

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

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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.