

Living Landscapes - a vision for the future of Essex Area 34 - "Ramsden Heath and Woods"

A Summary of the Vision Document

The Concept

The Living Landscapes project has been developed by the Wildlife Trusts national organisation and is being implemented across the country by the individual County Trusts.

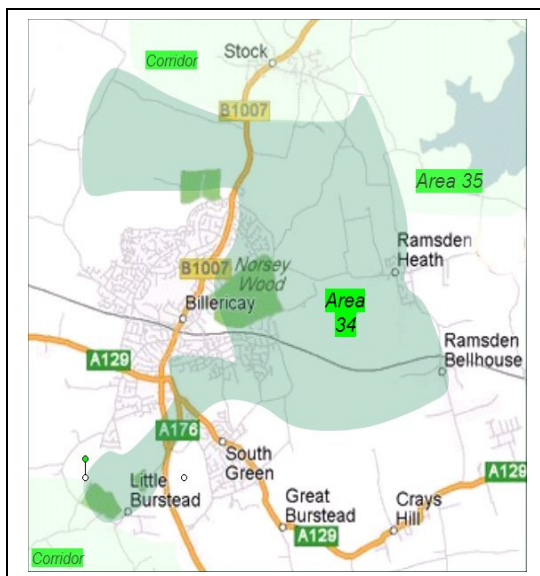
While there are good numbers of Nature Reserves in many parts of the UK, these are of varying sizes and are often isolated from each other by areas of poor habitat which inhibit the free movement of many wildlife species. Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) has identified 80 areas within the county where there is the potential to improve the environment for wildlife by creating links between existing Nature Reserves and encouraging environmentally-friendly land-management across a wider area.



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Area 34 today

Area 34 includes land to the north, east and south of Billericay. It extends from Buckwyn's Chase and Queen's Park Country Park in the north-west, eastwards towards (but not including) Hanningfield Reservoir (this is in Area 35 - "Hanningfield Reservoir and Woods") and then south to the villages of Ramsden Heath and Ramsden Bellhouse. The southern boundary runs roughly parallel to the railway line and about a mile to the south and there is an extension to the south-west to include Frith Wood, Landon Common and Little Burstead Golf Course.



The established Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) of Norsey Wood and Mill Meadows, both of which include areas defined as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), are included, together with privately owned woods such as Forty Acre Plantation, Devil's Wood, Meepshole Wood and Barrenleys Wood, and the surrounding agricultural land, which includes grazing and arable areas. In all, 17 Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) are included.

Work to date

A local EWT volunteer, and member of the Mill Meadows Society, has taken the initiative and, in consultation with representatives of a number of local interest groups and the EWT, has produced the Vision Document of which this is a Summary. Discussions have been initiated with local councils and several of the landowners whose property is included in the Area. There are two projects already underway: management of one of the woodland local wildlife sites and restoration of a moat at one of the schools.

Bodies involved

The main contributors so far have been representatives of Norsey Wood Society, Basildon District Council, Chelmsford Borough Council, EWT and Friends of Queens Park Country Park. Wider consultations based on the Vision Document are now beginning.



Objectives

These have been defined under four headings:

Wildlife - Initially, 15 species of birds, 6 of mammals, 4 of reptiles and amphibians, 7 of butterflies and moths and 4 of flowers are targeted (see below for a list of these species). All of these occur, or might be expected to occur, in the Area and have the potential for population increases given sympathetic land-management. Targets have been suggested for population increases for some species - for others, further research will be needed before practical objectives can be set. The species listed include previously common birds such as house martins and house sparrows and butterflies such as small tortoiseshell, all of which have become increasingly rare in the last 20 years.

People - Objectives cover increased use of Nature Reserves for educational purposes and facilitation and promotion of increased use of the countryside for walking, improving both the health and environmental awareness of the local population.



The Local Community - It is hoped to stimulate increased involvement in local environmental groups (new and existing) with more individuals actively taking part in voluntary conservation work (which might include monitoring of species populations as well as practical tasks in support of landowners). Encouraging the participation of young people through initiatives involving schools and youth groups will be a priority. There is also an ambition to create two additional "easy access trails" and organise more community events.

The Local Economy - It is planned to achieve greater involvement of landowners in Environmental Stewardship and Woodland Grant schemes and to promote sales of local produce and use of land for (commercial) leisure purposes.

Projects

Many of these will relate to the extension of Positive Conservation Management to more land within the Area and the creation of "Wildlife Corridors" to link existing Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites so that more species can roam over a wider area and avoid populations becoming isolated. Projects to survey/monitor existing wildlife and any changes in populations achieved will also be essential.

Other projects include:

- creating a network of local "Green Walks"
- improving the wildlife-value of existing ponds and creating new



ponds to encourage the movement of amphibians and reptiles and water-dependent insect and plant life.

- creating "Wildlife Corridors" for animals to feed and move around - these are principally field margins with hedgerows and scrub. They might also serve as permissive walking routes where this does not conflict with their wildlife value or landowners interests. Eight potential Corridors have initially been identified.
- Installing boxes for birds, bats and dormice, and carrying out surveys on wildlife to find out its status on the area

Resources required

Of course the prime resource will be support from the public and landowners. Funding will be needed too, and this will largely be obtained from grant schemes. We need conservation and land management expertise and manpower to make this happen and to create a Living Landscape which is sustainable and beneficial to the people who live in the Area.

Delivering the Vision

It is intended to establish a new Forum, with representatives from interested organisations, landowners and the general public to agree, plan and implement the projects which will be needed to make it a reality. We will also progress these projects as part of the Basildon Wildlife & Countryside Forum and the Chelmsford Biodiversity Forum and with regular liaison with the Essex Wildlife Trust so that initiatives can be shared across other Living Landscape Areas.



Organisations, individuals and landowners are being approached on projects, for example, specific woodlands, meadows and water areas. The extent to which the Vision can be delivered is, however, dependant on largely on the participation of the local community.



You can view or download the Vision Document at:

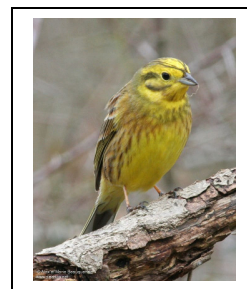
www.millmeadows.org.uk

Or contact Neil Sumner on Neilsumner123@aol.com, 01277 630849

For information about Living Landscapes in Essex, visit http://www.essexwt.org.uk/protecting_wildlife/living_landscapes/

Species needing protection, recovery or survey in this Living Landscape

Birds		Wildflowers
Kestrel	Yellow Wagtail	Glandular Eyebright
Barn Owl	Yellowhammer	Cornflower
Turtle Dove	Reed Bunting	Shepherd's Needle
Skylark	House Sparrow	Spreading Hedge Parsley
Swallow	Linnet	
House Martin	Bullfinch	Reptiles and Amphibians
Starling	Willow Warbler	Great Crested Newt
Song Thrush	Garden Warbler	Grass Snake
Swift		Common Frog
Insects		Common Toad
Tortoiseshell Butterfly		
Small Heath	Mammals	
White Admiral Butterfly	Brown Hare	
Garden Tiger Moth	Dormouse	
Buff Ermine Moth	Pipistrelle Bat	
White Ermine Moth	Noctule Bat	
Cinnabar Moth	Water Vole	
Buff Ermine Moth	Hedgehog	



Glossary

LNR	Local Nature Reserve	places with wildlife or geological features that are of special interest locally
LoWS	Local Wildlife Sites	Areas of land with significant wildlife value. In reality they are typically an area of ancient woodland, a flower-rich hay meadow or a village pond.
PCM	Positive Conservation Management	Maintaining, restoring or enhancing wildlife species on a site for which it has been designated. For example, managing a meadow to encourage the rare plant species it supports
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest	Special wildlife and geological sites