



Essex
Wildlife Trust

Guide to Essex Wildlife Trust's planning policy

We work to influence the planning process to protect wildlife and secure nature's recovery



To achieve this, we do the following:

- We provide comments and advice to local planning authorities on local plan consultations and individual planning applications.
- We consider each development proposal on its own merits.
- We identify which development proposals pose the biggest threat to wildlife and focus our effort on securing the best outcomes for nature.
- We base our planning work on sound evidence.

Development can have significant harmful impacts on wildlife:



- Direct loss of habitats
- Fragmenting and isolating habitats so they're no longer connected
- Disrupting natural processes, such as water flow or the nutrient cycle
- Reducing the amount and quality of natural resources, such as food or nesting habitat
- Reducing local species populations or causing them to become locally extinct
- Increasing disturbance by people and predation by domestic pets

However, development done in the right way can deliver some benefits for wildlife:

- Restoring or enhancing existing habitats
- Creating new habitats
- Re-establishing wildlife corridors between habitats
- Including features to benefit wildlife, such as swift bricks, bat boxes and pollinator-friendly planting



We aim to achieve the greatest positive impact for wildlife through effective use of our limited resources



When we comment on planning proposals our priorities are to protect:

- Our own nature reserves
- Internationally and nationally designated sites, such as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS)
- Important wildlife corridors and ecological networks
- Protected and priority species and habitats

Local Wildlife Sites have the best wildlife habitat outside statutory designated sites

Unlike SPAs and SSSIs they aren't protected by legislation, but they do have some protection in the planning system. They are extremely important for several reasons:

- They provide essential refuges for most of our wildlife.
- They act as stepping stones or wildlife corridors between statutory sites, such as SSSIs.
- They are vital core areas of habitat which must be protected so we can reverse nature's decline and create new Nature Recovery Networks.



We aim to influence planning policy at all levels:



- **National** – we lobby Government officials and MPs and respond to Government policy consultations through The Wildlife Trusts and Countryside Link.
- **County/District** – we place a high priority on directly influencing local plan policies, biodiversity strategies and green infrastructure strategies.
- **Individual Planning Applications** – we aim to influence planning decisions where proposals will have a significant harmful impact on wildlife.

We aim to achieve the greatest positive impact for wildlife through effective use of our limited resources by prioritising staff time

- All planning consultations and enquiries are assessed when we receive them.
- We give priority to those with the potential for the greatest impacts on wildlife and biodiversity.





These are our priorities:

- We'll object to proposals that could be harmful to our own nature reserves, internationally and nationally designated sites, and local wildlife sites.
- We'll respond to major applications with the potential to harm important ecological networks.
- We'll provide advice on major applications where there are opportunities to include significant improvements for wildlife.
- We'll advise local planners on how they should deal with protected species.

When we're dealing with planning issues we'll do the following:

- We'll object to development proposals that in our view will cause significant harm to wildlife.
- We'll advise and support local authorities to plan positively for nature, in order to secure genuine improvements for wildlife alongside new development, including long-term habitat management and monitoring.
- We'll work hard to influence planning decisions and minimise harmful impacts on wildlife resulting from developments and planning policies.
- We always aim to be reasonable and fair, but our first responsibility is to protect wildlife and ensure nature's recovery in Essex.
- We'll always make our decisions based on up-to-date evidence, expert opinion and/or policy on protecting and enhancing the natural world.



We can only consider planning proposals in relation to wildlife impacts



We won't express an opinion on areas outside our charitable objectives.
For example, we can't comment on:

- Visual impacts on the landscape
- The loss of green belt land
- Housing numbers/density
- Transport infrastructure
- Air quality

Due to our limited resources we can't respond to all planning applications

- We know that nearly all new development will cause some harm to wildlife. However, we don't have the capacity to respond to planning applications that will have a smaller impact on wildlife.
- We can offer advice to local communities, organisations or individuals who want to protect their local wildlife and need help in responding to planning applications.



We have to communicate with professional planners, developers, and ecologists



- It's very important that we come across as professional and that our aims are clear and consistent.
- We have to be realistic about what we can achieve. We must work effectively within the constraints of the planning system, using wildlife legislation, planning policies and guidance to make the case for protecting wildlife and securing nature's recovery.

Our planning work benefits considerably from your input as a local resident. The following is particularly important in supporting our aims:

- If you know of any sites of significant wildlife concern you can send us an email (address below). For example, a proposed development may cause direct harm to a local wildlife site.
- When emailing us, please include the planning application reference number and the name of the local authority.



Local residents who are confident in their wildlife identification skills could also do the following:



- You could visit local sites under threat from development to assess the condition of any wildlife habitat and feed back your findings to us via email.
- You could record sightings of protected and priority species in and around sites under threat from development, and email your results to us.

Please ensure that you keep yourself safe at all times and only use public rights of way

You could also take photographs of protected species on or near application sites

- This is really useful and helps to add context.

Again, please ensure that you keep yourself safe and only use public rights of way



What do we consider to be significant impacts on wildlife?



- Is the proposed development on, adjacent to, or close to a designated site (SPA, SSSI, Local Wildlife Site)?
- Does the application site contain priority habitats (species-rich hedgerows, wildflower meadows, ancient/deciduous woodland, a river or stream)?
- Does the application site support protected species (bats, water voles, dormice, nesting birds, reptiles, badgers)?
- Is the application site a valuable wildlife corridor linking other important habitats?

Please feedback your comments and findings to us

We can then include your evidence in our assessment of individual development proposals.



Local knowledge is invaluable!



Essex beavers
photos by Russell Savory





Essex Wildlife Trust

Planning contact details:

For all planning matters please contact Annie Gordon, the Trust's Conservation Planning Coordinator:

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