

Our
Strategic Plan
2020
2025

A Wilder Essex



Essex
Wildlife Trust

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The challenge

The environment is arguably higher on the political agenda than it has ever been before. As a direct consequence, it is an incredibly exciting time to be part of an organisation that can deliver fundamental benefits to wildlife conservation through active interventions on the ground and by inspiring collective and individual action. As passionate professionals, there is nowhere better to direct our energy at this moment in time than Essex Wildlife Trust. We need to think globally but act locally.

Having been founded in 1959, the Trust has the benefit of **over sixty years of experience in tackling environmental challenges spanning terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems.** With our track record of delivering tangible benefits for wildlife across the county, we are perfectly placed to support stakeholders, landowners and decision makers to deliver solutions that ultimately secure biodiversity net gain.

Despite the rising profile of the challenges that wildlife face, we know from research, such as the latest State of Nature report, that biodiversity continues to decline. **There is now an urgent need to tackle the climate emergency, restore damaged habitats, increase the connectivity between protected areas and well-managed land, and lobby for legislation** that places natural heritage at the forefront of policies and forward planning.

By most estimations, we only have a decade left to meet these challenges before the damage is irreversible. **The next ten years could be the most important in the history of nature conservation.** Given the scale of the challenge, the focus of our five-year strategy is impact. **It charts a course that will enable us to make the most of our resources over the next few vital years.**



We are part of a **wider grassroots movement** of Wildlife Trusts across the UK

Our movement

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

Together we have more than 850,000 members, 40,000 volunteers, 2,000 staff and 600 trustees. We manage almost 100,000 hectares of land across more than 2,000 nature reserves. Our movement embodies the concept of 'think globally, act locally', ensuring that **our conservation efforts do not stop at the county border**. All our work connects to a larger vision for wildlife in the UK.

The 'county' is a human construct. The species we protect are not confined by our local boundaries.



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

Our vision

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our mission

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

We will achieve our vision of being a county rich in wildlife and connecting people with nature by focusing our efforts on two areas: **protecting** and **inspiring**. These are the two key strands to our strategy.

Modern conservation must inspire people beyond the conservation community. We cannot do it all ourselves. Although we have large landholdings throughout Essex, we cover a proportionally small area of the county. If every garden in Essex were to become a mini nature reserve, this coverage would be significantly higher.

We are much more than a nature club for hobbyists. We serve the entire county. We want to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to develop a lifelong love of nature, covering **every area of Essex, urban as well as rural.**

“Modern conservation must inspire people beyond the conservation community”

Our values

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

Inspiring

- We showcase wildlife
- We demonstrate success
- We encourage a lifelong love of nature
- We spread enthusiasm for conservation and wildlife

Collaborative

- We work with partners
- We explore new opportunities
- We embrace innovation
- We share our vision

United

- We understand that we all play a part in our mission
- We support colleagues
- We work together as one

Professional

- We put integrity at the heart of everything we do
- We expect high standards
- We are efficient and accurate
- We are informal but professional

Our strategic objectives

Our strategy has **three overarching objectives** that support us in delivering our vision. Each objective is supported by a number of goals. There is no priority to the order in which our objectives appear within the framework, other than the fact that **Enable lays the foundations that maximise our ability to Protect and Inspire.**

1 Protect

2 Inspire

3 Enable

Furthermore, we have **three cross-cutting themes** that should be front of mind in everything we do:

1 Urban

2 Wellbeing

3 Connectivity

Enable lays the foundations that maximise our ability to **Protect** and **Inspire**

Our strategic framework

Cross-cutting themes

1. Urban

Protect

Goal 1

Demonstrating wildlife gain

Goal 2

Maximising the conservation value of our land

Goal 3

Championing key species

Enable

Goal 7 Evidencing impact

Goal 8 Embedding innovation and sustainability

2. Wellbeing

3. Connectivity

Inspire

Goal 4

Creating places of wonder

Goal 5

Inspiring a lifelong love of nature

Goal 6

Growing wildlife supporters

How we will deliver the strategy

We will support the delivery of the strategy by ensuring that all staff and volunteers can see how they help delivery across all objectives. We will also design a completely new performance and reporting framework to track our progress and achievements.

| **Goal 9** Making our money work harder for nature

| **Goal 10** Working together for wildlife

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

Protect

As a wildlife charity, our aim is to deliver **significant and measurable impact for wildlife conservation in Essex**. Our focus is not only on protecting and restoring habitats, but also enhancing and creating them. In order to demonstrate the tangible benefits of our actions and interventions, we must ensure that the right data is available. The collection, storage and analysis of this data requires careful planning. We will need to draw heavily upon our volunteer network and our existing data infrastructure.

We must also leverage upon our sixty years of experience across multiple habitats to deliver **bigger and better examples of wildlife protection**. By spearheading the national campaign for Nature Recovery Networks in Essex, we will lead the way in delivering the aspirations set out in Defra's 25-year plan at county level.

In order to achieve our conservation goals, we will need to form **stronger partnerships than ever with a broad range of stakeholders**, which will enable us to deliver impact that is scalable as well as significant. With commitment comes sacrifice. We must **prioritise our conservation goals** and, when necessary, be bold enough to step away from less critical species and habitats in order to focus our collective effort on the best overall outcome.

Goal

1

Demonstrating wildlife gain

We will focus our energy on demonstrating biodiversity net gain on **sites that we either manage or are able to influence**, spanning terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats. We will gather baseline data on focused sites, habitats and species, and **demonstrate best practice in conservation**.

We will position ourselves **at the forefront of planning and development**, influencing decision making and, where necessary, acquiring land for land banking.

Goal

2

Maximising the conservation value of our land

Although we have ambitions to extend our influence across the county, working closely with landowners, planners and developers, we will not neglect our own land. We will maximise the conservation value of our own sites, demonstrating **conservation excellence and higher levels of maintenance**.

We will position our sites as exemplar reserves, balancing recreation with conservation, and categorising sites so that our efforts deliver the best return.

Goal

3

Championing key species

We will **reverse the decline of key species**, using baseline data to determine appropriate levels of abundance and distribution. We will explore the reintroduction of species that capture the public imagination and lead to deeper engagement with the natural world, but also ensure that our focus is on groups of species and critical ecosystems.

We will use iconic species to connect people with nature on a far larger scale, using them as the focus of our campaigns.



We will use **iconic species** to **connect people with nature**

We want to nurture a county of **conservation-minded supporters**

Inspire

Gone are the days when land acquisition was the key to conservation success. Land value has increased to such an extent that it is no longer viable for a charity to pursue the purchase of land as the central pillar of its conservation strategy. Instead, **our focus should be on the opportunity to provide great wildlife experiences, inspire a lifelong love of nature, and encourage the people of Essex to take individual and collective action.** We must nurture a county of conservation-minded supporters.

We cannot protect wildlife in perpetuity on our own. We are simply not big enough. This does not stop us from leading the way, demonstrating what is possible, advising others, and **lobbying people in positions of influence to step up and do more.**

There are subtle yet fundamental differences between telling and showing: the art of inspiration is to guide our audiences in a way that allows them to arrive at the conclusion themselves. We must be expert storytellers, avoiding jargon and ensuring that our language is engaging and inclusive. **Research shows that, while necessarily raising the stakes, our communications must ultimately be positive. We need to use 'less loss' and 'more love'.**

We are well-equipped to inspire our audiences. We have a comparatively high number of Nature Discovery Centres that offer important touchpoints, allowing us to engage with over a million visitors through carefully considered experiences, interpretation and communications. Similarly, our membership base and social media supporter base are already large, providing a strong foundation from which to build for the future.

Goal

4

Creating places of wonder

The potential of our sites cannot be overstated. We will improve our Nature Discovery Parks and nature reserves so that **more people than ever have a great wildlife experience, feel more connected to nature, and take positive action for wildlife.**

We will develop our visitor engagement programme, create new wildlife spectacles and experiences, and measure the impact of our engagement.

Goal

5

Inspiring a lifelong love of nature

We will extend our reach to enable more people to have access to **outstanding outdoor learning experiences** that nurture a love of nature. We will target more urban populations, engage more youth, and **develop the role of informal educators such as rangers, wardens and volunteers.**

We will **inspire larger numbers of children and adults through our education and events**, enhance our website and digital estate, and improve our ability to measure impact.

Goal

6

Growing wildlife supporters

We will **review and improve our stewardship of all stakeholder groups** to increase recruitment and retention. This includes but is not limited to members, corporate partners, funders, legators, volunteers, visitors, followers, the media, influencers and decision-makers.

We will focus our efforts on **campaigns that raise our profile** and increase engagement, inspiring supporters to take individual and collective action.

We will improve our Nature Discovery Parks and nature reserves so that **more people than ever have a great wildlife experience**

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



Enable

Our ability to achieve significant and measurable impact for wildlife conservation will rely on having strong foundations upon which to build.

We need to develop a culture of accountability, where individuals and teams focus on the best outcome for the Trust, engendering a positive, can-do attitude; a culture in which staff and volunteers are proud, motivated and engaged, **with a shared understanding of what constitutes success.**

We must **embed our values throughout the organisation so that they run like a golden thread through everything we do.** The ability to measure our performance through an impact framework and key performance indicators is a top priority.

At a time when the competition for charitable funds is so extreme, we must not only review and implement efficiency savings across all departments, **we must also diversify our income streams to leverage upon new opportunities.**

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

Goal 7 Evidencing impact

We will measure the impact of all of our key charitable activities on a routine basis. Furthermore, we will improve the communication of our impact and the way in which we **formalise the process of learning from experience**, working towards a culture of continuous improvement.

We will make our **internal processes more efficient and effective**, leading to a leaner way of working that allows more space for value-added activities, thus creating more impact for wildlife.

Goal 8 Embedding innovation and sustainability

We will be **more innovative and agile in our work in order to match the pace and urgency of the environmental challenges we face, playing our part in tackling the climate emergency**. We will balance this with a **review of our organisational appetite for risk**. We will redouble our focus on sustainability and innovation, agreeing **ambitious new targets for energy use and waste reduction** with the aim of being carbon neutral as soon as possible.

By the end of the strategic period, we will have a culture of innovation and sustainability embedded across the organisation, supported by Innovation Champions and an Innovation Fund to enable ideas to become reality.

Goal 9 Making our money work harder for nature

We will **review all aspects of our finances**, from target-setting to financial reporting, to ensure that our processes and systems are fit-for-purpose, including key areas of business such as membership, fundraising, and human resources. We will take steps to ensure that our spending is always strategic.

We will diversify our income streams to **manage the risk associated with unstable sources of income**, such as agri-environment schemes, and to ensure our long-term financial sustainability.

Goal 10 Working together for wildlife

That we are a values-based organisation is mirrored in our culture and our people. We want to take this even further. We want every member of staff and volunteer to understand the importance of their role and how they contribute to our charitable aims. We will continue to **embrace and encourage more inclusivity, understanding that this engenders a greater breadth of experience and talent**.

We will be recognised as experts in our field who deliver for wildlife, who love our work, and who live our culture. We will continue to be recognised as an employer of choice, enjoy high levels of employee and volunteer satisfaction, and aim to embrace flexible working.

We will **continue to be recognised** as an **employer of choice**



We need to redress the balance in favour of the urban environment to ensure that we remain effective

Cross-cutting themes

Our three cross-cutting themes will be embedded in everything we do, ensuring that no opportunity is missed to **work with urban sites and populations**, leverage upon the growing understanding of **the importance of nature to mental and physical health**, and achieve our ambition of **connecting habitats across land and sea** and connecting people to nature.

Theme 1. Urban

Only 30% of the land in Essex is 'urban' while 80% of residents are 'urbanites'. Most of us live in urban environments. If we overlook this, we risk missing the opportunity to influence the majority of the population and a third of the land in our county. **We need to redress the balance in favour of the urban environment to ensure that we remain effective.**

Theme 2. Wellbeing

It is becoming increasingly apparent that **nature fundamentally affects our mental and physical health**. This presents opportunities as well as responsibilities. It allows us to engage with a broader range of audiences than ever before, with **the potential for new people to become visitors, members and supporters**. In turn, this presents us with the opportunity to inspire an enduring love of nature and encourage pro-environmental action.

Wellbeing also allows us to **'layer the argument' for why wildlife and the natural world is so important, in addition to other benefits such as ecosystem services and natural capital**. Exciting opportunities for funding are also available through the wellbeing agenda; although we only pursue these where there is a clear strategic fit. Another key dimension to this theme is the wellbeing of wildlife. **Wellbeing is not an exclusively human problem.**

Theme 3. Connectivity

We have been committed to the principle of **Living Landscapes and Living Seas** for a number of years, most recently within the framework of Nature Recovery Networks which aim to **increase connectivity between fragmented habitats and protected areas across the land**.

Whenever possible, we will capitalise on the opportunity to connect habitats, working with new and existing partners, landowners, neighbours, and other conservation organisations. Another **key dimension to this theme is the importance of connecting people to nature** which runs through everything we do.

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



Summary of goals

Objectives	Strategic goal
Protect	Goal 1: Demonstrating wildlife gain
	Goal 2: Maximising the conservation value of our land
	Goal 3: Championing key species
Inspire	Goal 4: Creating places of wonder
	Goal 5: Inspiring a lifelong love of nature
	Goal 6: Growing wildlife supporters
Enable	Goal 7: Evidencing impact
	Goal 8: Embedding innovation and sustainability
	Goal 9: Making our money work harder for nature
	Goal 10: Working together for wildlife

Our Strategic Plan 2020 2025



Essex
Wildlife Trust

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