keen to see more local people visit and take part where possible (as volunteers for example).

The survey undertaken to inform this strategy demonstrated that respondents considered that 'Heritage Attractions' were the District's most important 'assets' (64%) followed by 'Historic Market Towns' at 56%. The respondents to the survey were of an older age than the average for the District, but this still demonstrates good awareness of local heritage and its importance to the area.

Museums and Heritage Sites

Maldon District hosts a rich and varied network of museums and heritage sites, ranging from nationally significant destinations to small, volunteer-run centres that anchor local identity. Key attractions include Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome - the best-preserved First World War airfield in England, with most buildings listed Grade II*—the Museum of Power, Mangapps Railway Museum (a private collection of historic railway carriages and other related artefacts on the outskirts of Southminster), the Combined Military Services Museum (ranked number three in TripAdvisor's *Best Museums in Essex 2026*), and the Maeldune Centre, home to the Maldon Embroidery. Maldon Museum in the Park now operates under a three-year lease (previously one year rolling), though like many sites it continues to face challenges around volunteer recruitment and trustee capacity. Burnham-on-Crouch Museum, run by the Burnham History Society CIO, is one of the District's four Accredited Museums, alongside Stow Maries, Combined Military Services Museum and the Museum of Power. These accredited institutions can access support from Museums Essex, though they are not well-resourced to provide wider strategic leadership across the District, although the Museum Manager at the Museum of Power does provide wider support and advocacy (both in and outside of the District).

Perhaps the most recognisable and evocative heritage asset in the District (and perhaps in Essex) is Hythe Quay with its iconic Thames Barges and other historic vessels including the Steam Tug Brent. The area is a draw for visitors, a site for events and regular programming and where many get a chance to get out on the water and learn important skills. The Maldon & Heybridge Heritage Harbour was granted charity status in July 2025 and works alongside others including the Thames Sailing Barge Trust (TSBT) and Topsail Charters to ensure the historic quay has a key role in terms of heritage interpretation and related activities. The TSBT ambition for a permanent interpretation and activity space in the Bailiffs Hut on the Quay appears to be an important potential addition to the existing heritage offer (if it can progress in partnership with Maldon District Council). The historic waterfront in Burnham-on-Crouch is also of great importance of the District's maritime, industrial and social heritage and sense of place and has benefitted from significant community-led efforts to restore wharves and jetties along the waterfront. This has been overseen by Burnham Wharf Heritage who completed work on the

restoration of Kings Wharf in 2026 – with further plans for wharves at Burnham Sailing Club and Tucker Browns.

Beeleigh Abbey is one of the most important historic sites in the District. It is in private ownership although it does offer open garden days for visitors who can take in the historically inspired gardens and purchase unique produce, and there are specially organised history tours (hosted by a local historian). The owners have invested significantly in the ancient buildings and also have influence over a wider area (River Chelmer that borders the wider Abbey site and the Golf course) and are open to collaboration with other partners.

Partners in Tollesbury – led by Tollesbury Maritime Heritage CIC – have ambitions to significantly increase the heritage programming (including activities), interpretation and restoration of key historic assets. Recent investment from Essex CC Community Initiatives Fund is helping the CIC to work on plans for an ex-industrial space at the hard, with a view to converting to a community heritage and craft space. A community photographic project will support outreach and the development of an archive of relevant images. The plan is then to raise additional funding they have plans to renovate the last surviving traditional fishing boat built in Tollesbury. There are also longer-term plans to repurpose the old granary on the hard as a small museum and ‘pop up’ creative hub in addition to our community workshop space.

There are many other sites across the District, mostly managed by volunteers with limited capacity and funding. There is no guarantee that museums (or any other heritage attraction) will be in place forever. There was once a Maldon & District Agricultural and Domestic Museum in Goldhanger (the brown road sign still in-situ on Maldon Road – and still drawing would-be visitors in). This was a private initiative but has been closed for over 15 years although there is now an online ‘museum’ for Goldhanger. Other notable digital heritage assets include the Maldon Society Archives which are available to view in the Maeldune Centre (on a large screen which allows visitors to search over 8000 images from Maldon’s past (mainly photographs from the 1930s to the current day).

Other key sites include the remains of St. Giles Leper Hospital on Spital Road, which along with Beeleigh Abbey and the Carmelite Friary was closed with the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII. The Friary’s remaining walled gardens adjacent to Maldon Library are maintained by the Maldon & Heybridge Horticultural Society.

Maldon Museum in the Park

In March 2026 a concept emerged from Maldon District Council for a capital project on the site of the existing Maldon Museum in the Park and adjacent land. This was presented as an opportunity to enhance the existing museum building (including necessary underpinning and renovations), and to create new space connected to the existing building that could be utilised for exhibitions, interpretation and activities as well as hosting a café/restaurant offer. This responded to the Promenade Park Plan and Central Area Masterplan which both explored opportunities for new all weather community facilities in the park. This proposal has changed to become an outline concept for a new Arts and Cultural Centre, although there is a reference in the consultation to the Museum needing investment.

Maldon Museum in the Park is the charity that runs the space, currently on a 3 year licence from MDC. The charity has very limited resources and relies upon a core group of volunteers (including the

Trustees of the Charity). 27 volunteers in total - although not all as active as a core group which recently was as low as 3 people.

The Museum currently attracts up to 3,000 people per year, a relatively low number given the location in the park. However, the museum is closed throughout the winter months and the key challenge is the inability to plan ahead as until recently the charity operated on a rolling 1-Year licence. This would limit any organisations' ability to develop and plan for the future and severely restricts any fund raising ambitions (capital or revenue), or indeed accreditation. MDC does not provide any ongoing support for the Museum apart from a contribution towards insurance costs. The Museum's collection is extensive (artefacts collected prior to 1997 are actually officially owned by MDC, with the post-1997 collection mostly owned by the charity (or loans from individuals). The Trustees/volunteers are all knowledgeable on the history of the area and have a good understanding of key themes, as well as knowledge of the archive materials and visitor interests.

Taken together, these museums and heritage sites form a distinctive cultural ecosystem that contributes to tourism, education, community identity and pride in place. However, the sector remains heavily reliant on volunteers and fragmented fundraising, with no single strategic body overseeing development or long-term planning. While the District has benefited from strong National Lottery Heritage Fund investment over the years, this alone cannot sustain the breadth of activity. Strengthening coordination - particularly through emerging structures such as the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group's proposed History and Heritage Steering Group - offers a pathway to greater resilience, shared advocacy and a more coherent approach to safeguarding and activating Maldon's heritage for the future.

Tourism and heritage related signage is seen as being poor across the District (gathered from engagement and consultation – for example to and from the town centre in Maldon and Promenade Park or Hythe Quay. The North Quay regeneration proposals (which have not developed – largely because MDC does not have enough land ownership to affect change there) provide a concept for improved connectivity and use of historic buildings to create new links between Hythe Quay and other parts of the town. The issue of how to get people to walk between Maldon Town Centre, the Hythe and Promenade Park is a long-standing challenge.

Built Heritage across the District

The built heritage of the Maldon District is of great importance and provides a real sense of uniqueness and difference. There are over a 1000 nationally listed buildings in the District, and fifteen conservation areas spanning Bradwell-on-Sea, Burnham-on-Crouch, Goldhanger, Heybridge, Heybridge Basin, Langford, Latchingdon, Maldon, Mundon, Purleigh, Southminster, St Lawrence, Tillingham, Tollesbury, Tolleshunt D'Arcy and Woodham Walter.

Maldon District's conservation areas play a vital role in protecting the historic character towns, villages and coastal landscapes, and their importance aligns closely with paragraph 203 of the National Planning Policy Framework. These areas help sustain and enhance the significance of heritage assets, ensuring they remain in viable use while retaining their distinctiveness. They also generate wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits by supporting local identity, heritage-led regeneration and the district's appeal for tourism. By guiding new development to make a positive contribution to local character and by drawing on the historic environment as a defining element of

place, Maldon's conservation areas are important as part of a strategy to ensure the long-term stewardship of what makes the District such as an interesting place to live and visit.

Maldon District is rich in historic churches that anchor local identity and continuity, most notably the ancient Chapel of St Peter-on-the-Wall, built in the 650s by St Cedd for the East Saxons using the remains of the Roman fort of Othona. These churches embody centuries of spiritual, architectural and cultural heritage, acting as landmarks, community spaces and tangible links to the district's earliest recorded history. Some churches are cared for outside of the formal church governance – for example St. Mary's in Mundon and St. Peter's in Wickham Bishops are managed by the Friends of Friendless Churches who have cared for the historic buildings over recent years (and invested grant funding).

There is one particularly outstanding example of a community coming together to save an important heritage asset – St. Andrew's Church in Althorne. The church was closed to the public in 2023 as it had become unsafe (it was also placed on the Historic England 'At Risk Register' - it is Grade II Listed). A successful first stage application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) enabled the local team of volunteers to bring in much needed expertise to develop the project further and put together plans for crucial capital works (underpinning of the building, repair cracking walls etc.), and develop an activity plan that focuses on how the church can once again be at the heart of community life (recognising that the congregation is small and aging and a new vision was needed to ensure its long-term sustainability). The second round application to deliver the capital works and activities (which includes new volunteering roles) was submitted in May 2026. This is a good example of a heritage asset bringing the community together to take action and support the vibrancy and connectedness of a rural community.

A rather unusual historic asset is the Chalet Fields at Barrow Marsh Caravan Site; a rare Arcadian enclave of 36 privately built 1930s and 1940s chalets created by owners who camped on site while constructing their modest holiday homes. Together this forms a unique historic landscape that illustrates how people have shaped and inhabited Maldon's coast over time.

Folklore and Intangible Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage plays a vital role in shaping Maldon District's identity, fostering continuity between generations, and sustaining traditions that make the area distinctive. Practices such as sail dressing on Hythe Quay, shanty singing, barge rigging, knot-tying, Morris dancing, and the long-established regattas at Maldon and Heybridge Basin embody skills, rituals and social customs that connect people to the District's maritime past. The recent submissions to UNESCO for Sail Dressing and the Heritage Harbour at Hythe Quay, along with expressions of interest for other living traditions, demonstrate how these practices are increasingly recognised as part of the District's shared cultural capital. They are not museum pieces; they rely on active participation, intergenerational teaching and community pride to survive, imbuing everyday places with meaning and keeping Maldon's maritime character alive in the present (as well as helping to raise awareness, funding and volunteers).

Modern expressions of local folklore, such as the Maldon Mud Race, Maldon Gig Rowing and the enduring presence of Thames barges, show how intangible heritage evolves while still reinforcing communal bonds and local distinctiveness. Groups like the Friendly Brothers of Goldhanger and the tradition of historic dress worn at Maldon Town Council meetings illustrate how community identity is enacted through ritual, costume and shared values. Together, these elements shape a cultural

landscape that is as important as the District's built heritage, ensuring that Maldon's character is defined not only by its historic buildings and waterfront but also by the living practices that are strongly rooted in history but every bit as important today.

Industry and Agriculture

The industrial heritage of Maldon District is a crucial part of its story, showing how a largely agrarian landscape gradually diversified into an area shaped by ingenuity, maritime industry and small-scale manufacturing. The history of Benthalls (which started with the invention of the world-famous Goldhanger Plough) are reminders of this transition (some buildings remain), illustrating how local enterprise influenced both rural communities and the growth of Maldon's wider economy. Grassroots heritage archives such as *Goldhanger – In the Past* and other local heritage resources online further preserve memories, photographs and oral histories of industries that once defined everyday life. Maldon Salt, still produced today, is a rare surviving link to centuries of craft-based production, carrying forward techniques and traditions that have placed the District on the global culinary and cultural map.

Among the most significant industrial heritage assets is Beeleigh Mill, where the Beeleigh Mill Restoration Group - an entirely volunteer-led effort - maintains and restores the 1845 steam engine and the historic milling machinery of the former flour mill. Their work keeps alive the engineering, craft and mechanical skills that shaped Maldon's industrial past while offering a vivid, working example of nineteenth-century production.

In terms of agriculture there are a wealth of historic buildings and associated cultural heritage across the rural areas of the District. Often these are not seen by the public or visitors on the regular basis, but they are important nonetheless and often can be put to alternative uses that supports rural sustainability. Examples include buildings at Lofts Farm (Great Totham) and Lauriston Farm (Goldhanger) – both of which are working to create new creative and community spaces in historic structures. Both the Historic Environment Farm Environment Record (HEFER) and the Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England (or SHINE) can be utilised to record important heritage on agricultural sites and inform local policies and investment programmes.

Actions

Increased efforts around collaboration and a 'shared diary' for heritage related events – mentioned by a number of people. There is some good collaboration around this – for example Maldon Town's Local History Week that takes place in May. District-wide collaboration and programming of this kind is scarce (although there are opportunities to promote events on the Visit Maldon District Website which is available to everyone holding events and special programmes). As the concept of the 'Saltmarsh Coast' grows in significance (with local government reorganisation seeing MDC disappear), the importance of collaboration across this area will increase. This can support the awareness of the area's unique heritage and support the development of shared projects, activities and research (where relevant).

Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome is a unique asset so requires a dedicated relationship with local authorities: Not only heritage but covering environment, education and skills, social, health and wellbeing with over 33,000 volunteering hours (many highly skilled) each year supporting a small staff

team. It is the world's most complete surviving First World War aerodrome, with a concentration of original buildings, landscape setting and aviation archaeology. The technical, planning and access challenges require a partnership approach with local authorities needing to be proactive to ensure Stow Maries can operate effectively long-term (and access the funding and partnerships needed). With the emergence of the Mid Essex Unitary Authority comes potential benefits to Stow Maries (it is very close to the existing border with the City of Chelmsford), and Chelmsford has a good understanding of military heritage (although Stow Maries offer much more than this).

Resolve the Future of Maldon Museum in the Park: If there is support/funding available through MDC (which could in theory be matched by an external funding drive), then this needs to be resolved as this investment could have implications for other potential investment/support for culture and heritage across the District. The Museum needs capital investment and this could then boost the charity's opportunities for evolution and sustainability, which in turn could create opportunities to upgrade the exhibitions, interpretation and archive. Although current proposals are for a new Arts & Cultural Centre (adjacent to the existing Museum), there is no reason why the two spaces cannot be linked (even if not physically), as creative exploration of local heritage can be an opportunity to increase awareness and community engagement with the collections and associated cultural heritage and stories.

Improve signage and promote connectivity between Promenade Park and Maldon Town Centre: This issue has come up repeatedly in engagement and is also relevant to the events programme in Promenade Park where the town centre economy would benefit from greater levels of exploration given the 1000s of visitors each year to the Park (and in particular for specific events in the summer months). Routes along Mill Road from the Park exit on Mill Road (near the Museum) to the High Street are not particularly welcoming (parking and lack of pavement for part of the way), but can be walked in under five minutes. The route along the Hythe and up Church Street (or indeed North Street) is a bit longer (and possibly more pleasant), but again only a matter of minutes.

Tollesbury Maritime Heritage: Tollesbury is already popular for visitors (many are drawn to the Woodup Pool) and has a vibrant cultural and community scene as well for the local community. The Tollesbury Maritime Heritage CIC are working on plans to adapt an underused ex-industrial space at the hard, with a view to it becoming a community heritage craft space. This would require funding and there is ongoing community engagement through a photographic archive project. A further phase would be raise funding for work on the last surviving tradition fishing boat built in Tollesbury (which would include skills development and traditional seafaring and fishing activities). The restoration of the boat would take place in the community workshop and would be an excellent community engagement and visitor experience opportunity. The final phase would see the repurposing of the old granary as a small museum and 'pop up' creative hub that would not only save this important heritage asset but act as additional space to the community workshop. This is a very ambitious long-term strategy – but it is a strategy that is being actively pursued and should be supported as part of ongoing efforts to increase awareness and engagement with the history the Saltmarsh Coast.

Interpret and Explore the District's Early Medieval Heritage: There is a definite increase in national interest in the early medieval period, which stems from increasing media, archaeological and cultural engagement. Given Maldon's prominent national position in this important period, and that the Battle of Maldon marked an important moment in the concept of an England (perhaps as much as in the literary telling of the event as in the reality), there does appear to be far more that could be done to critically explore this history, linking the national and the local stories together to engage visitors. This

was proposed as a theme focusing on 'Origin Stories' as part of Maldon Town's bid for UK Town of Culture. The active debates about where the battle took place only creates more interest and supports exploration of the wider area (and the environment).

Prepare for the transition to Mid Essex: The importance of heritage to the Maldon District is clear, and relates closely to the visitor economy (and the wider Regenerative Tourism concept) as well as being core to the sense of place (although this is a diverse concept across the whole District with local distinctiveness very much an important concept). Chelmsford has an established Museum Service and could offer interesting opportunities to enhance engagement with Maldon's heritage as well as around governance and long-term sustainability. Early engagement and identification of where collaboration can take place across Brentwood, Chelmsford and Essex is important for heritage.

Hythe Quay and Heritage Interpretation and Activities: The Thames Sailing Barge Trust is well advanced with a project that will enable them to develop plans for long-term sustainability as a charity through activities and improved heritage interpretation, focused on space at Hythe Quay. In terms of the District's heritage and visitor profile, as well as the work with communities and volunteers, this is a key project for Maldon and the wider area with the Trust in a good position to source significant external funding with support of partners.

Mobilise the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC to effectively support and oversee District-wide heritage collaboration and resilience planning: Given the importance of tourism to the District (and that much of this relates to the strong heritage offer), the new CIC will need to be able to operate effectively to support collaboration between groups/organisations across the wider area, and advocate effectively to the new strategic authorities for the importance of the heritage to the wider economy, community engagement (and empowerment) and health and wellbeing.

4 - Arts and Culture

Introduction – Why is this important to the Culture and Heritage Strategy?

The Maldon District provides so much in the way of cultural and creative inspiration. In the natural environment and coast, historic buildings, myths and legends and much more. For a culture and heritage strategy it is important therefore to focus on the vitality and resilience of the cultural and arts sectors, recognising where there are limitations and challenges, and looking at where more can be done to support organisations, groups and individuals to do what they need to do to.

As is explored across this strategy, culture and arts are important for so many reasons. Opportunities for creative participation is vital for everyone; for personal flourishing and to bring people together either as participants or audiences, for health and wellbeing, and for exploring themes and issues that affect us all. The District is well known for events (of many different kinds), but increasingly arts and culture are being elevated through very successful art trails and literary programming or through the multi-arts Maldon Festival. This all improves internal and external perceptions of the District, supports the visitor economy and creates more momentum for cultural programming and projects (success is built upon experience and confidence).

What is clear is that this is largely built upon the all-important ‘grassroots’. There is no major cultural institution or organisation that has a role to lead the development of the creative and cultural sectors in the District. No major publicly-funded art gallery, theatre, performance venue or arts collaboration space (like an arts centre or studios). This limits the scope and scale of cultural programming across the District, but it also means that activity is very often community-focused and therefore accessible (or potentially so). Cultural activity takes places in many different spaces including village and church halls, pubs and breweries, libraries and in the open.

Responsibility for cultural development is therefore dispersed and democratic albeit with limited capacity and challenges associated with a large rural area. When the cultural vitality of a community is thriving, it fosters a sense of belonging, strengthening the social fabric by bringing people together in shared spaces and through collective cultural experiences.

Cultural activity strengthens local identity and creates the kind of shared experiences that make places feel alive rather than anonymous. Arts activity also fuels economic vitality - supporting local businesses, attracting visitors, and helping towns compete for residents, workers, and investment. The quality of the cultural offer can also influence the development of the wider creative economy – those businesses that require creative skills to succeed including design and fashion, film and production, marketing, advertising, publishing and software/games development. These sectors can be important for local economic productivity (as they tend to be higher value added and require a highly skilled and educated workforce), as well as increasing demand for cultural experiences and events locally.

One of the defining images of the District is in the form of the statue of Brythnoth, Ealdorman of Essex of the Battle of Maldon fame. It is probably the most well-known piece of art in the District and used on all kinds of marketing. This is by local artist John Doubleday, and it brings together themes that are all relevant to the culture and heritage strategy in one excellent and engaging piece – art, heritage, environment and tourism. It also stands alone looking out while encouraging people to visit and take a

picture, relax and reflect, learn about local history and take in the amazing (and forever changing) natural environment. Very much reflecting the Maldon-context.

Strategic Reflection – National and Regional Context

Arts Council England

Arts Council England's *Let's Create* (2020–2030) set out a ten-year vision for a country where everyone's creativity is valued and everyone can access high-quality cultural experiences. It was built around three interconnected Outcomes: Creative People, supporting personal and lifelong creativity including amateur and youth activity; Cultural Communities, strengthening local cultural ecosystems through collaboration between professional and voluntary sectors; and A Creative & Cultural Country, developing an innovative, internationally engaged professional cultural sector.

To deliver these Outcomes, the strategy introduces four Investment Principles. These are Ambition & Quality, Inclusivity & Relevance, Dynamism, and Environmental Responsibility. These Investment Principles set expectations for how funded organisations should work.

Following on from the Hodge Review of Arts Council England (2025), a review of *Let's Create* as a strategy was announced, along with the development sector-specific guidance (music, visual arts etc.), and this will guide future investment decisions (across all funding programmes) as well as that national advocacy role ACE plays for the creative and cultural sectors.

As an interim measure ACE published (May 2026) a Strategic Framework 2026 which sets out three strategic objectives that their investment in organisations, individuals and projects must support:

- It must support Excellence
- It must deliver for Everybody
- It must reach everywhere

'A commitment to excellence will sit at the centre of every service we design and every investment decision we make. We will back individuals and organisations who are dedicated to producing outstanding work, in terms of output, practice, or engagement.'

'We believe our investment should support everybody in every community, village, town and city to connect with excellent art and culture. It should help more people, especially children and young people, to develop and express their own creativity.'

It is noticeable that there are references in there document to the wider benefits of participation with arts and culture including health and wellbeing and 'rebuilding social fabric' – both of which are very relevant to the Maldon District, as well as the references to villages and towns (recognising that there needs to be a focus on all areas – not just the larger urban centres of England).

Shaping the Future of Essex's Creative Sector

Published in 2025, in part as a response to proposed Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation, the report (funded by Essex CC) seeks to identify strengths (established clusters, space to grow, strong community festivals), and barriers (low and precarious earnings, skills and talent pipeline gaps, transport constraints, and a 'brain drain' to London). The report positions Culture Essex

(Essex CC) as a coordinator, investor and ‘bridge-builder,’ using catalytic seed funding and longer-term support to join up networks, embed culture across council priorities, and attract external investment.

Headline opportunities include piloting Creative Opportunity Zones to strengthen existing clusters, boosting skills and lifelong learning pathways, intensifying collaboration through networked programmes, and promoting Essex as a creative industries destination via a clear prospectus or manifesto.

Place-based implications highlight the value of coastal and heritage assets for creative production, cultural tourism and identity. This is very relevant to the Maldon District with strong maritime heritage, festivals, and heritage-led visitor appeal. Where towns combine distinctive settings, affordable workspace, and connected networks, the report sees potential to retain talent and grow businesses. Conversely, gaps in evening transport (particularly affecting rural areas) and workspace supply constrain participation and sector growth.

The roadmap emphasises co-produced, locally rooted interventions, which could be backed with local funding, to turn these assets into sustained creative economy gains.

Essex Cultural Strategy and the Essex CC Arts & Cultural Fund

The Essex Cultural Strategy is a high-level document that framed the opportunities for investment and support by Essex CC and its many partners and stakeholders in the cultural and creative sectors. The document aims to explore what makes Essex culturally unique including its stories, communities, landscapes, and creative energy. The Maldon District certainly contributes to all of these. Themes explored include:

Enrich – To support flourishing of the cultural and creative sectors across Essex – more collaborating and sharing of information across Essex

Empower – Recognising the need for more skills development and opportunities for young people to work in the sectors in Essex

Amplify – Supporting sector collaboration and commissioning Essex-wide programmes – support leaders to be more effective

Grow – supercharge the growth of the creative sectors across Essex with investment in infrastructure and making the case for culture as a driver of the economy

The Arts & Cultural Fund (and other associated funding for culture through ECC) has been available on an annual basis since 2022, and in that time there have been at least 5 projects that have seen activity take place in the Maldon District. This includes the Maldon Festival (twice). The Maldon Festival secured investment for 2026-27 to continue the development of this important cultural programme and align with other events/festivals.

It is currently uncertain whether there will be any further funding from Essex CC for arts, culture and heritage following the political changes in May 2026. The Portfolio of ‘Arts, Culture and Heritage’ has not been continued, with ‘heritage, culture and arts’ now part of a new portfolio ‘Regeneration, Planning and Heritage’. The portfolio also includes ‘tourism’ and ‘marketing Essex and place promotion.’

Summary of Local Context

There is a good arts and cultural scene across the District, with activities around visual art and workshops, commercial galleries, art trails, amateur dramatics, music festivals and events, U3A activities, Blackwater Arts Society, and local activities in village halls for example. The District has one Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) – Paper Birds – a socially engaged theatre company who have national and international reach and are keen to work more locally where possible. The lack of a focused cultural centre has come up fairly regularly during engagement (and through the consultation), and indeed has been something of an ongoing discussion point for a number of years.

Although not particularly well defined, the cultural centre concept would appear to be a space that can be utilised for exhibitions, workshops (including practical hands-on sessions), small events. This is something to develop further (and appears to be ongoing through MDC which Cultural Engine will be supporting where possible).

Creative health concepts are an opportunity for the District and for the cultural scene (explored below). This should be explored in more detail (work has already taken place on events and setting up a network with Maldon & District CVS).

Core events like the Maldon Festival will also be important as collaborative systems to develop over time, encouraging District wide programming and collaboration around themes, promotion and development of new audiences for high quality cultural output.

The rural nature of the District means it is difficult for many people to access cultural events and sessions, so recognising the importance of local assets such as village and church halls, pubs and other communal spaces is key, as is understanding the capacity that exists around them (mainly based on volunteer time with very little funding).

Visual arts

The Visual Arts are reasonably well represented in the District, with the three established Art Trails being the most prominent example. The Art Trails in Tollesbury, Maldon and Burnham-on-Crouch are excellent collaborative systems that have brought creatives together to demonstrate the fantastic talent locally, and attract significant local and visitor interest (evidenced by increased visitor numbers at key locations including museums). This is a good example of cultural, business and strategic coordination (as MDC has provided some support over the years), and directly supports the ongoing vibrancy of cultural practice across the area. The Trails should be seen not only as important cultural and visitor economy events, but also as broader cultural development opportunities where more could be done to sustain and support this kind of collaboration, skills development and publicity throughout the year. As part of the development of the strategy, Cultural Engine organised the first District wider cultural network gathering (in Heybridge in March). This was attended by creative practitioners from across the District and demonstrated a clear interest in this kind of event and ongoing process. This should be maintained and supported on an ongoing basis and should also be the Steering Group for the new Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC.

Many of those involved in the Art Trails engage with local art groups that are fairly prevalent in the District. This includes those linked to U3As (for example Burnham-on-Crouch), or clubs including Maldon Art Club (meets at Plume School) and Mayland Art Club. The Blackwater Arts Society (part of the wider Arts Society movement) has a healthy membership and holds regular (and very popular) art-focused talks at Wickham Bishops Village Hall. They also support small projects each year, including

working with local schools. The Othona Community (Bradwell) also host arts and crafts, music and nature exploration on a regular programme throughout the year.

Although there are six commercial galleries in the District, there is no major or central publicly funded space. Commercial galleries include The Gallery in Maldon which holds regular exhibitions and artist talks. There is also the Sculpt Gallery near Great Baxted which has held regular exhibitions and is now completely dedicated to the work of Anglo-Dutch artist Maurice Blik (open to visitors to view the collection). Exhibitions can take place across the District and are a good way of opening up arts and culture to a wider audience. In 2022 Essex Cultural Diversity Project (Arts Council England NPO) funded artist Nabil Ali to create new works not only inspired by the coastal landscapes of the Dengie, but also made out of materials found there and the wider area (using ancient recipes). An exhibition entitled 'Along the Saltmarsh' was staged at both St. Thomas' Church Bradwell, and St. Peter on the Wall Bradwell.

Exhibitions of local artists are also held at the Maeldune Heritage Centre, which holds one of the most important art/craft works in the District in the form of the Maldon Tapestry. This work commemorates the 1000th anniversary of The Battle of Maldon, with images of the history of Maldon from that time until its unveiling in 1991. It was overseen by artist Humphrey Spender who worked with over 80 local people for over three years, and remains popular for visitors today. The Cole Gallery at Burnham Museum also holds exhibitions, particularly during Burnham Art Trail which attracts many visitors to the area (and the Museum).

Accessible and affordable studio spaces for emerging (or indeed established) artists are not easy to find. Infrastructure of this kind is important for the cultural (and visual arts) sector to thrive in any location, encouraging local creatives to stay local. Space had been available prior to Covid in the Station House in Burham-on-Crouch, but this has since shut (although the Town Council has the lease and is investing in renovations with a view to opening it again – not necessarily as studio space).

There had been a popular annual art exhibition in Langford (Langford & Ulting Art Exhibition) until 2024, but this has not been able to continue due to the organisers moving away from the area (thereby demonstrating how much reliance there is upon a relatively small number of volunteers for events of this kind).

Arts Council Funding

It is the case that Arts Council England (ACE) has not had Maldon District in its sights for some time, particularly for projects through the core Project Grant funding programme. There is one National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) based in Maldon (Paper Birds), but their programme is very much national and international (although they are certainly keen to collaborate more with local partners where there are opportunities).

ACE data demonstrates that there were only 3 successful applications for ACE funding in last 2 full years in Maldon District, and much of the resulting activity would not have been in the District from these projects. This compares poorly with many other parts of Essex (although neighbouring Rochford is very low). ACE funding is very competitive, but there is funding to be had for good projects that meet the ACE Outcomes (although there is an ongoing review of ACE strategy and funding priorities).

One recommendation from the Hodge Review of ACE that was published in December 2025 is that all local authorities should have a cultural strategy, recognising the importance of local funding, support and delivery to arts and culture across the country at a local level. This recommendation reflects the importance of local authorities (and local authority funding) for arts and culture across England (although the situation is different across all local authorities)

For Project Grants, match funding is encouraged partly because it demonstrates support and partnership but also because it relieves the pressure from ACE funding. However, it is possible to apply without if securing match of any kind (in-kind or cash) is challenging. Small pots of local authority funding that can support additional fundraising (from ACE or other sources) can be a good strategy. Another is to support the arts and cultural sectors to make applications – as there is not very much evidence of this happening (and certainly not happening successfully for many years).

Although Project Grants will fund project by project rather than supporting long-term sustainability of organisations or individuals; it is the case that securing ACE funding (or indeed other sources) can support the development of new ideas and concepts which can lead to new opportunities. Along with Project Grants, there are other sources of funding from ACE including Developing Your Creative Practice (DYCP) which is aimed at giving artists time to literally do what the title of the fund says – this might be to take some time out to research and develop new ideas. Following the Hodge ACE Review there does appear to be a commitment to support longer-term investment in individual creative practitioners (in the way that organisations can be supported) – although details are scarce currently.

Other larger strategic grants and programmes such as Creative People and Place or Place Partnerships will be challenging for the Maldon District as it is not a priority area for ACE investment. However, Chelmsford did secure a Place Partnership funded programme without being a priority place (emphasis on developing young people's creativity which is very relevant to the Chelmsford City area).

It is worth noting that there is much more success in the District when it comes to National Lottery Heritage Funding – another of the National Lottery related funding programmes. However, this definitely reflects the much more developed heritage sector (even if reliant largely upon dedicated volunteers), and a good case that can be made for investment in infrastructure and activities.

Audiences

As set out in this document, the Audience Segmentation data analysed for this strategy demonstrates that audiences for arts, culture and heritage tend to be more traditional, as well as older (than the Essex average) – although the differences between the Maldon District and the rest of Essex are not hugely significant. However audiences for culture, heritage and events come from across a wider area (including areas with younger and more contemporary cultural interests), and this has benefits for the economy as well as influencing the cultural scene locally.

Literature

Literature and writing festivals are increasingly popular across the UK, with many events hosted in Essex (including the annual Essex Book Festival). Literature festivals contribute to cultural exchange by providing a platform for different voices and perspectives to be shared, debated and celebrated. These events facilitate interactions between authors, readers, and cultural practitioners from various backgrounds, fostering dialogue and understanding across different cultures. They can also be

beneficial for authors to gain a following and for businesses and/or venue to host. They can be relatively cost effective to organise and host as the infrastructure required is limited.

The Essex Book Festival does host events every year in the Maldon District. For example in 2026 the 'Future Power Half Term Fun' at The Museum of Power, as well as 'In the Steps of J. A. Baker' at Heybridge Basin (the latter demonstrating the potential interest in nature writing in the District).

The main focus of literary programming in the Maldon District is currently through Maldon Books in Maldon town centre; an independently-owned business that contributes significantly to the interest and vibrancy of the high street in the town. This is not easy in an Amazon-dominated market, but through intelligent stocking and offering wider engagement opportunities and events they are an important cultural space. Maldon Books holds fairly regular author talks throughout the year, as well as other gatherings or meets, for example chess related.

There does appear to be scope for more literary-related programming across the District with a relatively affluent and older audience profile for culture.

Theatre

Although there is no purpose-built theatre in the District, theatre and amateur dramatics is still very much part of the cultural scene. The only Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) in the District is Paper Birds. They run a thriving participatory programme that sees them work with up to 20,000 young people each year as workshop participants, co-creators and audiences. Paper Birds are named practitioners on several UK exam boards, meaning their theatrical devising methods are taught at GCSE and A-level within schools and colleges. The company runs regular Continual Professional Development for drama teachers and practitioners. Their courses have been attended by thousands of participants nationally and internationally, as well as delivered for organisations such as The National Theatre. However, their work in the Maldon District is very limited. This is partly due to the national and international nature of their work, but also a reflection on the lack of suitable theatre spaces for their theatre programmes, performances and rehearsals which require high-level technology (as there is significant digital content).

The Town Hall in Maldon has a stage and the space for audiences to watch theatre. However, the space doesn't appear to be suitable for most theatre with significant feedback on poor acoustics and lack of accessibility to the rear of the building. Maldon Town Council may look at options in the near future for the Town Hall building which does need investment in many different areas (although not commitment currently). The following quote from the survey sums up the general feeling regarding the town hall: *'Improve the Town Hall performance space, and some additional performance space that's less expensive to use/hire.'*

Touring theatre takes place at various locations across the District and is included in the Maldon Festival as well as special events at Beeleigh Abbey. This provides opportunities for audiences to experience quality theatre/performance, but not for taking part.

In terms of amateur dramatics, there are some notable groups that are all based around community participation and generate good audiences. Most significantly (partly because of the unusual location) is the Latchingdon Arts & Drama Society (LADS) who meet, rehearse and perform at the Tractor Shed on the outskirts of Latchingdon (the last event was 'The Mirror Crack'd' by Agatha Christie in April

2026). Other groups including Dengie Amateur Dramatics Group (who perform once a year in Dengie Village Hall), and Wickham Bishops Drama Club (who perform at Wickham Bishops Village Hall). Maldon has some fantastic stages with good capacity for audiences in various halls across the District, notably Wickham Bishops & Tollesbury in particular.

Although not 'live' in the sense that the performers are in the same space as the audience – residents of Tollesbury can view performances at the Tollesbury Centre through National Theatres Live. This is very unusual (as usually at larger venues and place), and demonstrates the commitment and ambition for culture (and heritage, environment and community) show across Tollesbury.

Music

Music, like most of the cultural scene in the District, is most active at the grassroots. There are many musicians who are also promoters who have worked hard over a number of years to develop music events. The larger festival programme at Promenade Park is the obvious focus for large scale music – for audiences but also potentially for local talent.

The Maldon Festival demonstrates a large number of venues in Maldon that are willing to open their doors for musical performances and support the arts, which counters the lack of permanent facilities in the town. At the moment programming is varied, but the festival demonstrates that Maldon can host a multi venue event, if a third party promoter was interested.

There are good local initiatives that run without any significant capacity or funding, such as the Southminster Competitive Festival of Music. This is an event supported by Southminster Parish Council that takes place each year in April at St Leonard's Church. The purpose is to encourage young people from across the Dengie Peninsula to perform, develop confidence and gain musical experience in a friendly, non-exam setting. This is an outlier of an example however and demonstrates the commitment of key individuals to support music in their localities.

Midsummer Music Festival takes place at the Parlour Café in July and hosts local bands as well as local food and drink. The Parlour Café is an important cultural and social space in this part of the District. The Blues at the Barns (Creeksea) programme no longer takes place however as there was limited capacity to organise and the changing focus of the barns (now a wedding venue). The programme brought together local and national Blues performers, so was a significant date on the cultural calendar.

Pubs and bars across the District are where the majority of accessible music performances take place throughout the year. Well over half of the pubs in the District host music (and often other cultural) events. This puts pubs and bars in an important position culturally, supporting the local music scene and providing audiences with an important cultural experience. For example the Station Arms in Southminster hosts a monthly folk club and other gigs, giving the opportunity for music making (and for people to develop their confidence in music making).

Maldon Shanty Festival is very popular and attracts large crowds given its clear cultural relevance to the heritage of the area. The second year of the festival took place in May 2026 on Hythe Quay, and in St. Mary's Church, raising money for the Thames Sailing Barge Trust.

Essex Music Services support the ‘Maldon Community Music Centre’ at Plume School in Maldon, which offers a combination of individual, small group, and ensemble music provision after school on Tuesdays during term-time. The Essex Music Services programme in the Maldon District does appear to be smaller than in some other parts of Essex, and they do require proactive partnerships to deliver.

One potential musical growth opportunity in the District could be Bell Ringing. There are a number of bands that keep this important tradition alive. A current focus for training new bell ringers is St. Mary’s in Maldon, where there has been much activity over the last couple of years. The South East Essex District Master (of Bell Ringing), appointed in 2024, has rapidly reignited bell ringing in Maldon, building new bands at St Mary’s and All Saints through an energetic, multi-channel recruitment drive that has drawn see over 20 new learners. He works with schools, youth groups and local media, and is looking for new opportunities in Maldon and elsewhere in the wider area. Something different for the Maldon District to specialise in.

It is also worth noting that Sam Ryder, the UK’s most successful Eurovision entry in recent times, hails from Maldon and gained early experienced playing venues across the District.

Creative Sectors

In Maldon there are a total of 21,000 employees across all sectors - 505 of these are in the creative and cultural sectors (2.4%). This is lower than the proportion of creative and cultural businesses in East of England (3.41%) and lower than the proportion in England (5.05%), as well as Chelmsford (2.91%) and Brentwood (4.04%). Brentwood is likely due to proximity to London. There should always be an ambition to increase this sector, although this is dependent upon many factors including affordability of space for start-ups ups, availability of flexible space, perceived connectivity (to urban areas like Chelmsford or London), and the quality of wider cultural offer and hospitality sector. The Audience Agency segmentation backs up this picture of the District, indicating that more traditional audiences for arts and heritage are less likely to work in the creative industries more generally (compared to parts of London and the South East for example).

People working in the creative sectors tend to be educated and the sector as a whole is seen as having higher productivity than many others, including those that are prominent in the Maldon District (hospitality and retail for example). Even small increases in creative employment can disproportionately raise overall economic output because creative subsectors (design, digital, film, architecture, advertising) generate significant GVA per job.

The Maldon District already has a relatively well-skilled population and an economy that is focused around micro-level businesses with just under 90% of enterprises being micro-firms meaning they employ fewer than 10 people. Creative sector businesses tend to be smaller, so there would appear to be opportunities for creative sector development locally.

[UK business: activity, size and location - Office for National Statistics](#)

UK Town of Culture – Maldon Town

The UK Town of Culture programme was announced by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in early 2026. The concept encourages towns to use culture, creativity, and local heritage to drive regeneration, civic pride, and community participation. It’s designed as a lighter-touch counterpart to UK City of Culture, giving smaller places a platform to showcase their cultural identity, test new partnerships, and attract investment without the scale or cost of a full city-wide bid.

As part of the work on the Culture & Heritage Strategy, Maldon District Council supported an Expression of Interest (EOI) for Maldon Town (and parts of Heybridge as one continuous urban area). This was submitted on the 31st March with endorsement also from Maldon Town Council.

The EOI required a vision and a story of the town (and contribution to the national story) to be presented, and the key themes for future creative exploration were:

Origin Stories: From the Battle of Maldon in 991 to the present day, we will explore how stories shape places and people. This theme brings together heritage events with new creative work across art, spoken word - including 991 new poems for Maldon - theatre and performance. Maldon excels at turning stories into events: the Mud Race began as a local curiosity and became a national spectacle. With its instinct for storytelling, the historic Plume Library, and figures like Byrhtnoth and Captain Anne, Maldon has deep wells of inspiration - even Tolkien drew on the Battle of Maldon when imagining Middle-earth.

Preserving: Inspired by Maldon's world-famous salt, we'll examine what it means to conserve and protect - from the historic built environment and local archives to traditions, myths and the intangible heritage that binds communities. As heritage organisations across the UK rethink how they engage younger audiences and adopt new technologies, TOC will invite creative practitioners to respond to the idea of "preservation": what we value, why we value it, and how this will evolve for future generations. Maldon's own traditions will offer a rich starting point for exploring how customs are maintained, adapted and reimagined.

Festivals of the Future: Maldon is a town that hosts events of all sizes and welcomes thousands of visitors each year. TOC provides an opportunity to explore how festivals can evolve in a changing world: how expectations differ across generations, how can temporary social spaces like festivals/events spark new ideas that support long-term cultural development, and become more sustainable (in all senses), responsive to local context, digital enhanced (where relevant) and inclusive. Maldon's track record highlights creative ambition and operational competence. The range of events that we already enjoy - art trails, literature and food events through to large soul concerts demonstrates appetite for creative risk taking which will be essential for TOC 2028. Let's explore and have fun together!

Town and Climate Maldon: sits on the frontline of climate change. The tides that held back the Danes in 991 now threatening marshland, farmland and urban areas. Alongside this, new opportunities such as viticulture are reshaping landscapes and diversifying the visitor economy. This theme will bring together artists, environmental organisations, farmers/producers and maritime sectors to explore how creativity can help communities understand and respond to environmental change.

Use of Empty Spaces for Culture – Town Centres

This is a common issue and there were various references to opportunity space during the consultation (generally in private ownership). To get these kinds of initiatives off the ground requires liaison with private owners of property – which can be done but needs a dedicated focus. The role MDC (or the new CIC) can play in supporting this process should not be underestimated and could be part of a wider drive to support the vibrancy of the town centre economy in Maldon and Burnham-on-Crouch.

Arts and Cultural Centre Proposals

Throughout the strategy development and consultation process, the lack of a central (and publicly funded) cultural centre or space for the District has been raised regularly. The desire to see more art exhibitions and creative courses was also a feature of the survey for the Culture and Heritage Strategy.

Although not particularly well defined, this would appear to be a space that can be utilised for exhibitions, workshops (including practical hands-on sessions), and small events. This is something to develop further, and indeed there is an active consultation process for a proposed new Arts & Cultural Centre at Promenade Park in Maldon, led by Maldon District Council. This is very early days, but progress needs to be made quickly if this is to materialise (with local government reorganisation taking shape), and a sustainable long-term business case will need to emerge as reliance upon public funding without any other sources of income is challenging. A design has emerged for a space adjacent to the existing Museum in the Park. Notwithstanding the planning challenges and issues relating to development in Promenade Park (not universally popular), this is an interesting start and should be fuel for further engagement.

Actions

Strengthen networking and collaboration across the cultural sectors. In order to support the cultural sectors – which tend to be grassroots and largely voluntary – there is a need to strengthen collaboration and support with access to funding. Building on the early work undertaken through the strategy to form an Arts & Cultural Network will need to be continued.

Related to the above, **the emergence of the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC as a new delivery and strategy body** to provide advocacy and support all sectors that support the Saltmarsh Coast ‘place brand’ and tourism more generally – the Steering Group for Arts & Cultural that is proposed could fulfil the function of a network and a system of collaboration and co-production. This would recognise importance of the cultural scene to the profile of the area.

Improve the rate of public money coming into the sector – primarily through Arts Council England (ACE). The current situation is poor and there doesn’t seem to be a culture of applying (outside of the one NPO that Maldon District has). Funding workshops can be delivered and focused sessions on developing projects. Total reliance upon ACE or other public funding isn’t necessarily sustainable, but can help with specific projects and developing ideas that can lead to new opportunities.

The three Art Trails should be seen as partners of MDC (and the new CIC) in terms of cultural development and visitor economy. Their engagement with businesses demonstrates their ability to work across sectors, and the opportunity for a wider programme to be delivered around the core Trails is promising, if there is more capacity and certainty over funding. It takes a year to organise a Trail, so working to annual funding deadlines isn’t really sustainable.

Resolve the future of the proposed new Arts and Cultural Centre (and Museum) – there is a clear desire across stakeholders engaged in the strategy (and for many years before) to see something new that can be a central focus for arts and culture (exhibitions, workshops, events, public engagement etc.). There is no clear vision for this however as many different interests. Developing a capital project is one challenge (with issues around planning, objections to development in the park etc.), but a longer-term sustainable business case with mixed model of income (public and generated) will also need to be developed. Engagement with Mid Essex partners (particularly Chelmsford which has an established museum service and theatre) could be part of the long-term strategy.

Related to the above, **an operational meeting on existing and planned investment in culture and heritage (and tourism) between Mid Essex local authorities** is something that should be considered. This will identify where there are overlapping priorities, and potential challenges. The focus should be on placing culture and heritage as a key issue for the new unitary authority and planning for the sustainability of assets and programmes at all levels

To support the Mid Essex collaboration – present St. Peter’s Way as a collaborative project that links Brentwood, Chelmsford and Maldon together – environment and nature, myths and legends, stories (nature writing), pilgrimage, urban and rural context, and art commissions that encourage people to think about Mid Essex connections. This could be a defining project of the new Mid Essex – and one that gets going before 2028 (supporting community engagement for the new administration).

Accessible and affordable creative studio space for emerging creative practitioners is not part of the current mix across the District. There is an opportunity for stakeholders to work together on Station House in Burnham-on-Crouch (they are investing in renovation currently). However, other opportunities should be identified thinking about existing public sector assets where possible. Maldon & District CVS can support this with their experience of Men’s Sheds and an interest in creative health and wellbeing.

Building on the UK Town of Culture bid with some actions that develop the key themes presented will be important to show momentum and confidence in Maldon’s creative future. This is as much about positioning Maldon as an ambitious town (and wider area) that is open and confident in its heritage and culture (and story of place). New work could be commissioned relating to ‘Origin Stories’, ‘Preserving’ and ‘Town and Climate’ in particular. Festivals of the Future concept could feed into updated MDC strategy.

Support the Maldon Festival - The Maldon Festival has been revived and secured some investment from the Essex CC Arts & Cultural Fund to support its development as a cultural development programme, with the ability to bring cultural events to diverse locations across the District and encourage creative exploration of the wider area. This programme has the opportunity to become a leading multi-arts concept with high-quality performers from the local area, nationally and abroad. As ever, short-term and uncertain funding does not support long-term planning, partnerships and creative vision.

5 – Environment, Nature and Coast

Introduction – Why is this important to the Culture and Heritage Strategy?

"Out on the salt marshes near Maldon, the land seemed to dissolve into water and the water into land. Mud, tide, creek, sky — all shifting, all merging. It was a place where boundaries blurred, where wildness lay in flux rather than fixity." (Robert Macfarlane, *The Wild Places*, 2007)

It is impossible to consider the natural, coastal and rural context of the Maldon District without placing it at the centre of any culture and heritage strategy. The environment shapes a distinctive sense of place, and for many years the idea of the 'Saltmarsh Coast' has been inseparable from the wider area. Maldon Salt is world famous and uniquely tied to the District. Red hills scattered along the coastal edges are remnants of long-established salt-harvesting practices.

Robert Macfarlane references the Maldon District of Essex when exploring the salt marshes and coastal landscapes of eastern England. He describes the coastal marshes as forms of overlooked wildness – places where tidal rhythms, mudflats and estuarine ecology express both cultural history and natural environment. These are not only spaces of great ecological importance but cultural places weighted with meaning, shaped by thousands of years of human interaction - fishing, sailing, settlement, infrastructure and realignment.

Rurality is the dominant factor across much of the area, with Defra classifying Maldon District as 80% rural. Although significant development continues across the District, particularly around the urban fringes of Maldon and Burnham-on-Crouch, the rural context persists and many settlements remain relatively isolated from urban areas (especially on the Dengie). Farming is a key industry in terms of its impact on the District's landscapes, and although it employs relatively few people directly it remains a cultural reference point across the area. This includes the many village and parish signs that are part of the District's heritage and a sense of pride for communities (as well as many having good artistic qualities).

The District is the agricultural, wild, natural and watery edge of the new Mid Essex Unitary Authority – a vital patchwork of parishes, settlements, nationally and locally important sites for nature. A well-developed network of paths creates opportunities for exploration (although many feel more could be done to maintain and promote these historic rural arteries – and that more are still needed).

The UK is one of the most nature depleted nations in the world, but there is so much positive activity taking place across the Maldon District to reverse this. This is happening at scale and hyper-locally and it is something of which everyone in the area should be proud. Much of this is under-the-radar and there is a clear role for culture to inspire and mobilise, particularly in relation the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy which will require significant community mobilisation across the county over the coming years if progress is to be made.

In relation to this strategy – the natural environment is both a cultural and heritage reference point as well as crucial to tourism and the visitor economy. It is also a focus for increased community and strategic action in relation to nature recovery – and the arts, culture and heritage can inspire and facilitate this action. This particularly relates to the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) that needs a significant upscaling of activity to deliver on over the coming years. Conservation is not (just) a

science. The work of charities, government, local groups and individuals is supported by an ongoing multi-disciplinary process that includes creative input and leadership conservation

Creative health research and arts-based environmental projects demonstrate that creativity can unlock new forms of engagement. Art, storytelling, and participatory design help people imagine alternative futures, understand ecological change, and feel part of a shared stewardship mission. Regional and Essex-wide programmes such as the Wild Essex Imaginarium, Beach of Dreams, EA Sustain Festival, or the national ReMeMaRe programme are regularly exploring the importance of culture and arts to important issues relating to environment and climate change. The popularity of nature writing similarly (nature writing programmes would work well across the District). Storytelling and meaningful cultural and social experiences can be as important as scientific facts when it comes to mobilising engagement with nature.

Maldon is at the forefront of so much that matters to the future of the UK – coast and climate change, renewable energy, changing rural and agricultural context, reimagining the resilience of rural parishes and their key cultural and heritage assets. This is a creative and inspirational opportunity for mass participation and action.

Strategic Reflection – National and Regional Context

Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The most important nature and environmental related policy document is the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Greater Essex - published in 2025 responding to national government guidance. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) introduced Local Nature Recovery Strategies through the Environment Act 2021 as part of the government's wider policy agenda to halt biodiversity decline and support nature recovery across England. The Essex LNRS has been delivered through significant collaboration (overseen by Essex CC) across the county including local authorities, farmers, charities and community representatives. Its primary purpose is 'to identify locations to create or improve habitat most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment'.

The LNRS should help local planning authorities integrate nature recovery into development planning and decision-making, and guide a coordinated, spatial approach to identifying priorities for habitat creation, restoration, and enhancement at a local level.

The Essex LNRS is full of evidence-based proposed interventions and priorities for nature recovery – but it is also a fantastic opportunity and inspiration for cultural programming and engagement.

Environmental Improvement Plan 2025

The Environmental Improvement Plan (published 2025) is the UK Government's approach to addressing many different environmental opportunities and challenges across the country – including recognising the importance of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and outlining plans to ensure they have legislative weight in terms of planning and development. There are also aspirations to improve access and engagement with nature, as well as recognising health benefits from engagement with nature and recognising the skills needs for modern agricultural practices.

‘Everyone has a role to play in restoring nature – from individuals managing our gardens and farmland for biodiversity, to those enjoying our parks, nature reserves and Protected Landscapes.’

‘Reduce barriers to access, boost children’s connection with nature and increase their understanding of the natural world and how to protect it.’

Natural England – ‘Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security’

This ‘Recovering Nature’ strategy, published in 2025 sets out how restoring and protecting the natural environment can support economic prosperity, public health, climate resilience, food security, and sustainable development in England. The strategy promotes large-scale nature recovery through stronger ecological networks, nature-based solutions, greener planning and development, and improved access to nature, while emphasising collaboration between government, local authorities, landowners, businesses, and communities to reverse biodiversity loss and deliver long-term environmental and societal benefits.

‘We are part of nature and wholly dependent upon it. Nature shapes, and is shaped by, our history, culture and land use. It continues to define the places where we live and work; enjoying and caring for nature continues to shape the quality of our lives.’

The recognition of the importance of nature to culture and a sense of history relates strongly to the Maldon District context.

National Lottery Heritage Fund

Although primarily a funder of heritage projects, the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) places strong emphasis on nature recovery, biodiversity enhancement, and environmental sustainability within its funding guidance. Natural heritage features significantly in NLHF’s funding priorities including projects that protect and restore habitats, create larger and better-connected ecological networks, deliver nature-based solutions to climate change, and reconnect people with landscapes, coasts, and green spaces.

Nature is also framed as an integral part of cultural and historic heritage, with the fund supporting initiatives that combine conservation of the natural environment with social, educational, and wellbeing benefits.

Biodiversity Duty – Town and Parish Councils

Under the Environment Act 2021 (Section 102), Town and Parish Councils (and indeed all levels of local government) have a duty to consider what actions they can take to conserve and enhance biodiversity in exercising their functions. This means in practice that they consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, agree policies and specific objectives, informed by local context and opportunity, and they must demonstrably act to deliver their policies and achieve their objectives. While not required to publish a formal biodiversity report, councils must integrate biodiversity into decision-making, land management, and partnership activity, and may use council funds to support biodiversity conservation. In reality the way this is interpreted very much depends on the individual circumstances of the Parish or Town Council, and the capacity and leverage it has over land and assets. It is however an opportunity for local communities to articulate their priorities and work together for nature recovery. Many of the District’s local councils do have a Biodiversity Plan or Statement. It is likely that greater impact could be had if there were focused support packages, and

collaboration with local nature and climate groups (as well as larger environmental charities). The Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy should provide impetus for this.

Health Benefits – Access to Nature

In 2022 the Office for National Statistics released a bulletin entitled ‘Health benefits from recreation, natural capital, UK: 2022’. It recognised that access to nature is important for mental health, and important for inspiring people to engage and take action to protect and conserve local environmental assets (rivers, coast, natural spaces including in urban areas). The value of health benefits associated with outdoor recreation within the UK was estimated to be between £6.2 billion and £8.4 billion in 2020. This is a significant benefit to society and the Maldon District has so much opportunity (across all parishes) for people to get into the environment (in many different forms).

ReMeMaRe Heritage Group

This sub-group of the wider UK ReMeMaRe (Restoring Meadow Marsh and Reef) mission seeks to unite interested parties to share experiences of engaging with cultural heritage in habitat restoration projects. The group promotes learning and collaboration to better understand and celebrate our cultural heritage in support of marine & coastal habitat restoration. This project is notable as it recognises cultural heritage as important to nature conservation, with government agencies including Environment Agency and Natural England key partners.

Summary of Local Context

Given the rural, coastal and agricultural nature of the Maldon District, there is so much to consider and such as wide variety of projects, activities and strategies that provide a very rich context for heritage, culture and the unique sense of place that sets this part of Essex apart.

The environment - nature, coast, rivers, marsh, historic landscapes, agriculture and rurality. Maldon District is defined by its relationship to the natural environment as much as it is to its heritage. While there are concerns about the future relating to a range of factors including development, climate change and loss of rural amenities, it remains central to so much localised activity as well as local and strategic environmental policy. Maldon’s landscapes have provided inspiration for literature, film and art (including many local artists who take part in the excellent art trails). The Dengie is an ancient landscape with ancient field systems, paths and landmarks (including St. Peter’s Church at Bradwell).

The largest areas of natural and wild space are managed by the larger environmental charities including the RSBP, Essex Wildlife Trust and National Trust. These are predominantly but not entirely coastal. The entirety of the District’s coastline, including the Blackwater Estuary and tidal reaches of the River Crouch, is included in both nationally and internationally designated sites. These include a variety of important coastal habitats, including saltmarsh, grazing marshes and mudflats. The District’s coastal grazing marshes are part of a series of distinct managed landscapes and are a major heritage asset as well as environmentally important.

Summary of Important Sites for Nature

Maldon District’s internationally designated sites include the Blackwater Estuary National Nature Reserve Ramsar/Special Protection Area and the Dengie National Nature Reserve Ramsar/SPA, with the southern fringes also intersecting the Crouch & Roach Estuaries Ramsar/SPA. Much of the shoreline and intertidal zone also falls within the Essex Estuaries SAC (Roach, Crouch, Blackwater and

Colne), reflecting the importance of its saltmarsh, mudflats, sandflats and estuarine habitats for internationally significant bird populations.

Nationally, the principal SSSIs are Blackwater Estuary SSSI (covering much of the district's foreshore, saltmarsh, mudflats and grazing marsh), Dengie SSSI (open coast and marshes on the Dengie peninsula), and component/overlapping units such as Old Hall Marshes SSSI and Tollesbury Wick Marshes SSSI; there is also the small geological Maldon Cutting SSSI and the Bradwell Chenier Ridges (within Dengie SSSI). Together, these protected areas form a near-continuous belt of internationally and nationally important coastal wetlands around the district's coast.

Essex Wildlife Trust and RSPB Sites in the Maldon District

The RSPB's flagship site in Maldon District is Old Hall Marshes near Tollesbury and Salcott — one of the finest examples of coastal grazing marsh in England. Sitting alongside the Blackwater Estuary, the reserve features historic sea walls, reed-fringed fleets and red hill salterns, and is nationally important for breeding waders and wintering wildfowl. Public access along the sea wall paths makes it a popular destination for birdwatchers and walkers, offering an immersive experience of the district's wild, open coastal landscape.

Essex Wildlife Trust manages several complementary sites across the district, together forming a rich and varied network of habitats. Tollesbury Wick Marsh is a large reclaimed peninsula of grazing marsh, rills (shallow channels) and saltmarsh on the Blackwater, managed primarily for lapwing, redshank and wintering birds with permissive seawall access. Elsewhere, Maldon Wick Nature Reserve occupies a former railway cutting with chalky grassland and scrub rich in butterflies and wildflowers, while Heybridge Gravel Pits support wetland birds and dragonflies through freshwater pits, reedbeds and scrub. Chigborough Lakes near Heybridge and Goldhanger offers a more accessible family and education-focused experience, with lakes, reedbeds, wet woodland and hides, and Bradwell Shell Bank provides important coastal habitat on the Dengie coast.

Underpinning much of this work is EWT's Conservation Grazing programme, which deploys hundreds of cattle and sheep across key sites - including Tollesbury Wick and Blue House Farm at North Fambridge - to maintain the open, species-rich habitats on which internationally important wildlife depends. The Grazing programme requires significant resources each year to manage and maintain, and EWT are keen to increase awareness (and funding) to support this important work.

National Trust and Northey Island

Northey Island is a tidal island and saltmarsh in the Blackwater Estuary (one potential site for where the invading Vikings landed and came ashore across the causeway for the Battle of Maldon – other possible sites have also been put forward). The National Trust coastal adaptation project at Northey Island has been a long-term environmental conservation scheme designed to protect and restore the island's internationally important saltmarsh habitat in the Blackwater Estuary. The project responds to the growing impacts of climate change, rising sea levels, and erosion, which are threatening wildlife that relies upon the existing marshland. Dredged material, including from the Blackwater, has been utilised across four areas to support the delivery of this project (and example of BUDS – beneficial use of dredged material). There has also been an important cultural project – 'Conversations with the Sea' where artist Sara Hayes worked with visitors and local communities to increase understanding of the conversation efforts relating to the island and its importance of wildlife (and the challenges of climate change and rising sea levels).

The Blackwater Partnership

The Blackwater Partnership (managed by Essex Wildlife Trust) is a collaborative network of environmental and coastal-management groups, landowners, farmers and academics working across the Blackwater Estuary in Essex. The partnership is important as it focuses on landscape-scale restoration opportunities and projects that have a significant impact on the coastal areas of the Maldon District. This includes coastal adaptation and flood resilience, saltmarsh restoration, habitat creation for birds and wildlife, natural flood management, climate-change adaptation along the Blackwater.

Government agencies Natural England and The Environment Agency are both engaged and opportunities for collaborative approaches to landscape-scale projects. This includes the potential for a Higher-Level Countryside Stewardship Scheme bid for Tollesbury Marshes which would require collaboration between landowners, farmers as well as environmental charities.

The Blackwater Partnership is an important forum for collaboration, not only between environmental charities, NGOs and landowners, but also for culturally-focused work that can support community awareness and engagement with important projects and environments across this part of the District. The wider Blackwater Operational Catchment covers a much larger area than is often recognised, starting with the River Pant that rises near Saffron Walden. From there the river flows south-east through rural Essex settlements before becoming the River Blackwater at Braintree and eventually reaching the Blackwater Estuary at Heybridge Basin.

Essex Coastal Grazing Marshes Project

As a distinctive and complex historic environment, coastal grazing marshes are a major heritage asset, contributing to the special landscape character of many parts of the Essex coast. In 2014 a report was published – ‘Essex Coastal Grazing Marshes Project’ – that explored the cultural, heritage as well as environmental significance of the marshes (primarily in and around the Maldon District). The documents their historic character, extent and significance while highlighting progressive loss since the 1930s, noting that conservation efforts along with detailed analysis of their importance has (and continues to) address the issue. These efforts continue today with a key focus through the Blackwater Partnership for example.

The report explores literary references as a key part of the wider (and ancient) cultural heritage that is so important to this area of Essex. John Betjeman for example captures the sense of remoteness (despite being actually rather close) and aliveness of the environment and related coastal activity:

*‘Far Essex, - fifty miles away
The level wastes of sucking mud
Where distant barges high with hay
Come sailing in upon the flood’*
(‘Essex’ – John Betjemans’s Collected Poems 1979)

The report argues that value lies not only in exceptional natural importance of the marshes, but also in their ‘typical and commonplace’ fabric - drainage patterns, sea walls, field systems and industrial/maritime traces - and that this heritage should guide day-to-day management, agri-environment funding and strategic decisions (for example Shoreline Management Plans). By analysing

the significance of each surviving marsh area, it proposes a more integrated, heritage-informed stewardship alongside nature conservation and flood risk management.

A further report from 2019 - 'Heritage, natural capital and ecosystem services: Case Studies for Coastal Grazing Marshes' considers how to embed the historic environment within natural capital and ecosystem services frameworks for coastal grazing marshes, using Old Hall Marsh (RSPB) and Tollesbury Wick (Essex Wildlife Trust) as case studies. It sets out a heritage asset register (sea walls, sluices, borrow dykes, counter walls, creeks, saltern "red hills", duck decoys, WWII defences, oyster pits, rail and pier remains, place-names and traditions) and maps how each asset contributes to provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural services. The method adds heritage evidence and risk registers to standard natural capital accounting, showing that grazing marshes are human-made, historically rich landscapes where physical and intangible heritage is integral to sense of place, flood defence, water management, recreation and education.

At both sites, the study links heritage significance to practical management and valuation: it assembles asset and risk registers, illustrates benefits (nature conservation, flood storage, carbon, recreation, volunteering, landscape/aesthetics), and shows where changes (managed realignment or habitat works) could unintentionally damage below-ground archaeology or characteristic features. The conclusion is that heritage can and should be assessed alongside ecology in natural capital accounts, using a shared methodology to inform Shoreline Management Plans and other strategic planning approaches. This is important long-term so as not to erode the historic fabric of these sites.

Maldon Nature Conservation Study: Assessment of Selected Sites (2022)

This report is a high-level appraisal of 19 sites across Maldon District to inform planning (and could be referenced for future community action). Most sites are brownfield with scrub/grassland mosaics or hardstanding and includes sites such as Sadds Wharf, Basin Road (Heybridge Basin), Oval Park (Langford) and Barnhall Road (Tolleshunt Knights). The study's purpose is screening and evidence-gathering, not definitive designation: it maps ecological value, highlights risks to nearby protected areas, and identifies where further survey and Biodiversity Net Gain design will be required to manage impacts and secure gains.

Essex Estuaries Farm Cluster

The establishment of a new Farm Cluster that is focused on the Maldon District estuaries (although covering a larger area of coastal/estuarine Essex) is an important step forward for the area. Farm Clusters support the agricultural sector to collaborate to undertaken nature recovery and resilience, but they can also be good partners for wider community awareness raising and even specific projects. Public engagement is part of the ambition of the new Essex Estuaries Farm Cluster CIC - with opportunities for cultural programmes to support this and greater awareness of the area's agricultural context.

Local Action and Projects

There are three local environmentally focused groups in the Maldon District – Dengie Climate Action Partnership, Tollesbury Climate Partnership and Heybridge & Maldon Climate Action Partnership. Along with other local groups and charities, such as Blackwater and Chelmer CIC and Lauriston Farm, they play an important role in supporting nature recovery and promoting climate resilience (as well as other issues such as recycling and sustainable transport). All of the groups recognise the importance of culture and cultural activity as a way to engage communities and support action. For example, the

eARTh youth project works with local young people to make nature-based art and share ideas of relevance to the future.

The first meeting of the groups from Tollesbury, Heybridge and Maldon and Dengie took place in May 2026 with the intention to explore future collaborations to support wider awareness raising, engage with concepts such as Regenerative Tourism and strategic input to local government reorganisation.

There are some local spaces that are managed by volunteering including Our Wild Local Space (OWLS) a site owned by Moat Housing in Maldon but managed on a 10-year licence by Heybridge and Maldon Climate Action Partnership. OWLS offers many opportunities for over 20 regular volunteers as well as being an important space for local home education groups.

Another is Ironworks Meadow which is managed as a community nature reserve by the Chelmer Blackwater Reserve Community Interest Company (run completely by volunteers). The site was protected from development and holds strong links to Maldon's industrial past. Large sections have remained largely untouched for many years. As a result, it offers an exceptional setting for wildlife conservation and community engagement with nature – small mammals, reptiles and many invertebrates which exist amongst the reedbeds, flowing water channels, open meadow, scrub, a narrow woodland belt and an old borrow dyke. A fire caused significant damage to the site in 2025 resulting in the need for pathways through the site needing to be rebuilt (with funding coming from local fundraising).

Lauriston Farm (Goldhanger – behind the seawall on the Blackwater Estuary) is managed by a dedicated Charitable Community Benefit Society and works to manage the 210 acres using Biodynamic principles, as well as offering education and training and day placements for adults with learning difficulties. 85% of the of the farm is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and there are two listed building as well. There is a dedicated community space and kitchen that supports the operation and the farm hosts a number of guided walks each year demonstrating the work to support biodiversity. Recognising the links between cultural practice and environment, there are emerging plans to host creative practitioners on site for residencies which would be a unique opportunity to engage with many important issues relating to the land, nature, farming and how communities relate to all of this.

Lofts Farm (Great Totham) is another interesting space that is emerging as a centre for cultural practice focused on nature and engagement with the environment (including natural dyes that are grown on site). Lofts Farm already hosts workshops including 'An Introduction to dying fabric sustainably'. Lofts Farm (and Lauriston Farm) are excellent local examples of bringing culture, heritage and environment together to inspire, take action and educate. They both should be recognised and supported in their endeavours as they contribute something very different and important to the District.

Stow Maries is obviously most often associated with the historic WW1 Aerodrome. However important work takes place at Stow Maries in relation to nature (and the all-important opportunities for people to engage with it). 93 acres at Stow Maries has become a haven for wildlife largely due to the fact that it has been so little interfered with since WW1. The open expanses of grassland provide space for butterflies and other insects, while pockets of woodland and sheltered ponds create refuge for important species. cooler, quieter refuges. Stow Maries hosts Family Nature Days which included guided walks of

the site, and has a team of dedicated volunteer who support maintenance and community engagement.

Regenerative Tourism and Environment

The emergence of the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC (addressed elsewhere in this strategy document) provides an opportunity to increase collaboration between environmental organisations and groups, and the wider cultural, heritage and tourism sectors. After all, the environment is *the* main attraction for visitors and loved by local communities. Those responding to the survey undertaken to inform this strategy are clear that ‘Coastal Spaces and Destinations’ is the District’s best asset (93%) followed by ‘Rural and Natural Landscapes’ (72%).

Regenerative Tourism puts environmental conservation at the centre – recognising that it is often the natural environment that is a big part of the draw for visitors to a particular location, while also seeking to acknowledge and mitigate the potential threats that come from increasing numbers of visitors. The Regenerative Tourism Strategy that is being developed for the Saltmarsh Coast will bring local organisations and activists together to ensure that conservation is right a central concern and focus for action. Essex Wildlife Trust’s Eco Tourism plans are a good example of bringing together the concepts of experiential tourism and conservation, with a test programme that will focus on EWT sites in the District (plans for roll out in 2027).

The Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival is a core programme that will be managed directly by the new CIC, recognising the potential that comes with encouraging considerate exploration of the District’s environments (inland and coastal), supporting awareness raising of conservation and nature recovery efforts. The festival also links to the District’s Public Rights of Way network which is important for providing access to the countryside and coast, supporting recreation, tourism, health and wellbeing, and enabling people to experience the district’s natural and historic environment.

St. Peter’s Way – A Potential Joint Project for Mid Essex

St. Peter's Way is over 50 years old as a concept. Primarily a formal walking route, it links the three local authorities of Mid Essex together. This is a unique project opportunity to explore a unifying concept for Mid Essex, connecting sites of cultural and heritage interest while raising to nature recovery priorities and healthy lifestyles. An initial feasibility stage could be supported which would identify opportunities for cultural programming and community engagement, and future plans for sculptures, alternative and digital interpretation and a range of community-facing events. Ultimately the project will explore the connections between places, the history, culture, environment, agriculture, and creative health opportunities.

Actions

Engage with and support the Blackwater Partnership: Strategic and (where relevant) operational support should be given for major landscape scale project concepts (and ultimately delivery) - the sense of place and place brand depend largely on the organisations that make up the Blackwater Partnership (including farmers and other landowners). Overseen by Essex Wildlife Trust, the Partnership are open to participation by Maldon District stakeholders and recognise a cultural framing of challenges and opportunities can be an opportunity for wider community awareness and to support specific projects. MDC and/or the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC can identify some landscape

scale projects that are proposed and offer support if it is needed (funding, community engagement, letters of support, technical etc.) - for Higher-Levels for a Higher Level Countryside Stewardship Scheme bid for Tollesbury Marshes.

Essex Estuaries Farm Cluster: The establishment of a new Farm Cluster that is focused on the Maldon District coastal/estuaries (although covering a larger area of coastal/estuarine Essex) is an important step forward for the area. Farm Clusters support the sector to collaborate to undertake nature recovery and resilience, but they can also be good partners for wider community awareness raising and even specific projects. Public engagement is part of the ambition of the new Essex Estuaries Farm Cluster CIC - with opportunities for cultural programmes to support this and greater awareness of the area's agricultural context. The partners in the Farm Cluster are more than capable of progressing with ambitions and nature recovery, but where MDC and/or the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC can be helpful and of delivery or strategic support, then this should be offered.

Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) - Creative Collaborations: Working with the local climate action / nature partnerships and other groups at a hyper-local level - commission four environment and culture themed programmes that raise the profile of key nature recovery priorities in the District (informed by the LNRS), the work already underway to protect/enhance, and the local action that can support this. This will also raise the profile of the local groups that are taking action and support town and parish councils with their 'Biodiversity Duty'. Other simple actions that bring culture and nature recovery together should also be explored (film showings, nature writing events etc.) in partnership with local climate and nature groups and town/parish councils.

Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival and Nature Recovery: The Walking Festival is very popular and the primary focus is often the District's unique environment (and heritage). There is already good integration between the organisers and the wider business, tourism and heritage sectors. The Festival can become a key focus for enhancing understanding of nature recovery priorities (and successes). Given the Festival's regenerative core concept and its importance to tourism/place brand, this is one of the core programmes for the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC.

St. Peter's Way: St. Peter's Way is over 50 years old as a concept. Primarily a formal walking route, it links the three local authorities of Mid Essex together. This is a unique project opportunity to explore a unifying concept for Mid Essex, connecting sites of cultural and heritage interest while raising to nature recovery priorities and healthy lifestyles. An initial feasibility stage could be supported which would identify opportunities for cultural programming and community engagement, and future plans for sculptures, alternative and digital interpretation and a range of community-facing events. Ultimately the project will explore the connections between places, the history, culture, environment, agriculture, and creative health opportunities.

6 - Regenerative Tourism

‘Regenerative tourism is an approach which reimagines the tourism industry as a force for sustainability, inclusivity, accessibility, and genuine hospitality. Regenerative tourism aims to leave a place in a better condition than if it did not have tourism. Rather than maintaining or sustaining a place, regenerative tourism seeks to improve a place through tourism.’ (The Social Value of Tourism – Visit Britain)

‘Maldon District offers a canvas for people to paint their own experiences’ – Culture and Heritage Strategy consultation response (2025)

Introduction – Why is this important to the Culture & Heritage Strategy?

Through the process of developing the culture and heritage strategy, a plan and governance process for regenerative tourism has also emerged as a corollary. Tourism and the visitor economy is crucial to the wider economy across the District for employment, particularly in some of the more rural areas. The tourism offer is interlinked to the cultural, heritage and environmental offer of the District. 18% of the Maldon District Workforce were employed in the wider tourism/hospitality sectors in 2024 (which is higher than for Essex as a whole). Tourism and the visitor economy matter.

The aim of the Regenerative Tourism approach is to recognise that a successful tourism and hospitality sector is part of an ecosystem that includes heritage, culture and environment. In other words, tourism and the related economic and social benefits, are reliant in large part on perceptions of the Saltmarsh Coast area, and that these perceptions are to a significant extent based on the cultural, heritage and environmental offer. This is true for visitors and also for local communities (who are also visitors and spend money and volunteer locally). For many years the Saltmarsh Coast concept has been utilised to promote tourism, based on the unique landscapes and heritage of the District. A Regenerative Tourism strategy reinforces this and seeks to develop collaboration further and greater understanding of the interrelationship between sectors (for the benefit of all).

There is a circular concept at the heart of the regenerative strategy for the Saltmarsh Coast – ensuring that a growth in tourism delivers lasting benefits for culture, heritage and the environment. It is therefore imperative that cultural, heritage and environmental organisations think collaboratively about attracting new audiences, deepening engagement with existing audiences, offering distinctive and engaging experiences, and how their insight and data can feed back in to a governance system that has oversight and accountability.

A regenerative tourism approach provides an opportunity for a ‘whole system’ approach, understanding that tourism is unpinned by a complex ecosystem of organisations, locations, environments, stories, narratives and infrastructures all interwoven and (to some extent) reliant upon each other. It enables local partners to look inward while considering the wider benefits – thinking critically about how the area is outwardly positioned to visitors, investors and local communities.

Strategic Reflection – National and Regional Context

The concept of Regenerative Tourism has been gaining traction over a number of years in the UK and across the world. For example, in Norfolk partners are working on the Brecks being recognised as the UK’s first Regenerative Tourism National Character Area. This focuses on the landscapes, geology and

natural environment and apparent underdeveloped tourism offer, seeking to attract high-value, environmentally aware visitors, help spread tourism across different seasons and locations, and strengthen the area's identity as a destination in its own right while protecting its local character and fragile natural resources.

The concept can also work at a regional level, with Destination North East England publishing a Regenerative Visitor Economy Framework 2024:

'Our vision is a thriving North East England where tourism and events are a catalyst for transformation, seamlessly integrating economic growth and innovation with social and environmental regeneration. Our region's inclusive visitor economy contributes to the wellbeing of local communities and the revitalisation of our stunning natural landscapes and cultural heritage.'

In Essex, Maldon District is already leading the way on establishing not only a strategy for regenerative tourism, but also a collaborative governance system that is capable of looking long-term (beyond local government reorganisation) at the needs and opportunities of the wider tourism and visitor economy. This can influence the approach to tourism and the visitor economy through the new Mid Essex Unitary Authority.

Essex Destination Management Plan 2025-2030

The Essex Destination Management Plan (Visit Essex) highlights the need for a clearer and more coordinated visitor offer across Essex, with stronger links between attractions, market towns, festivals, food and drink, and distinctive landscapes to create high-quality visitor experiences and themed destination clusters. It also emphasises the growing importance of sustainable and regenerative tourism, encouraging low-impact travel, support for local businesses and communities, and diversification into tourism activities (very relevant to the Maldon District), particularly within the farming sector, to strengthen rural economies and help conserve the landscape.

The distinctive nature and diversity of the Maldon District means that it is a good place for Regenerative tourism, and indeed it has been recognised by Visit Essex for the success of the Saltmarsh Coast concept and the work of the District Council and many other partners in effective promotion, marketing and packaging of opportunities for visitors.

'Travellers are increasingly taking action to make sustainable choices whilst on holiday, such as choosing to walk, bike or use public transport, and buying local, and travelling outside of peak season to avoid overcrowding. Regenerative travel is also increasingly popular, with travellers seeking to ensure the money they spend goes back to the local community in some way.'

The concept of 'experiential' tourism aligns well with 'regenerative' as people look for distinct experiences often related to culture, heritage and the environment – *'appropriate experiences and products linked to unique Essex landscapes and attractions.'*

Rural diversification is also recognised as not only important for the local economy, but also for experiential tourism – *'Encourage the diversification into tourism, by farmers, to help keep their businesses sustainable and protected our landscape.'* Again, this is something that the Maldon District is already delivering on (growth of viticulture experiences for example) with potential for significantly more – with the regenerative tourism concept a helpful focus. The new Local Plan process for the

Maldon District (or indeed Mid Essex) will need to consider this issue and provide the necessary and appropriate flexibility to support rural diversification.

There is also interesting reflection on the importance of technology and social media in relation to tourism (and regenerative/experiential tourism in particular). Technology and social media strongly influence Generation Z's travel choices, with many seeking authentic, local and culturally rich experiences. This can also encourage more sustainable and socially responsible tourism options, encouraging the growth of eco-friendly travel and community-focused destinations.

Visitor Levy Proposals for England

The UK Government is currently consulting on proposals to introduce an overnight Visitor Levy in England, sometimes referred to as a 'tourist tax', which would allow local areas to charge a small fee on overnight accommodation such as hotels, B&Bs and holiday lets.

Unlike in Scotland and Wales, where local authorities are being given these powers directly, the English proposals are closely linked to the Government's devolution agenda, with powers intended primarily for Mayoral Strategic Authorities led by elected Mayors. Revenues generated through the levy would be retained locally and could be reinvested into tourism infrastructure, transport, cultural assets, public realm improvements and wider economic growth initiatives, helping destinations manage visitor pressures while supporting sustainable tourism development.

Should the Visitor Levy be introduced it will be overseen by the Mayoral Combined Authority for Essex (led by an elected Mayor from 2028), and this reflects the importance of Maldon District being able to have an effective voice and advocate for the importance of the visitor economy. A well established regenerative tourism system led by an independent not-for-profit organisation will be important in this endeavour.

The Social Value of Tourism – A report by Visit Britain (2025)

This report examines the broad social, cultural, and community impacts of tourism, with a particular focus on the experiences of local communities most directly affected by it. Drawing on polling evidence, case studies, and statistical analysis, it highlights the ways tourism can support community pride, well-being, and regeneration, while emphasising the need for sustainable and inclusive approaches to tourism development. The case is made that there is an appetite across the British public for travelling within the UK *'that is both good for communities and the environment. Nearly 60% of the public say that when they travel, they try to leave the place better than they found it.'*

'The regenerative approach goes beyond goals of previous decades, prioritising not only environmental stewardship but also the lasting well-being of local communities, economies, and cultural heritage. This proactive, forward-thinking approach views tourism as a tool for tackling economic, social, and especially environmental challenges, aiming to rejuvenate and restore rather than capitalise on the places and people that make tourism possible. By putting the needs of host communities and visitors at the forefront, regenerative tourism fosters a sustainable balance that benefits everyone. Ultimately, this model creates opportunities while reducing risks, ensuring tourism contributes positively to people, places, and shared prosperity for generations to come.'

Summary of Local Context

Development of the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC

Building on the excellent partnership working over the last few years, supported by Maldon District Council, with the participation of businesses and organisations from across many different sectors, the establishing of a new not-for-profit organisation – Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC is taking place. The current T26 Leadership Group that has been working for a number of years on promotion, marketing, supporting collaboration and share projects will remain in place. The new system will therefore see a new Community Interest Company (CIC) with a Board of Directors responsible for overseeing the strategic direction of the regenerative tourism strategy (and ultimately paid staff), with the T26 Leadership Group being the forum through which new sector-focused ‘Steering Groups’ will feed in and influence the direction of travel for strategy, initiatives and advocacy for the Saltmarsh Coast area. The Steering Groups including Heritage, Culture & Arts, Environment and Nature, Events, Waterways & Maritime, Food & Drink, Rural and Town Centres.

Some of the core concepts that will make up the regenerative strategy include the following, with detail developed through the Steering Groups.

- Local economy – offering local products and experiences that are distinctive and relevant to the Saltmarsh Coast area. Ensuring that visitors (and local residents) buy local and support local producers, businesses and organisations (including by visiting sites and spaces)
- Stay local – encouraging the sustainable growth of hotel space and other overnight opportunities (including glamping, development of agricultural spaces etc.). This will ensure more direct spend from visitors into the local economy.
- Authenticity and local distinctiveness – authentically ‘saltmarsh coast’ experiences that are rooted in the area’s history, heritage, culture, environment and terroir – opportunities for experiences and taking part
- Preserving, conserving and interpreting the heritage and culture of the Saltmarsh Coast area – ensuring investment goes where it is needed to support local organisations to deliver and meet the expectations of visitors and participants (high quality exhibitions and programmes, relevant and compelling interpretation, accessible buildings with good facilities, digitally engaging and educational including for schools)
- Carbon Neutrality - Implement programmes to reduce carbon emissions from tourism activities and place/space (existing and new build). Support tourism businesses and attractions to reduce their carbon emissions and encourage sustainable travel
- Environmental restoration and resilience of ecosystems – Raise awareness of the unique environments across the Saltmarsh Coast and support initiatives to protect and enhance environments in keeping with ambitions in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and other strategies and plans, and support efforts to secure membership of organisations. Promote low impact activities including through events and guided walks that focus on nature restoration (and offer opportunities for participation)
- Community empowerment – Local communities recognise the benefits of tourism – linked to civic pride (improve volunteering), economic benefits (high streets etc.) and inward investment, and recognise themselves as tourists (with the ability to play a role in a ‘regenerative approach’) and can share their experience as volunteers
- Skills development, business support and investment in innovation and partnerships with Higher Education.

Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival

The Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival (SCWF) was launched in September 2023 and celebrates the Saltmarsh Coast landscape through guided walks focused on nature, wildlife, heritage and local food and drink. It encourages both residents and visitors to explore the District on foot, helping people connect more closely with the area's landscapes, communities and local businesses.

The SCWF has been very popular and was rated one of the best 10 Walking Festivals in the UK in the Guardian (2024) – alongside well-established festivals including Isle of Wight and National Forest Walking Festivals. Over 120 guided walking sessions have been delivered since 2023 and 85 businesses have benefitted from engagement with visitors. The concept is regenerative in that it focuses on creating meaningful and deeper visitor experiences with environments and local places including businesses (such as pubs). Walking tourism aligns strongly with a regenerative approach, helping visitors connect more closely with landscapes, heritage and local businesses in a low-impact and 'slow' way.

The SCWF will be one of three core initiatives managed directly by the new Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC in recognition of the importance of programmes that embody the concept of 'regenerative', as well as encouraging considered exploration of places across the District (which is also 'experiential').

There are also wider opportunities to support sustainable and regenerative visitor experiences through walking – for example through promotion and creative exploration of St. Peter's Way which runs through the three local authority areas that will make up the Mid Essex Unitary Authority – Brentwood, Chelmsford and Maldon. Further to this, cycling is also an important part of the mix and Maldon has much to offer visitors on bicycles, including the National Cycle Network 1 which runs from Dover to Shetland, as well as other routes that take in the Blackwater Rail Trail (the former Maldon to Witham Railway Line). The Friends of Flich Way charity plays a significant role in maintaining the Blackwater Rail Trail with volunteer parties undertaking work to keep the route clear and ensure the local heritage is visible (including the historic Railway Halt at Langford).

There are other events that also embrace the concept of 'regenerative' in the District. This includes the world-famous Maldon Mud Race that supports local charities and businesses, provides a rich and diverse culture and sporting experience for visitors, puts the District on the map nationally and internationally, and is embedded in the natural environment of Maldon and the Blackwater.

Launch Event – Regenerative Tourism Strategy and Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC

An event was organised at the Tin Roof Café (Woodham Mortimer) to launch the concept of a Regenerative Tourism Strategy for the Maldon District and the important role that the new CIC would play in this. There was significant enthusiasm for increased levels of collaboration and buy-in to the core concept of 'regenerative'. Issues raised included accessibility (lack of sustainable transport options across the District), need for funding to support initiatives, collaboration and support for events, opportunities for sailing clubs to continue diversifying their core offer (to support increased visitor interest), and practical issues of relevance to the environment and nature including the need for effective control of dogs in protected natural areas.

Since the event much work has taken place to set out the immediate and mid-term priorities for the CIC and the wider regenerative tourism system, and the application to establish the new CIC has been made.

Overnight Stays and Hotels

The current overnight stay offer in the District is limited and expensive – for example the one Travelodge in Maldon is more expensive than comparable Travelodges elsewhere in the country.

A stronger overnight stay offer from other areas including Chelmsford means that visitors can come to Maldon but not necessarily stay in the District overnight. This is certainly the case for larger events where those working often stay outside of the District (in Chelmsford for example) – mainly due to the lack of available hotel spaces. The need for new hotel and overnight stay options has been recognised for some time (for example in the evidence base for the Local Plan in 2015), with the situation becoming more challenging as the tourism offer develops (including through the proactive work of the District Council in partnership with local businesses).

Farm and rural diversification is one strategy that can increase not only the options for visitors but also the ‘experiential’ and ‘regenerative’ principles and practice of tourism in the District. One example of this is Grove Cottages in Tollesbury (on land associated with Mell Farm), with many other similar examples across the District. Camping and glamping options are also important as part of the ‘experiential’ mix for visitors.

While overnight stays are not automatically ‘regenerative’ – the concept of encouraging longer (and therefore generally higher spending) stays will help to ensure that spend is retained within the Maldon District economy, and that the distinctive experiences people have visiting the area results in direct investment.

Actions

Establish and empower the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC, ensuring independence from all local authorities while also being accountable to the many interested stakeholders who will play a role in the Regenerative Tourism strategy and action plan. A crucial part of the 'community empowerment' process; establishing an organisation with the capacity, strategic insight and local connectivity to deliver into and beyond local government reorganisation. The new organisation can be a successor body to MDC functions around tourism, promotion and marketing and cross over with wider policy areas including planning, environment, community development and health/wellbeing. It is critical therefore that the new CIC has the resources to scale up and take forward the existing strategy and emerging action plans without spending significant time (and often volunteer time) looking for external investment (at least initially).

Study to develop the core concept of 'Regenerative' - linked to the particular opportunities across the 'Saltmarsh Coast'. The concept at the core of 'Regenerative Tourism' is the crucial difference between a standard tourism approach (i.e. more visitors and higher spend) and a regenerative approach which aims to feed directly into the assets and people that make the District attractive to visit (and to live and do business in). The existing Regenerative Tourism Strategy (delivered as part of the Culture & Heritage Strategy) identifies a process for this and a governance and engagement system that will enable many different stakeholders to feed in. Continue hosting collaborative events that

enable stakeholders to feed in and learn from good practice examples from across the UK and internationally.

7 – Planning

Why is this Important to the Culture & Heritage Strategy?

The local planning system has a potential role to play when it comes to culture and heritage development across the District, and is certainly important for environment and nature recovery (through Biodiversity Net Gain for example). The main reference points will be the Local Plan (and the process to get there) and Neighbourhood Plans (where they are in place or being developed).

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) gives culture and heritage a strong, explicit role in plan-making by setting out clear expectations for how local planning authorities should recognise, conserve and enhance the historic environment. Chapter 16 emphasises that heritage assets are irreplaceable and should be conserved ‘in a manner appropriate to their significance.’ It requires plans to develop a proactive strategy for the historic environment that sustains and enhances heritage assets, supports viable uses that are consistent with their conservation, and recognises the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits they bring. This includes requiring development to contribute positively to local character and distinctiveness and encouraging opportunities to draw on the historic environment to shape a strong sense of place.

Emerging reforms published in 2026 maintain this trajectory by reinforcing the need for long-term strategies for heritage within local plans and by linking heritage more closely to regeneration, community wellbeing and placemaking. Proposed policy HE1 (Plan-making for the historic environment) builds directly on paragraph 203 of the existing framework and strengthens requirements for early evidence-gathering, identification of at-risk assets, and the integration of heritage considerations into growth strategies. This widens the policy rationale for investment in heritage, positioning it not only as an asset to protect but as a key element in shaping sustainable development, cultural identity and local economic resilience.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (October 2023) introduced a new 30-month plan-making system with a streamlined evidence base and defined project management stages, supported by secondary legislation published in March 2026. Because the work on the emerging Maldon District Local Plan cannot be submitted for examination under the legacy system by the Government’s 31 December 2026 deadline, the MDC is instead required to publish its intention to begin plan-making under the new system by that date, which will formally trigger the 30-month timetable.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

Maldon District Council currently has no CIL policies, and it is not clear whether CIL would be appropriate for developments across the District. This has been the subject of some specific analysis that will now feed into the new local plan process (when that is initiated). A Community Infrastructure Policy can support cultural infrastructure where cultural facilities are recognised as essential community assets, enabling councils to secure developer contributions for new or improved cultural spaces, creative facilities, heritage assets, and community-led cultural activity. However, it is likely that there would be many competing demands for investment in community facilities and infrastructure, so there is no guarantee that funding for culture or heritage would happen in the event of there being a CIL policy and schedule in place.

Section 106 agreements are another potential way of securing investment into local community (and cultural) infrastructure. Section 106 agreements can be used to secure site-specific mitigation where a development creates additional demand for cultural or community facilities. This would have to be demonstrated and there would likely to other competing demands for the investment.

Rural Diversification and Regenerative Tourism

There are examples across the District where historic agricultural buildings (or buildings on or near farms) are in need of investment and reinvention. This is an important part of rural diversification, ensuring that rural communities remain viable socially and economically. Cultural activity (workshops, small events etc.) are increasingly popular across the District in rural locations with some good examples of spaces being reinvented. This is also a core part of the 'regenerative tourism' concept that is emerging as a strategic priority for the Maldon District, and planning has a key role to play in terms of the visitor economy and tourism. So policies that support sustainable travel, create a context for rural diversification and a flourishing of distinctive businesses (with locally relevant products) will be important as the new local plan process emerges. This broadly fits with the NPPF 'Supporting a Prosperous Rural Economy' Paragraph 88b which states that policies should enable – 'the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses' and 88c – 'sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.'

8 – Town and Parish Councils

Introduction – Why is this important to the Culture and Heritage Strategy?

Town and parish councils are democratic institutions most closely rooted in their localities and the lives of people across communities. It is the layer of government where trust is often highest and people can feel genuinely connected to decision-making processes. Every part of the District is covered by a Town or (in most cases) a Parish Council, and because they operate at the hyper-local scale, they are uniquely placed to reflect the priorities of their communities, whether rural or urban. Town and Parish Councils need not simply be administrative bodies maintaining local amenities (although this is important); they are locally focused institutions capable of convening residents, supporting community groups, and can enable people to shape the places they live.

At a time when the emergence of larger unitary authorities risk widening the distance between communities and decision-makers, Town and Parish councils will remain in place and can continue to play a role to connect communities to strategic decision makings and policy. For Mid Essex, they can act as a bridge between local community voice and the strategic level of unitary and mayoral authority. This responds directly to the fact that there will be fewer local authority councillors per resident, and challenges around the relevance and visibility of key decision-making processes. Whether through neighbourhood planning, parish meetings, participatory budgeting or simply the everyday act of showing up to a parish meeting, they are likely to be important in ensuring the devolution and local government reorganisation strengthens rather than diminished community voice and empowerment.

Across the Maldon District Town and Parish Council are of many different sizes, so their ability to affect change, develop local programmes and hold regular events and debates varies. Some clerks only work a few hours a week. They are all important however and play a key role in supporting local heritage, events and in some cases cultural activities. They very often provide a digital information source for those wanting to find out about a particular parish or area (including visitors), more often than not they include information on local history and heritage.

The importance of Town and Parish Councils to heritage and culture across the District isn't necessarily in their direct support through funding. Rather it is their understanding of their village or parish that can provide context and opportunity for cultural and heritage related programming. Cultural, heritage and environmental participation can be important for engaging people in local issues and civic life more generally, so town and parish councils are part of the essential infrastructure across the Maldon District to support the all-important grassroots movements. The nature of cultural, heritage and environmental participation across the District is through many different local groups, organisations and informal gatherings.

Strategic Reflection

The main strategic reference point for Town and Parish Councils across England at this point in time is the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. This is because in Essex, as in many other areas, there is a fundamental shift taking place which will affect town and parish councils across England. Many of the current town and parish councils were established during the previous round of local government reorganisation through the Local Government Act 1972 (enacted in 1974). This is still very much in the memory of some older people still involved with Town and Parish Councils today.

The English Devolution White Paper from 2024 which set up the process for the current round of local government reorganisation (lgr) and Devolution states that the Government ‘will expect new councils [unitary authorities] to take a proactive and innovative approach to neighbourhood involvement and community governance so that citizens are empowered’. The current Bill does not have a clear role set out for town and parish councils, partly because they do not fit in to a one size fits all concept for neighbourhood governance (or the proposed ‘neighbourhood committees’).

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) published a response to the announcement in March 2026 of the new unitary authorities for many parts of England.

‘We emphasise that strong neighbourhood governance must be built around empowered communities that are trusted and enabled to lead. As new unitary councils take shape, they should recognise and work with existing local structures, carefully considering which elements of current pre-local government reorganisation neighbourhood models can be strengthened rather than replaced.’ (NALC calls for parish and town council involvement following announcement of new unitary councils – March 2026)

NALC also made reference to the potential for existing second-tier local authorities to consider transferring some assets to Town and Parish Councils prior to local government reorganisation – in order to protect them as community assets into the future (not that there is necessarily any suggestion that lgr will undermine community assets – although there is uncertainty in the process).

NALC have also reported on debates in Parliament (House of Lords) that recognised that the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill was not clear on the role of Town and Parish Councils.

‘In the debate, peers highlighted strong cross-party concern that parish and town councils are undervalued in the legislation, stressing that they are central to community life, essential for neighbourhood governance, and should not be sidelined by larger strategic bodies or ministerial powers’ – (NALC Reporting December 2025)

A Paper published in December 2025 entitled ‘The Future of Local Democracy – Devolution and the Need to Empower Town and Parish Councils’ (University of Birmingham) explores the challenges and opportunities faced by the most local level of government in relation to the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. In particular ensuring there is an effective and ‘independent’ system for communities that is not dominated by the big strategic authorities:

‘There is a risk that without independent mechanisms for community voice and activity, the strategic priorities of larger areas will be pitched against smaller communities and perpetuate the “David and Goliath” battles that have hitherto affected community voice in decision making’

There is much good practice in this paper with examples from areas of England where the Town or Parish Council has achieved success with significant projects and effect community voice and representation. There is also recognition however of the capacity and skills challenges faced by smaller local councils.

Mid Essex will see a merger of three local authorities which do have a good number of Town and Parish Councils (although Maldon has far more than Brentwood which currently has 9). In 2023 Chelmsford

City Council supported the establishment of a new Chelmsford Garden Community Council (formed from areas that were previously parts of Little Waltham, Springfield, Boreham and Broomfield parishes), in recognition of the significant growth in the area and the need for improved local representation of the new communities. The Town and Parish Councils in the Maldon District know their communities and their local areas well and this knowledge will be crucial in making the wider devolution and local government reorganisation processes successful and relevant – as long as there are effective systems in place to ensure they have voice. Their voice is very likely to be important when it comes to supporting local assets, heritage, culture and environment.

Community Right to Buy

Although not necessarily a ‘right’ that has to involve Town or Parish Councils, in many cases they will be involved in one way or another when it comes to communities looking to purchase important local Assets of Community Value (ACVs). The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill is strengthening the process through which communities can work together to purchase and take over local assets if they come up for sale and are considered at risk (for example likely to close and potentially see a change of use). The ‘Community Right to Buy’ element of the legislation replaces the previous ‘right to bid’, with an increased timescale for communities to raise the necessary funding to purchase a registered Asset of Community Value (ACV) – up from 6 months to 12 months. The ‘Community Right to Buy’ listing will also be for 10 years (up from the current 5 years).

Summary of Local Context

Town and Parish Councils in the Maldon District

Across the District there are 34 parishes, 3 of which are twinned to make up Maldon District’s 31 parish/town councils. There are two Town Councils (Maldon and Burnham-on-Crouch), with the others being smaller Parish Councils. The fact that they vary in size and capacity (and resources) means that the scope for local action (projects, advocacy, responding to planning etc.) varies. Some Parish Clerks only work for around 4 hours per week (officially – in reality many of them do many more hours than they are paid for). Funding for local projects is fairly restricted but some there are some good examples of where the Parish Councils support local events. The Tillingham Flower Show for example, or the Southminster Competitive Music Festival (although in both cases these are also driven by key individuals).

The two larger Town Councils do directly support and fund some local events. Burnham-on-Crouch Town Council supports a number of key events in the town including the Carnival and Quay Day during Burnham Week (and manage the very popular Pirates on the Quay programme). The Town Council is also working on a way forward for the Station House which has been closed as a community space since Covid – this includes investing significantly in the building renovations.

Neighbourhood Plans

Neighbourhood Plans can be important for setting out local priorities, and providing an evidence base and record of local issues and priority projects that can support broader advocacy and investment. Currently there are four ‘made’ Neighbourhood Plans in place across the District, with work ongoing for a new Neighbourhood Plan for Maldon Town (supported by Rural Community Council for Essex – RCCE). The status of being ‘made’ means that it has been through the full process (including

examination) and has been approved and formally published. The plans in this ‘made’ category currently are – Langford & Ulting, Wickham Bishops, Great Totham and Mayland.

Neighbourhood Plans form part of the wider development planning process for local authority areas, and are taken into account when planning applications are decided upon. There is no legal or statutory duty for a Town or Parish Council to have a Neighbourhood Plan, and the policies and detail of the Plans must not conflict with the wider policies set out in a District Local Plan for example.

The Maldon Town Council Neighbourhood Plan has established an effective community engagement process which includes a working group focusing on heritage. The Maldon Society has also published a Vision for the Town which will feed in to the Neighbourhood Plan process (and support the wider focus on the importance of heritage and culture in the town centre context). Woodham Walter Parish Council are also in the late stages of developing a Neighbourhood Plan. In the Woodham Walter Plan (not yet ‘made’) culture is referenced as important to the sense of place:

‘The village has developed over many years and has an established culture and presence that reflects the way of life that it represents. That should be valued, honoured, and not changed lightly; it is a cultural heritage. The Neighbourhood Plan is the shared vision, shaped by local voices and local values to support these sentiments and to create a stronger village for tomorrow.’

The Mayland Neighbourhood Plan (2021 – 2042) includes as one of the key ‘Objectives’ to ‘Celebrate local heritage and culture in new development and local events and activities.’ This is an important statement as it recognises that a Neighbourhood Plan can consider wider cultural and heritage outcome, and that these are important for a local sense of place.

Notwithstanding the challenge for Town and Parish Councils around capacity and resources that comes with developing a Neighbourhood Plan, they can be important for highlighting local priorities which can include heritage, culture and environmental initiatives and proposed investment/projects. Where Neighbourhood Plans are proposed (or in process), then MDC and other stakeholder should support them where possible, and encourage an exploration of local heritage (including intangible heritage), culture and environment – strengthening the evidence base and potentially supporting future investment.

Village and Church Halls

Most villages in the District have a Village Hall and often other local facilities (sometimes linked to a church), and these provide a very important part of the local community infrastructure upon which local activities (including culture) rely. Although Parish Councils often play an important role in supporting village hall (and sometimes providing funding), the majority are run by separate charities or committees. Village Halls are well utilised throughout the year across the District, and this demonstrates a good level of community-based activity including health and wellbeing, culture and workshops/meetings. Given that Village Hall are more-or-less entirely reliant upon dedicated volunteers, consideration should be given in any review of community resilience to how sustainable the situation is in each parish. Some Village Hall have attracted good levels of external investment over the years, including Goldhanger Village Hall secured National Lottery funding for significant improvements to the Hall, and Steeple Village Hall was purpose built in 2004 utilising significant external funding. Tolleshunt D’arcy Village Hall Charity Trust was established in 2019 to support efforts to raise funding to replace the existing village hall (on the same site). A major funding bid to the

National Lottery was not successful (in 2019). Work continues on fundraising and the focus is now on a progressive improvement programme for the existing building - all of this demonstrates significant local voluntary commitment to securing the future of an important local asset (that holds a wide range of events and sessions)

Some church spaces and connected buildings are very important for regular events and gatherings. For example St. Mary the Virgin Church plays a crucial role as a space for meetings, workshops, music, as well as hosting local art exhibitions (and sales).

Assets of Community Value

Town and Parish Councils, and other local groups, can seek to register local buildings as Assets of Community Value (ACV). The process is overseen and assessed on a case by case basis by the District Council. This process can help to protect important local buildings and spaces by giving communities a legal opportunity to pause potential commercial sales and organise to purchase the property to ensure that it remains a key local asset (a shop or pub are most common). The 'Community Right to Buy' concept is being strengthened through the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, meaning that local communities will have longer to raise the necessary funding to buy assets that are on registered as Assets of Community Value and are up for sale. Currently there are six such assets registered in the Maldon District including pubs, Wickham Bishops Library and allotments in Burnham-on-Crouch. Given that such spaces often host local events, gatherings and programmes, ACV can be important for protecting local heritage and culture.

Actions

Community Resilience Review: In the run up to and through to Local Government Reorganisation (which is framed around 'community empowerment') - build a clearer understanding of the resilience of local grassroots assets that are crucial to the local community, what 'community empowerment' models need to be in place (or strengthened) to support their long-term viability. Work with Town and Parish Councils and other local partners. Culture and heritage assets will be a key part of this as the accessibility of existing and future activities will rely upon local assets/spaces, and participation in heritage, culture and environment activities can support wider civic participation. Use this to inform discussions around the establishment of 'neighbourhood committees' (or whatever the process will be).

The Town and Parish Forum to feed in to the Regenerative Tourism Strategy: A real strength of the visitor offer across the District (Saltmarsh Coast) is the variety and distinctiveness of local areas (villages, rural areas, towns and coast). Town and Parish Councils all have views on the visitor economy and what is important to their local area, as well as extensive local knowledge, so it is important that they are able to feed in to the Regenerative Tourism strategy as it develops. This is best done through the existing Town and Parish Forum which has been managed by MDC for some time with opportunities for briefings and discussion on strategic issues such as planning, health and wellbeing and economic development.

9 – Health and Wellbeing

Introduction – Why is this important to the Culture & Heritage Strategy?

‘Creative health activities can include visual and performing arts, crafts, film, literature, cooking and creative activities in nature, such as gardening; creative health approaches may involve creative and innovative ways to approach health and care services, co-production, education and workforce development. Creative health can be applied in homes, communities, cultural institutions and heritage sites, and healthcare settings. Creative health can provide tools for engaging with communities that often do not get a voice and support a better understanding of the issues they face.’ National Centre for Creative Health Toolkit

Culture and heritage are important in so many ways to communities – the opportunities to critically explore locally relevant or challenging issues, bringing people together and supporting civil society, supporting economic development and tourism. What is emerging ever more prominently in research and strategy across the UK and internationally is the importance of participation in cultural, heritage and environmental activities to health and wellbeing. This is often framed as ‘creative health’ or similar concepts such as ‘green prescribing’, and there are clear links to the established practice of ‘social prescribing’ where patients are offered opportunities to take part in social activities to improve their health. The ‘wider determinants of health’ concept reflect the many factors that affect the health and wellbeing of individuals, and this includes the social, economic, and environmental conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age.

The Maldon District has everything that is needed to support communities to have good health outcomes, through taking part in activities (including cultural and heritage) and engaging with the natural environment. There are many local organisations and larger charities supporting this throughout the year and across the District. The recent shift towards ‘Neighbourhood Health’, part of the wider restructuring and strategic direction relating to the NHS 10-Year Plan, provides new opportunities to embed creative health into locally-relevant strategy and delivery of services and projects.

Government health policy over the last couple of years has created new opportunities for the cultural and heritage sectors to become recognised as part of the wider context when it comes to good public health outcomes. In particular it is the strategic move towards ‘prevention’ of poor health (NHS 10 Year Plan) that is the opportunity and the most relevant element of the health policy shift to this strategy.

Strategic Reflection

NHS 10 Year Plan

The UK government’s 10 Year Plan for the NHS (2025–2035) sets out three ‘transformational shifts’:

- Hospital to Community: Expand neighbourhood health centres for integrated, place-based care.
- Sickness to Prevention: Prioritise early intervention, lifestyle support, and mental wellbeing.
- Analogue to Digital: Leverage digital tools for access, prediction, and personalised care

This emphasis on ‘prevention, in particular has created new opportunities for the cultural and heritage sectors to become recognised as part of the wider context when it comes to good public health outcomes. In practice this means a move and towards a more proactive, locally relevant approach to prevention of poor health outcomes, getting in early at all ages to stop people getting ill and developing more serious or long-term conditions. Accessible, affordable and community-based activities, including those that incorporate or focus on arts and creativity, can form an important part of this approach.

Integrated Care Boards and Neighbourhood Health Plans

A key element of the NHS 10 Year Plan in relation to ‘prevention’ and a more locally-focused and relevant approach is Neighbourhood Planning. This can best be understood and

In order to prepare for this, the Integrated Care Boards that currently cover the Essex area (and in some cases into neighbouring counties) are restructuring to form one for Greater Essex. This will then enable a locally responsive system of placed-based governance that will align to the five proposed unitary authority footprints through the ongoing local government reorganisation (LGR) process. The ambition is that this then can strengthen local leadership, accountability and partnership working across the NHS, local authorities and the all-important voluntary and community sectors (which includes heritage, culture and environment).

Similarly to LGR where the initial strategic move is to create larger governance structures, the focus will then be on neighbourhood health plans aligned to the new neighbourhood areas which will be co-produced with a range of local organisations. This includes the many potential system partners who will have a chance to work in partnership and deliver a wide range of services (including community-based) that contribute to health and wellbeing locally. Ensuring that creative health and the value of the cultural, heritage and environmental sectors is recognised in this process will be important.

In order to achieve this there will be a process of devolving budgets, service planning and decision-making to a local level to ensure that partnerships are built between organisations to deliver services that go beyond traditional health care to address the wider determinants of health. The current proposal is that there will be a ‘convenor’ model established to allocated funding based on the local priorities, working closely with the central ICB but with necessary autonomy. The ‘convener’ will be a lead organisation that will set the agenda locally, broker relationships across NHS, councils and voluntary and community sector, align resources to agreed outcomes, track progress of funded initiatives/projects with simple shared metrics, and support wider system-wide learning. It is not yet clear on what scale/geography this would operate.

Alongside this community model, work will take place on identifying a site and operating model for new Neighbourhood Health Centres which will provide a focus for local services (complementing the neighbourhood and community approach).

‘Centres should bring together NHS, local authority, and civil society services to provide a coordinated, population-focused offer. In doing so, due regard should be given to the Civil Society Covenant principles of partnership, working throughout the planning, decision-making and operational service delivery of NHCs’

Creative Health

‘Creative health should form an integral part of a 21st-century health and social care system – one that is holistic, person-centred, and which focuses on reducing inequalities and supporting people to live well for longer - Creating the conditions for creative health to flourish requires a joined-up, whole system approach incorporating health systems, local authorities, schools, and the cultural and VCSE sectors’ – All Party Parliamentary Group on Creative Health

Creative health refers to using creative practice to support and improve health and wellbeing. It spans activities like arts and performance, crafts, film and writing and nature-based creativity such as gardening, as well as innovative ways of designing and delivering care through co-production with groups and through workforce development. These approaches can be embedded in everyday life and services — at home, in communities, in museums and heritage settings, and across health and care environments.

The positive contribution that creative health activities and programmes can make to public health across both rural and urban areas is well documented. Two major pieces of research have been produced by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Creative Health – including one published in 2023 ‘Creative Health Review’

‘Creative health can help people to stay well, recover better and enjoy an improved quality of life throughout the life course. It can help communities, especially where there is disadvantage, to thrive. Our recommendations are not just affordable; if implemented, they will, as we demonstrate, save public expenditure and help us to become a more.’ - The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing and the National Centre for Creative Health (December 2023)

Following the publication of the ‘Mapping Creative Health in Essex’ report in 2025, which was supported by Essex CC and delivered by national charity Creative Lives, an Essex Creative Health Network has been established with the aim of

Arts Council England or other cultural and heritage funders will not be able to support a significant upscaling of creative health activities and projects across the District. Given the opportunities for creative health to address issues such as rural/social isolation and poor mental health and the depth of creative health experience across the cultural and heritage sectors in the District – now is the time for coordinated action. The public health system is complex and the standard expectation is that creative practitioners and organisations (and museums etc.) make the case for the effectiveness of creative health from outside of the core system. The changes to policy and strategy mean that the emphasis will shift on to neighbourhood health and prevention – so this will become ‘the system’ and creative health can be a key part of new broader and more partnership-focused delivery strategies.

There is also significant evidence of the importance of heritage activities to health and wellbeing. This demonstrates the underlying issue that gathering people together for positive and productive activities is good for individuals and wider society, and that the cultural, heritage and environmental sectors are well placed to play this important role.’

‘Heritage has a direct positive impact on our health. The overall wellbeing value of everyday heritage encounters is worth £29 billion every year, with health benefits equivalent to over £1,600 NHS spend

per citizen annually). Heritage visits save the NHS over £193.2 million annually through reduced GP visits and mental health service usage.’ – ‘Backing the Bedrock’ Heritage Alliance (2025 Report).

There is also significant evidence that show how access to nature can improve public health outcomes – and there are clear opportunities for creative activities and nature access as part of the same experience.

‘.....regular access to greenspace reduces GP visits by 28% and could save the NHS £2.1 billion annually. As healthcare shifts toward prevention, these natural spaces provide a powerful complement to clinical interventions.’ – ‘Growing together - how community-led green infrastructure delivers health and climate benefits’ Natural England (2025)

The NHS 10 Year Plan will focus on the establishment of Neighbourhood Health Centres that will provide comprehensive provision of health and other related services (with a focus on prevention and wellbeing) – a concept that creative health activities should be at the core of. Further to this, local government reorganisation will mean an apparent commitment to neighbourhood governance, with communities able to identify their own policy and funding priorities. A vibrant and inclusive cultural and heritage sector should be part of this, relevant to communities and with funding to support it in recognition of its positive impact on health, wellbeing and community cohesion

This increased focus on ‘neighbourhoods’ and concepts of community empowerment and leadership should provide fertile ground for the mobilisation of creative health approaches (or more broadly community-focused activities which support the concept of prevention of poor health.

Essex CC - Health and wellbeing strategy 2026-29

The Essex CC Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2026-29 provides a framework for Essex CC and its partners to target capacity and resources in support of the direction of travel for national policy (including NHS) – providing a bridge between current systems in place and the changes to strategy and delivery that will emerge over the next few years (primarily neighbourhood-focused approaches).

‘The strategy is focused on strengthening a place based, preventative, and community-led approach to health and wellbeing. It encourages system-wide collaboration across health, care, local government, and the voluntary and community sectors. The strategy aims to complement the principles set out in the Essex Caring Communities Commission, which champions neighbourhood-based care, community empowerment, and a rebalanced relationship between public services and residents.’

Priorities set out in the strategy provide scope for a roll out of creative health projects across Essex – Essex CC originally funded the ‘Essex Creative Health Mapping Report’ in 2025. These include:

- Scaling up proven interventions - Scaling what works, amplifying impact through trusted partnerships, and strengthening the collaborative infrastructure that exists across Essex
- Act early to prevent ill health and embed healthy habits – *‘listening to residents and working closely with communities to understand their needs....co-design approaches that are rooted in lived experience’*
- Being rooted in place – Aligning with the 10 Year Plan and the move towards neighbourhood health boards and neighbourhood plans, and fostering *‘strong local connections and champion inclusive, community-led health and wellbeing outcomes.’*
- Collaborate – Bring together *‘health, care, local government, and community partners to align efforts and maximise impact’*

Nationally Public Health budgets across England are important for local programmes that aim to improve the health of populations with through prevention, advice and support. The Kings Fund's analysis shows that for 2026-27 local government will receive £4.4bn for its public health activity in cash-terms, rising to £4.5bn in 2027-28. This is behind the 'real value' of the grant for 2016-17. This means for England (and it will be a similar figure for Greater Essex) that the government is committing to just over £70 per head for local government public health spending over a year (which is the cost of four to five packets of cigarettes).

This has also to be considered alongside the significant advertising push through television, online/digital, in stores and in public spaces by the food industry, and the high number of fast-food outlets across towns (although Maldon and Burnham on Crouch appear to have fewer than other larger towns in Essex). Although public health programmes can be very effective and much of the spend is determined a District-level, the pressure on the wider health system means that considering concepts such as a 'neighbourhood' approach, 'prevention' and 'caring communities' – there is potentially much to be gained from voluntary and community, culture, heritage and environmental sectors looking to evidence the impact of their work in relation to wellbeing and community cohesion.

Essex Caring Communities Commission

The Essex Caring Communities Commission report 2025 sets the scene for a broader and community focused approach to health and wellbeing, focused on the community and very much reflecting the wider determinants of health. The Essex Caring Communities Commission Report recognises the importance of community collaboration, placing health and wellbeing very much in the context of community resilience. Rather than focus on public health and the NHS, the report recognises the importance of wider civil society, and this in turn creates a strong strategic and practical backdrop for creative health. The importance of 'grassroots' organisations and groups across the Maldon District is a key issue, and in particular the cultural, heritage and environmental organisations that make up so much of the social infrastructure that supports civil society, community cohesion and good health and wellbeing outcomes.

Taking inspiration from the Essex Caring Communities Work, it will be important to support and mobilise the cultural, heritage and environmental sectors to engage with public health where there are opportunities and mutual benefits from doing so.

Essex Devolution

The proposed Mayoral Strategic Authority for Essex (and the Mayor) will have a statutory health duty, which will require them to have a regard to improving health and reducing health inequalities across the full breadth of their responsibilities. This also includes having a seat on the Integrated Care Board for Essex and overseeing good partnership working between the Mayoral Authority, local authorities and health sector organisations (including the ICB). Creative Health as a concept can feature as part of this if partners recognise the opportunities, particularly around neighbourhood health and the importance of prevention (NHS 10 Year Plan). This has happened in other Mayoral Authorities including South Yorkshire where there is now a Creative Health Enabling Plan in place that works with partners across Doncaster, Barnsley, Rotherham and Sheffield.

'The Creative Health sector in South Yorkshire is ready and able to play a core strategic role in health creation in our region. Changes in the policy landscape related to health and devolution offer

opportunities for Creative Health to become embedded in new delivery structures and systems.’ – South Yorkshire Creative Health Enabling Plan

Summary of Local Context

Maldon District Health

Although Maldon District is officially relatively affluent compared to other areas of Essex, the most recent Index of Multiple Deprivation data highlights pockets of deprivation within parts of Heybridge, Maldon East and the Dengie Peninsula (parts of Bradwell and Tillingham). In rural and coastal communities, deprivation is often less visible than in urban areas and is closely linked to issues such as poor access to services, transport isolation, limited local opportunities and ageing populations. These factors can contribute to a wider perception of communities being overlooked or disconnected from employment and social/cultural activities, and this therefore creates a case for targeted place-based and accessible initiatives that could include creative health, as well as programmes such as ‘Strength and Balance’ and ‘Walks for Wellness’

It would be appropriate, recognising that resources are always scarce for new community and public health initiatives, for activities (including creative health) to be targeted at the most deprived areas of the District.

One Maldon District Partnership

The One Maldon District Partnership (OMDP) is a senior-level partnership bringing together public sector organisations, voluntary groups, community organisations and private sector partners to improve health, wellbeing, community resilience and prosperity across Maldon District. It was established in 2022 to create a more joined-up approach to tackling ongoing challenges and to make the most of collaborative opportunities.

The partnership has provided strategic leadership for Maldon District by bringing organisations together to share intelligence, align resources, strengthen collaboration and respond collectively to emerging opportunities and challenges at both local and wider regional levels. There has been an ongoing aim to place communities at the centre of decision-making through effective engagement, community development and partnership working, while maximising funding opportunities and improving outcomes through coordinated action.

The nature, framing and oversight of the OMDP is currently being considered (May 2026), but the principles reflect a long-standing commitment to collaborative working supported by Maldon District Council over a number of years. There has been a focus on the issue of ‘frailty’ as well as utilising the Thriving Places Index to guide investment (for example highlighting the importance of access to green space for health outcomes).

The OMDP provided the first opportunity for the consideration of a creative health approach for the Maldon District, and this led further into work to develop a programme and some initial pilot project funded through public health.

Maldon & District CVS

Maldon & District CVS plays a key role in delivering the Maldon District's health and wellbeing agenda by acting as both a frontline community support organisation and through partnership oversight that connects residents, voluntary groups, local authorities and health services. Its work directly supports local priorities around mental health, physical activity, loneliness and prevention, helping residents stay active, connected and resilient. Through projects such as Walks for Wellbeing, Get Active, the Community Gaming Initiative, Public Living Rooms, digital inclusion support and the Social Supermarket, the organisation tackles social isolation, improves physical and mental wellbeing, and provides practical support for vulnerable households. The CVS also strengthens the wider voluntary sector through volunteering, training and community coordination, making it a critical delivery partner for preventative health and community resilience across the district.

Maldon & District CVS hosted the first event focused on creative health and the opportunities through the strategic move towards neighbourhood health in March 2026, and is working to establish a creative health network for Maldon, identifying opportunities for projects and engaging proactively with the emerging neighbourhood health context.

Essex Shed Network

In partnership with UCAN (Uttlesford), Maldon & District CVS employ the Essex Shed Network Project Lead (hosted in Maldon). The whole support programme across Essex is funded by Essex CC (not the individual Sheds). The Essex Shed Network, established in 2016, supports both new and existing Men's Sheds across Essex. Its role includes offering practical guidance on setting up Sheds, drawing on experience from established Sheds to support new opportunities. Support covers funding applications, governance, health and safety, and codes of conduct. The Network also delivers training and organises regular county-wide events that enable Shedders to share knowledge, build connections and strengthen the overall network. All of the Sheds are independent groups and not directly managed by the CVS. In Maldon there are currently 2 Sheds (Southminster and Maldon), but there is interest in establishing others.

Social prescribing in the Maldon District

The Maldon District currently has two established Social Prescribing initiatives, both linked to Primary Care Networks (PCNs) – Maldon and Witham PCN, and the Dengie (Dengie & South Woodham Ferrers PCN). Each has a dedicated Social Prescribing Link Worker who work across their areas to refer people to a wide range of activities and support services. The key aim is to stop people presenting frequently at a Doctor's Surgery for health (and mental health) issues that could be linked to social isolation - essentially enacting the principle of 'prevention' at the heart of the NHS 10 Year Plan. Many patients tend to present at a Surgery because there is very little in the way of local support and they are very often socially isolated.

The Link Workers maintain an extensive database of locations and activities, including village halls, churches and local community programmes that might be relevant to those being referred. This requires significant collaboration with the Public Health team at the District Council and many local organisations and charities. The main challenge is accessibility for those who might live in some of the more rural areas and cannot access public transport (either at all, or at the right times to access activities). There is currently nothing in the way of Community Transport that might have been relied upon in the past.

The Link Workers do prescribe arts and crafts activities, as well as walking groups. However, it is not a simple process as not everyone who is referred to activities will necessarily make it on their own, so finding ways to support people to take part is a challenge. Often this is down to poor mental health, particularly affecting younger and older people. Strategies can include chaperoning (through volunteers), particularly for walking groups, although securing volunteers can be a challenge.

Creative health approaches require effective evaluation and monitoring of progress if they are to be integrated into the wider public health programme. The Social Prescribing Link Workers could play a key role in this as they regularly input information on their prescribing/referral activities into SystmOne – the NHS’s digital system for patient records. It is therefore potentially possible to look at the impact on patients who have been referred into and through the social prescribing system over a period of time (anonymised and reported without referring to personal data etc.).

If creative health (and positive activities more generally) is to take off as a concept in the Maldon District, then close collaboration with the Social Prescribing Link Workers and their connections will be critical. They understand the local context in each of the parishes in which they work, the spaces and the opportunities and challenges.

Active Essex

Active Essex is the county’s strategic body for sport, physical activity and health improvement, working across Essex to increase physical activity, reduce health inequalities and support healthier, more connected communities. In the Maldon District, Active Essex has become an important delivery and partnership organisation within the wider One Maldon District Partnership and Livewell agendas, helping to embed physical activity into prevention, community wellbeing and social prescribing approaches. Through the Find Your Active Maldon network, Active Essex brings together local authorities, health partners, community organisations and voluntary groups to promote, support and fund activities (through a regular small grants programme).

Active Essex are key partners for a strategic creative health approach, with opportunities to support the development of new initiatives, and scope to offer advice and support for integrating creative health activities within existing activity programmes.

Loneliness and Social Isolation

More broadly there is good evidence to show that social relationships are particularly in relation to good health outcomes. Individuals with adequate social relationships have a 50% greater likelihood of survival compared to those with poor or insufficient social relationships. The magnitude of this effect is comparable with quitting smoking and it exceeds many well-known risk factors for mortality (for example obesity and physical inactivity).

Loneliness is an increasing challenge for society and for health outcomes in particular. 8.4m people live alone in the UK with the cost of loneliness being £9,900 per person each year. The rate of one-person households in the Maldon District for 2021 is 26% (7,418 in total). This is likely to have increased since 2021 although is still lower than the national average of 30%. Maldon’s older age profile (25.9% over 65 compared to 20.2% for the national average) suggests the many single-occupancy households are likely 65+ with many living in more isolated rural areas. The average age across the Maldon District is 48 – this is higher than national and for Chelmsford (41) and Brentwood (44).

Actions

Continue to develop the Maldon District Creative Health Network: This would support a continued focus that was initiated through discussion at the One Maldon District Partnership (OMDP). It would be led by Maldon & District CVS in recognition of the connections they have to communities and many local groups in the area, their management of key health and community initiatives such as Wellness Walks and Essex Sheds, and their direct engagement in Neighbourhood Health. The Network would also be the collaborative local system to feed in to emerging Neighbourhood Health Plans and other associated policy and strategy development (including the potential ‘Convener’ Model for distributing funding at a neighbourhood level).

Pilot Creative Health Projects: Where possible draw upon small pots from the Maldon Public Health funds (or other relevant funding). This would help to build strategic understanding and work towards a collective evidence base of impact, feeding in to the Maldon District Creative Health Network. This could then lead in to a larger bid to external organisations such as Arts Council England (who do fund some creative health projects and programming). Targeting initiatives to the most deprived wards in the District (where there are opportunities to do so) would be appropriate – (parts of Heybridge, Maldon East, Bradwell/Tillingham).

Additional to (or as part of the above Pilot Programme) look at opportunities for micro-interventions linked to existing health and wellbeing or social activity: Consider opportunities to fund creative activities where there already gatherings – this could be described as ‘micro creative health interventions’ that could be additional activities at Essex Sheds, Walks for Wellbeing or Community Gaming – all overseen by Maldon & District CVS. A similar approach could be taken to working with local environmental groups and charities. This would be cost effective and easy to mobilise, with a gentle introduction to creative health to participants and the benefits that stem from ongoing programmes that encourage participation over a number of weeks/months (to support evaluation).

Maldon District Partners should continue to engage with the Essex Creative Health Network: This was established to follow on from the Creative Health Mapping Report published in 2025 and funded by Essex CC. Its purpose is to bring different partners together from across the relevant sectors (health, local authority, creative) and work towards embedding creative health practice and projects across the county. There are many benefits to taking part (good practice, insights into partnerships and public health strategy, funding opportunities, evaluation) and all sessions have been attended in preparation of the Culture & Heritage Strategy

Engage with the Social Prescribing Link Workers: Accepting that capacity within the social prescribing system is stretched and it can be difficult for those prescribed to activities (including creative/craft/green etc.), seek to learn what the on-the-ground and hyper-local challenges are when it comes to prescribing activities to improve health and wellbeing (prevention). This can inform the Maldon District approach to creative health development. Where new pilot (or micro) initiatives are established, ensure that there is liaison with the social prescribing link workers.

Evaluate Health Benefits of Existing Activities: Where it is feasible to do so, and where the organisation/group overseeing the activities recognises the value, one way of building up a locally-relevant evidence base of positive health impacts from creative (or heritage) related activities and participation (including volunteering), would be to work with those organisations that are already successfully engaging local people in regular activities and seek to understand the health benefits over a longer-term period. This could feed into a collective evidence base approach referenced above.

10 – Festivals and Events

Introduction – Why is this important to the Culture & Heritage Strategy?

The Maldon District, and in particular Promenade Park, has a good reputation for hosting a range of events and festivals. Culturally this brings interest into the area for communities and attracts 1000s of visitors each year. The sector delivers many different cultural opportunities, as well as sport, heritage, food/drink and community. Festivals and events are important therefore to the District's cultural and social vibrancy, and for supporting the local economy.

Festivals can act to bring people together, perhaps around shared interests in music or heritage, and can stimulate and inspire people to get involved themselves. As with the vast majority of the culture, heritage and environmental sectors in the District, there is significant grassroots support and engagement particularly across rural areas, and even some of the larger events such as the Maldon Mud Race and Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival are volunteer led.

Strategic Reflection

British Arts Festival Association - 'Festivals Forward: Festivals Mean Business 4'

Published in 2024, the 'Festivals Forward: Festivals Mean Business 4' report from the British Arts Festival Association, the key findings make a strong case for the importance of the sector. It found that Festivals in the UK form a vast and diverse ecosystem, spanning everything from major national programmes to tiny hyperlocal celebrations. They are deeply rooted in place with around 40% of audiences travelling less than five miles. As part of the UK's cultural infrastructure, more than 1,000 arts festivals collectively drew over 5.5 million in-person attendances in 2023, many supported by year-round outreach programme. It also reports that the sector is financially fragile despite its scale and impact. In 2023, festivals delivered 11,500 events, showcased 34,000 artists and created 2,700 new works, but average expenditure (£245k) continues to exceed income (£225k), reserves are declining, and costs have risen sharply while ticket sales remain below pre-pandemic levels.

Most festivals operate with extremely lean staffing, typically just three FTEs year-round and rely heavily on volunteers, even as they generate significant cultural, social and economic value. The evidence points to a sector that is 'surviving, not thriving', and warns that without stable investment and a coherent national festivals policy, the UK risks losing many of the hyperlocal cultural assets that underpin community engagement, artist development and local economic vitality. Although Scotland does have a festival strategy, there isn't one for England (or indeed the UK). So it is important for local authorities and their strategic partners to make the case.

Association of Independent Festivals

The Association of Independent Festivals represents the interests of much of the sector, and works to advocate to government, share insights and good practice. It has highlighted a sector under intense pressure, with organisers facing steep rises in core costs such as security, medical provision, power, waste, insurance and infrastructure, alongside growing compliance demands including Martyn's Law and updated drugs and alcohol guidance. The Association has demonstrated how festivals are increasingly exposed to climate-driven weather volatility, requiring far more robust preparedness and resilience planning, while workforce shortages, volunteer burnout and the loss of experienced freelancers continue to undermine capacity. Alongside all of this, over the last decade there have been

expectations for festivals to improve sustainability, accessibility, inclusion and ethical practice, but often without the funding or supply-chain support to deliver these ambitions.

The point is that there remains a reasonably vibrant independent festival and events sector, while at the same time it is becoming vulnerable to increasing challenges and risks – the main ones being ever tighter financial margins (less consumer spend) and increased costs (much associated with health and safety and infrastructure). This has resulted in many festival going under in recent years, or taking a ‘fallow year’ to work on their longer-term sustainability.

East Anglian Festival Network

The East Anglian Festival Network is a subscription based organisation that covers the East of England – Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire. The Network’s role is to share good practice, listing/promotion, and host networking events (including a core networking event in St. Ives Cambridgeshire every year). Engagement with the Network indicates that in 2025 there around 150 fewer events listed in the region than in 2024. Many have scaled back on promotion, taken a ‘fallow year’ or have folded.

Essex Destination Management Plan 2025-30

The Destination Management Plan recognises the importance o festivals and events in the wider tourism and visitor economy mix for Essex.

‘Festivals and events are an important component of Essex CC’s visitor economy. In 2024, there are at least 470 events of various different types planned in the County. Festivals and events are distributed across the study area with a pronounced nucleus in the urban centres.’ – Essex Destination Management Plan 2025-30

Essex Cultural Diversity Project Regional Research

Between 2024 and 2026, Essex Cultural Diversity Project worked with the East Anglian Festival Network and Cultural Engine to look at key trends and issues affecting the festival and events sector – with a focus on small and medium-sized events. The research engaged with over 100 organisers and events and festivals of all sizes.

The research found that there were more events in Essex than other parts of the region with the majority having audiences of either 500 – 2500, or (in more cases) 2,500 to 10,000. Funding festivals was mainly through ticket sales and sponsorship, along with donations and concessions at festivals (food and drink). The importance of public funding (particularly those with 100% public funding) was much lower (with a perception from those engaged in the research that it had declined significantly over the last few years). Public funding did remain important as part of the funding mix however, enabling many festivals to survive and reduce ticket prices (or have no charge at all). This is backed up by the British Arts Festival Association research which shows that only 29% of income was from the public sector in 2023 (although this remains important in the overall mix). The research also found that the majority of organisers stated that if they were to consider public funding, they would require support with this.

Overall the research found that strategic organisations (Arts Council and local authorities) should prioritise support for small and medium-scale festivals and events, which already demonstrate strong local engagement, deep community roots and reliable volunteer capacity, particularly in rural areas

with limited cultural provision. Backing activity at this scale would be affordable and would build on existing town and parish council funding (and other hyper local fundraising) and infrastructure. Given the prevalence of local festivals and events across the Maldon District, these findings are particularly relevant.

BBC Research – Ticket Price Inflation

Recent BBC research (May 2026) found that ticket prices for major UK festivals had risen significantly over the last decade, increasing faster than inflation. Although the Maldon District has no ‘major festivals’ (and many are free), the research points to wider pressures on the sector around costs – staffing and technical labour, infrastructure, security and health and safety, power, transport and production.

Summary of Local Context

The Maldon District, and in particular Promenade Park, has a good reputation for hosting a range of events and festivals. Culturally this brings interest into the area for communities (music, family, thematic programming), and attracts 1000s of visitors each year. However, it is challenging times for the wider events sector and regionally many events (of all sizes) no longer take place. There are many factors relating to this including cost of living, infrastructure and health and safety costs and changing leisure and cultural habits. Maldon sits in an Essex context with ‘competition’ from Chelmsford, Colchester and Southend, and there is an increasing trend towards major national/international players dominating the market which could threaten the viability of independent promoters and festival organisers (who would tend to be interested in Maldon). Commercial viability is therefore an ongoing challenge, and something that MDC should be aware of if there remains an ambition particularly for larger music-focused festivals and events in Maldon.

Colchester has become a particular hotspot for larger music events over the last few years, particularly the Colchester Castle Summer Series, which for 2026 will see major acts including Bastille, Fat Boy Slim, Richard Ashcroft and Billy Ocean playing to large crowds. Other events in locations such as Chelmsford City Racecourse, Hylands Park as well as in Southend mean there is an increasingly busy summer calendar for those interested in these kinds of events from across Essex and beyond. For the Maldon District the situation appears healthy with major events such as Soutasia still taking place, as well as many smaller events throughout the year.

MDC Events and Concessions Strategy (2023-28)

The Vision for the Strategy is ‘For the Maldon District to become one of the top coastal destinations in Essex for events and concessions, providing exciting and enjoyable experiences.’ Published in 2023 it was intended to guide the MDC approach to working with festival and event organisers, as well as articulating the strategic and operational reasons why MDC takes a proactive approach. It is primarily focused on land owned by MDC (in reality the main focus is Promenade Park), although there are references to Riverside Park in Burnham-on-Crouch.

The two main drivers for MDC in relation to festivals and events can be summarised as aiming to generate an income to MDC of around £80,000 a year (primarily through Promenade Park), and to support cultural and civic interest and development and experiences through events that have a civic importance, events that promote Maldon District regionally, nationally, or internationally, and events that are of wide-ranging interest. There is also a recognition that temporary concessions (mainly food

and drink related and often – although not exclusively associated with festivals and events) can present opportunities to increase visitor number and spend within the local community.

Given the relatively healthy situation regarding the range of events taking place at Promenade Park, and the good working relationship that MDC has with organisers, the Strategy appears to have been a success. However, reviews are necessary (as the Strategy recognises), and with the advent of the ‘regenerative tourism’ concept for the Saltmarsh Coast and an ever changing (and competitive) environment for the sector, as well as the decision to underwrite the ‘special event’ in 2027 – the Strategy should be reviewed to consider anew the role of events and festivals in particular for 2027 onwards (and into Mid Essex).

The renewed strategy might also include consideration of how Riverside Park in Burnham-on-Crouch, which is also owned by MDC, might see investment in infrastructure that would enable it to be utilised more often than it currently is for events. Despite being close to a train station, the Park is poorly utilised for cultural and social gatherings compared to Promenade Park in Maldon. Engagement with the Town Council and other local stakeholders would be necessary.

Value of Festivals and Events

The importance of Festivals and Events to the wider economy is often a key factor referenced when it comes to local authorities and organisers making the case to stage them (particularly where they are in public spaces). This has recently been picked up by Colchester Amphora (who have a contract to support events with Maldon District Council), with a report finding that the wider events programme was worth £23.9m in 2024-25, including Castle Summer Park Series and the programme in Charter Hall. The reference is the value of overnight stays from visitors from outside of the city, and the positive impact on the local economy through retail, hospitality and transport spending. The report also recognised the wider positive impact on wellbeing, civic pride and social connectivity, as well as the skills development opportunities. Colchester is a much larger place and economy with a well-developed overnight stay offer, but the key issue of wider spend in the area around festivals and events is relevant.

Nationally, a recently published reports entitled ‘The Value of the UK Outdoor Events Sector’ by the trade body The Power of Events (April 2026) found that events tend to generate far more economic value than can be seen in the organisers own accounts. Essentially every ‘*pound of ticket income, sponsorship or grant triggers roughly another £1.50–£2.80 in spending by visitors, suppliers and staff - and in many cases much more. Understanding that gap is the foundation of any credible advocacy for the sector. This means that the sector’s total economic impact could be as much as £50billion.*’

Locally the case has been made by MDC that there is a significant economic impact from events and festivals in the District (primarily Promenade Park), presented in a ‘Special Event Performance Funding’ report in 2025 (later considered in March 2026 – see below). The case was based on the Economic Impact of Tourism 2024 for the Maldon District which uses the well-established Cambridge Economic Impact Model to provide figures for local authority areas. The report indicates that the Soutasia event in June 2024 could have generated up to £842,886 additional spend in the local economy based on a mix of local and visiting (staying) audiences. Whatever the actual figure, the key issue is that festivals and events are important as part of the cultural and social offer for the District, and that there is a wider economic benefit that justifies MDC taking a proactive approach (and in some cases co-investing).

Special Events Support – Maldon District Council

In March 2026 MDC agreed to contribute funding to support a ‘Special Events Performance’ demonstrating willingness not only to take a proactive approach to engaging with and working with festival promoters, but also (in certain circumstances) to invest financially where there are opportunities to test new models. For example commercial/public partnership models and/or supporting particularly cultural opportunities that are relevant to the Maldon-context. It will be important for the Maldon District to be competitive and attractive to investment in the sector, as well as supporting local and community-focused programming, so this kind of approach to investing (or underwriting) in partnership with commercial promoters suggests a potential way forward for the District (albeit expecting to get the investment back from ticket sales). The partnership was proposed with Soutasia which has been drawing large audiences to the District, with the opportunity to generate more visitor spend in the local area (and parking fees).

Summary of the events in Maldon District

There are a wide range of events and festivals that take place across the year in the District. This offers something for everyone, particularly in Maldon (although accessibility from more rural areas is a challenge).

The three ‘core festivals’ that will be directly overseen by the new Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC are the Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival, Maldon Festival and Heritage Open Days (including looking to develop beyond Maldon Town). The Walking Festival in particular is now well established and has been supported by MDC as well as dedicated volunteers who have led the development of guided and self-guided walks, engaged with businesses, recruited guides and undertaken promotion and partnership development. The Maldon Festival secured some investment from the Essex CC Arts & Cultural Fund for 2026, primarily to support scaling up to support the multi-arts programme to become sustainable, play a key role in promoting local talent (as well as drawing in talent from across the UK and abroad), and encourage exploration of the wider area by visitors and residents.

Across 2026, a wide range of locally organised festivals and events are taking place in the District, including Ashfest in Asheldham (invite-only but with a quality programme), the volunteer-run Burnham Carnival, the Little Totham Village Fete (June), the Mundon Summer Fete (September), the Tillingham Flower Show (July) with a full programme of activities, the returning TollesFest in Tollesbury, and the Tolleshunt Major Summer Fair (May) organised by the St Nicholas Village Hall Committee, as well as the Langford and Ulting Country Fayre & Classic Car Show (July) hosted at the Museum of Power.

Taken together, the majority of festivals and events across the District are delivered by hyperlocal groups - often informal and volunteer-led - with support from Parish Councils, which in many cases involve the same community members. This network of small-scale organisers forms an important part of the District’s cultural and social infrastructure, sustaining regular activity and community participation throughout the year.

It is also worth noting that there are events that have taken place in the recent past that are no longer happening – mirroring broader national trends and challenges for the sector at all scales. This includes Wibblefest in Southminster (was organised by the brewery), Purleigh Village Fete (having a year off due to capacity and funding challenges), Heybridge Summer Fayre, Tolleshunt D’Arcy Village Fete (no one

has come forward to support the organisation), Wickham Bishops Summer Fair and Bell Meadow Day in Woodham Walter (used to take place every two years).

Larger (mainly commercial) events taking place in 2026 include Maldon Mud Race (May), Soultasia (June), Smoke & Fire (August), and UFest (August) which promotes community initiatives and organisations and is organised by MDC (not commercial), Colourscape (August) and the Nearly Festival (September) which specialises in tribute bands.

Burnham Week

Burnham Week remains a key date in the cultural and social calendar for the District and for Burnham-on-Crouch in particular. Managed by a separate company (Burnham Week Ltd), it represents a successful long-term partnership between the Royal Corinthian Yacht Club, the three other sailing clubs in Burnham-on-Crouch and Creeksea Sailing Club. Anecdotally it appears that the Week attracts fewer visitors than a few years ago due to changing social habits, with yachting visitors and visiting fleets less likely to spend the whole week in the area (with the knock-on impact on local businesses). Historically Burnham Week was seen as the last major regatta of the year, with boats mud birthing and staying for the week. However, there have also been environmental changes that has seen the river silting up meaning there isn't the depth required for many of the boats.

The Town Council host Quay Day (which is organised separately from the core Burnham Week – although there is close liaison) and other events around the core week and are keen to see more cultural programming as part of this, engaging existing and new visitors to the area. This could include more heritage walks and events, maritime history (and developing Pirate Day). A collaborative focus including all partners involved in Burnham Week and associated programming should work together to ensure the sustainability and increase the cultural and heritage elements.

Given the historic importance of Burnham Week and the importance of local businesses and the wider visitor economy (particularly important in this part of the District), as well as the opportunities that are being led by Burnham-on-Crouch Town Council to develop additional events and cultural programming around the Week; every effort should be made to support both the core Week and the wider programme.

Culture and Heritage Strategy Survey

Of those responding to the strategy survey the majority attended local festivals or events, with 30% stating 'regularly' and 40% stating 'sometimes'. There was strong interest in the District hosting more 'Heritage exhibitions or events' (61%) along with 'Live Events and Festivals (41%)'. This demonstrates that heritage is a key interest across the District and the perception that more could be done to celebrate it.

Festivals and Events Gathering – April 2026

The gathering brought a number of festival and events organisers together for the first time to discuss common issues and identify some challenges that might be highlighted through the Culture and Heritage Strategy and addressed through collaboration. Prior to the Gathering in April 2026, there had been a focused discussion on the Events and Festival Sector at the Regenerative Tourism Launch event in March 2026. The headline issues from this were focused on issues relating to ensuring that there is a more collaborative and 'joined up' approach to marketing events (and ensuring this feeds in to broader place marketing), exploring opportunities to share data and information across different events and

organisers, and accessibility and transport challenges. Health & Safety was also flagged (particularly relating to Martyn's Law), as well as a recognised need to attract younger audiences to local events (age profile of many is older).

These were also key issues identified at the gathering in April, with a particular focus on Health & Safety and Martyn's Law and the potential impact this might have on event organisers, planning, securing and cost (particularly for smaller events who rely upon volunteers who may not want to take legal responsibility). It was suggested that MDC (or in time the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC) could offer more direct support on health and safety, for example offering briefings, talks and good practice examples to support local organisations when developing their plans. It was also proposed that technical equipment could be shared between smaller events to reduce costs. There was also a strong desire to continue the Network approach for the whole District, with the opportunity to share insights and information. This should therefore continue and eventually should form the new Regenerative Tourism Steering Group that will feed into the Regenerative Tourism strategy and the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC).

Another issue was the apparent lack of young people with the necessary skills and experience who can work (or volunteer) on local festivals and events – part of a wider discussion around skills needs for the sector more generally. It was proposed that a 'pipeline' programme be coordinated between organisers to give young people a chance to develop skills and confidence (which can then build the resilience of the sector long-term – as well as being inherently 'regenerative').

Regenerative Festivals and Events

The wider 'regenerative' concept is important for Festivals and Events in the District, as there obvious economic, social and cultural benefits from successful events, festivals and gatherings. To this might also be added opportunities for local artists and practitioners to develop their profile, audiences and confidence, encouraging ever more collaboration with local suppliers of food/drink and infrastructure, and working to support local charities and groups through fundraising and giving them a platform. There will always need to be a balance however between wider benefits and commercial viability, as without commercial viability there cannot be wider benefits.

Some existing events that take place in Promenade Park do have clear links to the concept of 'regenerative', most obviously the Biodiversity & Regenerative Food Festival which takes place in May in Promenade Park (as well as other locations across Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Kent). This was a popular event and attracted local suppliers and environmental groups. The Maldon Mud Race is a major locally organised event that is totally rooted in the local context. The Mud Race attracts large crowds (and many competitors) and raises significant income for charities. This a good example of a locally-relevant and potentially 'regenerative' event that is rooted in the local area and context, contributes to the local economy (and charities) and puts the District on the map.

Actions

Produce an updated Events and Concessions Strategy that reflects not only the regenerative principles but also considering the role of MDC in investing where there are particular opportunities to do so. A greater focus on Burnham-on-Crouch and Riverside Park in particular where far fewer events take place than at Promenade Park. Eventually this strategic approach could be overseen by the new

Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC and/or Mid Essex unitary authority; but taking action now to support this process is important.

A ‘Regenerative Festivals and Events Charter’ – Notwithstanding the commercial challenges for the events sector, a regenerative approach would aim to support more spend in the local area (encouraging broader exploration by visitors), increase volunteering, giving local suppliers of locally distinct products a chance to supply events (improve the Saltmarsh Coast brand), and (perhaps most importantly for this strategy – identify ways of platforming local creative talent at larger events. This process could be overseen by the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC (and informed by the Steering Group for Festivals and Events).

Continue efforts to develop a Network for the Festival and Events sector in the Maldon District – Build on work that has taken place through the strategy development to ensure there are opportunities for those organising events and festivals (whether commercial or voluntary) to get together, engage with MDC, share experience, good practice and insight (and potentially infrastructure/kit where appropriate), and have briefings and information sessions on important issues relating to legislation, health and safety, volunteering etc. There might also be a focus on developing a coordinated approach to developing a ‘pipeline’ of local talent that could give young people the chance to develop skills and confidence in technical skills relating to events and festivals. The Network can become the new Steering Group for Festivals and Events identified as important to inform the work of the Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC.

11 – Volunteering

Introduction – Why is this important to the Culture & Heritage Strategy?

Given the importance of grassroots organisations and groups across the District, the majority of which are supported by or entirely run by volunteers, there is a need to recognise this strategically. Nationally there are challenges related to volunteering that the Maldon District is not immune to. Anecdotally across the District many organisations are finding that people who may once have volunteered (either formally or for specific events) are no longer able to do so. Time is a key factor – not only in the sense that people appear to have less free time to volunteer for local organisations and initiatives, but also in the sense that time is of the essence when it comes to really understanding the issues relating to volunteering in Maldon - and working collaboratively to do something about it. So much that we value and need relies upon it.

All organisations engaged in the research for the strategy do have their own approaches to recruiting volunteers, and many remain very successful at this. However, the subject is one that often dominates discussions about the future sustainability of organisations and groups, with a heavy reliance upon older people in particular. Whilst Maldon District has an aging population (older on average than Brentwood and Chelmsford for example), this doesn't appear to automatically translate to increased rates of volunteering. Relying upon previous trends that have seen older people (retired people) stepping into volunteering roles isn't necessarily an appropriate strategy any more.

The key organisation for volunteering in the District is Maldon & District CVS, and they have been proactive in supporting work on the Culture & Heritage Strategy through collaborating on exploring the increasing relevance of creative and neighbourhood health to the District (with a strong emphasis on taking part and volunteering).

Strategic Reflection

'Volunteering with heritage projects and activities is a powerful way to boost self-esteem and develop a sense of purpose. Whether restoring historic sites, leading guided tours, or archiving local history, volunteers gain valuable skills while contributing to something meaningful. Engaging with others in shared tasks fosters social connection, combats loneliness and enhances overall wellbeing' (National Academy for Social Prescribing Website 2026)

There is a heavy reliance upon volunteers (and particularly volunteers from older age groups across) across the Maldon District, and this relates to the voluntary and community sectors as a whole and particularly (in the context of this strategy) heritage and environment. The grassroots nature of virtually all cultural, heritage and environmental groups and organisations means that volunteering matters for the future of these sectors. Reflecting on some national research and strategic approaches can help frame the approach locally.

Historic England's published 'Opportunities and Benefits of Heritage for Young People' (part of the Heritage Count series) in 2023 considers national research, demonstrating that young people are far more likely to engage with volunteering opportunities when they are hands-on, social and connected to issues they care about – for example nature. Evidence shows that early involvement in heritage

builds confidence, skills, wellbeing and a stronger sense of belonging, while giving young people a voice in shaping the places they live. For the Maldon District with its rich maritime, coastal and cultural traditions, this means creating supported pathways for young people to take part in storytelling, conservation, festivals, volunteering, environmental projects and digital interpretation.

The National Academy for Social Prescribing has resources online that share examples of projects that link to local heritage – for example the ‘Heritage Connectors: bringing social prescribing to the heart of Frome’s heritage’ which helped people in the town of Frome (Somerset) to get involved with local history and culture through informal social prescribing, recognising the physical and mental wellbeing benefits.

In terms of health benefits (explored more in the Health & Wellbeing Section of this report), Historic England’s ‘The Benefits of Volunteering’ (part of the Heritage Counts series 2023) shows that heritage volunteering has clear health and wellbeing benefits, with volunteers reporting improved mental wellbeing, reduced loneliness and higher life satisfaction. This is linked to confidence improvements, strengthened social connections and a sense of making a meaningful contribution to local places.

Whilst it is clear that volunteering has health benefits for those taking part, as well as clear benefits from the volunteering capacity for the organisations and groups, there are wider societal considerations to consider when it comes to developing local strategies. The power of social connections and the ability to affect positive change are important considerations that can have lasting impact on social cohesion, addressing some of the issues explored in the Government’s ‘Protecting What Matters’ Policy Paper (April 2026). The Paper highlights rising pressures on social cohesion nationally, including increasing polarisation, declining trust, and communities feeling less connected and resilient in the face of social and economic change. It argues that improving cohesion requires strengthening local relationships, tackling hate and extremism, investing in community infrastructure, and empowering local actors to build shared belonging and confidence across neighbourhoods. Increasing volunteering rates and opportunities at a local level could be part of a response to these challenges, as this can bring people together for public good and increase real (in person) social connections.

There are similar challenges articulated through the ongoing National Conversation – part of the Independent Commission on Community Cohesion - which states that – *‘Something has shifted in how people experience community life. Trust feels more fragile. Connections that once held neighbourhoods together – the school gates, the high street, the local pub, the place of worship – are harder to find in many places. And too many people feel that nobody is asking what they think about it.’* This is in part informed by the British Future Report (2025) ‘The State of Us: Community Strength and Cohesion in the UK’ which recognised ‘.....a decline in formal volunteering in recent years, with 16% of people offering their time to formally constituted organisations in 2023-24, compared with 35% in 2013-14’. The report also states ‘Volunteering helps to build bridging and linking social capital, which drives cohesion. In turn, cohesive societies encourage further volunteering’. This relates to the concept of ‘community empowerment’ that is explored elsewhere in this strategy document (and is also closely linked to local government reorganisation).

The survey undertaken to support the Culture & Heritage strategy asked the question ‘Do you feel you have the power, influence or ability to start something in your area?’ – with 45% answering ‘No’ and a further 28% answering ‘Some (but not a great deal)’. Those responding to the survey were of an older

age group and apparently reasonably well engaged with activities or their community. So learning from national research and local examples (explored below), strategies are definitely required to mobilise communities, with a coherent approach to volunteering one of the opportunities.

There is a need to shift the primary focus on volunteering from the capacity that volunteers provide, and focus additionally on the positive impacts for individuals and wider society. This is not an either/or situation – this strengthens the opportunities to put volunteering at the centre of wider policy and processes, linking to health and wellbeing, social cohesion and economic development for example. This shift in focus is recognised in the ‘Transformative Volunteering 2024-27’ report by the Heritage Volunteering Group *‘[volunteering]..can provide human connections and sever the chains of social isolation, it can give people new skills and pathways to employment and can provide a space for people from all walks of life to come together.’*

There are some good local examples of volunteering approaches that are linked to heritage, for example the Knowsley Heritage Grants Programme. A report into this programme found that it worked well because organisations invested in the infrastructure that makes volunteering possible: coordination, brokerage, training and small, flexible grants that helped groups design inclusive roles and remove barriers. This focused support turned interest into sustained participation, showing that enthusiasm alone isn’t enough without the systems that help volunteers feel confident, prepared and welcomed. Partnerships and peer-learning networks strengthened the sector further, giving groups space to share knowledge, build confidence and collaborate beyond individual projects. By embedding quality standards and securing follow-on funding, the programme created long-term capacity and a more resilient ecosystem for volunteering in the heritage sector.

Elsewhere in this strategy the concept of Neighbourhood Health is explored and the opportunities for community and voluntary organisations to play a key role in delivering health outcomes through a range of programmes is clearly there and needs to be recognised strategically. Concepts including creative health form a core part of this, and volunteering clearly has a role to play in relation to health as well as social outcomes. The Neighbourhood Health Plans that cover the Maldon District area will provide an opportunity for these issues to be explored and wider partners (across the Community and Voluntary sectors) recognised as playing a key role.

Related to health and wellbeing, the Essex Caring Communities Commission report recognises the importance of volunteering to civil society and social infrastructure, referencing the many people across Essex who contribute formally and informally through many different routes. There is a recognition that this kind of activity is not peripheral but a major driver of wellbeing, social connection, safety and resilience. Volunteering is also presented as a critical economic asset, with national data showing its enormous financial value and its role in reducing demand on overstretched public services.

‘...success in generating large scale volunteering by (1) generating a purpose for volunteering that is exciting and galvanising, (2) creating attractive volunteering roles with organisational structure to support those roles, (3) communicating volunteering opportunities in a way that reaches and engages people not currently doing volunteering.’ (Essex Caring Communities Report)

Summary of Local Context

The key theme of 'grassroots' upon which so many of the District's heritage, environmental and cultural movements and organisation rely upon is inextricably linked to the ongoing challenge of recruiting and retaining volunteers. There is a heavy reliance upon volunteers who work hard throughout the year to ensure that historic assets are maintained and heritage interpreted, community activities delivered.

According to a study commissioned by Essex Community Foundation and published in 2023 ('The Structure, dynamics and impact of the Third Sector in Essex'), the Maldon District has a very high percentage (41.1%) of voluntary and community sector organisations who are classed as 'Micro' – meaning they have a turnover of less than £10,000. For 'Small' (between £10,000 and £49,000) it is 38.2%. This is higher than many other Districts/Boroughs in Essex and demonstrates how resilience of the sector will be an ongoing challenge – relating to both volunteers and funding.

61% of those who responded to the survey to support this strategy stated that they did volunteer in the District, with a further 14% outside of the District. Respondents to the survey were overwhelmingly from older age groups. What the survey does highlight is that it is very much older individuals who provide the majority of volunteers, and this is backed up by research with groups across the District. This is largely because they have time to volunteer and very often have important skills that are needed. Of those that didn't volunteer it was a lack of free time that was the limiting factor (38%).

What emerges consistently however from across the heritage sector in particular, is the need to secure more (and younger) volunteers. Evidence nationally and locally shows that this is more likely to happen when there is clarity on roles being offered, support provided and the opportunities for people to see how they can expand their skillsets and CVs. This is not easy for organisations or groups that are themselves largely based on volunteer input or very restricted staff capacity, so a collaborative and strategic approach is probably required.

Nationally, youth unemployment has risen in recent years, with around one in six young people out of work and persistent concerns about the number of 16-24-year-olds who are NEET (not in education, employment or training). Former government minister Alan Milburn's work on social mobility highlights how NEET status can have long-term impacts on life chances, reinforcing the need for early intervention, skills development and meaningful opportunities for young people. Although Maldon District's overall unemployment rate is lower than both Essex and UK averages, the underlying issues remain relevant. The aim should be to ensure young people in Maldon can access locally rooted opportunities - particularly through heritage, culture and environmental participation - which can build confidence, skills and stronger pathways into work.

Volunteering opportunities are posted on to the Maldon & District CVS site, and this includes roles with local heritage organisations (for example Maldon Museum in the Park or Thames Sailing Barge Trust). The Thames Sailing Barge Trust is a good example of an entirely voluntary organisation with a very successful record of recruitment and training of volunteers for many different roles. At any one time they have around 100 with 40 involved in activities on a regular basis. The support given to those are keen to participate is impressive, with roles as skippers and many other technical and craft roles available. There is a similar situation at Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome where they have a dedicated and highly skills pool of volunteers who work on a wide range of projects (with over 33,000 volunteer hours each year).

Maldon & District CVS, as well as playing a District-wide role to support volunteering also have 80 volunteers who work on a range of local projects. This includes supporting the Essex Shed Network which is itself an excellent volunteer-led system (there are two in the Maldon District).

One thing in common with these good examples is that it is very clear at the beginning what the offer is for volunteers. There is a clear training and support programme and a well set out roles that enable people to see what they will be doing and achieving.

The Combined Military Service Museum has a core team of volunteers and this does include younger people who are given the support to build their confidence and skills, with some of them going on to get jobs in the heritage and community sectors.

The Museum of Power has two members of staff with all other roles covered by a team of committed volunteers. This is crucially important for the functioning of the museum and the success of the volunteering operation is down to a number of factors – most importantly the ongoing support of the staff and the way that volunteering opportunities are offered. The roles are clearly set out with the skills required and opportunities for personal development, being creative, social connections and even drink coupons! Opportunities that are clearly set out for would-be volunteers include Front of House, Learning (supporting school visits) and Events.

The majority of village halls are run by volunteers, and given the rural nature of the District this is a vital network that relies upon dedicated local capacity to function. Very active spaces in the District including Goldhanger Village Hall, Tillingham Village Hall and The Centre Tollesbury are all volunteer run. Tollesbury in particular has some very skilled technicians who support events and screenings, including National Theatres Live.

Despite the efforts of Maldon & District CVS to promote volunteering opportunities and offer some support to the wider sector, there is no direct funding from Essex CC or any other sources to support volunteering initiatives or infrastructure. Small pots of funding had been in place up to 2024, but this is no longer the case.

Actions

Strategic approach to volunteering: Some organisations do very well and have excellent numbers of skilled volunteers. Others struggle to secure new volunteer capacity. Given how significant the reliance upon volunteers is for so many of the organisations/groups across the District who work on culture, heritage and environment - the situation is precarious and needs a greater collaborative focus. This could be supported by Maldon & District CVS (who already support volunteering initiatives in the District but are not currently funded to support volunteering infrastructure). This would require a considered analysis at the needs of local groups, the skills and capacity requirements, development of volunteer sharing strategies (if appropriate), and a coordinated training / support programme. Could be linked to wider 'community empowerment' concepts and recognise the particular context of the Maldon District (i.e. the needs locally may be different from other parts of Essex).

12 – Pubs and Bars

Introduction – Why is this important to the Culture & Heritage Strategy?

Pubs and bars have been a high-profile news story for a number of years, appearing to capture a sense of national concern over their future as both local community assets and something linked to a sense of national identity. Pubs sit in a complex policy context which means they are perhaps difficult to place in terms of national or local programmes of support. They are centres for social interaction for communities while also contributing strongly to the local tourism and visitor economy. Pubs offer employment and skills development opportunities and can underpin community resilience through the potential to offer other services. They can be part of the local supply chain supporting the local food, drink and rural economy, and – importantly for this strategy - they are also very often part of the local cultural scene providing host to music, cultural and social events. Many are listed and much-valued heritage assets that contribute to a strong and distinct heritage and sense of local distinctiveness. Some have become community-owned and managed, creating opportunities for local collaboration across communities increasing social capital and a local stake in the rural economy.

Strategic Reflection

Pubs across the UK are under intense pressure from a tax system that many in the sector argue is fundamentally unbalanced in favour of other sectors (retail or online businesses). There are combined challenges around business rates, VAT and National Insurance (and National Minimum Wage).

Over the past year, several national campaigns have highlighted the mounting pressures facing pubs in the UK, driven by rising costs, energy prices, supply-chain inflation and a tax system that sector bodies argue disproportionately affects hospitality. Campaigns such as Hands Off Our Pubs (HOOP) have grown rapidly from local activism into national movements calling for urgent government intervention on business rates, VAT reform and protections against large-scale closures, as reports show multiple pubs shutting doors permanently across the country. Alongside this, organisations like the British Beer & Pub Association, the Campaign for Pubs and the British Institute of Innkeeping have been campaigning for fairer taxation, support with energy bills and planning protections to prevent viable pubs being lost to redevelopment. Together, these campaigns argue that pubs are essential social infrastructure, central to community cohesion and local identity, and that without stronger national action, all pubs, including independent and community-run pubs will struggle to survive.

The *Telegraph* has run one of the most vocal national campaigns, Save Our Pubs, highlighting the rapid rate of closures - often more than one or two a day - and framing pubs as essential community assets under threat from rising taxes, energy bills and regulatory pressures. It launched a National Pub Day to rally public support and repeatedly argued that government policy must change to prevent the loss of Britain's 'local social infrastructure.'

National programmes including The Pub is the Hub have provided support over many years to pubs wanting to diversify their business model and develop additional services. The Purleigh Bell secured funding in 2014 and received a visit from the then Prince Charles (Charles III) who founded the Pub is the Hub in 2001. The Purleigh Bell was able to increase their focus on cultural programming and exhibitions is a key feature of their success today. The Pub is the Hub was founded partly to address the 'unprecedented challenges' facing rural communities and ways of life, also stated that the current

situation relating to the pub sector was like to result in ‘thousands of vital job losses that will be devastating for communities across the country’.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill (which is also the legislation for local government reorganisation) will strengthen the process through which communities can move to purchase and take over local assets including pubs and local shops if they come up for sale and are at risk of closure. The ‘Community Right to Buy’ element of the legislation replaces the previous ‘right to bid’, with an increased timescale for communities to raise the necessary funding to purchase a registered Asset of Community Value (ACV) – up from 6 months to 12 months. The ‘Community Right to Buy’ listing will also be for 10 years (up from the current 5 years). The process of purchasing and taking over a local pub by the community is not an easy process, but it is increasingly common across the UK, with many examples across the East of England.

In Essex, Uttlesford District Council developed a pubs engagement and funding programme in 2025 which recognised the unique role pubs and bars play in the local community - economically, socially and culturally - as well as the challenging conditions in which they are operating - rising energy costs, particularly for older buildings, alcohol taxes, rent, staff retention and keeping up with social media promotion and website updates. The grant scheme (funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund) supported pubs and bars to carry out energy efficiency measures, trial new community initiatives and offered support for social media and website promotion (which can be crucial for attracting new customers and for wider place promotion).

The University of Northumbria have undertaken research investigating the importance of pubs to communities and ‘social capital’, as well as the impacts of pubs on rates of crime. Although the focus wasn’t cultural or heritage related, there are some interesting points that put the pub in an important position socially and culturally, particularly in rural area. The research found that the disappearance of public houses is inseparably linked to other institutions and traditions which have drifted away, such as post offices and organised activities. When there is a pub at the heart of communities there were more community events, suggesting that the very existence of a pub promoted local activity, especially when operating in tandem with other ‘third places’ such as village halls.

Summary of Local Context

Pubs remain important assets in the majority of the District’s parishes, albeit there have been many closures over the years (mirroring national trends). Research shows there are at least 65 pubs across the District, with well over half hosting fairly regular cultural and social events including live music. This includes pubs in the majority of the parishes which is important as often there are few other businesses or social spaces.

Many of the District’s pubs are ‘free houses’, meaning that they are independent (i.e. not owned by a large regional or national pub company), and this affords some freedom in terms of the beer and food offer and for events. The Norton Pub in Cold Norton is community-owned, one of an increasing number of pubs that have been taken over by the community in the UK (not a simple undertaking). With the proposed strengthening of the legislation around the ‘right to buy’ local assets, there could be opportunities for this kind of direct community action where pubs are at risk of closure elsewhere in the District.

Some of the bars are linked to local breweries including Wibblers (Southminster) and Datum Attitude (Heybridge). Datum Attitude is located in a small industrial area in Heybridge and holds regular music events with local artists as well as art exhibitions. Independent breweries add interest to the area for communities and visitors (Datum is very popular with local communities around Heybridge). The Blackwater Brewing Company is based in Steeple and runs the Star at Steeple pub which host events including music and food related.

The Purleigh Bell has a very strong cultural/arts programme with a dedicated exhibition space with opportunities for local (and in some cases) international artists to show their work, as well as cultural and craft activities. The Purleigh Bell is very much an outlier in that it is recognised as an important cultural and arts space, taking its programming seriously and attracting interest nationally and internationally.

Many other pubs across the District act as key social and community infrastructure, organising events. The Hurdlemakers Arms in Hazeleigh runs a major fete and beer festival; the Swan in Little Totham leads the village car show and fete; the Beckingham Bell in Tolleshunt Major animates the village green with regular events including the Summer Fair and a monthly farmers' market. The Bell in Woodham Walter helps deliver Bell Meadow Day with the Parish Council, while the Jolly Sailor in Heybridge Basin hosts the monthly Basin Waterside Market. A number of pubs put on gigs and open mic nights all year round for bands and solo musicians. This includes The Kings Head (Tollesbury), The Station Arms (Southminster), The Ferry Boat Inn (North Fambridge), Hardys Bar (Mayland), The Muddy Duck, Hemlocks (Maldon), The Swan (Little Totham), The New Welcome Sailor, The Anchor, The Queens Head and The Victoria Inn (Burnham)

Two pubs have won National Pub of the Year – The Cap and Feathers in Tillingham (1989) and The Swan in Little Totham (2002 and 2005). This means the Maldon District is out on its own nationally in terms of winners.

The Maldon District Council Asset of Community Value register has pubs listed, demonstrating the importance to the local area – The Chequers (Goldhanger), Queen Victoria (Woodham Walter), The Cricketers (Bradwell-on-Sea), Olio at The Chequers (Wickham Bishops).

Pubs also feature on the many routes that are promoted through the Saltmarsh Coast Walking Festival including 'Bradwell Pirates and Pubs', 'Burnham-on-Crouch to Southminster' and 'North Fambridge Seawall Stroll'. This highlights the importance of pubs to the visitor economy and sense of place.

Actions

Pub Engagement: Given the national coverage of challenges facing pubs and bars across the UK, and the importance of these businesses and social spaces to local communities across the District (and particularly in rural areas), specific engagement with the sector to identify and understand particular issues and challenges is recommended. Pubs are important cultural spaces as evidenced by how many regularly programme events of many different kinds (including music). Also to encourage pubs to look at national programmes (Pub is the Hub for example), and liaise with MDC to feed into economic and tourism development, and any advocacy that MDC and/or the new Saltmarsh Coast Tourism Group CIC can play strategically (Mid Essex/Mayoral Authority).

Music and Culture Offer for Pubs: Given how many pubs offer opportunities for musicians, it could be possible to offer mini tours to touring national bands, diarising dates between pubs and offering between 5 and 10 dates over a short period of time. This kind of offer might be attractive to larger bands across genres.

13 – Libraries

Introduction – Why is this important to the Culture & Heritage Strategy?

Libraries are important educational, social and cultural spaces, and their role has evolved considerably over the last couple of decades to include a wide range of information, advice, services and events. Ultimately, for culture and heritage development in any part of the UK, libraries have a key role to play, and this is certainly the case in the Maldon District with many good collaborative examples to learn and take inspiration from.

Strategic Reflection

‘We see libraries as sitting at the heart of creative, collaborative, culturally vibrant communities - We also acknowledge and appreciate the work that libraries deliver that extends outward from their core offer of culture and creativity – particularly in the field of creative health and wellbeing. We believe that whoever leads on national development for libraries in future must recognise, support and champion their unique contribution to the cultural life of our country and the creative life of citizens and communities.’ (Arts Council England Response to Hodge Review March 2026)

Arts Council England (ACE) has been the national development agency for libraries for the last ten years. This has been undertaken through various schemes and initiatives including through targeted funding programmes such as the Libraries Improvement Fund and opening up opportunities for library services to become National Portfolio Organisations (which would increase their engagement with cultural sectors).

Local Government Reorganisation (lgr) will likely have an impact on the future management and strategic direction of libraries. This was reflected in the ‘Essex Libraries – Better Together’ campaign for example that sought to gain clarity on the oversight of what is currently a coherent library service for Essex managed by Essex CC (currently unresolved).

A report produced by University of East Anglia (UEA) in 2023 focusing on the East of England’s libraries – ‘Libraries for Living and For Living Better’ suggested that library services across England can generate social benefits to their communities to a value of at least £3.4bn per year. This relates not only to their core roles but also to their role supporting digital inclusion, health and wellbeing and targeted initiatives around children’s literacy. Libraries very often hold a range of community outreach programmes (health, digital, literacy, mental health etc.), as well as cultural, heritage and community events (this can depend upon having space).

Libraries can also be important for supporting the local creative ecology of places. Research published in 2024 by Libraries Connected (‘Public Libraries and the Creative Industries’) explored how *‘public libraries play a significant but often overlooked role in the UK’s creative industries, providing free cultural access, supporting diverse audiences, and acting as hubs for skills development’*. There is a specific reference to ‘makerspaces’ which offer collaborative space for creative and technical projects, with technical kit available (3-D Printers for example) and support for skills development. Ipswich libraries is a good example of this.

The Libraries Connected report shows how libraries can broker partnerships, host cultural programming, and deliver digital and creative learning, illustrated through case studies from Wakefield, Merton, Gloucestershire, Barnsley, Leeds and Coventry. The briefing argues that libraries should be recognised within national and local cultural strategies, included in cultural infrastructure planning, and given equitable access to arts funding, positioning them as essential civic assets within the wider creative economy.

The Culture Nature England (CNE) programme overseen by Natural England is another example of the importance of libraries as connector and collaborative spaces that facilitate engagement on key issues.

'...CNE reimagines public libraries as gateways to nature, creativity, health, and community resilience. At its heart, the programme aims to inspire more people to care about and connect with nature - especially those who may not typically engage with it. Delivered in partnership with Libraries Connected, CNE is bringing this vision to life through practical, community-led projects that strengthen both people and places.' (DCMS October 2025 – Collaboration is the Key – Public Libraries as Gateways to Nature)

A number of case studies relating to CNE explored how libraries can act as *'trusted, inclusive civic spaces that bridge people, nature and community partners, using collaboration to widen access, build confidence and strengthen place-based resilience.'*

Summary of Local Context

There are four libraries in the Maldon District – Burnham-on-Crouch, Maldon, Wickham Bishops and Southminster. Only Maldon Library is open five days a week (closed Wednesday), and some communities to the east of the District may well access Witham and Chelmsford libraries.

According to data from the DCMS and Arts Council England Participation Survey, 25.49% of people living in the Maldon District had visited a library in the last 12 months. This is only slightly lower than the regional or national average. While people will have visited for many different reasons, it does demonstrate the potential reach that libraries have to a large proportion of the population. However, given the rural nature of the District and the fact that only Maldon Library is open 5 days a week, access to the library for many will be challenging.

The four libraries across the Maldon District, and in particular the large library in Maldon Town Centre, are very important civic, social and cultural spaces that can help to shape healthier and more connected places. They sit at the heart of local life, reducing inequalities, strengthening community bonds and supporting everything from early years development to adult learning, wellbeing and economic vitality. As the local government reorganisation process develops, their role could be important as a key part of the social infrastructure through which local government (and its partners) can engage residents and seek to building a sense of local priorities for neighbourhood governance. Libraries are key partners in delivering on creative health ambitions (set out elsewhere in this strategy), cultural events and workshops, as well as ensuring that there is access to local information, advice and guidance on a wide range of issues

The local libraries have demonstrated effective place-based working, collaborating with other local organisations. For example Maldon Library launched the ‘Men’s Gaming Cove’ in partnership with Maldon and District CVS, supporting the mental health and wellbeing of men aged 30–50 as part of a wider programme to reduce suicide in this particular age group. Funded through the One Maldon District Partnership and supported by organisations including Mind Charity, Oddballs Foundation, Both Parents Matter, Healthwatch Essex, and Reach Out for Mental Health, the initiative offered literature, resources, and activities such as gaming sessions, a hair plaiting workshop for dads, male story times, health MOTs, and a fitness seminar with celebrity influencers.

Essex Libraries are part of the Arts Council England National Development Framework – a national accreditation scheme that is designed to support public library services to innovate and respond to the needs of communities. It is structured around four areas: People, Place, Purpose, and Policy & Practice, covering community understanding, local impact, leadership and resource use, and professional standards. As an accredited service, Essex will now participate in national networks that help shape and support the framework’s future development.

Regarding the Library Service in the District, it is important to note that whilst there are clear opportunities to increase the range of engagement sessions around themes including creative health and cultural events, that potential partners (and hirers) need to be aware of the costs to the Library Service, and the considerations that come with activities in a public library (with a wide mix of users and expectations). There are costs to the Library Service particularly when it comes to opening up the spaces in the evening (outside of core library opening hours) – staffing and utilities primarily. The Library Service has to factor these in, and it is important that potential partners are aware of this (although there are occasions when the case can be made for the importance of events or programmes to both the community and the library service). In practice this means that some events may need to be ticketed (or have a source of external funding), as was the case for the very popular talk by Maria Medlycott on ‘The Origins of Maldon’ (September 2025).

Actions

Maldon Library (and other libraries in the District) have already demonstrated effective collaboration with schemes to support health and community outcomes. As the **creative health system in the District develops, it will be important to engage directly with the leadership team responsible** for Maldon, Wickham Bishops, Southminster and Burnham-on-Crouch Libraries and identify where new initiatives could be (or existing initiatives developed further).

Support the Essex Library Service in the District to apply for funding (for example the Libraries Improvement Fund from Arts Council England). The Library Service is not overseen by MDC but libraries will be important spaces for creative health, heritage and cultural events and learning, and are already important for community outcomes. A collaborative approach, building on existing work, will support outcomes relevant to the Culture & Heritage Strategy including creative health, heritage and cultural events.

14 – Archaeology

Introduction – Why is this important to the Culture and Heritage Strategy?

Archaeology across the Maldon District, both as a subject of interest and the practice of undertaking 'digs', appears to be of great importance. There are active local groups and, given the District's ancient origins and landscapes, it is relevant to communities with many opportunities for participation, recording, preserving and interpreting.

The principal historical event associated with the District - the Battle of Maldon - is both an (ongoing) archaeological story as well as a literary and political one. The Viking sword in the Combined Military Services Museum (shrouded in some mystery in terms of origins) is probably the most important archaeological object in the District (certainly the most well-known). The story associated with the Battle of Maldon excites the imagination of many local people and visitors, so the discovery of actual objects that could be associated with such a notable historical event is of great interest. But there is so much more to be discovered, and unlike many areas of Essex where digs are more often associated with development sites (important though this is), in the Maldon District there are groups that have a history of taking on digs based on local research and interest. This is unusual and should be valued.

Strategic Reflection

Archaeology is increasingly popular on the national stage, with television programmes such as *Digging for Britain* and the significant online interest in *Time Team* (now online). In Essex, the Festival of Archaeology and Heritage (organised by Place Services) now hosts a wide range of talks and demonstrations. The interest in Maldon District is very much in keeping with wider trends.

Policy Context

From a policy perspective, the wealth of archaeology (and knowledge of it) strengthens the overall case for heritage and conservation being important considerations in relation to planning, regeneration, infrastructure development, and health and wellbeing. Equally, archaeology of the Maldon District (as well as geology and landscapes) can provide creative inspiration and support exploration of the area.

In 2025 a Report 'Trowel and Error: A Public User Needs Survey' was published by the Council for British Archaeology (in partnership with Museum of London Archaeology). The report highlights that archaeology often feels remote to people who are not already involved, largely because much of the work happens out of public view and the results are dispersed across specialist platforms that are hard to access. Practical barriers such as cost, travel, time and limited clear information make participation difficult for new or underrepresented groups, and even those who are curious frequently feel that archaeology is 'not for them'.

At the same time, professionals in the sector often lack the time, resources or skills to design effective public-facing activity, which limits opportunities for wider engagement. Although public interest in archaeology is high, the report concludes that its visibility and everyday relevance remain low, creating a gap between the value archaeology could offer and the extent to which people currently experience it.

The 'Trowel and Error' report offers a number of solutions to the challenge of encouraging broader understanding and engagement, and these will be relevant to the Maldon District. It proposes that

archaeology becomes genuinely accessible when it's shaped with communities from the start, presented in multiple formats and languages, and delivered through a blend of digital, print and in-person channels that meet people where they are.

By designing content that's accessible, locally relevant and connected to everyday life, and by mapping audiences early and working with facilitators, especially for children and students, the sector can open clear, confidence-building pathways for everyone to take part. For the Maldon District this might be initially in the form of improved interpretation of collections and stories relating to digs that have taken place over the past few years. Local groups do take part in the Festival of Essex Archaeology & Heritage that takes place at Cressing Temple.

Summary of Local Context

Why is archaeology important for the Maldon District? Archaeology and ancient landscapes (and buildings) are part of the imagination piece that can facilitate a tangible connection to the past - and importantly a local past. Although direct participation in archaeology is limited across the UK, people can be drawn to it as audiences because it offers a mix of mystery, evidence and a unique story of discovery each time. It offers storytelling opportunities around both discovery (and related intrigue) as well as the artefacts uncovered or traces in the ground.

Discoveries reflect a particular point in time, enabling us to imagine what that location might have been like in the distant (or more recent) past, offering a glimpse of a time very different to our own (or perhaps more familiar than we might have expected). Archaeological finds therefore can connect people to a place: understanding what happened under your feet, in your town, or along your coastline creates a sense of connection that few other disciplines can offer.

An important feature of the ancient landscape is the prevalence of Red Hills that are repeatedly documented along the Dengie Peninsula and the wider Maldon area, forming part of a dense concentration of prehistoric and Romano-British salt-making sites. This is an obvious link to what Maldon is world-famous for today.

Few places in England can point to such a continuous chain of human engagement and interaction with the land across the District - Saxon kings choosing high ground for defence, medieval communities shaping river trade, Civil War engineers re-fortifying old earthworks, and modern residents continually navigating the same topography. Archaeology is also important to the whole narrative 'sense of place' piece that contributes so much to the attraction for visitors to the District - somewhere a little mysterious and distinctive, supporting experiences that you can't have elsewhere. Archaeology therefore contributes to 'experiential' tourism and 'regenerative' in that it is supported by experienced volunteers and connects back to the local story.

Michael Portillo was drawn to Maldon on his 'Great British Railway Journeys' television programme. He met with local historian Stephen Nunn and they discussed the Battle of Maldon and the potential location for the battle, with reference to the Viking sword on display at the Combined Military Services Museum. This is evidence of national interest in the Battle of Maldon and associated archaeology.

Active Groups in the Maldon District

There are two archaeology groups currently active in the Maldon District – Burnham-on-Crouch U3A Archaeology Group, and the Maldon & District Archaeological and Historical Group (MAHG).

The Burnham-on-Crouch U3A Archaeology Group was founded in 2018 as part of the thriving Burnham-on-Crouch U3A movement, which brings together hundreds of members across a wide range of participatory groups. The Archaeology Group has around 50 members, with close to 20 regularly taking part in local digs, and holds the distinction of being the only U3A group in the East of England that actively participates in excavations. Operating to a high professional standard, its trained volunteers formally record all findings through the Historic Environment Record, ensuring their work contributes meaningfully to the wider archaeological knowledge base. The group's most celebrated achievement is the 2020–21 identification and excavation of the long-lost medieval palace of the Bishop of London at Southminster Hall, supported by grant funding from Turncole Wind Farm which enabled the involvement of a lead professional archaeologist. Other digs have taken place at Maylandsea, Creeksea Place and St Barnabas Church in Bradwell-on-Sea.

Beyond the excavations themselves, members contribute through background research, site work and interpretation, and the group has secured additional funding from Essex Community Foundation to support professional training delivered by Archaeology South East. The group actively promotes participation as an enjoyable and socially rewarding activity, welcoming people of all backgrounds into the world of archaeology. Its achievements are recognised locally through a dedicated display space at Burnham-on-Crouch Museum, which helps share the group's discoveries with the wider community and visitors to the town.

The Maldon Archaeological and Historical Group (MAHG), is a registered charity founded in 1977 to investigate and document the history of Maldon and its surrounding areas. Over the decades it has contributed important archaeological work, including the Lofts Farm excavation in Great Totham (1978–1984), whose records are now held by the Essex Record Office. Reports of other excavations over the years are available on its website. They have a clubhouse at Brickhouse Farm Community Centre in Maldon which holds many of the finds (although they are keen to find additional space and support for interpretation and engagement). Despite this legacy, the group currently operates with very few volunteers, limiting its capacity to continue its work at the same scale

Both groups have contributed significantly to the historical record of the Maldon District, working on projects that are not linked to development and are therefore inspired by local knowledge and research. This is rare in Essex and should be valued and, where possible, supported as an important part of the grassroots heritage ecosystem across the District.

Of recent interest was a talk by Maria Medleycott on the 'Origins of Maldon: An Archaeological Talk' at Maldon Library which attracted significant interest in September 2025, demonstrating an appetite for this kind of heritage programming. The talk revealed significant archaeology still to be uncovered in Maldon Town (although recognised this would be challenging due to development over centuries).

Maldon District Geology

It is worth reflecting on the importance of geology to the Maldon District, given the significant interest in this locally and the diversity in the geological record. This includes the ruins of the 12th century leper hospital (St. Giles) on Spital Road, which displays a variety of rock types in the walls which would have been collected locally – bringing together nicely social history and geology on one site.

“Geodiversity...has a cultural role to play, influencing the character of our built environment through building stones, providing inspiration to art, and helping to define where we live and our ‘sense of place’. It is the link between geology, landscape, nature and people” (Report on Local Geological Sites for Maldon District Council – GeoEssex August 2023)

The Local Geological Sites report explains how the Ice Age had radical impact on the course of the early Thames, and how this has created many of the natural landscapes across the Maldon District today. ‘The ribbon of flooded gravel pits stretching across the Dengie Peninsula from Burnham-on-Crouch to Bradwell-on-Sea mark this former route of the Thames Medway’

Exploring the concept of ‘local distinctiveness’ requires consideration of geology (it is arguably relevant everywhere). There is much for communities to explore, discoveries to be made including at Butt’s Cliff at Althorne (which is one of many Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the District), situated on the outer bend of the River Crouch where erosion of the London Clay reveals a rich source of fossils.

Actions

Ensure that local **archaeology groups can feed in to the Regenerative Tourism Steering Group for Heritage**, given the knowledge and experience they have, with an emphasis on ensuring that the groups themselves are sustainable and have the necessary volunteers and resources needed to continue their work.

When **MDC are working on potential options for an improved (or new) Maldon Museum, consider engaging with the archaeological groups**, not only for their insight and knowledge of local history and geology, but also because storage and interpretation is a challenge for them and facilities could be built in to new proposals to support them.

15 – Audience Segmentation

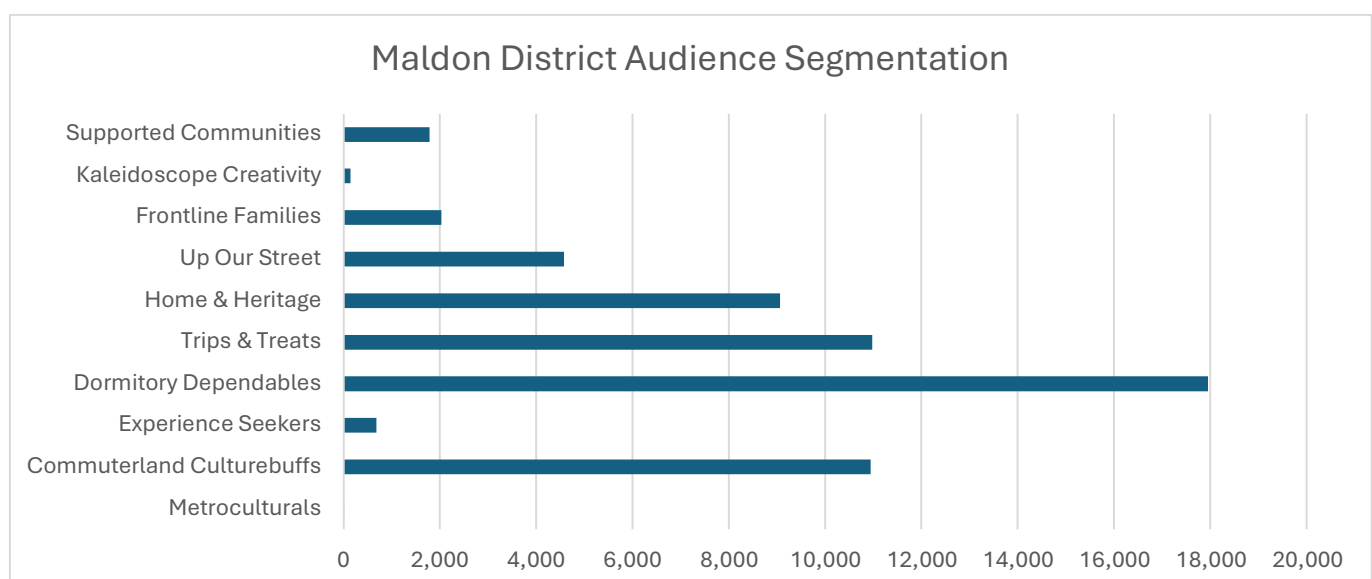
Audience Segmentation

The Audience Agency’s segmentation model - known as Audience Spectrum - is the UK’s most widely used cultural audience profiling tool. It divides the population into ten distinct segments based on people’s attitudes toward arts, culture, and heritage, as well as their social and demographic characteristics.

An analysis the Maldon District’s audiences demonstrates that the dominant audience segments are on the whole more ‘traditional’ in terms of their interests and engagement with culture and heritage.

The audience segments that are mostly to be found in the District are:

- **Commuterland Culturebuffs:** Affluent and settled with many working in higher managerial and professional occupations. Commuterland Culturebuffs are keen consumers of culture, with broad tastes but a leaning towards heritage and more classical offerings. Mature families or retirees, living largely in leafy provincial suburban or greenbelt comfort, they are willing to travel and pay for premium experiences, their habits perhaps influenced by commuting. Motivations are multiple, ranging from social and self-improvement to the pursuit of learning opportunities for older children. They tend to be frequent attenders and potential donors.
- **Dormitory Dependables:** A significant proportion of audiences are made up of this dependably regular, although not high frequency, engagement group. Most live in suburban or small towns and show a preference for heritage activities, alongside popular and more traditional, mainstream arts. Many are thriving well-off mature couples or busy older families; lifestage coupled with more limited access to an extensive cultural offer means that culture is more an occasional treat or family outing than an integral part of their lifestyle.
- **Trips & Treats:** This group may not view arts and culture as a passion, they are reasonably active despite being particularly busy with a wide range of leisure interests. Comfortably off and living in the heart of suburbia, their children range in age and include young people still living at home. With a strong preference for mainstream arts and popular culture like musicals and familiar drama, mixed in with days out to museums and heritage sites, this group are led by their children’s interests and strongly influenced by friends and family.

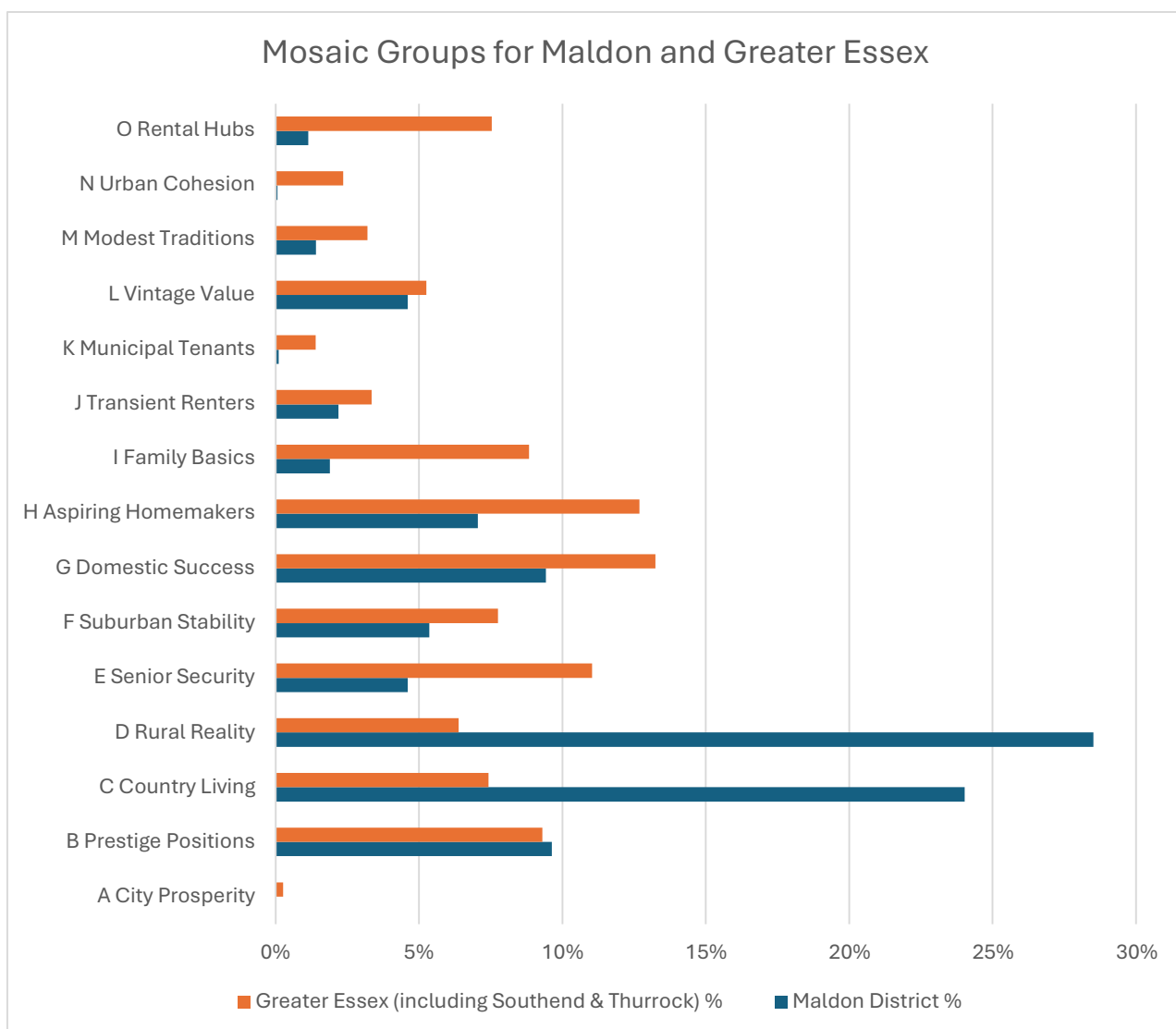


The audience segments that have the interest in the most contemporary arts and cultural experiences do not really feature highly in the Maldon District (or indeed in Essex as a whole).

The audience segment analysis for the Maldon District broadly reflects that of wider Essex, although the ‘Home & Heritage’ audience is a fair bit higher in Maldon than Essex (16% for Maldon compared to 10% for Essex as a whole), indicating a less regular cultural engagement (and certainly more traditional and child/family orientated in Maldon).

Mosaic Data

Another source of data that can be referenced to better understand audiences and interests in the District is Mosaic, designed by Experience as a ‘cross-channel’ consumer classification system which segments the population into 15 groups. These can be utilised to understand the likely customer behaviour of people/individuals in a particular area. The behaviour gives a strong indication of their interests (including culture).



The data shows that the most prevalent Mosaic Groups in the District are (overwhelmingly) ‘Rural Reality’ and ‘Country Living’. Both represent more traditional interests (including in heritage and culture).

- **Rural Reality:** Rural Reality are people who live in rural communities and generally own their relatively low cost homes. Their moderate incomes come mostly from employment with local firms or from running their own small business.
- **Country Living:** Country Living are well-off homeowners who live in the countryside often beyond easy commuting reach of major towns and cities. Some people are landowners or farmers, others run small businesses from home, some are retired and others commute distances to professional jobs.

As can be seen from the graph, these two Mosaic groups are far more prevalent in the Maldon District than in the rest of Essex, reflecting the rural nature of the District.

How Audiences Might Change in the Future

Consideration should be given to the significant new development taking place across the District, and the existing Local Plan's policy for 'mixed and balanced communities' that favours housing development with an emphasis on providing for families and affordable housing. This is in recognition of the existing availability of larger homes. With a strong heritage and cultural offer, the new developments are likely to see more families and younger people living on the urban fringes and therefore in touching distance of the town centres (Maldon in particular).

'To create a better balanced stock to address the impact of the ageing population and the needs of young people entering the market, the Council will need to deliver a higher proportion of smaller (1 or 2 bedroom) units over the life of the Plan.' – (MDC Local Plan 2014-19).



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND IMPROVEMENT**

**to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
11 JUNE 2026**

PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2026 / 27

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To meet the statutory requirement to annually seek the Council's approval of a Pay Policy Statement.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That the Committee notes:
- a) the inclusion confirming that payments relating to election duties fall outside the Council's standard pay policy arrangements, reflecting their statutory and distinct nature;
 - b) the removal of Pay Bands A and B, as required under the National Joint Council (NJC) Pay Award 2025/26, and the consequential transition of affected employees to Grade C with effect from 01 April 2026/27;
 - c) that Market Supplements will increase in line with nationally agreed pay awards, ensuring consistency and transparency in pay management arrangements;

To the Council:

- (ii) That the 2026 / 27 Pay Policy Statement attached at **APPENDIX 1** be approved.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The Localism Act 2011 requires that Councils publish a Pay Policy Statement describing the approach of the authority to pay matters and the remuneration of the highest ("Chief Officers") and lowest paid staff. The Pay Policy Statement was originally put in place on 1 April 2012. This is required to be approved annually by the elected Members of the Council.
- 3.2 The Pay Policy Statement has been reviewed and is attached at **APPENDIX 1**. It reflects the current arrangements for pay at Maldon District Council (MDC).
- 3.3 A clarification has been included to confirm that payments relating to the administration of elections fall outside the Council's standard pay policy arrangements. This reflects the statutory and operationally distinct nature of election

duties, which are governed by separate legislation and guidance. The addition is for transparency and does not introduce any change in practice.

- 3.4 Pay Bands A and B have been removed from Maldon pay scales in line with the National Joint Council (NJC) Pay Award 2025/26. This is not a local policy decision but a required implementation of the national pay award and is therefore presented for Members to note.
- 3.5 As a consequence of the removal of Pay Bands A and B, approximately five employees currently aligned to these Bands will transition to Grade C. Due to the Council's commitment to pay The Real Living Wage supplement to those on lower bands, these staff are already in receipt of higher pay than bands A and B. Whilst this change may result in some hourly rates at the upper points of Grade C (C11–C12) where normal increments are applied, exceeding the Council's The Real Living Wage supplement, the overall financial impact on the pay bill is expected to be minimal.
- 3.6 Market Supplements have been updated to reflect that they increase in line with nationally agreed pay awards. This aligns with Senior Leadership Team discussions regarding the consistency and sustainability of pay related allowances.
- 3.7 The Council's pay ratio has modestly increased from 1:3:9 to 1:4:4. This is primarily driven by the implementation of Transforming Together Phase 2, which introduced changes to the senior management structure and associated responsibilities rather than a fundamental change in pay policy. The ratio remains broadly consistent with previous years and within normal local government expectations.
- 3.8 At the time of writing, the NJC annual pay award has not been agreed nationally and therefore not applied to the pay scales shown at **APPENDIX 1**. At the point this is agreed, the Pay Policy Statement will be updated, and staff will be provided backpay to 01 April 2026 as necessary.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 To meet the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 the Committee is requested to recommend to the Council the re-adoption of the Pay Policy Statement attached at **APPENDIX 1**.

5. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2025 - 2028

5.1 Delivering good quality services

- 5.1.1 The publication of a Pay Policy Statement supports the Council's commitment to transparency, good governance, and the delivery of efficient and effective services.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – None directly arising from this report.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – The Pay Policy Statement supports transparency in pay arrangements, including the relationship between the highest and lowest paid employees.

- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including Fraud implications)** – Compliance with statutory requirements mitigates the risk of legal or reputational challenge.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – The removal of Pay Bands A and B and the transition to Grade C will have a minimal impact on the overall pay bill. Any future increase in Market Supplements will be managed within existing budget frameworks and subject to usual approval processes.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – The changes reflect national pay agreements and existing operational practices, with limited impact on staff.

Background Papers:

APPENDIX 1 Pay Policy Statement 2026 / 27

Enquiries to:

Leanda Cable, Director of Strategy and Improvement
Ben Jay, Director of Finance

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Pay Policy Statement 2026/27



MALDON
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Document Control Sheet

| | |
|---|---|
| Document title | Pay Policy Statement |
| Summary of purpose | Compliance with Localism Act |
| Prepared by | Resources Specialist Services Manager |
| Status | Final |
| Version number | 14 |
| Approved by | Strategy and Resources (S&R) Committee 13.04.25 & Council 03.04.25 Amended by delegated authority 13.10.25 S&R Committee & Council 2026. |
| Approval date | 03 April 2025 (Council) Reviewed May 2024 in line with restructure at Tier 1. Approved Council 29 May 2024. Updated Feb 25 to align pay award 24/25, Salary Sacrifice added, structural updates, inclusion of how pay is calculated, pay ratio, market supplements, overtime and irregular hours in line with WTD (01.01.24 Amendment), removal of SCP P from NJC Payline. Reviewed August 2025 amended the new Payline in line with NJC and JNC pay award. Reviewed October 2025 in line with Transforming Together Phase 1 Senior Leadership Team changes. Reviewed April 2026 |
| Date of implementation | 3 April 2026 |
| Review frequency | Annual (or as necessary before then) |
| Next review date | To apply agreed NJC and JNC pay awards during 26/27 And 01 April 2027 (annually) |
| Circulation | All staff & Members |
| Published on the Council's website | Yes |

Validity Statement

This document is due for review by the date shown above, after which it may become invalid.

Pay Policy Statement

Introduction

This Statement has been written to meet the statutory requirements of the Localism Act 2011 (the Act), Chapter 8 (Pay Accountability) Section 18 (1) and to aid transparency in respect of Maldon District Council's policy regarding pay to all staff.

The Council seeks to be able to recruit and retain employees in a way which is competitive and fair.

1. General policy

- 1.1 For the purpose of this policy a chief officer and non-statutory chief officer under section 2 of the Local Government and Housing Act, 1989 includes the Chief Executive as Head of Paid Service and Directors on the Council's Senior Leadership Team.
- 1.2 The Chief Executive is responsible for the overall management of the Council and its resources. They have delegated authority to determine pay for all employees of the Council.
- 1.3 The appointment and dismissal of the Chief Executive and Statutory Officers, and appointment of Directors are determined under the Officer Employment and Disciplinary Procedure Rules. The Chief Executive leads on the development and the implementation of the Council's strategies and sets the framework for community engagement.
- 1.4 The Council's pay policy statement is underpinned by the principle of equal pay and recognises equal pay between both female and male officers as a legal right under employment law and ensures fair and non-discriminatory remuneration package across the authority.

2. Determination of Job Grades

- 2.1 Maldon District Council has adopted the "Hay Job Evaluation Scheme" which systematically establishes the relative values of different jobs. The Scheme has been used to determine the grades of all existing posts and for new posts as they arise. It is the only mechanism within the Council for determining the grading of posts. Responsibility for administering and coordinating the Job Evaluation Scheme rests with Human Resources (HR).
- 2.2 A job can only be considered for re-evaluation where there has been a significant change to the responsibilities and accountabilities of the post and where the post holder and the Manager agree a need for a review. The Manager will need to advise where the changes have come from as another post may be affected resulting in a decrease in the applicable grade of that post. If this results in an increase in grade, this will become effective from the date of the job evaluation panel was held. If this results in a decrease, pay protection will apply.

- 2.3 All roles in the Council are job evaluated and place all roles within a single unified pay scale approved by the Council. Any appointment outside of this Policy, for reason of market forces for instance where there are recruitment challenges, would be agreed by Strategy and Resources Committee.
- 2.4 The Job Evaluation process was designed to achieve compliance with Equal Pay legislation and to standardise the contractual terms and conditions of staff. Remuneration of all Council employees is governed by agreed policy and procedures.
- 2.5 The Council's pay policy statement and its principles are applied consistently to all employees. For part-time employees, salary entitlement and the Council's conditions of service are applied pro-rata to comparable full-time employees.
- 2.6 Temporary employees' salary entitlement and the Council's conditions of service will be applied on the basis of an equivalent to that of permanent employees.

3. Policy on Payments

3.1 Chief Officers

3.1.1 The Local Government and Housing Act, 1989 defines Chief Officers as the following statutory roles (the post titles in brackets identify the relevant posts within the council's senior management structure):

- The Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive)
- Chief Financial Officer Section 151 (Director of Finance S151)
- The Monitoring Officer (Director of Legal and Governance)

3.1.2 The Council defines other posts Chief Officers in non-statutory roles:

- Director of Neighbourhood Services and Communities
- Director of Place, Planning and Growth
- Director of Strategy and Improvement

3.2 Pay and its calculation

3.2.1 The Council's pay scales range from C9-P64. Each grade within the spinal column point consists of four spinal points.

3.2.2 To calculate hours pay, the employees' annual salary is divided by 365 (days), multiplied by 7 (days), divided by the number of hours worked.

3.2.3 For employees working less than 37 hours or those on average pay, the actual hours worked are divided by 37 (hours) then multiplied by the annual salary which gives the pro rata rate.

- 3.2.4 The pay line for Directors is subject to the same factors as the rest of staff pay, for example any annual pay award granted and aligns to the National Joint Council (NJC).
- 3.2.5 Any exception to this, such as a proposal to change the pay of senior staff out of line with normal pay awards would be subject to a report to the Council and approval being given.
- 3.2.6 The Chief Executive and Directors have delegated powers to award discretionary points on an officer's salary scale within approved budgetary limits where they deem it to be in the interests of the Authority. This only applies to points up to the maximum of the salary band for that post.
- 3.2.7 New entrants will normally be placed at the bottom of the scale unless in exceptional circumstances it can be demonstrated that they have had experience in the same role with the same level of responsibility in another organisation with the capability to work and function at a high level from the outset. Other considerations to merit an appointment at a higher scale point are when a case is made to establish demonstrable previous skills and experience against proven organisational need. These will need to be agreed by HR in consultation with the appropriate manager above Head of Service. In the case of a Chief Executive appointment this will be confirmed by recommendation to the Council through the Appointments Board. The Section 151 and Monitoring Officer will be confirmed by the Appointments Board however pay will be determined by the Chief Executive.
- 3.3 Performance related pay and bonuses
- 3.3.1 Maldon District Council does not have performance related pay or bonus payments for any post. As there is no mechanism for linking pay and performance in this way 'earn back' arrangements are not appropriate.
- 3.4 Progression through the Pay Spine
- 3.4.1 New staff receive an increment after successful completion of their six-month probationary period. Internal movers may receive an increment at the six months anniversary under our performance management scheme. Those appointed at the top of the scale point in their grade will not achieve any movement.
- 3.4.2 Those at Director level will have their performance reviewed annually by the Chief Executive.
- 3.4.4 The Leader and the Deputy Leader of the Council will be responsible for reviewing the Chief Executive's performance.
- 3.4.5 Incremental increases are not paid if the individual is already at the top of their pay band, or, if they have received an incremental rise within the previous six months.

3.5 Fees, allowances, benefits in kind and expenses

3.5.1 The Chief Executive is also the Returning Officer for the District, meaning that the post holder has specific responsibilities in respect of all elections and national referenda held in the District. These duties attract fees that are variable depending on the election. For Parliamentary, Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, European elections and national referenda these are set by the Government, for County elections by Essex County Council and for District and Parish elections these are set locally. The Chief Executive may delegate the Returning Officer duties to the Director of Legal and Governance and in doing so, delegates the allowance also.

3.5.2 Apart from these fees, allowances, benefits in kind or expenses are available to all staff and on the same basis. During the course of elections, support from employees may be requested, in such cases, the fee payable will be agreed by the Head of Elections in consultation with the Returning Officer, outside of usual pay policies.

3.5.3 Staff appointed as Deputy Returning Officer's by the Returning Officer can receive a proportion of the above fees dependent upon the responsibilities undertaken at each separate election, as determined by the Chief Executive as Head of Paid Service.

3.6 Pension

3.6.1 All staff are eligible to join the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) in accordance with the terms of that scheme. No special considerations apply to the posts listed in 2.1.

3.6.2 The employee contribution rates for members of the LGPS are reviewed on 01 April each year. The rates as effective from 01 April 2026 are as set out below:

Below are the newly released contribution bands which will be effective from 1 April 2026. These are calculated by increasing the 2025/26 employee contribution bands by the September CPI figure of 3.8% and then rounding down to the nearest £100.

| Band | Actual pensionable pay for an employment | Main section contribution rate for that employment | 50/50 section contribution rate for that employment |
|------|--|--|---|
| 1 | up to £18,400 | 5.50% | 2.75% |
| 2 | £18,401 to £29,000 | 5.80% | 2.90% |
| 3 | £29,001 to £47,300 | 6.50% | 3.25% |
| 4 | £47,301 to £59,800 | 6.80% | 3.40% |
| 5 | £59,801 to £84,000 | 8.50% | 4.25% |
| 6 | £84,001 to £119,100 | 9.90% | 4.95% |
| 7 | £119,101 to £140,400 | 10.50% | 5.25% |
| 8 | £140,401 to £210,700 | 11.40% | 5.70% |
| 9 | £ 210,701 or more | 12.50% | 6.25% |

3.6.3 Every three years an independent actuary calculates how much the Council should contribute to the Scheme. Employer contributions are 21.3% of pensionable gross earnings for 2026/27, 20.0% for 2027/28 and 18.8% for 2028/29.

3.7 Severance payments

3.7.1 Where senior staff leave in the normal course of business (resignation, retirement, etc.) the same procedures would be applied as for any other staff member, and no additional payments would arise as a result.

3.7.2 Should a staff member leave as a result of a settlement agreement these, by their nature, are subject to negotiation with the individual and their representatives and so are variable in their terms. Such agreements are formal legal arrangements and confidentiality binding on both parties is a key component, so any payment arising from such an agreement would not be published. Authorisation of the payment would be in accordance with the Statutory Guidance on the Making and Disclosure of Special Severance Payments, the Council's Terms of Reference and Scheme of Delegation and it would need to represent value for money for the taxpayer in the circumstances.

3.7.3 Senior staff that were previously employed by the Authority and left with a severance or redundancy payment may be re-employed on a consultancy basis to cover short term staff pressures where it is considered appropriate and in the public interest to do so.

3.7.4 For the purposes of continuous service, employees with multiple roles may have different continuous service dates which reflect the start date within the role. The role being made redundant will be calculated on the correct continuous service date.

3.8 Additional Payments

3.8.1 When recruiting to a senior post the salary offered would be that applicable to the grade of the post, as determined by Job Evaluation, and within the established pay line. No additional payments would arise, unless a market supplement to enable recruitment was considered justified due to a recognised technical skill shortage in the job market. See also Market and Retention Supplements.

3.8.2 Employees with multiple jobs within the Council, as per HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) guidelines, have their National Insurance (NI) liability amalgamated to reflect the correct deduction.

3.9 Statutory roles

3.9.1 The Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer and Head of Paid Service are not subject to any additional payment. The statutory nature of the roles are

considered as part of the substantive role; these are aligned to when being considered under the Hay Job Evaluation Scheme.

3.10 Publication of remuneration of senior staff

3.10.1 This Pay Policy Statement, once approved by the Council, will be published on the Council's website.

3.10.2 The remuneration and pension contributions of senior staff whose remuneration and pension contributions are £50,000 and over are published annually in the Financial Statements of the Authority. These are placed on the Council's website.

4. Lowest paid staff and The Real Living Wage

4.1 Definition

4.1.1 Maldon District Council is committed to paying The Real Living Wage which is a voluntary rate of pay to apply. When The Real Living Wage increase is announced each year, it is requested that the increase is applied within 6 months. Therefore, it is commonplace to apply any inflated rate to employees pay the first date of the following month. Staff in Pay Bands up to the hourly rate of pay of The Real Living Wage are paid a supplement to bring their hourly rate of pay up to that of The Real Living Wage rate. The increased rate of £13.45 per hour was paid to employees from 01 November 2025.

4.2 Pay Policy in respect of lowest paid staff

4.2.1 All staff up to Chief Executive are subject to identical terms and conditions, procedures and policies as all other staff. In some cases, these policies give slightly different benefits to different levels of staff. For example, the lowest pay bands to the top of E benefit from enhanced pay rates for overtime. No enhancement above grade E is paid. In contrast the basic amount of annual leave increases with grade bands.

4.2.2 The Council employs Apprentices, but these are not included within the definition of 'lowest paid employees' and are not subject to The Real Living Wage rate as they are paid the legal pay rate for Apprentices.

4.2.3 In line with the LGPS Pay Award 25-26, the lower pay bands A-B have been removed from the Council's pay scales for 26-27. All staff on bands A-B will automatically be placed at band C. The Real Living Wage applies up to the hourly rate of pay that aligns.

5. Pay Ratio's

5.1 The Pay Multiple is the ratio between the highest taxable earnings and the median earnings figure for the whole authority in accordance with the Transparency Code 2014.

5.2 Publishing the ratio of pay of an organisation's top earner to that of its median earner has been recommended to support the principles of Fair Pay (Will Hutton 2011). Maldon District Council, as at the end of Quarter 4 (March 2026), has a pay ratio of 1:4.4 between the Chief Executive's salary and the median earnings of all employees. This represents the relationship between the highest and median levels of pay across the organisation. The Council's pay ratio remains proportionate for an organisation of this size.

6. Pay Award / Negotiation

6.1 The NJC for local government services ('Green Book') negotiates pay on behalf for Local Authority staff. Maldon District Council is committed to paying its employees the nationally agreed pay award each year. The award for 2025/26 was aligned to the Council's own pay scale as below;

- Spinal Column Point (SCP) A1 - N56: Increase of 3.2%, pro rata (NJC)
- SCP O57 - P64: Increase of 3.2%, pro rata Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC)

6.2 Apprentice pay rates fall in line with the Apprenticeship rate of pay as set by the government.

6.3 Pay for the Chief Executive is paid at SCP P which is subject to pay awards as negotiated by the JNC for Chief Officers of Local Authorities. The pay negotiations for 2025-26 awarded 3.2% uplift. The pay award for 26/27 is still in negotiation nationally, this Policy will be updated when it is agreed.

6.4 Employees who have left the Council's employment prior to their pay award being implemented may submit a written request for payment of monies owing to them. Any monies due to that employee from 01 April to the last date of their employment will be paid.

6.5 Any agreed increase is published as soon as the agreed increase is known. This will usually be backdated to 01 April where this is agreed part way through a year OR as determined by the NJC / JNC negotiations. Payment to staff is managed as soon as is reasonably practical but usually uplifted the following month and any back payment made the next.

6.6 The Council does not employ any staff under the JNC for local authority Craftworkers ('Red Book').

7 Other pay

7.1 Market and Retention Supplements

7.1.1 There may be occasions when the evaluated salary for a post fails to attract any suitable candidates and consideration is given to increasing the salary by way of a market supplement. They may also be payable to maintain a skilled and experienced workforce. Managers will need to have tried to recruit at the

evaluated level and provide HR with salary details of similar jobs within the market.

7.1.2 Supplements will be benchmarked against the salaries for similar jobs annually to ensure they are still required. This will be undertaken by the line manager in conjunction with HR. Should this research result in the market supplement no longer being required, there will be a three month pay protection before withdrawal of the supplement. Directors will then approve these at Senior Management Team level.

7.1.3 Pay for Supplements will be capped at a maximum of 15% of the pro rata salary. These are also subject to pay award increases and are reviewed on an annual basis.

7.1.4 Market and Retention supplements are time-limited and subject to annual review. They are identified separately from basic salary in all documentation and records, including pay slips. Market supplement payments will be subject to the following criteria;

- Subject to tax and national insurance contributions
- Paid pro-rata to part time employees
- Included in statutory calculations for the purposes of sick pay, redundancy pay, annual leave, maternity, adoption, paternity, parental bereavement leave, neonatal care leave, shared parental leave
- Included in overtime
- Increased in line with pay awards

7.2 Honorarium payments

7.2.1 This may be awarded in recognition of an employee taking on a special project or role for a limited time. This is capped at £500.

7.3 Additional Responsibility Allowances (ARA) payments

7.3.1 This may be awarded where an employee is covering part of the duties of a post at a higher level due to absence of a more senior member of staff (e.g. sickness or secondment) – for 4 weeks' or more. Payment is capped at a maximum of two spinal column points above the employees' substantive rate of pay.

7.4 First aid allowance

7.4.1 Employees that are designated first aiders will be paid a flat fee of £6 per month. Employees that are required for the purposes of their job to be first aid qualified will not receive the first aid allowance.

7.5 Events

7.5.1 From time to time, the Council may seek support on a corporate basis for employees to put themselves forward to work on a special event outside of their normal contract of employment. Employees will be paid the event rate. Events worked on will be within the district and/or that which the Council supports. A flat fee of £17.50 per hour will be payable regardless of the day and/or time of the week.

7.6 ICT Out of hours Payments

7.6.1 Disturbance payments of £166.67 per month are payable to identified individuals as a fee for working unsocial hours as and when required to meet with business needs.

7.7 Duty Rota Out of Hours (OOH) - Housing

7.7.1 For employees required to be on call for out of hours, specifically relating to homelessness response, payments will be made at the set fee of Monday to Friday £12.00 per hour, Saturday, Sunday and Bank holidays £20.00 per hour. Additional payments made per call at the employees SCP.

7.8 Overtime

7.8.1 The Working Time Regulations (WTD) amendment 01 January 2024, introduced 'rolled up holiday pay' for workers with irregular hours and part year workers. Where overtime is payable to employees, payment for overtime worked continuously over a 3-month period will receive an automatic uplift of 12.07% to their pay to ensure additional holiday accrual is accounted for and separately identified on the payslip.

7.9 Irregular hour workers

7.9.1 The Council tries to minimise the number of persons engaged on a zero hours 'irregular worker' contract. However, where they are engaged, under the WTD, annual leave is accrued based on the number of hours they work. The Council manages this obligation by increasing the rate of pay by 12.07% and is itemised separately on the payslip.

7.10 Other pay

7.10.1 Information on the Council's policies on Occupational sick pay and maternity, shared parental leave, paternity and adoption, parental bereavement leave, shared parental and neonatal care leave can be obtained from the Council's HR Team.

8 Other benefits

8.1 All employees have access to Occupational Health provision and a fully funded Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which provides access to

Counselling services and 24/7 confidential support for the staff member and their immediate families. This also provides for a wider benefits platform area that offers discounts on a huge variety of shopping platforms.

- 8.2 Free on-site car parking is available to staff, subject to availability, as well as a flexible working approach, flexi-time scheme and learning and development opportunities.
- 8.3 Staff are provided with login details to access Kaarp benefits, a free local government benefit site that provides lifestyle voluntary benefits service thought discounts on personal purchases.
- 8.4 A discount is offered to staff for local gym membership.
- 8.5 The Council offers a salary sacrifice scheme to employees through both a car scheme and cycle-to-work. Both initiatives provide staff by making agreed deductions from salary before tax, NI and pension (if applicable) deductions are made.
- 8.6 The LGPS has a provision within its regulations to allow an employer to contribute to an employee's Additional Voluntary Contribution (AVC) arrangement. This is known as a "Shared cost" AVC which would be administered through a salary Sacrifice.
- 8.7 Any deduction through a Salary Sacrifice Scheme at the Council will not affect any redundancy calculation by any detrimental effect. Should an individual lose their post through a reorganisation resulting in redundancy, it is proposed that 3 months' notice will be given as part of the Consultation process, to ensure they can withdrawal from the salary sacrifice scheme so as it does not have a detrimental impact on any severance payment.
- 8.8 The Essex Pension Fund has confirmed that the salary sacrifice shared cost AVC does not have any impact on provisions for ill-health retirement or death in service.

9 Reimbursement of expenditure

- 9.1 All employees are required to make the best use of council resources and are obliged to consider the most cost-effective option when incurring any expenditure in the course of their duties.
- 9.2 Subsistence allowances are payable when employees incur additional expenditure on meals because they have been unable to follow their normal meal arrangements whilst out on business.
- 9.3 Examples of where an employee may need to incur expenditure on meals are as follows:
 - Attendance at training courses or seminars where meals or refreshments aren't provided

- Site visits
- Meetings at other organisations
- Travelling to locations as part of official duties

9.4 Subsistence amounts are stated in the Council's Mileage and Expenses Policy.

10 Pensions

10.1 The Council's pension scheme is administered by Essex County Council. General details of the LGPS are available from HR. Both the employee joining the scheme, and the Council contributes to the scheme.

10.2 The rules under which auto-enrolment operates will continue to apply to all Council employees. Eligible staff will be automatically enrolled unless they choose to opt out. This exercise will be repeated every three years on the anniversary of each eligible employee's enrolment.

11 Conclusion

11.1 The Localism Act 2011 requires relevant authorities in England and Wales to prepare a Pay Policy Statement for each subsequent financial year. This paper sets out the Council's policy statement on pay for employees. The next statement will be reported to the Council for its approval next year.

11.2. Should there be a need to amend the existing Pay Policy Statement during the course of the year that is outside of delegate authority, an appropriate recommendation will be made to the Council.

Salary Bands 2025-26

| Pay Scales Subject to NJC 01st April 2025 | | | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-------------------|---------|--------|-------------|--------|
| Grade | | SCP | 01 April 2025 Pay | Monthly | Hourly | Time & half | Double |
| C | C9 | 9 | 24648.24 | 2054.02 | 12.78 | 19.17 | 25.56 |
| | C10 | 10 | 25528.65 | 2127.39 | 13.23 | 19.85 | 26.46 |
| | C11 | 11 | 26422.27 | 2201.86 | 13.70 | 20.55 | 27.40 |
| | C12 | 12 | 27408.33 | 2284.03 | 14.21 | 21.32 | 28.42 |
| D | D13 | 13 | 27761.59 | 2313.47 | 14.39 | 21.59 | 28.78 |
| | D14 | 14 | 28590.28 | 2382.52 | 14.82 | 22.23 | 29.64 |
| | D15 | 15 | 29416.78 | 2451.40 | 15.25 | 22.88 | 30.50 |
| | D16 | 16 | 30243.26 | 2520.27 | 15.68 | 23.52 | 31.36 |
| E | E17 | 17 | 30599.83 | 2549.99 | 15.86 | 23.79 | 31.72 |
| | E18 | 18 | 31227.12 | 2602.26 | 16.19 | 24.29 | 32.38 |
| | E19 | 19 | 31859.92 | 2654.99 | 16.51 | 24.77 | 33.02 |
| | E20 | 20 | 32489.41 | 2707.45 | 16.84 | 25.26 | 33.68 |
| F | F21 | 21 | 33081.48 | 2756.79 | 17.15 | | |
| | F22 | 22 | 34026.84 | 2835.57 | 17.64 | | |
| | F23 | 23 | 34973.27 | 2914.44 | 18.13 | | |
| | F24 | 24 | 35916.42 | 2993.03 | 18.62 | | |
| G | G25 | 25 | 36037.47 | 3003.12 | 18.68 | | |
| | G26 | 26 | 37611.21 | 3134.27 | 19.49 | | |
| | G27 | 27 | 39188.25 | 3265.69 | 20.31 | | |
| | G28 | 28 | 40765.29 | 3397.11 | 21.13 | | |
| H | H29 | 29 | 41946.14 | 3495.51 | 21.74 | | |
| | H30 | 30 | 43719.07 | 3643.26 | 22.66 | | |
| | H31 | 31 | 45490.90 | 3790.91 | 23.58 | | |
| | H32 | 32 | 47266.03 | 3938.84 | 24.50 | | |
| I | I33 | 33 | 47855.90 | 3987.99 | 24.80 | | |
| | I34 | 34 | 49640.15 | 4136.68 | 25.73 | | |
| | I35 | 35 | 51401.76 | 4283.48 | 26.64 | | |
| | I36 | 36 | 53175.80 | 4431.32 | 27.56 | | |
| J | J37 | 37 | 53766.78 | 4480.56 | 27.87 | | |
| | J38 | 38 | 55815.16 | 4651.26 | 28.93 | | |
| | J39 | 39 | 57911.50 | 4825.96 | 30.02 | | |
| | J40 | 40 | 60009.02 | 5000.75 | 31.10 | | |
| K | K41 | 41 | 60637.09 | 5053.09 | 31.43 | | |
| | K42 | 42 | 62944.35 | 5245.36 | 32.63 | | |
| | K43 | 43 | 65251.63 | 5437.64 | 33.82 | | |
| | K44 | 44 | 67558.89 | 5629.91 | 35.02 | | |
| L | L45 | 45 | 68189.33 | 5682.44 | 35.34 | | |
| | L46 | 46 | 70075.92 | 5839.66 | 36.32 | | |
| | L47 | 47 | 71964.84 | 5997.07 | 37.30 | | |
| | L48 | 48 | 73851.43 | 6154.29 | 38.28 | | |

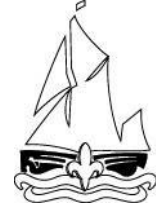
Living Wage
£13.45

| Grade | | SCP | 01 April 2025 Pay | Monthly | Hourly | Time & half | Double |
|-------|-----|-----|-------------------|---------|--------|-------------|--------|
| M | M49 | 49 | 75111.12 | 6259.26 | 38.93 | | |
| | M50 | 50 | 76787.96 | 6399.00 | 39.80 | | |
| | M51 | 51 | 78465.97 | 6538.83 | 40.67 | | |
| | M52 | 52 | 80145.15 | 6678.76 | 41.54 | | |
| N | N53 | 53 | 88702.78 | 7391.90 | 45.98 | | |
| | N54 | 54 | 91094.42 | 7591.20 | 47.22 | | |
| | N55 | 55 | 93484.87 | 7790.41 | 48.46 | | |
| | N56 | 56 | 95876.51 | 7989.71 | 49.70 | | |

Pay Scales subject to JNC chief Officers 01st April 2025

| | | | | | | | |
|---|-----|----|------------|-----------|-------|--|--|
| O | O57 | 57 | 98,219.76 | 8,184.98 | 50.91 | | |
| | O58 | 58 | 100,621.95 | 8,385.16 | 52.16 | | |
| | O59 | 59 | 103,085.01 | 8,590.42 | 53.43 | | |
| | O60 | 60 | 105,610.11 | 8,800.84 | 54.74 | | |
| P | P61 | 61 | 120,220.03 | 10,018.34 | 62.31 | | |
| | P62 | 62 | 128,283.32 | 10,690.28 | 66.49 | | |
| | P63 | 63 | 136,346.51 | 11,362.21 | 70.67 | | |
| | P64 | 64 | 144,409.80 | 12,034.15 | 74.85 | | |

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**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE**

to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
11 JUNE 2026

BUDGET MONITORING REPORT – PERIOD 12 (31 MARCH 2026)

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members of the Committee with the final (outturn) financial position for the Council for the period year to 31 March 2026 (Period 12).
- 1.2 In line with previous monitoring reports presented during the year, the outturn shows good performance in both revenue budgets and capital investment in line with expectation; debts have been reduced; and reserves have been applied in line with previous decisions.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- (i) notes the final revenue outturn as at 31 March 2026 is £133,000 under budget (0.9 %), with strong income performance in a number of operational areas. Further information can be found at **APPENDIX 1**;
- (ii) considers the capital outturn as at 31 March 2026 which is total capital programme delivery of £5.476m against revised budget of £6.980m, or 78% of the capital budget. Scheme delivery that is fully controlled by the Council has achieved 93% of budgeted spend for 2025/26. Due to the phasing of the delivery of works at the leisure centre, 60% of the projected capital expenditure was spent in 2025/26 with the remainder being forecast for delivery in 2026/27. Further information can be found at **APPENDIX 2**;
- (iii) approves the movements in Earmarked and General Reserves set out in **APPENDIX 3** and the associated application of reserves in the value of £4.854m, including £1.072m to revenue budgets and £3.782m of capital funding (see section 7.4 and **APPENDIX 3**), and the related adjustments to budgets (section 7.4 and **APPENDIX 4**).
- (iv) notes the revenue budget reconciliation between the opening and current budget in **APPENDIX 4**;
- (v) notes the improved general fund debt position and the cash benefit of £81,000 arising.

| Maldon District Council - Outturn | Revised | Actuals | (Under) / |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | Budget | P12 | Overspend |
| Directorate | £'000s | £'000s | £'000s |
| Neighbourhood Services and Communities | 5,504 | 5,346 | (158) |
| Legal & Governance | 2,791 | 2,791 | (0) |
| Place, Planning & Growth | 2,022 | 1,650 | (372) |
| Finance | 2,623 | 3,033 | 410 |
| Strategy & Improvement | 1,687 | 1,663 | (24) |
| Chief Executive | 726 | 726 | (0) |
| | 15,354 | 15,209 | (144) |
| MRP | 496 | 14 | 482 |
| Investment Income | (664) | (1,046) | (382) |
| Total Service Net Expenditure | 15,186 | 14,177 | (44) |
| Funded by: | | | |
| Government Grants | (1,703) | (1,838) | (135) |
| Council Tax | (6,275) | (6,275) | 0 |
| Business Rates | (4,693) | (4,647) | 46 |
| Transfer (from) / to Earmarked Reserve | (1,456) | (1,455) | 1 |
| Transfer (from) / to General Fund | (1,059) | (1,059) | (0) |
| Total Funding | (15,186) | (15,274) | (88) |
| Net Total Expenditure | (0) | (1,097) | (133) |

Figure 1 - revenue budget outturn

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The outturn Budget Monitoring Report provides the final financial position of the Council for the full year ending 31 March 2026 including revenue and capital outturn and the impact of those on retained reserves (General and Earmarked).
- 3.2 The report shows that operational budget performance was closely aligned to budget plans. This demonstrates the accuracy of the base budget position and the effectiveness of budget management by officers throughout the year.
- 3.3 Funding has been applied in line with the budget decisions in February 2025 and in later committee and council meetings. Capital funding has been reviewed, and funding sources are recommended in line with the wider financial environment the Council operates within. Revenue application of reserves funding is also recommended in line with resourcing priorities identified by Council and Committees through the year.

4. REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN – PERIOD 12

- 4.1 The outturn for the revenue budget is an underspend of £133,000. The strong performance is attributed to additional income from investments, car parks, and from planning activities. Strong income performance has offset additional unbudgeted costs in I.T ensuring that systems are sufficiently maintained. Further detail is included in **APPENDIX 1**.
- 4.2 Salary costs have been kept under review during the year. There have been a number of vacancies in all areas. In common with other small councils, it is often the case that vacant posts cannot be sustained for long and so interim staff are engaged

to maintain service delivery. The table below shows how underspent salary budgets have been used to fund interim and temporary staff costs.¹ The cost to the Council of interim and temporary staff has been reduced through participation in the Essex County Council (ECC) temporary staff service. It is estimated that this saved £114,000 by comparison with usual sector premiums.

| | Budget | Outturn | Variance |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Salaries | 11,342,400 | 10,346,661 | (995,739) |
| Temporary Staff | 372,100 | 1,329,382 | 957,282 |
| | 11,714,500 | 11,676,044 | (38,456) |

Figure 2 - comparison of staffing budget and temporary staff costs

- 4.3 The overspend in Finance Services is due to prior years' corporate savings targets being included in these budgets. These savings include £281k for 'vacancy factor' savings and £120k for senior officer savings. Vacancy factor savings have been unachieved. This is because vacant posts usually require cover to ensure service continuity, a more urgent issue in a small council. Senior officer savings, previously unachieved, have been exceeded as a result of the restructure (see section 5.4 below).

5. SIGNIFICANT CHANGES DURING THE YEAR

- 5.1 A number of key developments were undertaken during the year. These include the evolution of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals, the first year of the new Leisure Services contract, and restructure of staffing.

5.2 Development of LGR

- 5.2.1 Council meeting February 2025, business cases submitted November 2025, decision March 2026 as agreeing the Five Unitary Authority (5UA) model. Work in hand on the Mid-Essex footprint between the four predecessor councils (including ECC). Workstreams including legal and governance, finance, ICT, procurement, Human Resources (HR) already established and initial programme priorities being established, focussed on 'safe and legal on day one'.

- 5.2.2 Preparation for LGR includes two main strands of activity – first, ensuring that all Maldon District Council (MDC) services and associated records are fit for purpose and, second, beginning a wider process of converging data and services across the four councils which will form the new Mid-Essex Council.

5.3 First year of Leisure Contract

- 5.3.1 Investment in Blackwater Leisure Centre. Good membership performance. Good engagement with Places Leisure as contract holders. Overall good start to the contract and financials in line with contract projections. Contract management framework in place, being managed with regular operational officer meetings with strategic member oversight by the Leisure Partnership Board.

¹ This analysis also demonstrates that securing savings through holding posts vacant for a period of time ('vacancy factor') is not a viable approach.

5.4 Restructure

- 5.4.1 Following the review by the Local Government Association (LGA) the Transforming Together organisation restructure has led to redistribution of staff between grades, with the streamlining of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and reductions in the most senior grades and growth in other more operational grades within the organisation. This meets the objective of ensuring that there are sufficient staff at the right levels to be able to meet resident needs. Streamlining the senior tiers, adopting a consistent approach to grading and adoption of more meaningful and professional job titles has helped ensure a more consistent overall approach.
- 5.4.2 This has already provided benefits in streamlining key issues such as Fresh Service and Vacancy Control Forms, reducing the number of non-value-adding hand-offs between staff and speeding processes up. Controls have been moved to focus on budget management and not spending processes.

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Senior Leadership Team (SLT) | SLT has met weekly, face to face, since October 2025. Key developments are listed below. |
| | Greater scrutiny of reports prior to publication ensuring that Working Groups, Committees and Committee Chairs are briefed appropriately before meetings |
| | Wider policies are also under review to ensure that these are up to date ahead of LGR, and will be brought back to Committees in the coming months |
| | Financial management has been more closely aligned to the new staff structure, supporting heads of service and service managers to be better informed and better able to manage their services. |
| | Greater transparency in reporting to senior officers and members, ensuring that issues are dealt with in a consistent and appropriate way. |
| Senior Management Team (SMT) | Revised meeting schedule; clarification of terms of reference, forward agenda planning. |
| | Training planned for all service areas |
| | Supported delegation (e.g. budget and debt management, health and safety) |
| | Engagement of SMT with SLT activity regarding review and updates to agreed policies, to ensure all proposals are shared and understood. |

Figure 3 - benefits secured as a result of the staff restructure

- 5.4.3 Two phases - The restructure was undertaken in two phases – phase 1 covered Assistant Director and Director roles and went 'live' in mid-October 2025; phase 2 covered heads of service and service managers and went live from 1 April 2026. Both phases entailed two strands of work.
- (i) the review and revision of staff structures and job titles and descriptions to ensure a consistent overall approach across all areas, and
 - (ii) responses to the emerging requirements of Local Government Reorganisation.
- 5.4.4 Benchmarking and best practice - Staff structures up to and including chief officers were reviewed against sectoral best practice and revised to secure operational improvements (through clearer line management, comparable job titles, consistent job descriptions). Where possible, short-term posts such as staff on Fixed Term Contracts or staff whose posts were grant funded were all included in the revised

organisational structure and moved to 'permanent' posts. This has the benefits of providing certainty to staff and managers, as well as removing a series of complex adjustments to pay data which were becoming unwieldy and difficult to control. The revised structures are clearer and make overall management of staff resources simpler.

- 5.4.5 Consultation with staff - 50% of staff responded to the consultation process through engagement with line managers or HR. Staff concerns included how new day-to-day arrangements were to be implemented as well as how specific changes to structures and post definitions could be made. Many staff welcomed the increased clarity they received as a result of job descriptions being brought up to date and the definitions of their roles being reviewed and clarified. Work was undertaken to address 'single points of failure' (staff who carried substantial responsibility or knowledge who were not directly supported) and so reduce risks of service disruption. Concerns about unclear or excessive workloads were also addressed through a structured review of expectations, including new regulatory requirements. External advisers commented that the positivity of staff engagement was notable – staff did raise concerns but also made proactive suggestions on how working arrangements could be improved.
- 5.4.6 Overall, staff received the proposed changes positively as they enabled uncertainties and risks to be addressed in a transparent and structured way. The process has contributed to building a relationship of trust between staff and managers in all areas.
- 5.4.7 Rebalancing staffing – At the start of the reorganisation process, a key objective was to increase staff who provide services to residents and to decrease the number of staff in senior managerial grades. The chart below shows that this objective has been achieved. Directors have been reduced by two from 10 to 8 (although if 2024/25 is also considered, the reduction is greater – from 12 to 8). Head of Service and Service Manager grades have remained largely the same. Senior and Junior officers have seen an increase of 20 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) posts.

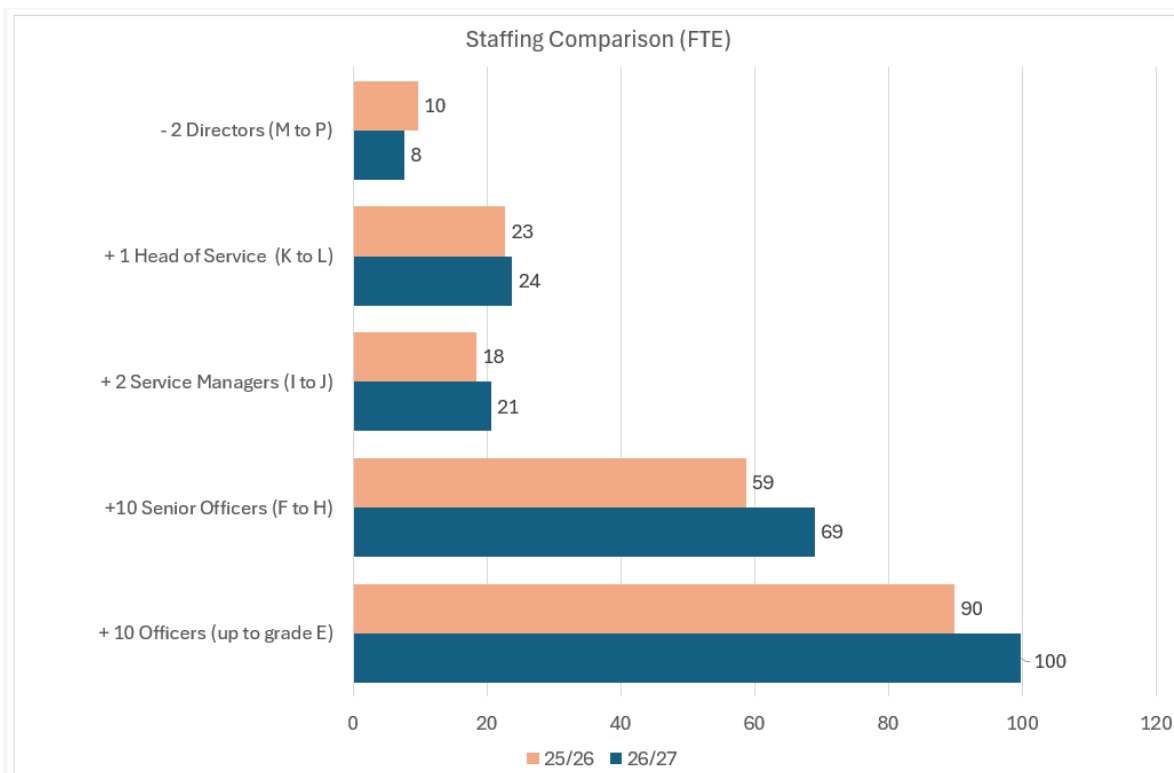


Figure 4 - comparison of staff full-time equivalents at April 2025 and April 2026

5.4.8 Recurrent savings – Base budget pay costs increased by £1.373m between February 2025 and February 2026 (when costs were calculated). Of this increase; £1.084m is funded from reserves to support posts identified as required through preparation for LGR (either to ensure MDC is wound-up in an orderly way, or to help with preparation for reorganisation itself), while a further £0.541m reflects the impact of pay inflation across all staff. This shows that the overall impact of the restructure undertaken as part of Transforming Together created a saving of £0.251m, offsetting other pressures arising from LGR.

| | 2025/26 | 2026/27 | change |
|---|---------|---------|---------------|
| FTE | 199 | 220 | +21 |
| Staffing budgets | 11.891 | 12.431 | +1.373 |
| <i>Of which:</i> | | | |
| <i>inflation</i> | | | -0.541 |
| <i>Short term posts funded via reserves (largely related to either additional work pre-LGR, or other preparatory work for LGR to be undertaken as part of 'business as usual activity')</i> | | | -1.084 |
| Overall savings from restructure | | | -0.251 |

Figure 5 – recurrent budget savings arising from the staff restructure

5.4.9 Cost impacts - One-off support costs amount to £170k.

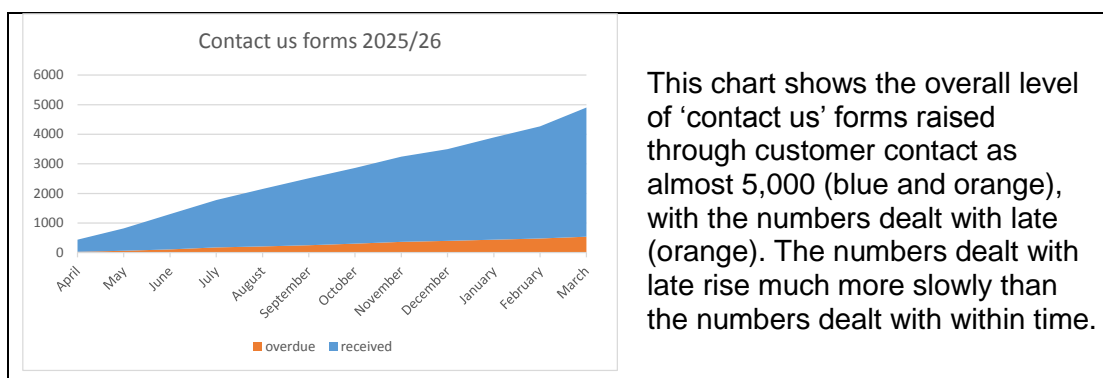
5.4.10 Severance costs:

- Redundancy total is £301,000. Redundancy costs are largely determined through standard contract terms.
- Pension strain total is £833,000. Pension strain costs are similarly determined by the terms of enrolment in the pension scheme (Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS)).
- One-off costs have been funded through the use of reserves (see section 7.4).

5.4.11 It should be noted that the costs of this 'Transforming Together' programme is almost identical to the restructure undertaken seven years ago, in 2018/19 and 2019/20.

6. ACTIVITY LEVELS

6.1 The charts below are taken from data routinely collected within the Council. The charts provide background on some of the high-profile areas of activity. These activities are key drivers of overall costs.



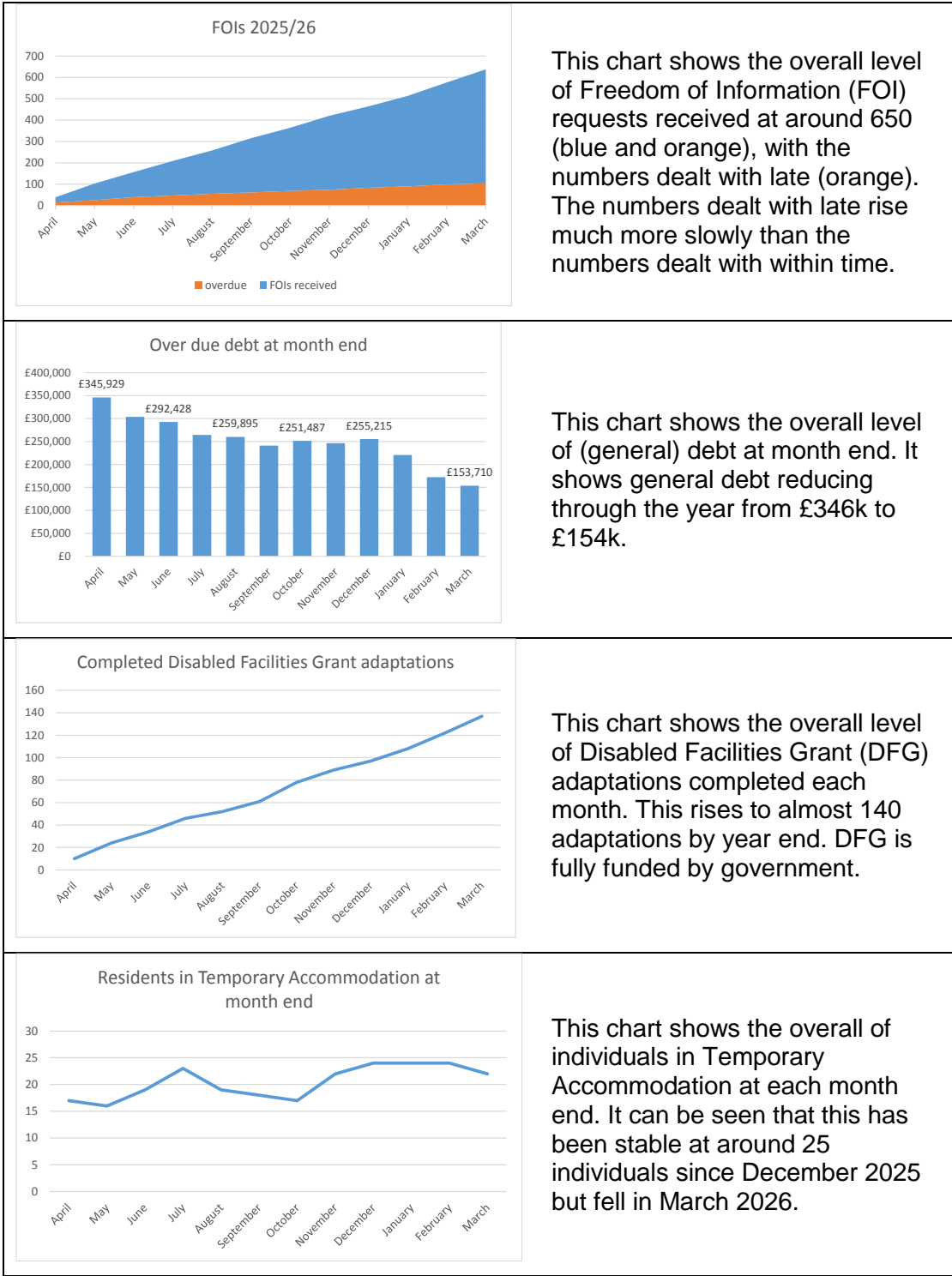


Figure 6 - activity data, 2025/26

7. CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING – OUTTURN

7.1 The outturn for capital projects delivered within 2025/26 was £5.475m against the revised 2025/26 Capital programme of £6.980m. Within the total, the largest scheme was the investment in the Leisure Centre. This is continuing to be successfully delivered and will run across multiple years. As the investments are being made through Places Leisure as a third party, the Council has less control over the timing of delivery.

- 7.2 Where the Council retains control and is investing directly in its own assets, delivery was at the level of 93% of budget. Within the activities funded via the Disabled Facilities Grant, planned expenditure was exceeded by 26% (which is funded by government). The main project details can be found at **APPENDIX 2**.

| Project | Budget (£) | Actual (£) | Balance (£) | % |
|---------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------|
| Leisure Contract | £3.946m | £2,488m | (£1.458m) | 60% |
| Disabled Facilities Grant | £539k | £680k | £141k | (26%) |
| Capital Programme | £2.495m | £2.307m | (£187k) | 93% |
| Total | £6.980 | £5.475 | (£1.504) | 78% |

Figure 7 - analysis of capital programme delivery performance

- 7.3 Capital schemes completed in the year are listed below.

| Projects delivered in 2025/26 |
|--|
| Riverside Park Skate Park and Equipment - Budget £193k Actual £193k |
| West Maldon Cllr Shaughnessy Park - Budget £138k Actual £138k |
| Oaktree meadow Play site resurfacing and fencing - Budget £146k Actual £146k |
| Amphitheatre- Budget £79k Actual £79k |
| Maintenance team Vehicle – Budget £38k Total Spend £38k |
| Community Engagement vehicles Budget £36k Actual £36k |
| Parks Transit vehicle - Budget £35k Actual £35k |
| Scout Hut Brickhouse Farm - Budget £26k Actual £25k |
| 99 Wood road – Community supermarket - Budget £20k Actual £20k |
| Demolition of Hythe Quay classroom - Budget £20k Actual £20k |
| BLC Roof Safety system - Budget £20k Actual £20k |
| Tractor Side Arm Flail - Budget £40k Actual £40k |
| REPF (Grant funded) Concession infrastructure Riverside park - Budget £18k Actual £21k |
| White horse lane resurfacing - Budget £112k Actual £107k |
| Ride on mower - Budget £35k Actual £31k |
| MDC Roads resurfacing - Budget £180k Actual £186k |
| Skate park prom - Budget £617k Actual £617k |
| Longfield's pathway resurfacing - Budget £65k Actual £66k |
| Leisure centre facilities - Budget £3.9m Actual £2.4m |
| Butt Lane resurfacing - Budget £138k Actual £121k |
| I.T PC Replacements - Budget £47k Actual £42k |
| Disabled Facilities Grants - Budget £539k Actual £680k |
| Replacement food waste bins - Budget £0k Actual £5k |

Figure 8 - capital programme schemes delivered

7.4 Reserves

- 7.4.1 The recommended changes to reserves are summarised below and set out in **APPENDIX 3**. In summary, this includes application of £1.072m to revenue budgets,

£4.140m to fund the approved capital programme (in line with the capital and investment strategy), an overall net call on reserves of £5.053m.

7.4.2 Revenue contributions are chiefly related to one-off costs of staff restructure but also include other agreed use of reserves such as for the dredging of Hythe Quay.

7.4.3 Capital allocations are significantly driven by planned capital investment in Blackwater Leisure Centre.

| Proposed use of reserves relating to Revenue Expenditure | | | |
|--|----------------|--|--|
| Area | Amount (£000s) | Reserve | Reasons |
| Budget 29 Jan | 14,282 | | |
| Corporate Management | 521 | Transformation | Redundancy costs /pension strain relating to restructure |
| Corporate Management | 260 | General Fund | Redundancy costs /pension strain relating to restructure |
| Blackwater Leisure Centre | 228 | General Fund | Leisure contract costs in year 1 |
| Rivers | 39 | Repairs and Renewals | Dredging costs at Hythe quay |
| Strategy and Resources | 14 | Transformation | Agency costs within Legal department |
| Strategy and Resources | 9 | Transformation | Agency costs within HR department |
| All proposed changes | 1,072 | | |
| Revised Budget 31 March | 15,354 | | |
| Proposed use of reserves relating to Capital Expenditure | | | |
| Area | Amount (£000s) | Reserve | Reasons |
| Capital projects 2025/26 | 1,052 | General Fund | Capital expenditure in 2025/26 |
| Capital projects 2025/26 | 1,904 | Council Tax and Business Rates equalisation | Capital expenditure in 2025/26 |
| Capital projects 2025/26 | 827 | Other earmarked reserves (set out in Appendix 3) | Capital expenditure in 2025/26 |
| Total | 3,782 | | |

Figure 9 - impact of proposed application of reserves to revenue budget and capital funding

7.5 General Fund Debtors

7.5.1 Outstanding debt for general fund activities as at 31 March was £383,811, as shown below. Of this total debt, 64% was 'current' i.e. within 30 days. 35% of debts were being actively pursued (£136,115).

| Debt stage | Debt at 31 Mar 2026 | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | £ | |
| 0-30 days (Current) | 243,816 | 64% |
| 31-40 days (Stage 1) | 388 | 0% |
| 41-54 days (Stage 2) | 3,493 | 1% |
| 55+ days (Stage 3) | 136,115 | 35% |
| All debt at 31 March | 383,811 | 100% |

Figure 10 - general debt at 31 March 2026

7.5.2 The year end debt position has been reduced by 50% throughout the year, as a result of targeted work by officers. Where debts can be collected, work is undertaken to achieve that. Where debt is not collectible (e.g. due to bankruptcy or similar) debts can be written off. As a result in the reduction in debt through the year, the level of

provision of impaired or 'bad' debt can be reduced. This is a cash benefit of £81k for the Council.

- 7.5.3 Of the debt over 55 days old, £43,240 relates to account in credit (for over 55 days), amounts paid since 31 March or amounts where payment plans are now in place. £13,424 has been placed with collection agencies. £79,451 is reviewed by officers on a weekly basis to determine the best action to be taken.

| Debt collection progress | 55+ days |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| Account in credit | -15,924 |
| Paid since 31 March | 32,219 |
| Payment plan agreed | 26,945 |
| With collection agency | 13,424 |
| Officer review | 79,451 |
| Total | 136,115 |

Figure 11 - General debt over 55 days old at 31 March 2026

- 7.5.4 General debt written off by the Council to the end of March 2026 amounts to £46.4k. This is written off against the bad debt provision set up at the start of the year, which was £1,030k (note 13, 'debtors impairment allowance').

7.6 Collection Fund

- 7.6.1 The Collection Fund holds all transactions relating to business rates and council tax. Billable amounts in 2025/26 totalled £79.7m. Some receipts arose relating to prior years (£1.1m). Of the amount billed in-year, 98% was collected. The impact on overall debt is marginal – debt reviews undertaken in the year led to uncollectible debt being reduced to a similar value to new debt incurred.
- 7.6.2 The strong collection rate (98%) and the stable debt position indicate good management of the collection fund.

| £m | Council Tax | Business rates | Collection Fund |
|--|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Total billable | 61.962 | 17.781 | 79.743 |
| In year receipts relating to prior years | 0.898 | 0.224 | 1.122 |
| Total collected relating to 2025/26 | 59.824 | 17.022 | 76.846 |
| Collection rate 2025/26 | 98% | 97% | 98% |
| Debt | | | |
| Debt brought forward | 3.323 | 1.253 | 4.576 |
| In-year uncollected | 1.453 | 0.551 | 2.004 |
| Prior year changes | -1.302 | -0.567 | -1.869 |
| Debt carried forward | 3.474 | 1.237 | 4.711 |

Figure 12 - collection fund outturn position

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 This report provides the final (outturn) financial position for the Council for the period year to 31 March 2026 (Period 12). It highlights that operational expenditure budgets are being well managed within allocated budget limits. In some areas, income

received is exceeding previous expectations. This provides good assurance that the starting point for planning next year's budget is sound.

- 8.2 Debt due to the Council is held at a reasonable level with appropriate and proportionate action in place to secure unpaid debt where needed.
- 8.3 On Capital schemes there is very good performance for delivery, and they are being delivered largely within budget and time expectations. Delivery of some budgeted capital expenditure will be re-profiled into 2026/27.
- 8.4 Reserves are maintained at a robust level compared to likely requirements.

9. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2025 - 2028

9.1 Delivering good quality services

- 9.1.1 Regular reporting and monitoring of the Council's financial position is a key control in ensuring the Council makes the best use of its resources and is able to make informed decisions to support our residents.

10. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – None directly.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None directly.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including Fraud implications)** – None directly.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – The subject of this report.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – None directly.
- (vi) **Impact on Devolution / Local Government Reorganisation** – The financial position of the Council will be scrutinised in advance of reorganisation as part of planning for LGR delivery. This report is written with that scrutiny in mind.

Background Papers: None.

Enquiries to: Ben Jay, Director of Finance (Section 151).

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REVENUE OUTTURN

| Maldon District Council - Outturn | Revised | Actuals | (Under) / |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | Budget | P12 | Overspend |
| Directorate | £'000s | £'000s | £'000s |
| Neighbourhood Services and Communities | 5,504 | 5,346 | (158) |
| Legal & Governance | 2,791 | 2,791 | (0) |
| Place, Planning & Growth | 2,022 | 1,650 | (372) |
| Finance | 2,623 | 3,033 | 410 |
| Strategy & Improvement | 1,687 | 1,663 | (24) |
| Chief Executive | 726 | 726 | (0) |
| | 15,354 | 15,209 | (144) |
| MRP | 496 | 14 | 482 |
| Investment Income | (664) | (1,046) | (382) |
| Total Service Net Expenditure | 15,186 | 14,177 | (44) |
| Funded by: | | | |
| Government Grants | (1,703) | (1,838) | (135) |
| Council Tax | (6,275) | (6,275) | 0 |
| Business Rates | (4,693) | (4,647) | 46 |
| Transfer (from) / to Earmarked Reserve | (1,456) | (1,455) | 1 |
| Transfer (from) / to General Fund | (1,059) | (1,059) | (0) |
| Total Funding | (15,186) | (15,274) | (88) |
| Net Total Expenditure | (0) | (1,097) | (133) |

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CAPITAL OUTTURN

| Project Title | Original Budget | Brought Forward from Prior Years | In-Year Changes | Revised Budget | Actuals | Capital Outturn | Variance Against Revised Budget |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| I.T | 47 | | | 47 | 42 | 42 | -5 |
| Vehicle & Plant Replacement | 163 | 0 | 22 | 185 | 169 | 169 | -16 |
| Maldon Promenade | 198 | 738 | 141 | 1078 | 1054 | 1052 | -25 |
| Riverside Park | | 186 | 7 | 193 | 193 | 193 | 0 |
| Community Centres | | 26 | | 26 | 25 | 25 | -1 |
| Playsites | 265 | 0 | 42 | 305 | 291 | 290 | -15 |
| Other Parks and Open Spaces | | 45 | 20 | 65 | 66 | 66 | 1 |
| Leisure centres | 4,000 | 0 | -34 | 3,966 | 2509 | 2509 | -1,459 |
| Car Parking | 0 | 158 | 92 | 250 | 228 | 228 | -22 |
| Rivers | | | | 0 | 13 | 13 | 13 |
| Waste | | | | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Housing | 539 | | | 539 | 680 | 680 | 141 |
| UKSPF | | | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 0 |
| REPF | 0 | 0 | 36 | 36 | 20 | 23 | -13 |
| Princes Road | | | 270 | 270 | 161 | 161 | -109 |
| Total | 5,212 | 1,153 | 616 | 6,980 | 5,476 | 5,476 | -1,505 |

| Funding | £000s |
|---|--------------|
| General fund | 1,093 |
| s.106 Funded | 803 |
| Disabled Facilities Grant | 645 |
| DEFRA Grant | 5 |
| South Essex Parking Partnership Funding | 158 |
| Capital Grants | 264 |
| Internal Borrowing | 2,508 |
| Total Funding | 5,476 |

Key:

DEFRA Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

REPF Rural England Prosperity Fund

s.106..... Section 106

UKSPF..... UK Shared Prosperity Fund

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USEABLE RESERVES

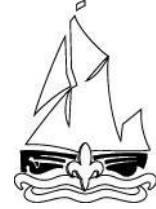
| Reserve Name | Purpose | Balance 31/3/25 | Orig Budget | Rev Comm | 12th June S&R | 24th July S&R | 2nd Oct S&R | 20th Nov S&R | 12th May | Net Change | Balance 31/3/26 |
|---|---|---------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Council Tax and Business Rates equalisation | This reserve is to counter the timing differences in Council Tax and Business Rates funding. [June 2026 update: due to LGR, this reserve is not required.] | (2,930,333) | | | | | | | 1,903,750 | 1,903,750 | (1,026,583) |
| Transformation | To provide funds to meet the one-off investment costs of efficiency savings or service reductions to be realised in future years. Also to enable the upfront costs of potential income generating projects. | (927,949) | | | 12,300 | 186,800 | 184,000 | | 544,800 | 927,900 | (49) |
| CLand Local Plan review | Money has been put aside from unspent budgets to support the creation and adoption of the Local Plan | (505,860) | | | | 233,300 | | | | 233,300 | (272,560) |
| Revenue Budget Commitments | This reserve exists to smooth out the timing differences between monies being earmarked to expenditure from the annual revenue budget and the expenditure | (131,700) | | 131,700 | | | | | | 131,700 | 0 |
| Original Budget | Original Budget | | 73,000 | | | | | | | 73,000 | 73,000 |
| Repairs & Renewals Fund | To provide funds to support additional revenue / capital costs arising from the need to maintain the Council's Asset base. | (161,600) | | | | | | | 39,000 | 39,000 | (122,600) |
| Local Government Reorganisation | Used for costs incurred relating to LGR | (500,000) | | | 5,000 | 25,000 | | | | 30,000 | (470,000) |
| Economic Development | Reserve set aside to support economic development activities in the District. | (29,530) | | | | 20,000 | | | | 20,000 | (9,530) |
| Community Safety | Reserve set aside to fund Community Safety activities. | (74,900) | | | | | | | 74,900 | 74,900 | 0 |
| Corporate Delivery | Set aside to assist in funding corporate priorities. Fully applied. | (124,850) | | | | | | | 124,850 | 124,850 | 0 |
| Electoral Registration | To provide a reserve to enable the Authority to forward fund the District Elections every 4 years and By-Elections when they occur. | (121,370) | | | | | | | | 0 | (121,370) |
| Community Housing Fund Grant | Reserve to support Community-led housing delivery. Objective is to help deliver affordable housing aimed at first time buyers. Accumulated grant funding. | (92,786) | | | | | | | | 0 | (92,786) |
| Domestic Abuse Grant | To support domestic abuse victims - funds DA post. Accumulated grant funding. | (84,220) | | | | | | | | 0 | (84,220) |
| Homeless Reduction Act Grant | Reserve set up to use three years of grant funding for Homelessness Reduction Officer. Funds RSI post. Accumulated grant funding. | (57,000) | | | | | | | | 0 | (57,000) |
| Revenues & Benefits | Various Grants - new Burdens, VEP, Transition - May be used to fund F&C provision, if vacancies are recruited to. No longer required. | (467,800) | | | | | | | 467,800 | 467,800 | 0 |
| Sports Development | Reserve set aside to fund Sports Development activities. Used for Active Maldon in 22/23. No longer required. | (30,510) | | | | | | | 30,510 | 30,510 | 0 |
| Heritage Projects | The Council gives grants in support of environmental initiatives and historic buildings. No longer required. | (8,000) | | | | | | | 8,000 | 8,000 | 0 |
| Insurance liability | To cover its liabilities under policy excesses, finance any claims for small risks not insured externally and cover any future liability from winding up of Municipal Mutual Insurance. No longer required. | (51,490) | | | | | | | 51,490 | 51,490 | 0 |
| Neighbourhood Plan Applications | To provide funding for preparation of Neighbourhood Plans. No longer required. | (29,000) | | | | | | | 29,000 | 29,000 | 0 |
| Triennial Pensions Payment | To provide a reserve to enable the Authority to forward fund the pension deficit for 3 years in 2023 and 2026. No longer required. | (240,000) | | | | | | | 240,000 | 240,000 | 0 |
| Total Earmarked Reserves | | (3,638,565) | 73,000 | 131,700 | 17,300 | 465,100 | 184,000 | 0 | 3,514,100 | 4,385,200 | 746,635 |
| Funding Reserves | Purpose | Balance 31/3/25 | Orig Budget | Rev Comm | 12th June S&R | 24th July S&R | 2nd Oct S&R | 20th Nov S&R | S&R | | Balance 31/3/26 |
| General Fund | Unallocated - available for any purpose | (8,636,024) | | | 55,000 | 119,500 | 70,000 | 327,100 | 1,539,500 | 2,111,100 | (6,524,924) |
| Total Funding Reserves | | (8,636,024) | 0 | 0 | 55,000 | 119,500 | 70,000 | 327,100 | 1,539,500 | 2,111,100 | (6,524,924) |
| Total Useable Reserves | | (12,274,588) | 73,000 | 131,700 | 72,300 | 584,600 | 254,000 | 327,100 | 5,053,600 | 6,496,300 | (5,778,288) |

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BUDGET RECONCILIATION FROM INITIAL (FEB. 2025) TO FINAL (MAR. 2026)

| Reconciliation to Original Budget | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|--------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------|---------------|----------------|
| P12 | | | | | | | | | |
| Maldon District Council - Budget Rec | Original | Rev Commit | June | July | October | November | January | May | Revised |
| | Budget | From FY24-25 | S&R | S&R | S&R | S&R | S&R | - | Budget |
| Sub-Directorate Level | £'000s | £'000s | £'000s | £'000s | £'000s | £'000s | £'000s | £'000s | £'000s |
| Neighbourhood Services and Communities | 5,397 | 100 | 5 | -405 | 140 | | | 267 | 5,504 |
| Legal & Governance | 3,874 | 11 | 12 | -1,130 | | | | 24 | 2,791 |
| Place, Planning & Growth | 1,840 | | | 162 | 20 | | | | 2,022 |
| Finance | 943 | | | 788 | 105 | | 6 | 781 | 2,623 |
| Strategy & Improvement | 673 | 21 | 5 | 577 | 84 | 327 | | | 1,687 |
| Chief Executive | 353 | | 50 | 424 | -95 | | -6 | | 726 |
| | 13,080 | 132 | 72 | 416 | 254 | 327 | 0 | 1,072 | 15,354 |
| MRP | | | | 496 | | | | | 496 |
| Interest Income | -664 | | | | | | | | -664 |
| Total Service Net Expenditure | 12,416 | 132 | 72 | 912 | 254 | 327 | 0 | 1,072 | 15,186 |
| Funded by: | | | | | | | | | |
| Government Grants | -1,703 | | | | | | | | -1,703 |
| Council Tax | -6,275 | | | | | | | | -6,275 |
| Business Rates | -4,365 | | | -328 | | | | | -4,693 |
| Transfer (from) / to Earmarked Reserve | -73 | -132 | -17 | -465 | -184 | | | -584 | -1,456 |
| Transfer (from) / to General Fund | | | -55 | -119 | -70 | -327 | | -488 | -1,059 |
| Total Funding | -12,416 | -132 | -72 | -912 | -254 | -327 | 0 | -1,072 | -15,186 |
| Net Total Expenditure | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

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**REPORT of
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

to
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
11 JUNE 2026

APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES AND WORKING GROUPS

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to appoint to Working Groups of the Strategy and Resources Committee for the ensuing Municipal Year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That the Committee appoints representatives to the Outside Bodies as listed in section 3.1.1 below, for the ensuing Municipal Year;
- (ii) That the Committee appoints representatives to the Working Group as listed in section 3.2.2 below, for the ensuing Municipal Year;

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

3.1 Outside Bodies

3.1.1 Members are asked to nominate representatives to serve on the following Working Groups, aligned to the Strategy and Resources Committee, for the ensuing municipal year.

| Outside Body | 2025 / 26 Representative(s) | To be Appointed |
|---|---|--------------------------------|
| Maldon Citizens Advice Bureau Liaison | Councillors A Fittock, P L Spenceley and M E Thompson | Three Members of the Committee |
| Maldon Museum in the Park Liaison Committee | Councillors K M H Lagan and A M Lay | Two Members of the Committee |

3.2 Working Groups

3.2.1 Members' attention is drawn to the following changes to the list of Working Groups appointed by this Committee:

- **Hythe Quay Desilting Task and Finish Working Group** – Deleted as Hythe Quay works have been completed.

3.2.2 Members are asked to nominate representatives to serve on the following Working Groups, aligned to the Strategy and Resources Committee, for the ensuing municipal year.

| Working Groups | 2025 / 26 Representative(s) | To be Appointed |
|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Car Park Fees Annual Review Group | Councillors J R Burrell-Cook J Driver, M F L Durham, and A Fittock <i>Please note the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council as the Council's Member representatives on the South Essex Parking Partnership Joint Committee are also members of this Working Group</i> | Four Members of the Committee |
| Waste Contract Member Working Group | Councillors J Driver, M F L Durham, K M H Lagan, R H Siddall, P L Spenceley and J C Stilts | Six Members of the Committee |

Background Papers: None.

Enquiries to: Committee Services.