

Culture, Heritage and Green Spaces Service

Essex Country Parks



Essex County Council

Strategic Links

Everyone's Essex:

- A high quality environment

Essex Vision:

- Enjoy life into old age
- Strengthen communities through participation
- Connect us to each other and the world

Organisational Strategy:

- Improve the health of the people in Essex
- Help to secure sustainable development and protect the environment

Residents' Survey:

- Parks / Open Spaces highest scoring option (60%) in 'What makes your area a good place to live?'

Local Nature Recovery Strategy:

- Country Parks play critical role as 'stepping stones' to connect areas of nature
- Connection with Local Nature Partnership as exemplar sites and promotional opportunities

Our Vision

- Establish ECC as an **exemplar in parklands management**
- Position Green Spaces to **influence positive change** in climate action behaviours
- Use the **natural environment to enrich lives**
- Create opportunities for Green Spaces to **contribute to the economic growth of the county**

Locations

ECC owned:

- Cudmore Grove Country Park, Colchester
- Danbury Country Park, Chelmsford
- Marsh Farm Country Park, Chelmsford
- Thorndon Country Park, Brentwood
- Weald Country Park, Brentwood

3rd party agreements:

- Belhus Woods Country Park, Thurrock
- Great Notley Country Park, Braintree
- Hadleigh Country Park, Castle Point

Trails:

- The Flitch Way
- Blackwater Rail Trail
- Colne Valley Rail Trail



Essex Country Parks in 2021-22

- **Regionally, nationally and internationally important sites:** 4 x SSSIs, 2 x Special Areas of Conservation, 3 x Special Protection Areas, 3 x Ramsar sites, 8 x Scheduled Monuments, 4 x Grade II Registered Park and Gardens
- **10,002 trees planted** as part of Essex Forest Initiative
- **1.4m visitors** in 2020/21, **53% higher** than 3-year average, due to COVID-19 restrictions affecting public choice
- **1.04m visitors** in 2021/22, **11% higher** than 3-year average (excl. 20/21)
- Retained **7 Green Flag awards**, the quality benchmark for open spaces
- Root and branch review of staffing service leading to **major restructure**
- Following extensive restructure, internal ECC recognition as a **'High Performing Team'**

Essex Country Parks in 2021-22

	2021/22 (P11 forecast)	2021/22 Budget
Expenditure – Staffing	£1,205,118	£1,268,021
Expenditure – Non-staff	£2,326,438	£1,262,474
Income	(£3,148,990)	(£2,076,791)
Net Cost	£382,566	£453,704

Plans for Country Parks



- Developing strategic management plans to ensure highest standards for biodiversity, heritage protection and amenity value
- Recognition of green spaces in the wider system for residents and visitors, both for health and wellbeing and Nature Recovery. Country Parks are 'keystones' as we develop Essex's Nature Recovery Strategy
- Continue to accommodate events, taking care not to damage or compromise Country Parks
- Country Parks have proved popular locations for film and TV, and we see this as a potential income stream in the future

Essex Country Parks in 2022-23

Short term...

- Prepare all 8 Country Parks for enrolment in new **Countryside Stewardship Scheme**
- **Finalise Parkland Management Plans** for 4 x Registered Parks and Gardens
- Retain **7 Green Flag awards**, the quality benchmark for open spaces
- Continued focus on **H&S and legislative obligations**, including securing appropriate short-term **investment in asset maintenance**
- **Review operating models** for car parking and Food & Beverage

Essex Country Parks in 2023-29

Medium term...

- **Culture change** across service
- Deliver against **Countryside Stewardship Scheme** agreements
- Secure sustainable **funding for proactive maintenance** programme
- **De-carbonisation** of operations
- Influence 'Environment' objectives from **Everyone's Essex**
- Monitor and measure **positive wellbeing impacts** from green spaces

Essex Country Parks in 2023-50

Long term...

- Realise the benefits of green spaces on the **wellbeing of communities**
- Establish Essex as a **leading county in providing green spaces**
- Enhance the **biodiversity** of the county, and country
- Enhance and increase the footprint and connectivity of **green and blue infrastructure**

Marketing

- Ensuring residents are **connected with green spaces** available to them
- **Keeping visiting affordable** - Explorer Passes are still the most cost effective way for residents to regularly access the Country Parks
- Key theme in 2022 to **connect residents with the world around them** and the wealth of **biodiversity**
- **Essex Explorer Magazine** launched in 2021, promoting **health and wellbeing** in the Country Parks and starts a conversation around **climate change** - can be picked up in libraries and connects other complimentary campaigns such as the annual Reading Challenge and the Summer of Culture



<https://www.explore-essex.com/culture/essex-explorer>

**ESSEX
COUNTRY
PARKS**


Essex County Council

Key Challenges and Pressures – *Wicked Issues*

- Balancing **commercial and non-commercial** priorities
- Maintenance funding – very limited capital or revenue provision despite significant assets requiring **maintenance and lifecycle funding** (car parks, play areas, pathways, toilet blocks, plant equipment, visitor centres, cafés, MTB trails)
- Developing and improving offer and **visitor numbers sustainably**
- Long standing **management and tenancy agreements**
- Joining up more effectively with **Districts and Boroughs**
- Access to Country Parks for **non-car users**