



Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (Essex Coast RAMS)

Technical Advice Note (TAN)
August 2026

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Acronyms

AA	Appropriate Assessment
AMR	Authority Monitoring Report
CIL	Community Infrastructure Levy
EA	Environment Agency
EWT	Essex Wildlife Trust
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
GPDO	General Permitted Development Order
HMO	House in Multiple Occupation
HRA	Habitats Regulations Assessment
LPA	Local Planning Authority
NE	Natural England
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
RAMS	Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SIP	Site Improvement Plan
SPA	Special Protection Area
TAN	Technical Advice Note
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
UU	Unilateral Undertaking
ZoI	Zone of Influence

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Appropriate Assessment (AA)	The stage of a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) which considers in detail the potential effects of a plan or project on the integrity of Habitats Sites and determines whether adverse effects can be ruled out.
Authority Monitoring Report (AMR)	A report produced by the Local Planning Authority to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of Local Plan policies and overall planning performance.
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	A charge applied by Local Planning Authorities on eligible development in their area to contribute towards the provision of infrastructure needed to support development.
Competent Authority	Any public body, government department, or statutory undertaker with the power for assessing or delivering plans or projects under the Habitats Regulations, including undertaking HRAs.
King Charles III England Coast Path	A long-distance National Trail providing continuous public access around the English coastline, including associated coastal margin, which may influence recreational pressure on Habitats Sites.
General Permitted Development Order (GPDO)	The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended), is a statutory instrument that grants planning permission for certain types of development subject to specified conditions and limitations (such development is then referred to as permitted development).
House in Multiple Occupation (HMO)	A property rented out to at least three people who are not from one 'household' (for example a family) but share facilities like a bathroom and kitchen.
Habitat Sites	Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), for the purpose of those regulations, including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and Ramsar sites, which are afforded the same level of protection in national planning policy. Can also be known as European site.
Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)	Assessments which must be undertaken in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) to determine if a plan or project may adversely affect the integrity of a protected feature of a habitats site before deciding whether to undertake, permit or authorise it. European Sites identified under these regulations are referred to as 'habitats sites' in the National Planning Policy Framework.
Impact Risk Zone (IRZ)	GIS-based tool developed by Natural England identifying geographically defined areas used to rapidly assess the likelihood that a proposed development or activity could negatively affect sensitive environmental sites, e.g. SSSIs, SACs, SPAs, Ramsar sites or habitats of protected species.

In-combination effect	The cumulative effects of a plan or project when considered alongside other plans, projects, or activities, particularly in relation to impacts on Habitats Sites.
In perpetuity	Mitigation for impacts on Habitats sites must be effective for the lifetime of the impact. For RAMS, best practice is to treat 80 years as the functional equivalent of in-perpetuity provision.
Local Planning Authority (LPA)	The public authority responsible for preparing planning policy and determining planning applications within its administrative area.
Natural England	The Government's statutory adviser and regulator for the natural environment in England, responsible for conserving, enhancing, and managing the country's landscapes, wildlife, and natural resources.
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	Sets out government's planning policies for England, guiding sustainable development and local planning decisions and how these are expected to be applied.
Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS)	A strategic mitigation approach (such as the Essex Coast RAMS) which addresses the in-combination recreational impacts of residential development on Habitats Sites, funded through developer contributions.
Ramsar site	A wetland site of international importance, designated under the 1971 Ramsar Convention, also known as "The Convention on Wetlands", and afforded the same protection as European designated sites within the planning system.
Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)	New or enhanced greenspace, aimed at deflecting visitors away from designated European habitat sites and creating more space for recreation.
Section 106 Agreement (S106)	A legally binding agreement under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 used to secure site-specific mitigation measures or financial contributions necessary to make a development acceptable. S106 agreements often referred to as 'developer contributions' operate alongside planning conditions and the Community Infrastructure Levy in areas where that charge applies.
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	Areas defined by regulation 3 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 which have been given special protection as important conservation sites.
Special Protection Area (SPA)	Areas classified under regulation 15 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 which have been identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds.
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	A nationally designated site protected for its important flora, fauna, geological or physiographical features.
Technical Advice Note (TAN)	Detailed planning document that provide detailed guidance and advice to developers and decision-makers about implementing planning policies. Can be material consideration in planning decisions, but are not legally binding or adopted policy documents.

Unilateral Undertaking (UU)	A legal obligation entered into by a developer under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to secure planning obligations without a bilateral agreement with the Local Planning Authority.
Zone of Influence (Zol)	The area within which new residential development is considered likely to trigger likely significant effects resulting in increased recreational pressure on Habitats Sites and mitigation therefore required. Zol is based on visitor survey evidence underpinning the Essex Coast RAMS.

1. Introduction

Purpose of the RAMS Technical Advice Note (TAN)

- 1.1 This Technical Advice Note (TAN) provides guidance on the implementation of the Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS).
- 1.2 The TAN replaces the Essex Coast RAMS Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). It is a material consideration in the planning process. It supports Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), applicants and decision-makers by:
 - Providing guidance on RAMS contributions and tariff payments including how and when applicants should make contributions.
 - Clarifying how mitigation is secured and delivered.
- 1.3 The TAN should be read alongside:
 - The Essex Coast RAMS Strategy (2026)
 - Relevant Local Plan policies
 - National policy and legislation
 - Further guidance including on SANGS
- 1.4 The TAN provides clarity on how competent authorities can lawfully discharge their duties under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 when determining planning applications. Decision-makers must still consider each proposal on its individual merits, but where RAMS applies and contributions are secured, it provides a clear pathway to reaching a legally robust conclusion of no adverse effect on integrity.
- 1.5 A 'frequently asked questions' (FAQ) document has also been produced to provide further information about the RAMS project. This is available on the Bird Aware Essex Coast website¹ and will be updated regularly.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) implications

- 1.6 The strategic approach to mitigating recreational disturbance on the Essex Coast will continue to be delivered through the Essex Coast RAMS. A partnership approach for the implementation, governance and monitoring of the RAMS has been in place and operating successfully since 2020, enabling the 12 local planning authorities within the partnership to meet their duties under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations.
- 1.7 Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Essex is not expected to impact on the delivery, effectiveness or day-to-day management of the RAMS. The RAMS is a strategic, evidence-based mitigation scheme, secured through developer contributions and implemented across administrative boundaries. The statutory duties under the Habitats Regulations will transfer to any successor authorities, and those duties will continue to be discharged collectively through the RAMS.

¹ Bird Aware Essex Coast: www.birdaware.org/essex

2. The Essex Coast RAMS

What is the Essex Coast RAMS?

- 2.1 The Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) is a strategic, partnership-led approach to mitigating the effects of increased recreational pressure on internationally protected habitats sites on the Essex coast, whilst allowing new homes and qualifying development to come forward.
- 2.2 It sets out how the recreational impacts of increased visitors, arising from new residential developments in-combination, are mitigated so that important coastal habitats and bird populations are protected. It enables sustainable development across Essex while ensuring compliance with the Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) by addressing the cumulative (in-combination) effects of new development while safeguarding internationally designated habitat sites and the species they support.
- 2.3 The RAMS provides a co-ordinated, coast-wide mitigation package funded through developer contributions, removing the need for site-by-site solutions. Measures focus on influencing visitor behaviour and managing access, including ranger services, education and engagement, signage, responsible recreation campaigns, dog management initiatives, seasonal protections, and targeted infrastructure improvements. Monitoring and adaptive management underpin delivery to ensure effectiveness over time.
- 2.4 The 2026 revised RAMS replaces the 2018 strategy, reflecting increased housing growth, extended Local Plan periods, updated evidence, improved costings, and lessons learned from implementation. It secures mitigation in perpetuity and strengthens the long-term, proactive approach needed to avoid adverse effects on site integrity.
- 2.5 Delivery of the mitigation is led by Bird Aware Essex, which provides on-the-ground engagement and behaviour change initiatives, ensuring the strategy remains visible, effective and evidence-led while supporting local planning authorities in meeting their legal duties.
- 2.6 The full strategy, visitor surveys and supporting documents are available via:
 - Participating Local Planning Authority websites
 - Bird Aware Essex Coast: www.birdaware.org/essex

The importance of the Essex coast

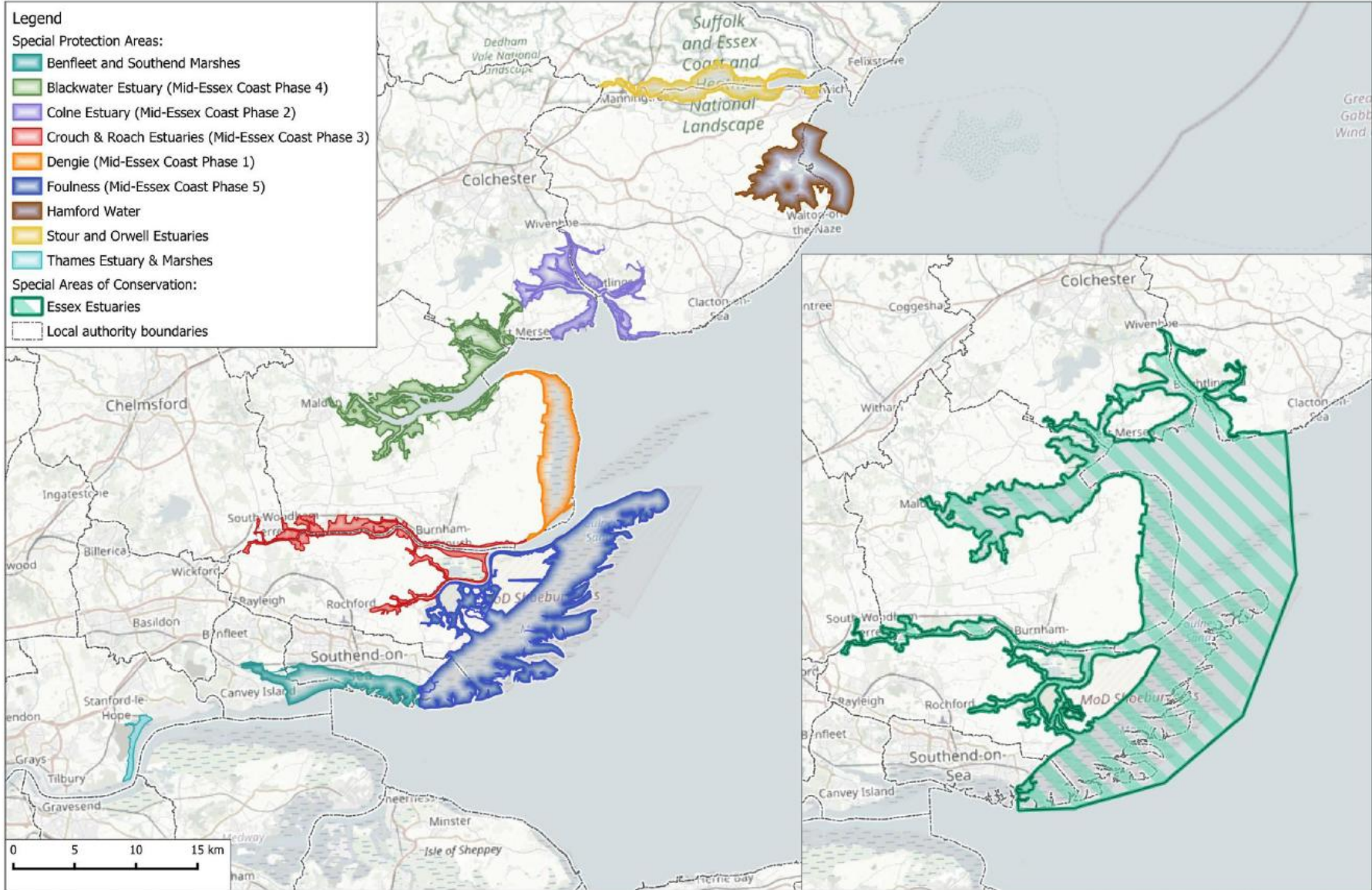
- 2.7 The Essex coastline is extensively designated for its ecological importance, including a range of internationally recognised habitat sites (often referred to as European Sites). These comprise nine Special Protection Areas (SPAs), nine Ramsar sites, and the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- 2.8 These designations, covering much of the coastline between the Stour and Thames estuaries, protect internationally important bird populations and afford a high level of legal protection. Collectively, they are referred to as European Sites or Habitats Sites (as defined in the NPPF).
- 2.9 The Habitats Sites to which the RAMS applies are as follows and locations of these are shown on **Map 1**.

- Essex Estuaries SAC
- Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar
- Hamford Water SPA and Ramsar
- Colne Estuary SPA and Ramsar
- Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar
- Dengie SPA and Ramsar
- Crouch and Roach Estuaries SPA and Ramsar
- Foulness SPA and Ramsar
- Benfleet and Southend Marshes SPA and Ramsar
- Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar

Requirement for strategic mitigation

- 2.10 Published Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs) for relevant Local Plans identify recreational disturbance as a key issue affecting Essex coastal SPAs, Ramsar sites and the SAC.
- 2.11 As Essex continues to grow and new housing is delivered, more people will live and work close to the coast. The coast is a major destination for recreational use and housing growth is expected to increase these recreational visits and demand for recreational activities such as walking, dog walking, cycling and water-based sports. While this provides social and wellbeing benefits, it also poses a risk of disturbance to sensitive bird species and damage to habitats such as saltmarsh and mudflats.
- 2.12 Evidence from the 2025 visitor surveys indicates that visits are predominantly local, frequent and year-round, with activities largely focused on walking and dog walking activities, and relatively low awareness of wildlife sensitivities.
- 2.13 HRAs (screening and/or Appropriate Assessments) for many Local Plans in Essex identified mitigation measures, with notable consistency reflecting 'in-combination' effects from planned and unplanned growth across local planning authority areas.
- 2.14 Natural England endorse a strategic approach to mitigation along the Essex coast to ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of designated Habitats Sites from in-combination recreational impacts.
- 2.15 The RAMS addresses in-combination effects arising from planned and unplanned growth across local planning authority areas. It does not consider impacts from individual developments in isolation, nor does it replace the need for project-specific mitigation measures that may be required to address additional or alone impacts, non-recreational or site-specific effects on Habitats Sites.
- 2.16 Some developments, particularly those close to Habitats Sites or of a larger scale, may also give rise to impacts alone. In such cases, additional project-specific mitigation may be required and secured through a separate project-level Appropriate Assessment, as advised by the LPA in consultation with Natural England. The RAMS does not remove this requirement.

Map 1. Designated Habitat Sites on the Essex Coast. Main map shows SPAs and Ramsar sites, insert map shows the SAC



3. The Legal Framework for RAMS

Legislation

The Habitats Regulations

- 3.1 The principal legal framework underpinning strategic mitigation schemes such as the Essex Coast RAMS, is the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (the Habitats Regulations).
- 3.2 Under Regulation 63, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) are 'competent authorities' and must ensure that any plans or project, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, will not adversely affect the integrity of a Habitats site. Where a plan (e.g. a Local Plan) or project (e.g. residential, tourist or attraction development) may affect such a site, a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is required.
- 3.3 This approach reflects the precautionary principle embedded within the Habitats Regulations. Where uncertainty exists, decisions must err on the side of caution, with conclusions supported by sufficient objective evidence to exclude harm.
- 3.4 HRAs for relevant Local Plans across Essex have consistently identified recreational disturbance, particularly from residential growth, as a key in-combination effect on coastal SPAs, Ramsar sites and the SAC.

Planning Act 2008 and Town and Country Planning Act 1990

- 3.5 The statutory framework for securing mitigation is set out in Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations 2010 (as amended).
- 3.6 Regulation 122 sets out the statutory tests that planning obligations must be:
 - necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
 - directly related to the development; and
 - fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development
- 3.7 For development under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, mitigation identified through HRA, including RAMS contributions, may be secured via planning conditions and/or Section 106 obligations to ensure compliance with the Habitats Regulations

In-Perpetuity

- 3.8 Mitigation secured under the Habitats Regulations must be effective for as long as the risk of harm to a site remains. This reflects established legal principles that mitigation must be reliable, enforceable and maintained for the duration of the impact.
- 3.9 For residential development, impacts such as recreational disturbance persist for as long as the development is occupied and are not limited to Local Plan periods.

- 3.10 Accordingly, mitigation must endure for the lifetime of the development. In practice, this is secured on an “in perpetuity” basis to ensure that residual and cumulative effects do not undermine site integrity over time.
- 3.11 On this basis, the Essex Coast RAMS must be delivered and funded in perpetuity to remain effective and legally compliant.

4. Scope of RAMS

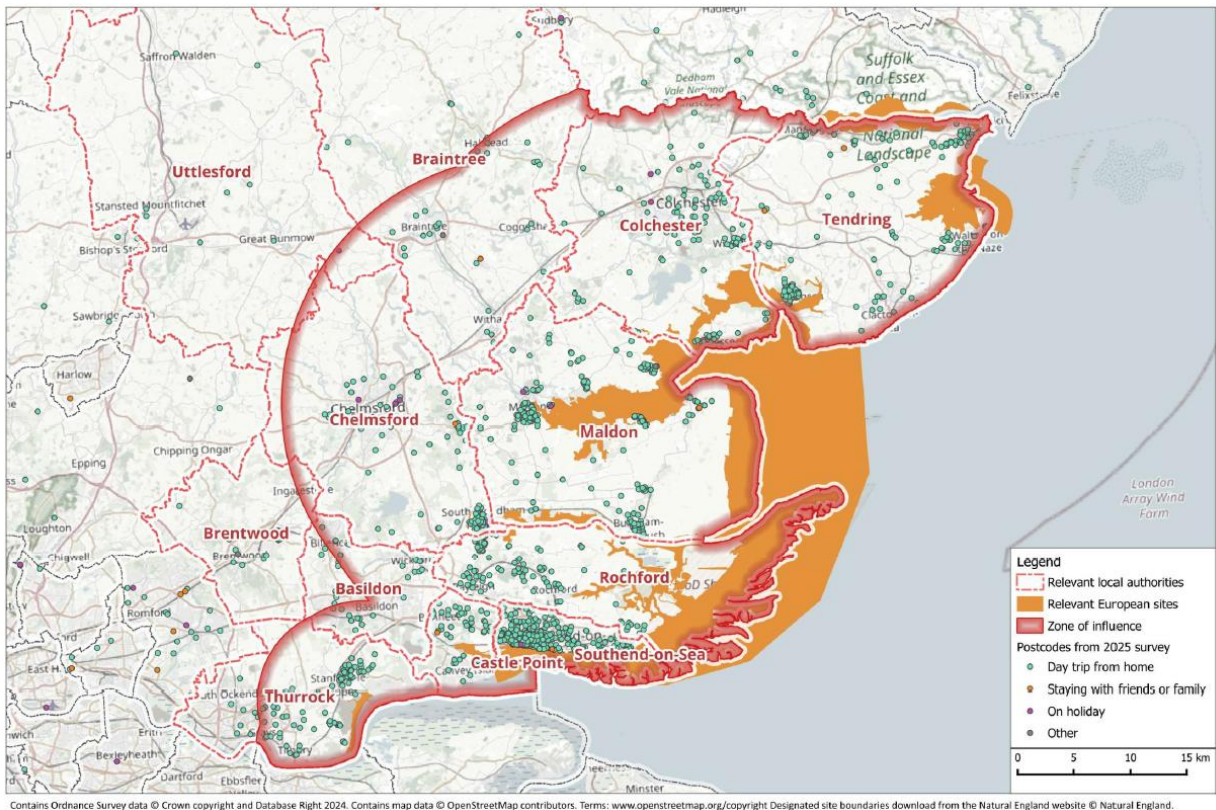
Where does the RAMS apply?

Zone of Influence

- 4.1 The RAMS applies to new residential and qualifying developments within the established Zone of Influence (ZOI) shown in Map 2 below. The ZOI identifies the distance from the protected habitat sites within which people are most likely to visit those sites regularly. It is therefore an area within which likely significant effects are triggered by new development and mitigation required.
- 4.2 The established ZOI, which was originally derived separately for each SPA and then merged, with values for each separate SPA ranging from 4.5 to 22km remains fit for purpose following a review. To view the ZOI or check if your development falls within it you can use the online interactive map on Magic Maps⁴, where you will find the definitive boundaries.
- 4.3 Housing Projections indicate approximately 148,309 new dwellings within the ZOI over the next 20 years. It is noted that this is a predicted figure agreed by LPAs in 2025 in order to agree a baseline for the RAMS review. Future reviews of the RAMS will take into account changes to proposed predicted housing growth.
- 4.4 With an estimated 609,786 existing dwellings in the ZOI in 2025, this represents a 24% increase in the housing stock within the ZOI. This growth will result in a commensurate increase in recreational visits to designated coastal sites, requiring an enhanced mitigation response.
- 4.5 Updated visitor surveys undertaken by Footprint Ecology in winter and summer 2025 demonstrated that increased recreational pressure remains a key impact. It was therefore concluded that an enhanced mitigation package is necessary to ensure compliance with the Habitats Regulations.

⁴ MAGIC website: <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

Map 2: Illustration of the Zone of Influence for the Essex Coast RAMS



What types of development does RAMS apply to?

- 4.6 The RAMS tariff applies to any future development that results in a net increase in residential units located within the identified Zone of Influence (ZOI), that may give rise to recreational impacts on European Sites and therefore trigger Likely Significant Effects (LSEs).
- 4.7 Table 1 lists the development types where LSEs are expected or may be expected. Whilst residential development represents the primary source of recreational pressure, other land uses can also create significant impacts on habitat sites, particularly those involving overnight accommodation, high visitor turnover or public recreational use. Any type of new overnight accommodation within 1.5km (approximately 15-minute walk) of the Essex coast, for example, is likely to give rise to recreational disturbance and therefore require mitigation.
- 4.8 Where appropriate, and supported by project level HRA, the RAMS tariff may also be applied to other forms of development beyond C3 dwellings, to ensure recreational impacts are fully addressed.
- 4.9 Developments not listed in the table, but which may also trigger likely significant effects include, but are not limited to:
 - Hotels (C1) – including boarding and guest houses;
 - Tourism attractions (F1, Sui Generis)

Table 1: Relevant types of development

Use Type/Class	Likely Significant Effect	Mitigation (tariff applied)
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)* (2.46 bedspaces = 1 dwelling)*
Residential Institutions (C2/C2A) Sheltered accommodation, extra-care, nursing homes, hospitals and secure institutions.	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) Schools, colleges or training centres and Student Accommodation	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) Net new temporary or permanent pitches	Yes	Contribution per pitch/plot (equivalent to per-dwelling rate)
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)

*a discounted rate is applied to these types of accommodation

Examples

Student Accommodation and Specialist housing

Residents at Specialist housing such as Student Accommodation are likely to have significantly lower levels of dog ownership compared to Dwelling Houses. A discounted rate has been applied to reflect this.

Worked Example:

Where 2.46 bedspaces is equivalent to a single dwelling for 200 units of student accommodation within the Zone of Influence would require a RAMS payment of £38,698.80 based on a tariff of £476 per dwelling:

$$200 / 2.46 = 81.3 \text{ units}$$

$$£476 \times 81.3 = £38,698.80 \text{ RAMS Payment}$$

$$200 / 1.9 = 105.2 \text{ units}$$

$$£476 \times 105.2 = £50,075.20 \text{ RAMS Payment}$$

Hotels and Holiday Accommodation

For Hotels and Holiday dwellings, some types may have lower level of dog ownership for overnight stays, see examples below. This will be considered on a case-by-case basis

Examples which could trigger LSE:

- Boutique hotels on edge of coastal town
- Dog friendly hotel or glamping site close to the coast
- Accommodation providing bikes for hire and/or accepting dogs

Examples which would not trigger LSE:

- Accommodation attached to conference or wedding venues
- City Centre hotels aimed at business users

Visitor attractions

Natural England has advised that visitor facilities within 0.8km or approximately 10 minutes walking distance of habitats sites that are not within a town centre boundary or settlement boundary, are likely to lead to likely significant effects. Natural England should be consulted on relevant proposals. The level of mitigation, which could be a contribution to the RAMS, will be considered based on the nature and scale of the proposal and location and links to habitats site.

What types of application does this apply to?

- 4.10 The RAMS applies to all full applications, outline applications, hybrid applications, and permitted development. In order to consider RAMS contributions at the outline application stage, the application should indicate a maximum number of dwelling units.
- 4.11 The General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) allows for the change of use of some buildings and land to Class C3 (dwelling houses) without the need for planning permission, with development being subject to the prior approval process. However, the Habitats Regulations also apply to such developments. The LPA is therefore obliged by the regulations to scope in those GPDO changes of use to dwelling houses where these are within the ZOI.
- 4.12 In practice, this means any development for prior approval should be accompanied by an application for the LPA to undertake an HRA on the proposed development. The development will need to include a mitigation package which would incorporate a contribution to the RAMS to mitigate the 'in- combination' effects. The alternative is for the applicant to provide information for a project level HRA/AA and secure bespoke mitigation to avoid impacts on Habitats sites in perpetuity. It is likely however that bespoke mitigation would be most costly.

What Applications does RAMS apply to?
• Full Planning Permission • Outline Planning Permission with all reserved matters • Outline Planning permission with some reserved matters • Reserved Matters (where we did not address HRA at the outline stage) • Residential new build • Residential Conversions • Prior Approvals

- 4.13 All proposals within the Zone of Influence must be screened under the Habitats Regulations.
- 4.14 Where a development may give rise to effects on a Habitats Site **alone**, these must be assessed through the project-level Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) process, with advice from Natural England. In these cases, bespoke mitigation may be required.
- 4.15 Where no alone effects are identified, but likely significant effects cannot be ruled out in combination with other plans and projects, mitigation is secured through the Essex Coast RAMS.
- 4.16 Where Likely Significant Effects cannot be ruled out, mitigation must be secured to enable the LPA to conclude no adverse effect on site integrity. In most cases, this will be achieved through a financial contribution to the Essex Coast RAMS.

NB: Seek advice from planning officer if unsure whether your development needs to pay the RAMS and / or if you need to assess and mitigate alone impacts.

5. What does RAMS do?

The Mitigation Package

- 5.1 The RAMS identifies a detailed program of strategic mitigation measures which are funded by contributions from residential development schemes. The details of the full mitigation package are set out in **Appendix 1**.
- 5.2 The updated mitigation package builds on the original adopted measures and introduces enhanced interventions where necessary to reflect increased housing growth, changes in recreational patterns and visitor behaviour and the requirement to deliver mitigation effectively for the lifetime of the development.
- 5.3 Measures focus on managing recreational pressure on the protected habitat sites through a combination of education, engagement, access management and monitoring. A coordinated delivery team, led by a Delivery Manager and supported by rangers and specialist officers, implements coast-wide initiatives such as awareness campaigns, behaviour change programmes, and targeted outreach (including work with dog walkers, schools and water users).
- 5.4 These strategic measures are complemented by site-specific interventions, including improved signage and interpretation, path and parking management, habitat protection (e.g. fencing and zoning), and infrastructure to guide visitor behaviour. Monitoring and data collection underpin the approach, ensuring measures remain effective and responsive to increased recreational demand arising from housing growth.
- 5.5 The outcome is a robust and proportionate mitigation package capable of ensuring that the recreational pressure arising from new development, in-combination, will not lead to adverse effects on the integrity of protected sites.
- 5.6 The updated RAMS accounts for approximately double the amount of housing growth, 148,309 new homes, in comparison to that in the current RAMS, 72,907 new homes.

What is the cost of the Mitigation package?

- 5.7 Appendix 1 contains details of the full mitigation package. The overall cost for the mitigation package is £ 72,594,500 in total from March 2026 until 2045.

Long term costing

- 5.8 For the purposes of RAMS, 'in perpetuity' is typically interpreted as a minimum period of 80 years. Mitigation measures must be sufficient to ensure that a plan or project will not adversely affect the integrity of a Habitats site, and therefore must remain effective, reliable and maintained for as long as the risk of harm persists. In practice, this means aligning the duration of mitigation with the lifespan of the impact it is designed to address.
- 5.9 In the case of residential development, the relevant effects, particularly recreational disturbance, arise for as long as the development is occupied. These effects are not limited to Local Plan periods and may continue for many decades. As a result, mitigation secured through the Essex Coast RAMS must endure for the lifetime of the development in order to ensure ongoing protection of designated sites.

- 5.10 While the Habitats Regulations do not explicitly refer to 'in perpetuity', established HRA principles require that mitigation relied upon to conclude no adverse effect on site integrity must be effective, certain and secured for the full duration of the impact. The duration of mitigation must therefore be determined by the persistence of the effect, rather than administrative or plan-making timescales.
- 5.11 If mitigation were to lapse while the effects of development continue, the risk of adverse effects on site integrity would re-emerge. This would be inconsistent with the precautionary principle and would undermine the lawful conclusion of no adverse effect. Accordingly, mitigation must be secured for as long as the development continues to generate recreational pressure.
- 5.12 The use of "in perpetuity" is consistent with established planning and HRA practice, including Local Plan examinations and appeal decisions, where it has been accepted as the appropriate mechanism for addressing ongoing and cumulative effects. Although often applied pragmatically as a long-term period (for example, 80–125 years), the key principle is that mitigation must endure for as long as the underlying impact remains.
- 5.13 Securing RAMS mitigation in perpetuity is therefore necessary and proportionate. It ensures that cumulative recreational impacts from residential development are managed for their full duration, enabling competent authorities to be satisfied—on a precautionary basis—that site integrity will not be adversely affected at any point over the lifetime of the development.

How is the mitigation being delivered?

- 5.14 The Essex coast RAMS is delivered through Bird Aware Essex, the public-facing service responsible for implementing many of the mitigation measures funded through RAMS contributions.
- 5.15 Bird Aware Essex focuses on engaging with visitors and encouraging responsible behaviour to reduce disturbance to internationally important bird species and their habitats. Through on-the-ground presence, education and targeted communication, it helps ensure that mitigation measures are not only effective but also visible and accessible to the public. In doing so, it plays a key role in providing the evidence-led approach required for local planning authorities to meet their duties under the Habitats Regulations.
- 5.16 The Bird Aware Essex team deliver a range of measures to help protect sensitive habitats and species, including:
- **Coastal rangers:** Rangers are regularly present at key locations, offering friendly advice, speaking with visitors, and raising awareness about the importance of the coast for wildlife.
 - **Information signs and interpretation:** Signage at access points and along paths explains the sensitivity of certain areas and provides guidance on how visitors can help minimise impacts.
 - **Targeted engagement** with recreational activity users, providing guidance around undertaking activities sensitively and reducing disturbance to birds and critical times and locations.
 - **Advice for dog walkers:** Clear, proportionate guidance on responsible dog walking, particularly in areas or seasons where wildlife is more vulnerable.
 - **Seasonal measures:** Temporary signage and increased ranger presence during key periods, such as bird breeding and wintering seasons.

- **Monitoring and surveys:** Ongoing visitor surveys and the use of monitoring equipment (such as people counters) to better understand how sites are used and to inform future management.

- 5.17 Further detail on the delivery and effectiveness of these measures is available in the Bird Aware Essex annual reports. [Home - Bird Aware Essex](#)
- 5.18 Bird Aware Essex plays a key role in ensuring that RAMS is effective, visible and evidence-led, helping local planning authorities meet their duties under the Habitats Regulations.

6. RAMS Contributions

What is the RAMS tariff?

- 6.1 The Essex Coast RAMS tariff is a standard financial contribution paid by developers to fund strategic mitigation measures. These measures address the in-combination recreational impacts of new development on internationally designated Habitats Sites along the Essex coast.
- 6.2 From **1 August 2026**, the RAMS tariff is:

£476 per net additional dwelling (or equivalent unit)

This forms the **baseline tariff** for future indexation.

How the tariff has been calculated

- 6.3 The tariff is derived from:
- The **total cost of the RAMS mitigation package** (£72.6 million); and
 - The **forecast number of new dwellings within the Zol** over the plan period.
- 6.4 The cost of mitigation is distributed proportionately across development to ensure contributions are:
- Fair
 - Evidence-based
 - Compliant with Regulation 122 of the CIL Regulations

Indexation of the Tariff

- 6.5 The RAMS tariff is index-linked annually to ensure it reflects changes in costs over time. The annual indexation of the RAMS tariff will be based on the January Retail Price Index (RPI) published by the National Office for Statistics (ONS):
- Index used: **Retail Price Index (RPI)**
 - Reference point: **January each year**
 - Publication: Updated tariff published in **March**
 - Implementation: New tariff applies from **1 April**

When are RAMS Contributions Required to be paid?

- 6.6 RAMS contributions from residential or qualifying development schemes will be required no later than on commencement of each phase of development. This is necessary to ensure that the financial contribution is received with sufficient time for the mitigation to be put in place before any new dwellings are occupied.
- 6.7 Where development is built in phases this will apply to each phase of house building. A planning obligation will generally be used to ensure compliance.

- 6.8 Replacement dwellings will be liable for the RAMS tariff where the proposal results in a net increase in the number of dwellings; for example, replacing one dwelling with one dwelling would not require a contribution, whereas replacing one dwelling with two dwellings would require a contribution for one additional dwelling.

How are RAMS Contributions secured?

Up-Front Payments / Direct Payments

RAMS contributions can be made via direct payment through the Local Planning Authority's website². Note that there may be an administration charge in addition to the tariff to process this payment.

Section 106 (S106) or Unilateral Undertaking (UU)

- 6.9 Planning obligations used to secure Essex Coast RAMS contributions are made pursuant to Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). These obligations must also satisfy the tests set out in Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended).
- 6.10 Regulation 122 requires that planning obligations are:
- Necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
 - Directly related to the development; and
 - Fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.
- 6.11 Planning obligations are legally binding on the landowner (and any successor in title). They enable the LPA to secure the provision of services (or infrastructure), or contributions towards them, which is necessary in order to support the new development i.e. by making an otherwise unacceptable development acceptable in planning terms.
- 6.12 Where S106 is used legal agreements for planning purposes should meet all the following tests in order to be taken into account when determining a planning application:
- They are necessary to make a development acceptable in planning terms;
- Mitigation is required to enable the Local Planning Authority (LPA), as competent authority under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), to conclude that there will be no adverse effect on site integrity.*

² S111 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives local authorities general powers to take actions that are necessary or helpful to carry out their statutory duties

- They are directly related to the development;

‘Evidence in the RAMS demonstrates that visitors come mainly from within the Zol to the Habitats sites. The ‘in- combination’ impact of proposals involving a net increase of one or more dwellings or qualifying unit within this Zol is concluded to have an adverse effect on Habitats site integrity unless avoidance and mitigation measures are in place.’

- They are fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to a development.

‘The tariff provides a proportionate and evidence-based mechanism to secure that mitigation.’

‘The measures put forward in the RAMS represent the lowest cost set of options available which will be both deliverable and effective in mitigating the anticipated increase in recreational pressure from new residential development within the Zol.’

‘The costs are apportioned proportionately between all developments dependent on the scale of development. The contributions will be spent on both project-wide mitigations such as Rangers, and specific mitigations within the Zol in which the contribution was collected. This contribution is therefore fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.’

- 6.13 Applicants are expected to meet the LPA’s legal fees associated with any drafting, checking and approving any deed. These legal fees are in addition to the statutory planning application fee and the contribution itself and must be reasonable. Details of the LPA’s current legal fees can be found on the LPA’s website.
- 6.14 Planning obligations may be secured either through a unilateral undertaking or a multi-party agreement (commonly referred to as a Section 106 agreement). In practice, the applicant will be required to enter into a formal legal agreement with the LPA to secure the required financial contribution. Essex Coast RAMS contributions are typically secured through such agreements and may form part of a wider Section 106 obligation where other planning requirements are also addressed.
- 6.15 The payment must be secured with all applications that would result in a net increase in housing. It applies to all full applications, outline applications, hybrid applications, prior approvals and permitted development. Reserved matters applications will be considered on an individual basis. Applications for outline planning permission should state a maximum number of dwelling units. It should be noted no exemptions can apply.
- 6.16 The Essex Coast RAMS provides mitigation for in-combination recreational impacts arising from development across the Zone of Influence. However, some proposals particularly:
- Large-scale developments; or
 - Developments located close to or adjacent to Habitats Sites

may also give rise to additional impacts alone.

In such cases, the LPA, in consultation with Natural England where appropriate, will determine whether:

- Additional mitigation measures are required beyond the RAMS contribution; and
- A project-level Appropriate Assessment is necessary to address those impacts.

Any additional mitigation must be secured in accordance with the Habitats Regulations to enable the LPA to conclude that the development will not adversely affect the integrity of Habitats Sites.

- 6.17 The RAMS contribution is payable in addition to other applicable developer contributions, including any Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) liability and other Section 106 obligations. Depending on the nature and location of the proposal, additional site-specific mitigation measures may also be required to address impacts on Habitats Sites and ecological features, as set out elsewhere in this document.
- 6.18 The mitigation measures identified in this TAN are designed to address the in-combination recreational impacts of development on Habitats Sites. These measures are secured through planning obligations, typically via Section 106 agreements, in accordance with the relevant legislative and policy framework. This approach reflects established practice at both a local and national level for addressing recreational disturbance impacts and has been consistently supported by Planning Inspectors through Local Plan examinations and planning appeals.
- 6.19 Please contact Planning Officers at the relevant LPA at the earliest opportunity to discuss your application and the most appropriate method of paying your RAMS contribution as methods vary between authorities.

Refunds

- 6.20 Refund of the tariff may be processed following a refusal of a planning application, where evidence of payment can be provided. This is normally following the three-month period for submitting an appeal to the Planning Inspectorate (and if an appeal is submitted, following the outcome of that appeal where the appeal has been dismissed).

Further questions can be added from the FAQs <https://birdaware.org/essex/bird-aware-essex-about-us/faqs/>

7. Alternatives to paying into the RAMS

- 7.1 The 12 RAMS partner local planning authorities (LPAs) encourage mitigation to be secured via the strategic approach and prefer developer contributions to the RAMS. This approach will help to ensure planning applications are quicker and simpler to process and the adequate and timely delivery of effective mitigation at the Habitats sites. It is also likely to be more cost effective for applicants.
- 7.2 As an alternative, applicants may choose to conduct their own visitor surveys and provide information to support the LPA in preparing project level Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Reports (to ensure that they can demonstrate compliances with Regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations) and secure the bespoke mitigation specified within. Where applicants choose to pursue this option, the LPA will need to consult Natural England on the effectiveness of the mitigation proposed.
- 7.3 Applicants may propose bespoke mitigation supported by:
- Project-level HRA
 - Evidence and visitor surveys

However:

- Strategic RAMS contributions are preferred
- Bespoke mitigation is likely to be more complex and costly
- Natural England will need to be consulted

8. Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG)

- 8.1 Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG) are additional greenspace, aimed at deflecting visitors away from the designated Habitat Sites (for example providing locations that welcome dog walking).
- 8.2 Development proposals within the Zone of Influence are required to contribute to the Essex Coast RAMS to address the *in-combination* recreational impacts arising from growth across the region. However, applicants should also be aware that some schemes may give rise to *alone* impacts on designated European sites that are not fully addressed through the strategic RAMS measures.
- 8.3 Natural England has advised that developments of 500 or more dwellings within the Zone of Influence and potentially some smaller non-residential developments close to the coast such as visitor attractions are most likely to have alone impacts on the designated habitat sites, and so may be required to provide additional mitigation through the provision of SANG.
- 8.4 Detailed guidance on SANG falls outside the remit of the RAMS Strategy. Additional information about SANGs in Essex will be set out in a dedicated SANG guidance note that will supplement the RAMS and this TAN.

9. Monitoring of the RAMS

- 9.1 To monitor the effectiveness of the RAMS, a monitoring strategy will be put in place, with monitoring and review undertaken by the RAMS Delivery Manager, and supported by the Rams Data and Monitoring Officer, supported by LPA representatives in the RAMS Partnership.
- 9.2 Monitoring will be undertaken and reported annually. LPA's may include monitoring information in their individual Authority Monitoring Report (AMR). As competent authorities under the Habitats Regulations, delivery of the Essex Coast RAMS is the responsibility of each partner LPA needing it to ensure their Local Plan is sound and legally compliant.
- 9.3 To ensure the monitoring process is fit-for-purpose, various monitoring activities will be undertaken at different times and at an appropriate frequency. The monitoring process in place will be used to inform future reviews of the RAMS.
- 9.4 Monitoring includes:
- Annual reporting
 - Visitor surveys
 - Habitat condition monitoring
- 9.5 Results inform:
- Adaptive management
 - Future updates of the RAMS
- 9.6 The RAMS will be updated on a rolling basis **approximately every 5 years**, providing the opportunity to check the mitigation, scale of growth and update any costs. As such the strategy provides a long-term solution to impacts from recreation. By addressing risks up front, the strategy provides a proactive, cross-boundary solution that ensures cumulative impacts of growth across a wide area are taken into account. The strategy ensures necessary resources and costs are identified and provides clarity for developers when bringing forward sites for development within a defined Zone of Influence.
- 9.7 Reports on delivery are published on the Bird Aware Essex website: [Bird Aware Essex Coast is an initiative to raise awareness of birds](#)

10. Useful Links

- Essex Coast Bird Aware – www.birdaware.org/essex
- MAGIC Maps - <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>
- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>
- Planning Practice Guidance - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>
- Natural England - <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>
- RSPB - [RSPB Bird & Wildlife Conservation Charity](http://www.rspb.org.uk)
- Essex Wildlife Trust - [Home | Essex Wildlife Trust](http://www.essexwildlifetrust.org.uk)
- Southend-on-Sea City Council (planning and building) - [Essex Coast RAMS – Southend-on-Sea City Council](http://www.southend-on-sea.gov.uk)

Appendix 1: RAMS Mitigation Package

[Home - Bird Aware Essex](#)

Mitigation measure	Description	Justification	Notes
Delivery Manager	Full-time post managing ranger team and providing overall steer for mitigation delivery and link to partners, stakeholders, planners etc. Role also proving strategic links and wider policy work/liaison	Manager post key to ensuring smooth delivery and oversight of implementation	Already established and post extended for further 20 years
Ranger team leaders (2 posts)	Ranger team leader post with responsibility for co-ordinating team, oversight of rotas, ensuring cover for holidays, sickness etc., health & safety oversight, transport logistics etc. Two posts to allow for a northern team and southern team.	Rangers are a cornerstone of the mitigation. Leaders necessary to ensure coverage and co-ordinate work	Ranger team already established. Expansion necessary
Rangers (6 full-time, 3 seasonal)	Ranger team expanded and key function is patrolling on the European sites and directly engaging with visitors to those sites.	Rangers are a cornerstone of the mitigation.	Ranger team already established. Expansion necessary
Vehicles and other resources for rangers	Running costs for vehicle and any other travel costs, plus resources to cover equipment needed by team (trail cameras for nest monitoring, temporary signage etc.)	Budget required for transport and operational work. A dedicated vehicle has benefit in providing additional branding.	Bird Aware Essex branding necessary to ensure vehicle is eye-catching
Dog project staffing costs	1 post, full time equivalent (FTE)	Staff costs to build project. Dog walkers main user group to influence and one with biggest impact	Post would be a dog specialist ranger post
Dog project resources	Running costs for events etc	Budget required for transport and operational work	

Communications Officer staffing costs	Mitigation relies on effective behaviour change through communication of key messages - focused, specialist work on social media, press, newsletters. Running campaigns relating to wildlife photography, drones, watersports etc.	Budget required for operational work, targeted comms planning, campaigns, social media, newsletter and promotional/networking opportunities.	
Comms costs	Costs to cover resources for comms post in terms of campaign material, images, expenses etc	Comms work may need to buy in specialist design and support, for example graphics, images etc. Budget also covers campaign launches, printing and updates to the website	
Production of monitoring strategy & monitoring support	Consultancy support to work with the BA team and stakeholders to design monitoring programme and recording to cover data collection by ranger team, other relevant data (e.g. volunteer surveys), reporting protocols and report production	Will ensure monitoring is conducted efficiently and data available to feed into mitigation delivery	
Monitoring and data staffing costs	Budget for dedicated staff member to implement monitoring strategy, potentially covering targeted ecological monitoring, regular vehicle counts across area, automated counters, data collection by rangers while on site etc	Data important to help hone mitigation, target resources and pick up any changes/emerging trends	
Monitoring resources	Budget to cover commission of specific surveys where needed (e.g. vehicle counts) and purchase of equipment (automated visitor counters) etc. Dependent on monitoring strategy	Data important to help hone mitigation, target resources and pick up any changes/emerging trends	
Visitor survey	Visitor survey to cover all European sites and surrounding GI (SANGs etc) at 5-year intervals	Provides data on changing use patterns, demographics, visitor numbers and visitor origins.	Repeat surveys of a selection of locations in line with work undertaken in 2024. Details to be set out in monitoring strategy

Education/community engagement officer	Full-time post undertaking work with schools including schools visits and attending events	Education lead able to go into schools and community events (fetes etc), working directly with children in local communities to raise awareness with young people	
Resources for schools and events	Budget to cover resources for education work	Education/community engagement officer will need props and resources when visiting schools etc	
Engagement material for holiday parks etc.	Project targeted holiday parks, caravan sites etc with resources to develop material such as packs, leaflets, signage designs etc.	Wide range of holiday parks around coast, many providing cabins etc available for use all year round. Some with slip ways, boat storage etc.	Project could initially start by working with small group of sites to understand what might work. Potential for incentives such as help gaining environmental certifications or accreditation alongside promotion of wildlife around coast, responsible access etc.
Site-specific projects	Flexible funding for range of local and site-specific projects	Workshops identified a wide range of possible projects that would have significant mitigation benefit but need to be subject to more detailed proposals and costings	Projects would bid for funds and delivery manager and Bird Aware team would work with local partners to develop ideas and suggest opportunities

Mitigation measure	One-off/ Capital cost	Rolling cost	Multiplier for rolling cost	Total cost	Notes on how cost calculated
Delivery Manager		£69,800	£80	£5,584,000	£48000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, equipment etc). 25-year timing covers plan period and beyond, ensuring monitoring/oversight over key period taking place at least.

Ranger team leaders (2 posts)		£104,500	£80	£8,360,000	2 FTE posts, each with £35000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, personal equipment etc).
Rangers (6 full-time, 3 seasonal)		£341,250	£80	£27,300,000	7.5 FTE, each with £30000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, personal equipment etc).
Vehicles and other resources for rangers		£55,000	£80	£4,400,000	4 vehicles, costed at: £450 per month to lease per vehicle, £1500 for livery, £2000 p.a. insurance, 15000 miles p.a. at 0.25p per mile running costs/charging. £2000 annual budget for team equipment. Rounded up to £55,000 to cover sundries (including parking charges) and personal mileage (some of which will still be required).
Dog project staffing costs		£52,250	£80	£4,180,000	£35000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, equipment etc). Costed in-perpetuity
Dog project resources		£8,000	£80	£640,000	Travel costs at 5000 miles p.a. and 0.45p per mile. Assumes use of own vehicle. Additional costs of £5000 to cover resources and equipment. Rounded up to cover sundry expenses, parking etc.
Communications Officer staffing costs		£31,350	£80	£2,508,000	£35000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, equipment etc). Costed in-perpetuity, part time (0.6 FTE).
Comms costs		£11,000	£80	£880,000	Costs provide budget for printing, design, image sourcing, events etc as required.
Production of monitoring strategy & monitoring support	£17,500			£17,500	Initial budget to cover commission of a monitoring strategy and support to ranger team and delivery officer to ensure robust monitoring protocol and recording forms
Monitoring and data staffing costs		£28,625	£80	£2,290,000	£35000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, equipment etc). Part time (0.5 FTE). Costed in-perpetuity.

Monitoring resources		£15,000	£80	£1,200,000	Indicative budget providing resources for purchasing and replacing equipment and commissioning surveys. Costs likely to vary between years and will be set out in monitoring strategy
Visitor survey		£35,000	£16	£560,000	Cost allows for 16 repeat surveys - potentially one survey every 5 years for 80 years.
Education/community engagement officer		£52,250	£80	£4,180,000	£35000 annual salary, plus 35% (to cover NI, superannuation, etc.) and £5000 per annum support costs (training, equipment etc). Costed in-perpetuity
Resources for schools and events		£6,000	£80	£480,000	Indicative budget providing resources to get material printed, develop school packs, teaching resources etc. Budget small but should be possible to work with other mitigation projects to borrow content, ideas and material etc
Engagement material for holiday parks etc.	£15,000			£15,000	One off cost to cover bringing in specialist help to contact parks and develop material. Delivery and further work as necessary by comms post. Short term project.
Site-specific projects		£125,000	£80	£10,000,000	There are 9 SPA/Ramsar sites, and the budget therefore provides around £13,888 per annum per site. This is an indicative sum intended as a guide only, potentially sufficient to fund 1-3 small projects at each site. No requirement to ensure projects at each site each year and scope to deliver larger one-off projects at a single location if substantial mitigation benefit. Annual budget with scope for amount to flex between years depending on housing delivery and available funds. Projects such as creating new routes/paths or changes to car parks likely to be one-off and funding therefore for 25 years, covering strategy period and slightly beyond.

End of document

