Chelmsford Policy Board

25 June 2026

Adoption of the Revised Essex Coast Recreational disturbance and Avoidance Mitigation Strategy (RAMS)

Report by:

Assistant Director – Planning and Place Shaping

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Purpose

The purpose of this report is to consider the revised Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) 2026 and associated tariff and to recommend its adoption by the Council's Cabinet. It also seeks approval to revoke the existing RAMS Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which no longer aligns with the revised RAMS and to replace it with a Technical Advice Note (TAN).

Recommendations

1. That the Board notes the revised Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) 2026 and associated tariff as set out in Appendix 1, superseding the original RAMS (2018-2038).

2. That the Board recommend to the Council's Cabinet that it adopts the revised Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) 2026 and associated tariff as set out in Appendix 1.

3. That the Board recommend to the Council's Cabinet that it approves the implementation of a revised Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) 2026 tariff of £476 per net additional dwelling (or equivalent qualifying development and index linked), to take effect from 1 August 2026.

4. That the Board recommend to the Council's Cabinet that it revokes the adopted Essex Coast RAMS Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), noting that its content is no longer fully aligned with the revised Strategy, evidence base and tariff.

5. That the Board recommend to the Council's Cabinet that it agrees to replace the Essex Coast RAMS Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) with an Essex Coast RAMS Technical Advice Note (TAN) and that the Assistant Director – Planning and Place Shaping be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Place Shaping, to finalise and publish the TAN for use alongside the revised Essex Coast RAMS Strategy 2026.

1. Background

1.1. The Essex coastline stretches for around 350 miles, one of the longest of any county in England. The coastline of Essex begins in the Thames Estuary in the south and extends northwards to the port of Harwich and the estuary of the river Stour. The Essex coastline is of exceptional nature conservation importance, it is home to both breeding and non-breeding coastal birds and features a variety of habitats and environments from sandy beaches, shingle spits and shell banks to mud-flat, saltmarsh, offshore islands, and clay cliffs.

1.2. The majority of the Essex coastline is covered by internationally important nature conservation sites that support significant bird populations through a range of designations including a Special Area of Conservation[1] (SAC), Special Protection Areas[2] (SPAs) and Ramsar[3] sites which are afforded the highest level of protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017[4] (as amended).

1.3. There are ten protected habitat sites along the Essex coast including the Crouch and Roach Estuaries SPA and Ramsar at South Woodham Ferrers. These sites are shown on page 10, Map 1 of the revised RAMS 2026 in Appendix 1.

1.4. As more homes are built in Essex, more people will live and work near the coast, leading to an increase in coastal visitors and demand for recreation such as walking, dog walking, cycling and water-based activities. This brings important social and economic benefits, including improved wellbeing and access to nature. However, higher visitor numbers can place pressure on sensitive coastal habitats, through increased recreational activities causing disturbance to birds and damage to areas such as saltmarsh and mudflats.

1.5. Recreational disturbance arising from residential development within the defined Zone of Influence (ZoI) has been identified as a key impact pathway on the designated habitat sites, particularly affecting qualifying bird species through disturbance, habitat degradation and increased visitor pressure.

1.6. Under the Habitats Regulations, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), are Competent Authorities, who have a legal duty to ensure that new development does not adversely affect the integrity of protected sites which includes recreational pressure from

[1] SACs are protected areas which support high-quality habitats and species.
[2] SPAs are protected areas which support rare, vulnerable and migratory birds.
[3] Ramsar sites are areas of wetland of international importance which are designated under the Convention of Wetlands under the Ramsar Convention 1971.
[4] Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended (commonly known as the 'Habitats Regulations')

occupiers of residential development. Where a risk of identified; effective mitigation must be secured before development can be permitted.

1.7. The RAMS is a partnership and co-ordinated approach between twelve Essex LPAs[5] which aims to mitigate the in-combination recreational impacts of new residential development on protected coastal habitats and bird populations. It ensures that planned housing growth across Essex can take place in a lawful and sustainable way, while safeguarding sensitive species and habitats protected by international nature conservation designations over the longer-term. By addressing risks up front, the strategy provides a proactive, cross-boundary solution that ensures cumulative impacts of growth across a wide area are considered. The strategy ensures necessary resources and costs are identified and provides clarity for developers when bringing forward sites for development within the evidenced Zone of Influence (ZoI).

1.8. The strategic RAMS approach enables developers to contribute towards a coordinated mitigation package delivered across a wide area, rather than being required to provide bespoke mitigation on a site-by-site basis for individual planning applications. This approach is widely used nationally and has been repeatedly demonstrated to be effective, efficient and legally robust through the planning process. Developers can also choose to provide their own bespoke mitigation rather than pay the RAMS tariff, however this is extremely resource intensive. RAMS provides a clear and efficient mechanism for complying with the Habitats Regulations, for both developers and LPAs. The Essex Coast RAMS is one of eleven strategic solutions nationally, of which seven are related to coastal habitats.

1.9. The RAMS was originally adopted by the twelve Essex LPAs in 2019/20. Chelmsford City Council operates as the project Accountable Body and Lead Institution responsible for managing the project finances and employing the project staff including the Coastal Rangers. The commitment to implement the RAMS is set out in the adopted and emerging Chelmsford Local Plans.

1.10. Bird Aware Essex is the delivery mechanism for the Essex Coast RAMS. It is the public-facing service that delivers many of the on-the-ground mitigation measures and plays a key role in ensuring that RAMS is effective, visible and evidence-led. As Accountable Body, Chelmsford City Council employs and hosts the Bird Aware Essex Coastal Rangers and delivery staff through a Partnership Agreement with the participating LPAs.

1.11. RAMS funding through developer contributions has already enabled the delivery of a number of tangible mitigation measures which directly benefit the Essex coastline including around South Woodham Ferrers. These include:

- Regular patrols and visitor engagement across the Essex coast by the project's team of Coastal Rangers
- Project-wide communication and engagement initiatives, including the installation of interpretation boards, signage, leaflet boxes and fencing at Marsh Farm Country Park, South Woodham Ferrers and contributions to 'Love your Chelmsford'

[5] Basildon Borough Council, Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Castle Point Borough Council, Chelmsford City Council, Colchester City Council, Maldon District Council, Rochford District Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council, Tendring District Council, Thurrock Borough Council, Uttlesford District Council

- Educational materials which promote responsible coastal visits including a Coastal Code
- Direct engagement with 7,600 school children including through the Food and Farming event and school events held at ARU Writtle
- Ongoing monitoring of both recreational activity and ecological conditions across the Essex coast, including South Woodham Ferrer's Habitats Sites.

2. The Essex Coast RAMS Review

2.1. In December 2023, Natural England, the Government's advisor for the natural environment in England wrote to the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership, formally advising of the need to undertake a review and update of the Essex Coast RAMS, specifically to address:

- Significant increases in projected housing growth across Essex (almost double original assumptions)
- Insufficient long-term costing of the original Strategy (or in-perpetuity funding)
- Under-provision of Coastal Rangers and equipment to manage 500km of coastline, and
- Omission of certain delivery elements in the original mitigation package (e.g. Coastal Ranger vehicles).

2.2. In line with established best practice, strategic mitigation solutions should also be reviewed approximately every five years.

2.3. Under the Habitat Regulations[6] mitigation measures must be secured and effective for as long as the plan or project has the potential to affect the protected site. In practice, this requires mitigation to be provided for the lifetime of the development. The original RAMS package was costed only to the end of the Local Plan period (2038) and not for the duration of the impact which was identified by Natural England as a fundamental omission. A review was required to ensure that mitigation measures are fully funded and secured in perpetuity. In addition, the original visitor surveys undertaken between 2011 and 2013 had become dated and required updating.

2.4. The RAMS review began in Summer 2024, and progress has also been regularly reported and agreed by the Essex Planning Officers Association (EPOA) Chief Officers Forum, which operates as the RAMS Project Board or main governing body. Independent ecological consultants, Footprint Ecology were appointed in October 2024 to undertake repeat visitor surveys across the coast, provide an up-to-date evidence base, review the effectiveness of the current mitigation package, and produce an updated Strategy that ensures the long-term costs of the mitigation are properly accounted for.

2.5. Natural England has endorsed the approach taken for the review and the final RAMS documentation. The final revised RAMS was also endorsed by EPOA Chief Officers on Thursday 30 April 2026.

3. Key differences between the current and revised Essex Coast RAMS

3.1. The revised RAMS represents a significant revision to the original approach, while maintaining the same underlying principles. The key changes are summarised below:

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6. Regulation 63 (Appropriate Assessment) and Regulation 64 (Derogations)

- An updated mitigation package, considering increased housing growth and in-perpetuity mitigation for the lifetime of development
- An updated tariff fee, and
- Amended development types eligible to pay the tariff.

Updated mitigation package

3.2. The National Planning Policy Framework published in December 2024 changed the standard methodology for calculating an area's housing need. This has led to a significant increase in the numbers of new homes to be built across Essex and in the project Zone of Influence (ZoI) since the adoption of the current RAMS in 2019/20.

3.3. Projections indicate approximately 148,309[7] new dwellings within the ZoI over the next 20 years, an increase of around 72,907 dwellings in the original RAMS. 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.

3.4. Updated visitor surveys undertaken by Footprint Ecology in winter and summer 2025 to support the RAMS review demonstrate that the Essex coast was busier in 2025 than indicated in the earlier surveys to inform the original RAMS. The Visitor Survey Report (attached at Appendix 2) concludes that an enhanced recreation mitigation package is necessary to ensure continued compliance with the Habitats Regulations.

3.5. The updated mitigation package builds on and expands interventions in the original RAMS to reflect the additional workload associated with providing mitigation for more planned housing growth, changes in recreational patterns and visitor behaviour and the requirement to deliver mitigation effectively in perpetuity or for the duration of the impact. It was developed through workshops and engagement with key stakeholders and subsequently refined in discussion with partner LPAs and Natural England. 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.

3.6. The enhanced mitigation package is summarised in Table 3 of the revised RAMS (attached at Appendix 1) and includes:

- An expanded and more specialised ranger service including 9.5 full-time equivalent Coastal Rangers (currently five) and three new specialist roles with budgets including an Education and Community Engagement Lead and Dog Project Officer
- A stronger focus on tackling dog disturbance risks including coast-wide dog projects and targeted engagement with commercial dog walkers
- Increased visitor engagement and education
- Increased seasonal coverage for beach nesting birds and winter roost protection
- Opportunities for new site-specific and more local mitigation projects, and

[7] It should be 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 consider changes to proposed predicted housing growth.

- Enhanced monitoring and data collection, with monitoring embedded as a core delivery function.

Updated tariff fee

3.7. The RAMS tariff is a financial contribution paid by a developer for every net new dwelling or qualifying unit to fund the strategic mitigation package. The original mitigation package was not costed in perpetuity i.e. it did not consider the lifetime of the development, calculated as 80-years. This omission was a primary reason why the existing RAMS tariff remains significantly lower than tariffs for comparable strategic schemes elsewhere in the country, despite the scale and sensitivity of the Essex coastline.

3.8. Natural England identified this as a key issue that needed to be addressed as part of the review. Had the original mitigation package in the current RAMS been costed in-perpetuity from the outset, the baseline tariff would have been £489.18 per dwelling, rising with inflation to approximately £660.06 at 2025 values. As the current RAMS does not include an in-perpetuity cost, the current 2026 tariff stands at £175.55. This is significantly lower than tariffs from comparable strategic mitigation solutions elsewhere in the country which typically range from £300 to over £1000, with an average cost of £500.

3.9. The updated RAMS mitigation package has been costed at £72,594,500 (was originally £8,916,448), reflecting delivery in perpetuity and the expansion and strengthening of the mitigation package. The tariff is calculated by dividing the total cost of mitigation by the total number of dwellings planned within the ZoI. As such, the revised RAMS tariff will be charged at £476 per new dwelling or qualifying unit (rounded to the nearest pound and indexed-linked annually). This revised tariff remains within the national average of £500 and can therefore be regarded as fair and proportionate. A summary of the tariff calculation is set out in Appendix 4.

3.10. As noted in paragraph 1.18, developers can provide their own mitigation requirements through a bespoke scheme if they choose, but the vast majority are likely to pay towards the RAMS instead as this is easier and more cost effective. The RAMS approach is also used across the country and provides clarity and certainty for developers and LPAs as it has been proven to be robust through the planning process.

Amended development types to pay the tariff

3.11. Whilst new residential development represents the main source of recreational pressure, other land uses can also create significant impacts on designated habitat sites, particularly those including overnight accommodation, high visitor turnover or public recreational use. The revised RAMS may therefore also apply to other forms of development to ensure that recreational impacts are fully addressed such as residential or overnight accommodation. Further detail on eligible development types will be provided the RAMS Technical Advice Note (TAN).

3.12. Given the increase in the tariff level, a transitional period for implementing the revised tariff has been agreed with Natural England (Appendix 3):

- For planning applications submitted between 1 April and 31 July 2026, the tariff applicable is the current tariff of £175.55
- Where planning applications are still awaiting final determination on 31 July 2026, the tariff applicable is the rate in force at the time of submission of the planning application to the LPA

- Where permission is granted at appeal and RAMS has not been paid, the tariff applicable is the rate in force on the date of the appeal being allowed
- For planning applications submitted on or after 1 August 2026, the new RAMS tariff applies.

4. Revoking the RAMS SPD with replacing with a RAMS Technical Advice Note

4.1. The current adopted RAMS SPD provides more guidance to developers and Planners on how the RAMS is implemented and provides a consistent mechanism to guide decision-making within partner LPAs. The current SPD does not reflect the updated mitigation strategy, evidence base or revised tariff, so is now out of date. It is therefore recommended that the current RAMS SPD is formally revoked.

4.2. As part of the Government's plan-making reforms[8], the ability to create and adopt new SPDs has been removed. Therefore, the SPD will be replaced with a Technical Advice Note (TAN) providing up-to-date guidance on the revised RAMS implementation. This approach is supported by Natural England and EPOA.

4.3. The TAN will not introduce new policy, so it is recommended that the Assistant Director – Planning and Place Shaping be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Place Shaping, to finalise and publish the TAN later this summer.

5. Governance and Longevity

5.1. The strategy will operate indefinitely on a rolling basis, with this version running to around 2031. The strategy has, however, been written in the context of local plans and the likely levels of growth to around 2045. The strategy will be reviewed and updated approximately every 5 years, providing the opportunity to check the housing numbers, delivery, costs and mitigation priorities. The reviews will inform the business plans that underpin the work of the partnership and their staff.

5.2. The existing RAMS partnership governance arrangements for decision making which include a RAMS Steering group and EPOA will continue following the review. The Essex Coastal Forum which comprises Officers and Members from partner LPAs, will also continue to receive reports on the project activities and implementation and provide democratic oversight. There will be also an opportunity to restructure the governance arrangements going forwards for example to ensure that it is resilient to Local Government Reform, Devolution and future planning system change.

6. Conclusions

6.1. There is a legal requirement for LPAs to comply with the Habitat Regulations and to implement the RAMS in the Council's adopted and emerging Chelmsford Local Plans. RAMS is a clear and effective mechanism for compliance through planning applications. It has a proven record of delivering mitigation measures since its

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8 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026

adoption in 2019/20 through Bird Aware Essex, contributing to the protection of designated habitat sites along the Essex coast. Chelmsford benefits from the mitigation (Coastal Ranger patrols, communication and engagement activities etc.) that takes place along the coastline including around South Woodham Ferrers.

6.2. The revised Essex Coast RAMS provides a robust, evidence-led and legally compliant framework to mitigate the impacts of residential development on internationally protected habitats. The updated tariff ensures that the full cost of mitigation is fairly and proportionately secured for the lifetime of the development.

6.3. Adoption of the updated RAMS 2026 is essential to enable the continued lawful determination of planning applications and to ensure the protection of the Essex coast's internationally important habitats. Implementation will be supported by a TAN due to be published later in the Summer.

List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy 2026
Appendix 2 – Essex Visitor Survey Report
Appendix 3 – Natural England Letter to LPAs 16 April 2026
Appendix 4 – RAMS Tariff Calculation Table

Background Papers:

Adopted Chelmsford Local Plan May 2020
Chelmsford Local Plan Review - Pre Submission (Regulation 19) Document 2025
National Planning Policy Framework, December 2024
Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) and Supplementary Planning Document available at https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/essex-coast-rams/
Home - Bird Aware Essex
The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017
Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023
The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026

Corporate Implications:

Legal/Constitutional:
The Council has a duty under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended, to ensure that development does not adversely affect the integrity of designated European sites. Residential development within the ZoI gives rise to recreational disturbance impacts. Without appropriate mitigation, these impacts could result in adverse effects on site integrity. The Essex Coast RAMS provides the mechanism by which these impacts are mitigated. Without the Essex Coast RAMS, the Council would be unable to conclude no adverse effect on integrity and would therefore be unable to lawfully grant planning permission for relevant residential development.

Financial:
The Essex Coast RAMS tariff ensures that the full cost of mitigation is funded through developer contributions. This approach ensures that the financial burden does not fall on the Council, that recreational mitigation is delivered in line with development and that long-term funding is secured.

CCC's contribution toward the cost of the Essex Coast RAMS and Technical Advice Note (TAN) is covered by existing budget provision. CCC costs for operating as the RAMS Accountable Body and Lead Institution are recouped e.g. through annual Delivery Officer HR line management costs and annual financial management costs.

Potential Impact on Climate Change and the Environment:
The Essex Coast RAMS project ensures that the integrity of habitats sites along the Essex coast can be effectively preserved. This enables the Council to more effectively protect, enhance and conserve habitats and species through the planning process.

Contribution toward Achieving a Net Zero Carbon Position by 2030:
There are no contributions arising directly from this report.

Personnel:
CCC has a S106 Monitoring Officer in post who is responsible for administrating the RAMS tariff payments. CCC staff are already in place for operating as the project Accountable Body and Lead Institution and these costs are recouped.

Risk Management:
The Essex Coast RAMS is needed to deliver the adopted and emerging new Chelmsford Local Plans. The RAMS and Technical Advice Note (TAN) will reduce the risk of legal challenges by ensuring that all applications that pay the tariff comply with the Habitats Regulations. Failure to adopt the updated RAMS could lead to delays in determining planning applications and possible delays to development.

Equality and Diversity:
An Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the revised RAMS. The revised Essex Coast RAMS and increased tariff present low risk of negative equality impacts, all of which are appropriately mitigated. The strategy supports statutory compliance, environmental protection and long-term public benefit, while meeting the Equality Act 2010 duties.

Health and Safety:
There are no Health & Safety issues arising directly from this report.

Digital:
There are no digital issues arising directly from this report.

Other:
The Review of the Local Plan will seek to contribute to priorities in the Council's Our Chelmsford, Our Plan 2023: A Fairer and More Inclusive Place, A Greener and Safer Place, and A More Connected Place.

Consultees:

CCC – Development Management

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

The report takes account of the following policies and strategies of the City Council:

Adopted Local Plan 2013-2036
Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy 2018-2038

Our Chelmsford, Our Plan

The above report relates to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:

Promoting sustainable and environmentally responsible growth to stimulate a vibrant, balanced economy, a fairer society and provide more homes of all types.

Creating a distinctive sense of place, making the area more attractive, promoting its green credentials, ensuring that people and communities are safe.

Bringing people together and working in partnership to encourage healthy, active lives, building stronger, more resilient communities so that people feel proud to live, work and study in the area.

FOOTPRINT ECOLOGY

Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS)

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FOOTPRINT ECOLOGY

Footprint Ecology is a small, employee-owned, ecological consultancy with an ethical focus. Founded in 2004 and based in Purbeck, Dorset we are catalysts for change, collaborating with organisations that share our commitment to sustainability and social responsibility. We create practical solutions to complex ecological challenges across a diverse portfolio including nature conservation, outdoor recreation and associated strategic planning.

Footprint Contract Reference: 837
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Summary

This avoidance and mitigation strategy ('the RAMS') sets out the mitigation requirements relating to impacts from recreation and the cumulative effects of new housing and tourism development on the Essex coastline. The strategy covers the internationally important nature conservation sites along the Essex coast, from the Stour Estuary to the Thames Estuary. This section of coast is protected through a range of designations (including Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar listing) that afford strict legal protection. The RAMS ensures the relevant local authorities meet legislative requirements and adequately protect these European sites when permitting development. It enables housing growth while ensuring the exceptional importance of the Essex coast for biodiversity is not undermined.

Residential development brings additional people to live in the area and an increased demand for recreation. In addition, increases in the number of tourists and visitors from further afield adds to the people visiting the coast. Access to the countryside is important to many, it brings economic and health benefits to society and is a legal right yet can be difficult to balance with nature conservation. High levels of recreation can result in impacts to the nature conservation interest for example through trampling damage, disturbance or increased fire risk.

This strategy replaces and updates the original strategy established in 2018. Just under 150,000 new dwellings are now planned within the established Zone of Influence within future plan periods (extending to around 2042).

Mitigation measures, set out in detail within the strategy, comprise SAMM (Strategic Access Management and Monitoring) and cover measures on and around the European sites. These measures are to address the in-combination effects of new development and include increased ranger time, signage, interpretation, screening and changes to parking. Monitoring is incorporated to help target the mitigation to the right locations. The level of mitigation is appropriate to the significant level of growth now anticipated and is secured in-perpetuity.

Off-site infrastructure and SANG ('Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace') provide additional scope to mitigate the alone impacts of particular development and deflect visitors away from the European sites (for example providing locations that welcome dog walking). Detailed guidance on SANG is however outside the remit of this strategy.

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.

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Maps

Acknowledgements

This strategy has been commissioned by Chelmsford City Council on behalf of a partnership primarily comprising Basildon Borough Council, Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Castle Point Borough Council, Chelmsford City Council, Colchester City Council, Maldon District Council, Rochford District Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council, Tendring District Council, Thurrock Borough Council and Uttlesford District Council, alongside Essex County Council, Natural England, Essex Wildlife Trust, and the RSPB. We are grateful to Leanne Brisland for overseeing the commission.
Cover photo © Goldhanger Creek by Footprint Ecology.

1. Introduction

1.1 This strategy sets out the mitigation requirements relating to the impacts from increased recreation (linked to the in-combination effects of housing growth and tourist development across the county) on important nature conservation sites on the Essex coast. It replaces a previous strategy and relates to the 12 relevant Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) that comprise the greater part of the Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) Partnership[1]. The RAMS ensures these authorities are adequately protecting the relevant wildlife sites from the impacts of recreation, while mitigating the impacts of new housing in a timely manner. The strategy also provides clarity for developers when bringing forward sites for development within a defined Zone of Influence.

1.2 The Essex coast is of exceptional nature conservation importance, with a suite of sites along the coast that are covered by international designations, which afford strict protection for the biodiversity and habitats present. These sites ('European sites') stretch between the Stour Estuary in the north and the Thames Estuary in the south.

1.3 New housing growth in the various towns and villages near the coast, and tourism development in the area, has the potential to result in more people visiting the designated coastal sites. Increasing recreation use brings particular risks - this strategy addresses those risks, ensuring LPAs meet legislative requirements when permitting relevant development. By addressing risks up front, the strategy provides a proactive, cross-boundary, solution that ensures cumulative impacts of growth are taken into account and that the necessary resources and costs are identified.

1.4 A strategic and plan led approach to protecting sites from the cumulative impact of additional recreation is now widely recognised as being more effective than dealing with such impacts on a development-by-development basis. A strategic approach has been in place for the Essex coast since 2018 and similar approaches have been established around the country (for

[1] The 12 Local Planning Authorities that make up the majority of the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership include Basildon Borough Council, Braintree District Council, Brentwood Borough Council, Castle Point Borough Council, Chelmsford City Council, Colchester City Council, Maldon District Council, Rochford District Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council, Tendring District Council, Thurrock Borough Council, and Uttlesford District Council. The partnership also includes Essex County Council, Natural England, Essex Wildlife Trust, and the RSPB.

example on the Suffolk Coast, the Dorset Heaths, the Thames Basin Heaths and the Solent).

1.5 Recreation pressure is complex, as the way visitors use a site can change with time and the distribution of the qualifying features can also change. Furthermore, to ensure effectiveness, mitigation needs to include a package of measures that work in an integrated way. For example, educating visitors, reinforcing messages with site-based staff, and providing the right infrastructure to meet visitor needs and influence visitor behaviour could all fit together as part of a mitigation package, but cannot be delivered in a piecemeal way, if implemented by individual developments on a case-by-case basis.

1.6 Collective funding is essential for on-site measures, and these can then in turn be supported by the provision of the right alternative green infrastructure, i.e. a positive step to create more space for recreation and make a meaningful reduction in visits to the European sites. A strategic approach also ensures that mitigation can be secured in a way to maximise benefits for local communities and wildlife, ensuring a positive approach that provides for recreation use and ensures long-term protection for the European sites.

1.7 The original strategic mitigation scheme (which this replaces) was developed in partnership by the relevant LPAs, with input from a number of other organisations (for more information see Place Services / Essex County Council, 2018).

1.8 The strategy established a Zone of Influence (i.e. the zone within which it is deemed that mitigation measures are required) and a series of mitigation measures that work together to provide robust protection for the various European sites. Mitigation measures have been funded by developer contributions. The mitigation included Strategic Access Management and Monitoring measures ('SAMM'), that were targeted towards the European sites and included measures such as rangers.

1.9 This RAMS document replaces and updates the previous strategy. It has been produced following visitor surveys and a structured programme of workshops and formal meetings involving a wide range of stakeholders. The update is necessary to provide continued protection for the relevant European sites, to account for changing recreational use of the European sites and to ensure the strategy is appropriate to the level of growth coming

forward in the respective Local Plans, with mitigation secured in-perpetuity for the duration of the impact.

2. Background and wider context

2.1 This section sets out the background to the relevant legislation and provides wider context in terms of countryside access, nature recovery and changes to planning and local government that may be relevant.

Legislative context

2.2 This strategy has been produced in order to meet particular legislative requirements. European sites are those afforded the highest level of legislative protection for biodiversity. Public bodies, including LPAs, have specific duties in terms of avoiding deterioration of habitats and species for which sites are designated or classified, and stringent tests have to be met before plans and projects can be permitted. Importantly, the combined effects of individual plans or projects must be taken into account. For LPAs, this means that the combined effect of individual development proposals must be assessed collectively for their cumulative impact.

2.3 The designation, protection and restoration of European sites is embedded in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended, which are commonly referred to as the 'Habitats Regulations'. They include Special Protection Areas (SPAs) classified under the 1979 Birds Directive and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the 1992 Habitats Directive. Collectively, these sites are sometimes referred to as Habitats sites. Ramsar sites were afforded the same level of statutory protection in England through the Planning and Infrastructure Act (2025). In this strategy we use the term 'European site' to refer to SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites.

2.4 European sites are the cornerstone of UK nature conservation policy. They form part of a 'national network' of sites that are afforded the highest degree of protection in domestic policy and law. Public bodies are referred to as 'competent authorities' within the legislation. The duties set out within the Habitats Regulations, in relation to the consideration of plans and projects, are applicable in situations where the competent authority is undertaking or implementing a plan or project, or authorising others to do so.

2.5 The legislation is founded on the 'precautionary principle' and it is necessary to rule out harm, rather than demonstrate impacts. Assessment (Habitats Regulations Assessment) requires consideration of effects either alone or in-combination, and this strategy therefore relates to the cumulative effects of plan-led development across the relevant local planning authority areas.

2.6 The strategy is therefore necessary to allow the LPAs, as competent authorities under the Habitats Regulations, to rule out adverse effects on integrity for relevant European sites, as a result of recreation linked to future housing growth. The strategy is therefore focussed on future risk and being able to have the necessary certainty, under the Habitats Regulations, that harm can be ruled out and impacts not exacerbated by further development.

Planning and Infrastructure Act

2.7 The UK government has set ambitious targets for house building over the current parliament. The Planning and Infrastructure Act (2025) aims to speed up and streamline the delivery of new homes, with a focus on strategic mitigation to enable development. The Act includes provision for a delivery body (Natural England) to be responsible for the production of Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs), determining standardised levels of environmental mitigation needed for certain types and scales of development in a specific area. Where an EDP exists, developers will have the option to pay into a new 'Nature Restoration Fund', which the delivery body will use to fund appropriate mitigations, including by pooling contributions from multiple developers. It is proposed that contributions to the Nature Restoration Fund will mean that Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs) will not need to assess the implications of a particular development in respect to the particular impact pathway the EDP is addressing. The first EDPs will cover issues such as nutrient neutrality but it is possible that they may cover impacts from recreation in certain areas at some point in the future.

2.8 It is important to ensure mechanisms are in place for strategic mitigation to be delivered in the absence of any alternative. As such this RAMS is intended to run as long as necessary to ensure continued mitigation and compliance with the relevant legislation. Regular reviews will be undertaken to ensure the strategy remains aligned with any legislative changes or new regulatory requirements.

Additional context

The importance of access to the countryside and the new England Coast Path

2.9 It is now increasingly recognised that access to the countryside is crucial to the long-term success of nature conservation projects, for example through

enforcing pro-environmental behaviours and instilling a greater respect for the world around us (Richardson et al., 2016). Access also brings wider benefits to society that include benefits to mental/physical health (Bragg and Atkins, 2016; Kondo et al., 2020; Lee and Maheswaran, 2011) and economic benefits (Bateman et al., 2014; Dasgupta, 2021; Day, 2020). In recent years there have been shifts in government policy and debate around enhancing access to the countryside.

2.10 Changes include the King Charles III England Coast Path, which will create a continuous walking route around the England Coast. The Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) provides for the establishment of the England Coast Path and, usually, the right of accesses over the associated coastal margin. The right of Coastal Access includes 'roll back' such that if a section of coast erodes, the path will move back accordingly.

2.11 The King Charles III England Coast Path is being rolled out in sections, with sections 32-40 covering the Essex coast. Some sections are fully open while other sections are approved (or partly approved) but not yet open, with establishment works planned or in progress. The path will ensure a clearly marked National Trail running along the coast and around the estuaries. While it is not for this strategy to provide mitigation for the Coast Path, it is important to understand its context as the path may influence how people access and use different areas of the coast.

Nature Recovery and the LNRS

2.12 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) support the establishment of a national Nature Recovery Network (NRN) and aim to identify opportunities and priorities for nature restoration at a local level. Essex's LNRS[2] highlights recreation as a pressure for many habitats and areas. The LNRS also maps areas of particular importance for biodiversity and sets out the priority species and habitats. The LNRS provides context to the RAMS in highlighting the wider importance and role of land outside European sites and collaborative working to facilitate nature recovery.

[2] See https://www.essex.gov.uk/about-council/plans-and-strategies/environment-and-planning/local-nature-recovery-strategy

Devolution

2.13 Greater Essex are part of the Government's Devolution Priority Programme. This involves the establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) for the local government areas of Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council and Thurrock Council. This proposed body would operate above the existing county, unitary, city, district and borough councils across Greater Essex.

2.14 In parallel, the Government is progressing Local Government Reform, which focuses on reshaping the structure of local authorities. Under current proposals, all 15 councils in Essex (including the county council, Southend and Thurrock) would be replaced by 5 unitary authorities.

2.15 In late March 2026, Government confirmed that they are 'minded to' approve a model of five new unitary authorities for Essex to replace the existing local authorities as well as Essex County Council.

2.16 As part of the behind-the-scenes work to align services, systems and ways of working, in preparation for the new unitary authorities coming into existence on 1 April 2028, consideration will need to be given to the future oversight, governance and coordination arrangements of RAMS.

3. Relevant European Sites

3.1 The European sites covered by the strategy are shown in Map 1, with their qualifying features listed in Table 1. This selection is the same as the previous strategy and it can be seen there is one SAC (the Essex Coast SAC), 9 SPAs and 9 Ramsar sites. The SPA and Ramsar sites are similar and the boundaries largely identical, so for simplicity only the SPAs are shown in Map 1. Hamford Water is the one SPA where the boundary is markedly different from the Ramsar of the same name, with the SPA extending to cover a wider area to the east.

3.2 It should be noted that the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA/Ramsar sites lies to the north of the area and the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA/Ramsar to the south and for both these European sites there are areas outside Essex that are not included in the strategy and not shown in Map 1. For the Stour and Orwell Estuaries, the Orwell component and the northern shore of the Stour lies within Suffolk and is covered by the Suffolk RAMS. For the Thames Estuary only the Mucking Flats (near Tilbury) component of the SPA/Ramsar is included. The rest of the SPA/Ramsar lies on the north Kent shore and is covered by Birdwise Kent and a similar mitigation scheme.

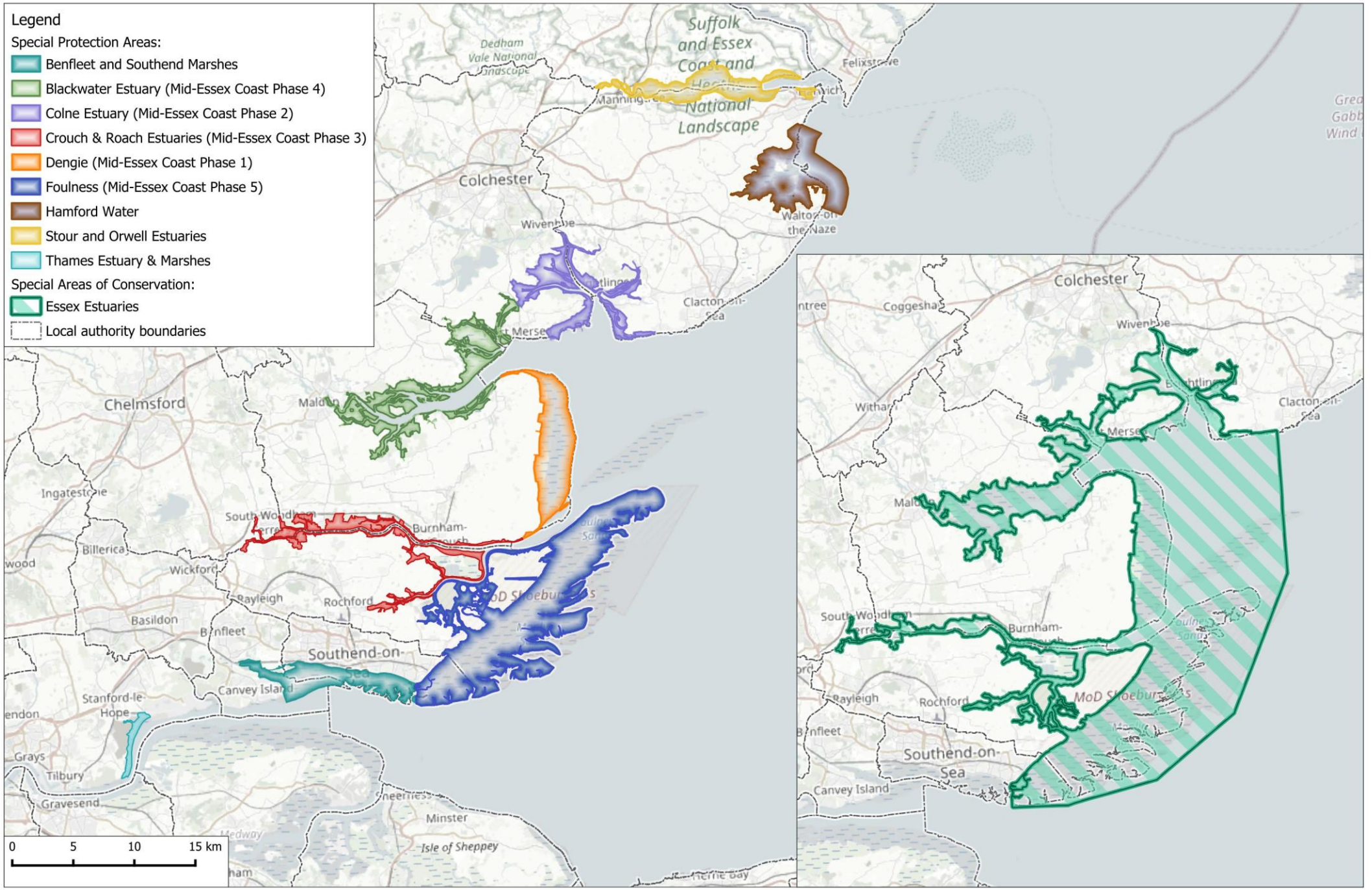
3.3 While Map 1 shows the designated site boundaries and Table 1 lists the particular features for each site, it is important to note that many of the qualifying features of the sites will move between sites. Birds may move from one estuary to another and as such the Essex coast potentially functions more as a single unit rather than multiple separate sites. Furthermore there will be areas outside the site boundaries that play a supporting role and will be functionally-linked (see Chapman and Tyldesley, 2016 for definitions and further background). The strategy encompasses such functionally linked land in that the birds using those areas could still be vulnerable to disturbance and mitigation measures may be relevant. These considerations are relevant for both breeding (e.g. Little Tern taking advantage of new areas of shingle) and wintering (e.g. use of fields and grazing marsh by wildfowl and waders).

3.4 It is also important to note that there are European sites in the area that are not covered by the RAMS. These include Hamford Water SAC, which qualifies solely for its population of Fisher's Estuarine Moth. This SAC is excluded from further consideration as the moth population (and the Hog's Fennel foodplant upon which it relies) is mostly restricted to islands within Hamford

Water (i.e. within areas largely inaccessible to recreation activity). In line with the previous version of the strategy, Abberton Reservoir SPA/Ramsar and Epping Forest SAC are also excluded.

3.5 Map 2 shows the combined area of the European sites in context with the 12 local planning authorities that collect RAMS contributions and intersect the Zone of Influence.

Map 1: European sites covered by the RAMS. Main map shows SPAs, and inset map (same scale) shows SACs



Map 2: The 12 local authorities within the the RAMS

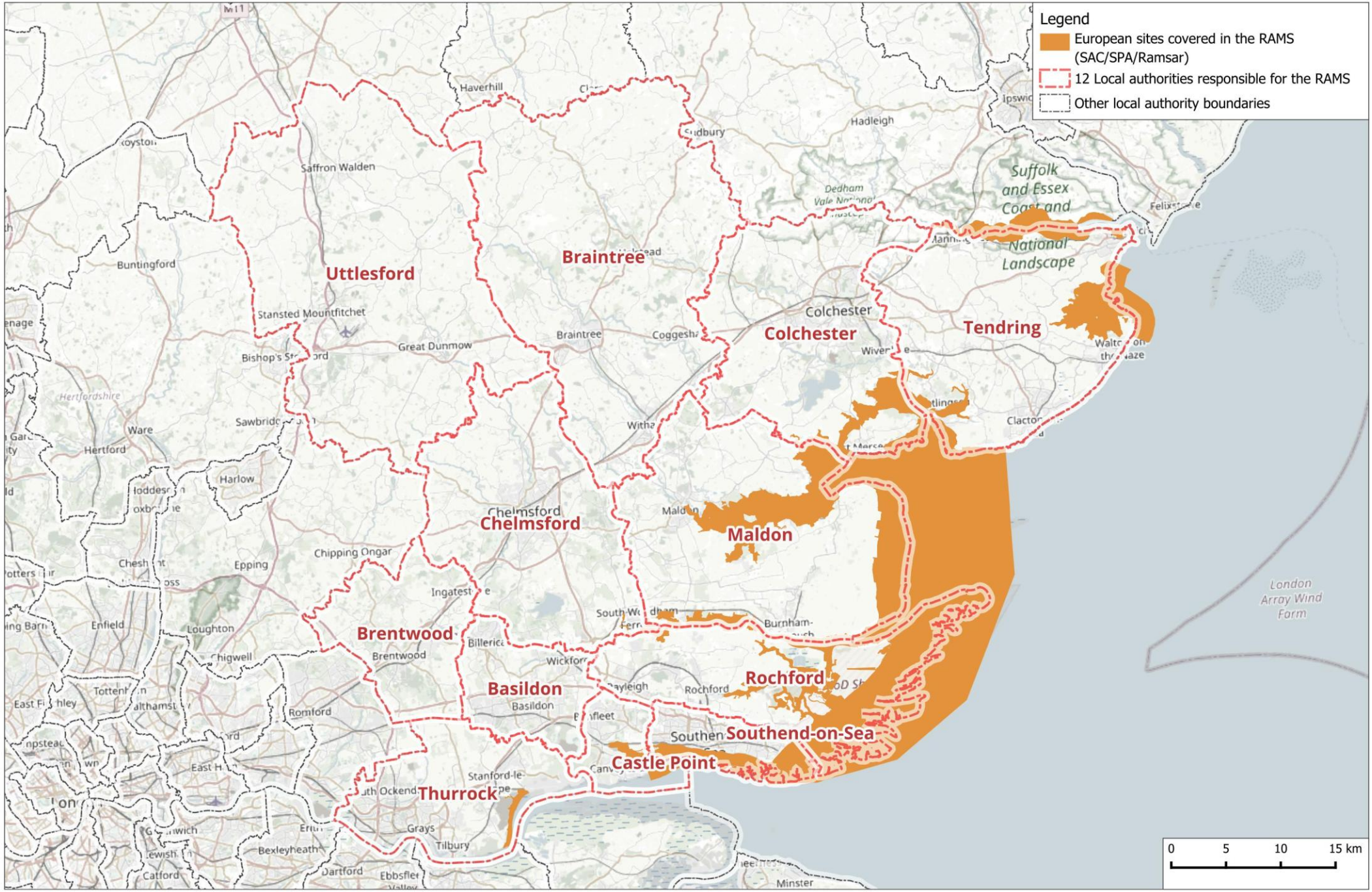


Table 1: European sites and qualifying features. Links cross-reference to the Natural England designated site page, which provides further background and the relevant conservation objectives, etc. For the waterbird assemblage underscoring refers to non-breeding only, and 'P' refers to passage only for other species.

European site	Habitats						Assemblages			Non-breeding birds														Breeding birds					
	Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide	Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand	Spartina swards	Atlantic salt meadows/saltmarsh	Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs	Waterbird	Wetland invertebrate	Wetland plant	Avocet	Bar-tailed Godwit	Black-tailed Godwit	Dunlin	Grey Plover	Knot	Oystercatcher	Redshank	Ringed Plover	Dark-bellied Brent Goose	Pintail	Shelduck	Teal	Hen Harrier	Avocet	Ringed Plover	Pochard	Common Tern	Little Tern	Sandwich Tern
Essex Estuaries SAC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓																							
Hamford Water SPA										✓		✓		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓						✓	
Hamford Water Ramsar												✓					✓	✓	✓										
Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA							✓					✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓				✓					
Stour and Orwell Estuaries Ramsar							✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓									
Colne Estuary SPA							✓										✓		✓				✓		✓	✓		✓	
Colne Estuary Ramsar					✓		✓	✓	✓								✓		✓										
Blackwater Estuary SPA							✓					✓	✓	✓					✓				✓		✓	✓		✓	
Blackwater Estuary Ramsar					✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓					✓										
Dengie SPA							✓							✓	✓				✓				✓						
Dengie Ramsar					✓		✓	✓	✓					✓	✓				✓										
Crouch and Roach Estuaries SPA							✓												✓										

European site	Habitats						Assemblages			Non-breeding birds													Breeding birds					
	Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide	Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand	Spartina swards	Atlantic salt meadows/saltmarsh	Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs	Waterbird	Wetland invertebrate	Wetland plant	Avocet	Bar-tailed Godwit	Black-tailed Godwit	Dunlin	Grey Plover	Knot	Oystercatcher	Redshank	Ringed Plover	Dark-bellied Brent Goose	Pintail	Shelduck	Teal	Hen Harrier	Avocet	Ringed Plover	Pochard	Common Tern	Little Tern	Sandwich Tern
Crouch and Roach Estuaries Ramsar							✓	✓	✓										✓										
Foulness SPA							✓				✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Foulness Ramsar					✓		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓										
Benfleet and Southend Marshes SPA							✓						✓	✓	✓			✓	✓										
Benfleet and Southend Marshes Ramsar							✓							✓	✓				✓										
Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA							✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓					✓						
Thames Estuary and Marshes Ramsar							✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	P											

Recreational use

3.6 Work commissioned by Natural England to inform the England coast path route and HRA work (Panter and Liley, 2016) noted the presence of at least 210 car parks within 1 km of the European sites relevant to the RAMS; these providing around 18,000 parking spaces. They also recorded nearly 2,000km of paths within the same area and mapped 143 jetties, 146 slipways and 40 marinas on the relevant shorelines. As such there are numerous opportunities across a wide area for recreational access.

3.7 Visitor surveys (Rush et al., 2025) commissioned alongside this strategy[3] involved surveys at 26 locations and 1,793 interviews were conducted with visitors. Most interviewees (93%) were visiting directly from home, however 7% were staying away from home, either on holiday (4% of all interviewees) or staying with friends and family in the area (3%).

3.8 The survey results show the main activities to the Essex Coast to be dog walking (45% of interviewees) or walking (35%). Visits were typically relatively short (averaging around 102 minutes in the summer and 75 minutes in the winter) and on average interviewees visited 2.3 times per week.

3.9 Close to home was the most common reason for choosing to visit the coast, reflected by the median distance (home postcode to interview location) of just under 5km. The survey results also highlighted the impacts of local facilities on visitor behaviour. In total, 16% of interviewees gave visiting a café, restaurant or pub as one of the activities they had undertaken (or planned to undertake) on the day interviewed. 4% of interviewees indicated that the presence of a café, restaurant or pub was the specific reason behind the choice of where to visit on the day they were interviewed.

3.10 The average route length was 3km although this differed between activities undertaken on site.

3.11 The results suggest that the Essex Coast was busy all year round, with 60% of interviewees indicating that they tended to visit all year round. For those survey points that were surveyed in both the summer and winter period, there were more people counted during the winter than the summer.

[3] Report available to download on the Footprint Ecology website

3.12 Benfleet and Southend Marshes appeared both the busiest and had the most local cohort of visitors, compared to the Crouch and Roach (quietest) and the Dengie and Hamford Water which each had a wider draw for visitors.

Impacts of recreation

3.13 Drawing from the general literature (Harris, 2023; Liley et al., 2010; e.g. Lowen et al., 2008; Marion et al., 2016), impacts associated with recreation to coastal sites include:

- Damage (trampling and wear);
- Contamination;
- Increased fire risk;
- Disturbance to breeding birds;
- Disturbance to wintering birds;
- Difficulties with land management; and,
- Damage to infrastructure, etc.

3.14 These are considered in turn below. It should also be noted that nutrient enrichment from dog fouling can also pose a particular issue (De Frenne et al., 2022) that is most relevant to low nutrient habitats. In coastal areas such habitats would comprise vegetated shingle or unimproved grassland. These habitats are largely absent from the area covered by the RAMS however, and do not comprise qualifying features of the relevant European Sites; this impact pathway is therefore considered no further.

Damage (trampling and wear)

3.15 Trampling damage relates to footfall and ground pressure from wheels (bikes, buggies etc.). Erosion and wear are also linked to boat use, including the scouring from the bottom of boats as well as the wake from fast moving boats and damage linked to anchors/moorings.

3.16 Mechanical damage to plant tissue causes a loss of vegetation cover, changes in the plant composition of the vegetation and loss of species and a reduction in plant height. Trampling can cause damage to root systems and increase water run-off, soil erosion and compaction with consequences for decomposition, nutrient cycling and water quality. Compaction can also cause a reduction in organic matter, affecting fertility and the water infiltration capacity of the soil. Compaction can also impact on mycorrhizal fungi, affecting plant uptake of nutrients from the soil. Other effects of

human trampling include the widening of paths and path erosion, particularly on slopes.

3.17 Particularly sensitive habitats include seagrass beds, saltmarsh (including those dominated by Spartina), Atlantic salt meadow, and halophilous scrub. There may also be knock-on consequences for species – not only birds but also habitat specialist invertebrate species. Species such as the wolf spider *Arctosa fulvolineata*, the striped Horsefly, Big-spotted Cleg, and Ground Lackey moth are reliant upon upper saltmarsh habitats where footfall is most likely.

3.18 Seagrass beds are present within the European sites and recreation is identified as a threat[4]. Saltmarsh and halophilous scrub are also widely distributed within the RAMS area, however given the difficulty in accessing some areas, damage is considered likely to be localised within proximity to urban areas and access infrastructure such as car parks.

3.19 While trampling is not highlighted as a major concern in the Site Improvement Plans (SIPs) for any of the European Sites under discussion, visual appraisal of aerial imagery nevertheless shows that (localised) evidence of such damage is readily apparent (see Figure 1).

[4] See https://www.essexwt.org.uk/what-we-do/protecting-wildlife/projects/seagrass for background.

Figure 1: Aerial images depicting examples of trampling damage/wear in areas of halophilous shrub and bordering saltmarsh at: (a) Bradwell-on-Sea (within the Essex Coast SAC/Dengie Ramsar); and (b) West Mersea (within the Essex Coast SAC/Blackwater Estuary Ramsar). Images © National Coastal Monitoring https://coastalmonitoring.org/.

Contamination

3.20 Ponds and small water bodies are often popular with dogs and dog walkers will often seek such features out, particularly in hot weather. Heavy use by dogs leads to turbid water, an impoverished invertebrate flora and a loss of vegetation (Denton and Groome, 2017; Groome et al., 2018).

3.21 Shampoos, wormer, tick and flea treatments are a further concern (Groome et al., 2018; Harris, 2023). There is growing evidence of contamination by pesticides including flea treatments such as fipronil and imidacloprid in watercourses (Perkins et al., 2024, 2021, 2020). Preliminary studies of waterbodies at four locations in the New Forest where dogs are known to regularly enter the water revealed the presence of imidacloprid and at one site levels were nearly double the internationally agreed toxicity threshold for aquatic invertebrates[5]. Testing of waterbodies in sand dune systems in the Sefton Coast area has found similar levels of contamination (Denning et al., 2024).

3.22 Dogs may also act as vectors for non-native invasive plant species, such as New Zealand Pygmyweed *Crassula helmsii* (Groome et al., 2018) and the trampling impacts around the edge of the waterbody may lead to a loss of surrounding vegetation, exacerbating impacts.

3.23 These issues are potentially relevant to aquatic, wetland and coastal habitats (such as ditches and borrow dykes) and the specialist plant and invertebrate species that they support. Such species include the Scarce Emerald Damselfly, which is found across several of the European Sites.

3.24 Contamination is also potentially relevant in terms of litter. While discarded rubbish, waste etc. is unsightly it may not always be directly damaging to the qualifying features. However, discarded fishing line can entangle birds, food waste may encourage predators (such as foxes, gulls etc) and certain products such as plastics are a widespread and recognised concern (Sutherland et al., 2012; Wilcox et al., 2015).

[5] Reported by the BBC: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-68400630

Increased fire risk

3.25 Fire incidence is directly associated with recreation use (Anderson, 1986; Miller and Miles, 1984; Tantram et al., 1999) for example through discarded cigarettes, sparks from a campfire, barbeques and even deliberate arson.

3.26 Fires can have major impacts on the soil, vegetation and fauna present, and recovery can take many years. Fire can change water filtration within soils and result in loss of nutrients (Mallik et al., 1984). Burning can also cause erosion through the exposure of soils – charred peat surfaces are particularly vulnerable (e.g. Maltby et al., 1990). Vegetation recovery may depend on the intensity of the fire and whether litter (protecting rootstock. and seeds) is burnt (Alchin, 1997).

3.27 Climate strongly influences wildfire risk and climate change is likely to increase the risks of wildfire and the types of habitat affected (Jolly et al., 2015). The incidence of forest fires globally has doubled since 1984 as a result of global warming (Mansoor et al., 2022). It is likely that wildfire incidence will occur in situations and vegetation communities where it has previously been rare or very limited (anon, 2017) and increasingly site managers will have to take active measures to minimise risks on sites.

3.28 While fire risk is therefore perhaps low for many of the habitats within the sites covered by the RAMS, this may well change. Most at risk will be upper saltmarsh and reedbed areas, particularly where these are relatively dry. A large fire on the Dee Estuary in 2022 destroyed reedbed habitat within the SPA there, and while outside the area covered by the RAMS, highlights that coastal areas can still be vulnerable.

Disturbance to birds

3.29 Disturbance occurs where human activity influences an animal's behaviour or survival. By far the majority of the literature (and there are thousands of studies), focuses on birds (Brawn et al., 2001; Hill et al., 1997; for a general review see Hockin et al., 1992; Lowen et al., 2008; Showler, 2010; Steven et al., 2011; Whitfield et al., 2008). Disturbance can also affect mammals, herptiles (see Edgar, 2002 for a review), and invertebrates.

3.30 Disturbance can have a range of different impacts, potentially affecting distribution, breeding success and health. Impacts can be chronic, for example otherwise suitable nesting habitat being completely avoided (e.g. Liley & Sutherland, 2007) or more short-term in nature, for example birds

becoming alert and then resuming the initial activity (Fernandez-Juricic et al., 2001).

3.31 Impacts can also include direct mortality of birds. There are studies showing increased predation rates when birds are disturbed, for example predators taking advantage of the change in behaviour caused by the disturbance (e.g. Brambilla et al., 2004). There are also examples of pet dogs preying on birds, for example both Ringed Plover adults and chicks have been witnessed predated by dogs (Liley et al., 2021; Pienkowski, 1984). Some studies document direct trampling of nests/eggs of ground-nesting species, where the eggs are so well camouflaged people are unaware of the damage they cause (Liley and Sutherland, 2007).

3.32 These impacts from disturbance can result from a wide range of activities. For example Steven *et al.* (2011), in their review of disturbance impacts to birds, listed the following activities and research findings:

- Standing/observing: 15 studies, 14 showing negative effects of disturbance;
- Touring/walking/hiking: 51 studies, 45 showing negative effects of disturbance;
- Running: 6 studies, 6 showing negative effects of disturbance
- Cycling/Mountain bike riding: 3 studies, 3 showing negative effects of disturbance;
- Canoeing: 3 studies, 3 showing negative effects of disturbance; and
- Dog walking: 11 studies, 11 showing negative effects of disturbance.

3.33 It is of course often difficult to separate different types of activities as at many sites multiple activities tend to overlap in space and time and impacts may be cumulative. Nonetheless, dog walking is widely recognised as a particular threat (Bavin et al., 2025; Harris, 2023) that has a disproportionate effect compared to other activities (Banks and Bryant, 2007; Cavalli et al., 2016; Gómez-Serrano, 2021; Lafferty, 2002; Taylor et al., 2007). Dogs are likely to be perceived as a greater threat, will actively chase birds and are able to access areas such as intertidal habitats that people on foot may avoid.

Breeding bird interest

3.34 Breeding birds are vulnerable to disturbance, with good evidence from the UK for a range of relevant species. For example disturbance has been shown to affect population size for Ringed Plover (Liley and Sutherland, 2007) and there are a range of studies showing disturbance effects for Little Tern (Medeiros et al., 2007; Ratcliffe et al., 2008; Rowell, 2020; Tratalos et al., 2021). Disturbance can lead to areas of suitable habitat being avoided entirely. In areas where they do nest, breeding birds are tied to a specific nest location, and there are particular energetic costs associated with egg laying, incubating, and raising chicks which can be exacerbated by disturbance.

3.35 The issues for breeding birds vary. Ringed Plover tend to nest on shingle and gravelly areas close to suitable intertidal foraging habitat. They are also territorial, meaning that territories/nests can be distributed along the beach. Terns are typically colonial nesters, with a more clumped distribution. Little Terns tend to nest in smaller, scattered, colonies spread across a range of beaches – typically the same sandy, open beaches favoured by people visiting the coast for recreation (D. Liley et al., 2023). The single remaining colony on the Essex Coast is at Hamford Water.

3.36 Sandwich Terns, by contrast, tend to nest in a smaller number of much larger, colonies. These colonies are susceptible to individual disturbance events, with the disturbance implicated in the abandonment of multiple colonies around the UK coastline (Brown and Grice, 2005; Tavener, 1965). The species' propensity to nest in a very small number of large colonies, and the potential for rapid abandonment makes it particularly vulnerable to human disturbance (Bourne and Smith, 1974; Garthe and Flore, 2007).

3.37 Common Terns will also nest colonially, with colony size varying across locations. The species will breed coastal shingle, beaches, saltmarsh, and offshore islands making it susceptible to coastal recreation (Brown and Grice, 2005), as well as inland lakes, reservoirs, and gravel pits.

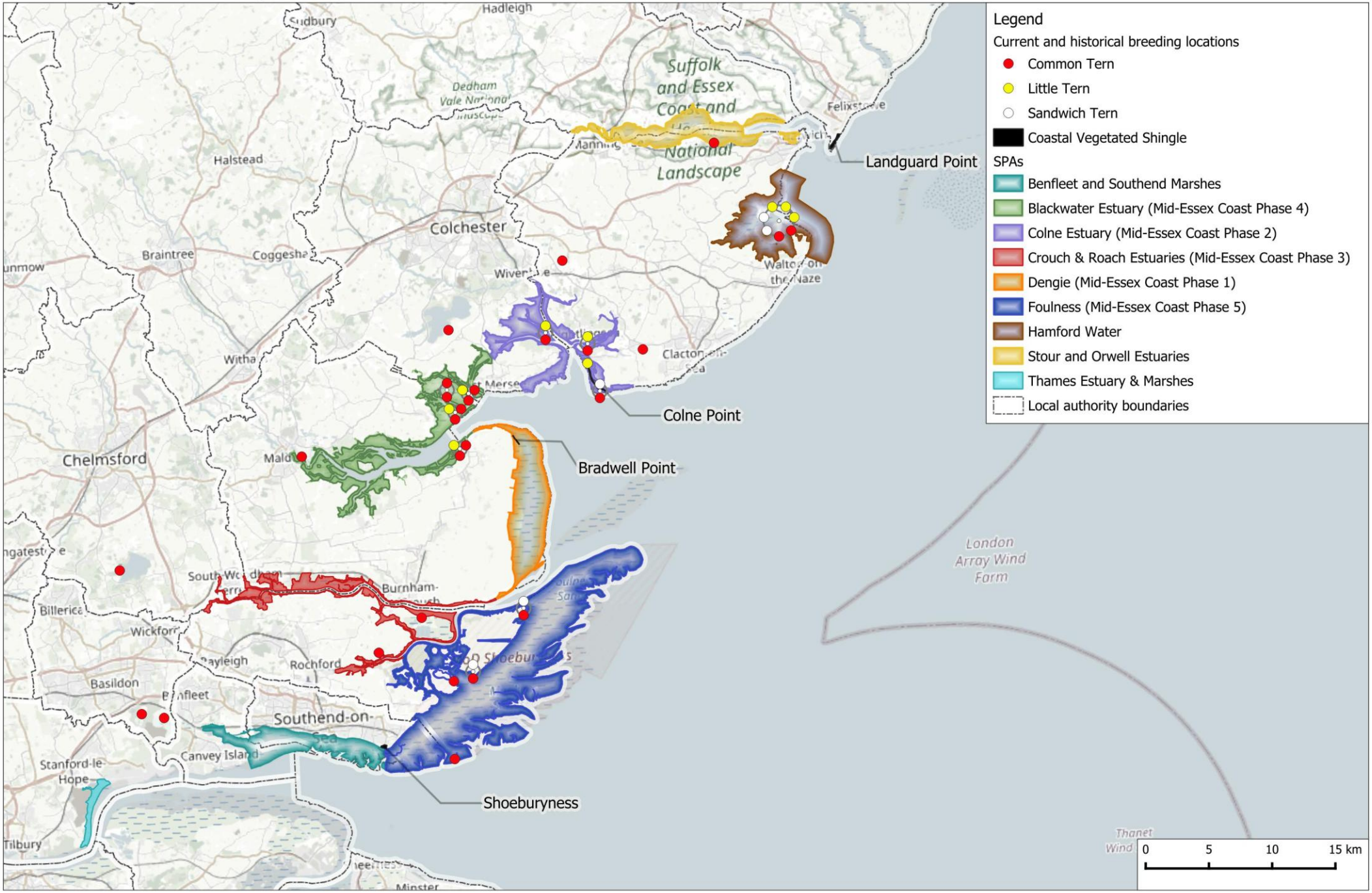
3.38 Avocets breed colonially on a range of shallow, coastal, wetlands, including saltmarshes and saline/brackish lagoons (Brown and Grice, 2005). The majority of saline/brackish lagoons that are used are those created within reserves such as Wallasea Island where protective measures (such as fences) are in place and therefore disturbance is potentially less of a concern. Saltmarsh areas are perhaps more at risk from disturbance for example

from dogs off lead or paddleboarders/kayaks accessing from the water. Such disturbance could also potentially affect other breeding waders that use saltmarsh, such as Redshank. Pochard generally breed on a range of sheltered/undisturbed inland waters, surrounded by dense vegetation, although they will also utilise brackish areas on the coast. As a breeding species they are potentially less susceptible to disturbance than the other breeding bird species.

3.39 Map 3 depicts records of breeding terns/tern colonies within Essex since 2000, alongside expanses of coastal vegetated shingle. The latter is shown as a proxy for additional/potential future breeding locations for Ringed Plover and Little Tern in particular. The bird data comes from a range of sources previously synthesised by Panter & Liley (2016), including the Essex Bird Report and Natural England, as well as more recent information from the Seabird Monitoring Programme[6].

[6] https://app.bto.org/seabirds/public/data.jsp

Map 3: Historical (post-2000) and current breeding locations for a selection of the SPA-qualifying bird species, shown alongside relevant European site and local authority boundaries. Areas of coastal vegetated shingle are labelled and shown as a proxy for potential/future Little Tern and Ringed Plover breeding locations. Note that overlapping points are displaced around a central point to aid interpretation



Non-breeding bird interest

3.40 The various estuaries and wetland habitats along the Essex Coast support very large numbers of non-breeding bird species, including waders and wildfowl. The relevant SPAs are classified for a range of species individually and also the wintering waterbird assemblage, reflecting the wide range of species and large numbers of birds that can be present around the whole coastline.

3.41 While overall numbers tend to peak during the winter, the coast is important for these non-breeding species for much of the year, with non-breeding birds present from July through to May. Different species will use different areas at different times of year and numbers fluctuate, and multiple populations from different breeding sites can be involved. For example, the local breeding Ringed Plovers are likely to move to southern areas of the UK and France and be replaced by birds from the Baltic and Scotland over the winter. In May, Ringed Plovers from more northern populations, even as far north as Greenland and Canada may pass through on passage.

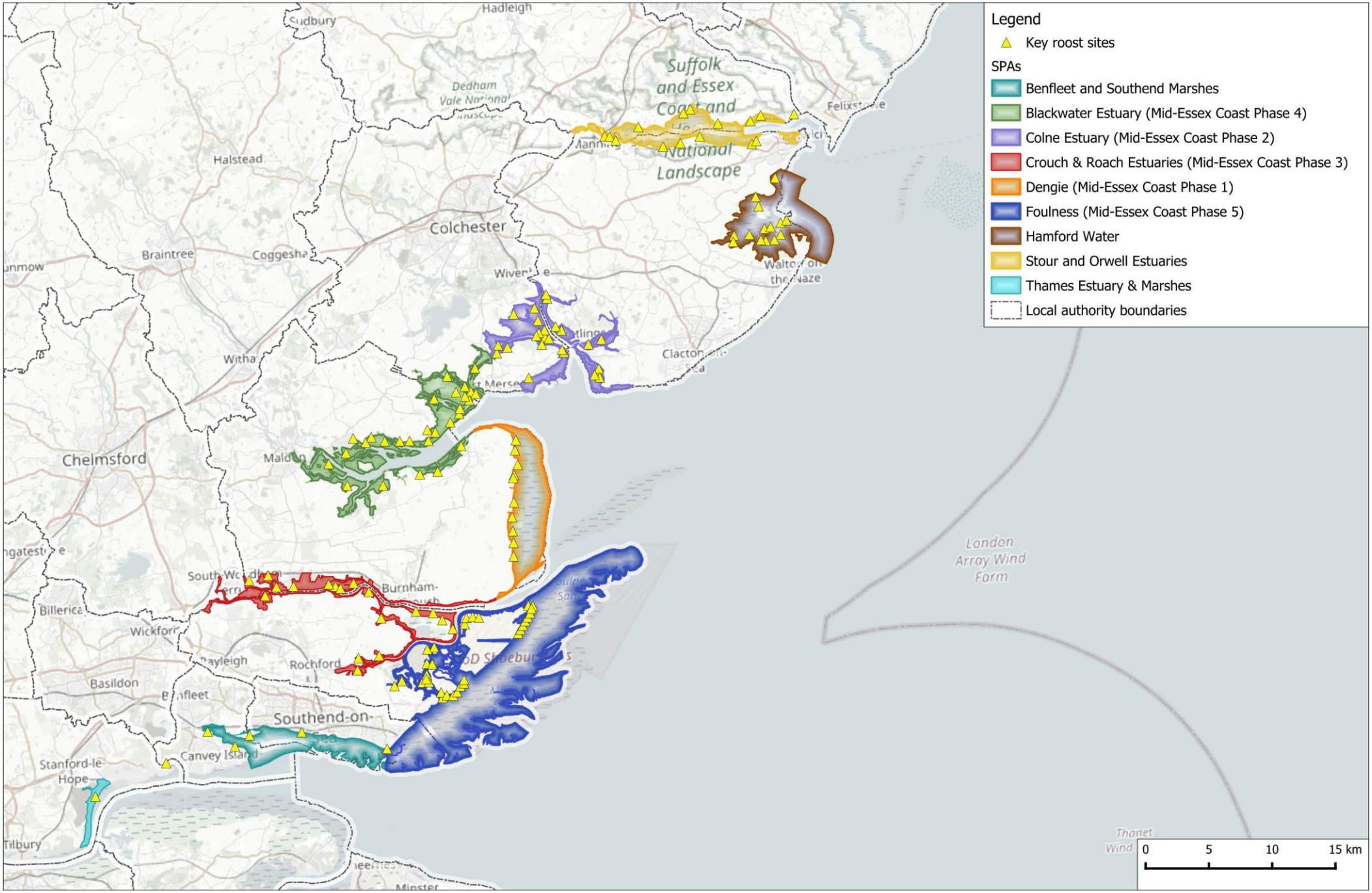
3.42 Disturbance for these wintering waterbirds can lead to areas of habitat being avoided (van der Kolk et al., 2022) and there can be energetic costs as a result of repeated flushing, which can be particularly damaging when food supplies or environmental conditions change (Goss-Custard et al., 2006).

3.43 Bird disturbance studies on the Orwell and Stour (Ravenscroft et al., 2008) over three winters found the Orwell to be much busier than the Stour, but birds tended to respond more to the presence of people on the Stour, potentially because the Stour held larger numbers of birds and there were more alternative areas available for the birds to switch to. Shoreline activities caused most disturbance at high tide while those occurring in the estuary caused the most disturbance at low tide. The authors suggested disturbance was having an impact on the populations of birds on the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA.

3.44 All intertidal mudflat habitat, when exposed, has the potential to be used by the non-breeding bird interest. Exposure will vary with the tidal cycle. In addition, birds will often gather over high tide and roost sites may support large numbers of birds at a given time. Use of roosts will vary according to prevailing weather conditions, habitat etc. and roosts can be avoided as a result of disturbance (Peters and Otis, 2007; van der Kolk et al., 2022). Map 4 overlays the relevant SPA boundaries with the locations of key wader and

waterbird roost sites, as identified in Panter & Liley (2016), with additional information synthesised from the previous Essex RAMS and informed by the RSPB (Place Services / Essex County Council, 2018). These data are not comprehensive but provide an indication of the distribution of roosts and highlight how roost sites are present within all the SPA sites.

Map 4: Key non-breeding wader and waterbird roost sites alongside the relevant European site and local authority boundaries



Difficulties with land management

3.45 High recreational use can lead to challenges for land managers, with staff time and resources directed towards litter collection, emptying bins, managing parking and dealing with any problems (such as lost pets, gates left open etc.). Furthermore, high levels of recreation use can potentially lead to demand for facilities and infrastructure, creating additional pressure for those managing sites. Local residents can also be a strong voice in opposition to any change, potentially meaning additional consultation and community dialogue required prior to any changes or high-profile interventions.

3.46 Dog attacks on livestock have led to challenges with grazing some sites. Essex Wildlife Trust have stopped grazing sheep at some locations due to dog attacks. Where grazing and dog walking co-exist there is often a need for greater staff presence, extra secure fencing and very clear messaging to visitors with dogs.

Overview and additional context

3.47 The impacts caused by recreational activities are varied, and some impact pathways are more relevant to some features than others. As such, the risks for each European site on the Essex coast are slightly different. Based on the qualifying features for each site and other information available, we summarise which impact pathways are potentially relevant to each European site in Table 2. We have not tried to assign a degree of risk or ranked issues for different sites; a tick in the table simply indicates the potential for risk.

3.48 While we have summarised the risks separately, they also interact, for example a saltmarsh fire would reduce the available habitat for birds, with the potential to exacerbate risks of disturbance. In addition, many of the features are quite mobile and change in distribution over time, this is particularly the case with species such as Little Tern.

Additional context

3.49 Climate change will impact the distribution of the qualifying features, exacerbate risks such as fire incidence, change recreation patterns and fundamentally change the coast and surrounding habitats. Rising sea levels, coastal squeeze and more storm surges lead to a loss of habitat such as saltmarsh than mean there is less space for both recreation and for wildlife.

3.50 Recreation use will shift over time in response to trends, social media and a range of social factors and as such there is some complexity and inevitable uncertainty around the scale of future risk.

3.51 Dog ownership increased markedly during Covid (Morgan et al., 2020). Wild swimming (Bates and Moles, 2022), paddleboarding (Baker et al., 2021), drones (Rebolo-Ifrán et al., 2019) and e-bikes (Rérat, 2021) are becoming increasingly popular while improvements in wetsuit materials and technology can allow people to spend more time in the water, leading to changes in participation in activities such as kite surfing, jet skis, windsurfing and swimming. Tourism trends are also changing, with for example an increase in campervans, mobile homes and short-trip vacations to countryside destinations (e.g. Sommer, 2020). Campervans also provide opportunities for life-style choices with some people choosing to live 'off-grid'.

3.52 Such changes in the types of activity and how recreation takes place may mean people access sites in novel ways, for example paddleboards can be launched anywhere and are easily portable, meaning access to the water may not be focussed around slipways. Changing patterns of access may mean people access the coast at different times of day or different weather conditions, further exacerbating the existing level of recreational disturbance.

Table 2: Summary of risks to the relevant European sites from recreation.

European site	Damage (trampling and wear)	Contamination	Increased fire risk	Disturbance to breeding birds	Disturbance to non-breeding waterbirds	Difficulties with land management	Notes and reasons for ticks where further information necessary
Essex Estuaries SAC	✓		✓			✓	Habitats such as saltmarsh, seagrass and halophilous scrub potentially vulnerable to damage and increased fire risk
Hamford Water SPA				✓	✓	✓	
Hamford Water Ramsar					✓	✓	
Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA				✓	✓	✓	Breeding Avocet an SPA feature and the supplementary conservation advice indicates Avocet have bred at Cattawade (as well as Trimley on the Orwell)
Stour and Orwell Estuaries Ramsar	✓				✓	✓	Ramsar listing includes a range of saltmarsh plants and eelgrasses potentially vulnerable to trampling
Colne Estuary SPA				✓	✓	✓	
Colne Estuary Ramsar	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Wetland invertebrate and plant interest potentially vulnerable to damage, contamination and increased fire risk
Blackwater Estuary SPA				✓	✓	✓	
Blackwater Estuary Ramsar	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Wetland invertebrate and plant interest potentially vulnerable to damage, contamination and increased fire risk
Dengie SPA					✓	✓	
Dengie Ramsar	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Wetland invertebrate and plant interest potentially vulnerable to damage, contamination and increased fire risk
Crouch and Roach Estuaries SPA					✓	✓	

European site	Damage (trampling and wear)	Contamination	Increased fire risk	Disturbance to breeding birds	Disturbance to non-breeding waterbirds	Difficulties with land management	Notes and reasons for ticks where further information necessary
Crouch and Roach Estuaries Ramsar	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Wetland invertebrate and plant interest potentially vulnerable to damage, contamination and increased fire risk
Foulness SPA				✓	✓	✓	
Foulness Ramsar	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Benfleet and Southend Marshes SPA					✓	✓	
Benfleet and Southend Marshes Ramsar					✓	✓	
Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA					✓	✓	
Thames Estuary and Marshes Ramsar	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	Wetland invertebrate and plant interest potentially vulnerable to damage, contamination and increased fire risk

4. SAMM ('Strategic Access Management and Monitoring')

4.1 SAMM measures form the basis of all strategic mitigation schemes (see Beveridge et al., 2024 for overview). SAMM comprise measures aimed at behaviour change or encouraging responsible access and are targeted at or around the European sites. Measures include signage, interpretation, ranger provision etc and extend to include monitoring linked to mitigation delivery to ensure the mitigation is targeted appropriately.

Mitigation delivery to date

4.2 Developer contributions have been used to fund the mitigation work set out in the original strategy (Place Services / Essex County Council, 2018), which at the time was designed to address impacts from 72,907 dwellings that (at the time) were anticipated to come forward in the period to 2038. The mitigation measures included:

- Recruitment of a full-time Delivery Manager (appointed in 2021) with role to oversee delivery and liaise with stakeholders;
- Adoption of the "Bird Aware" brand originally developed by Bird Aware Solent[7];
- Recruitment of a team of rangers to work on the ground to reduce disturbance by influencing the behaviour of visitors (team size of 4 full-time posts in 2024/25, including a lead ranger)
- Ranger attendance at a variety of prominent local events, raising awareness of Bird Aware Essex Coast and it's guidance;
- Development of initiatives to encourage responsible dog walking and encourage dog owners to go to less sensitive parts of the coast;
- Dedicated Bird Aware Essex Coast website[8] and social media channels, with content around responsible recreation, the ranger team, events, and general awareness raising;
- Production of an informative Bird Aware Essex Coast leaflet, about the habitats and the birds of the coast, that has been distributed widely throughout Essex;
- Habitat based measures, such as interpretation, fencing, waymarking, screening, access and habitat improvement; and,

[7] https://birdaware.org/solent/
[8] https://birdaware.org/essex/

- Institution of a monitoring scheme to track the implementation of mitigation measures and to assess their effectiveness.

4.3 The ranger team has grown over time and coverage across the area is not uniform, with effort targeted by the Bird Aware team. The team has identified at least 85 sites across the coast that require some sort of ranger presence and the level of provision at each is varied according to the ease with which it is possible to intercept and engage with visitors, presence of vulnerable features in areas that people might access, levels of recreation use and then effort is further refined according to tide, weather etc.

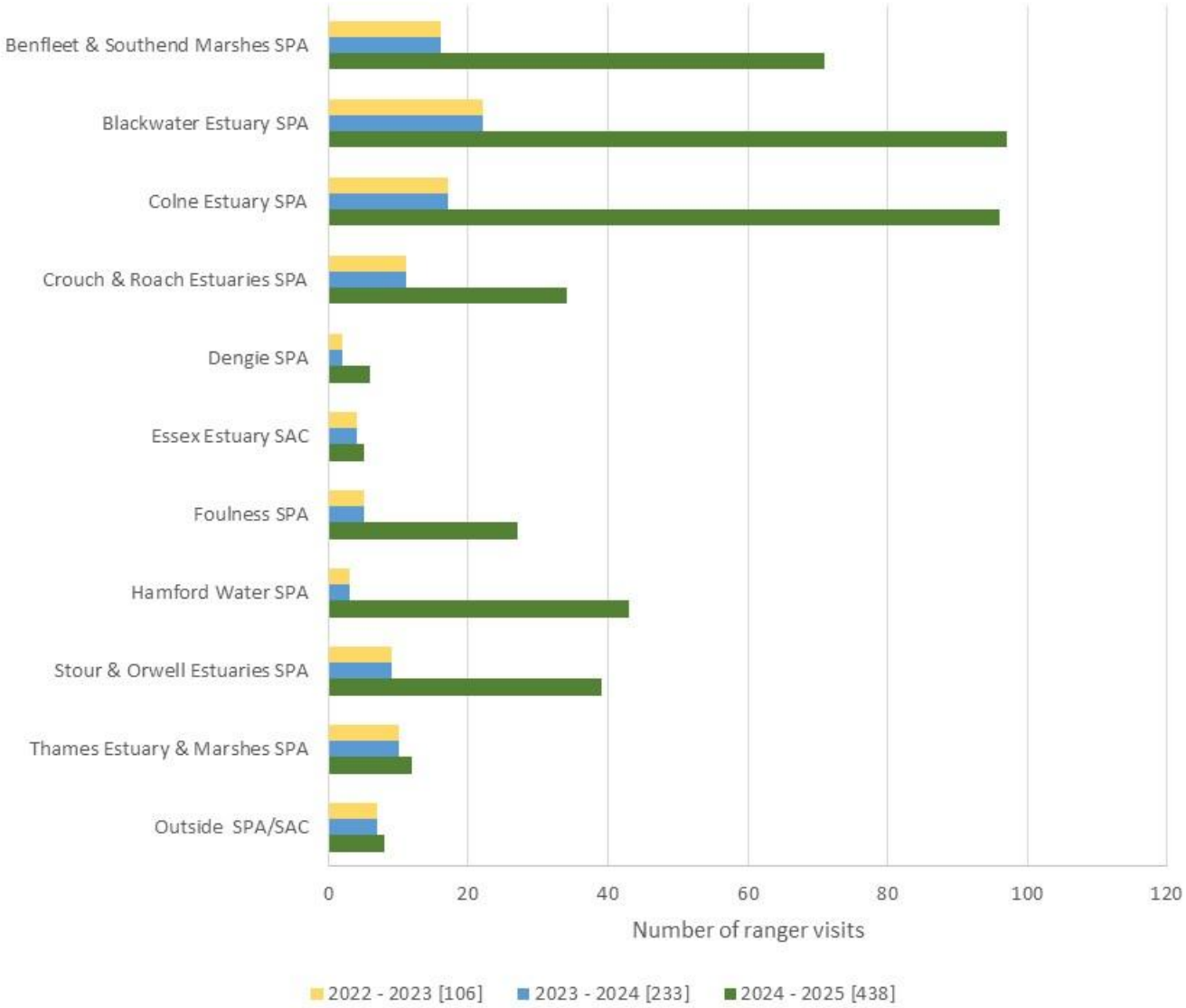


Figure 2: Ranger visits by year and European site. Data extracted from schedule provided by Bird Aware Essex team (note 24/25 data is the number of planned visits rather than actual visits).

SAMM measures in this strategy

4.4 SAMM measures include education, engagement with recreational users to influence their behaviour, raising awareness about the Essex coast and it's biodiversity, access management and monitoring. The measures are focussed around the European sites and extend to cover functionally-linked land in the vicinity. Measures are summarised below and itemised in Table 3 (at the end of this section). The measures have been carefully considered to build on the existing mitigation work achieved to date and further increase the level of mitigation provision to ensure it is sufficient to address the level of housing growth now planned.

Measures relevant to all sites

4.5 The delivery manager will oversee the implementation of the mitigation, with their role having strategic oversight of the mitigation, including the delivery of the strategy and partnership governance. The role ensures the budget and finances are appropriately managed, setting out the financial responsibilities, monitoring financial contributions, financial forecasting, RAMS reserves and in-perpetuity funds etc as appropriate. The delivery manager will also oversee the reporting and provide the point of contact for planning officers, other local authority staff, conservation organisations and other stakeholders etc.

4.6 The ranger team is fundamental to the mitigation delivery. It is proposed to have two ranger teams, one covering sites from the northern side of Blackwater north to the Stour estuary and one covering from the southern side of the Blackwater south to the Thames Estuary. Each team will have 1 lead ranger and 3 coastal rangers. Both teams will be supported by up to 3 seasonal ranger roles which will be flexible on the sites they support based on whether there are beach nesting birds that require specific support during the breeding season, providing flexible ranger support in the winter and for weekend working, and complimented by the dog officer and education and engagement officer roles. The overall ranger team size is therefore 9.5 full-time equivalent (fte) posts (including team leaders and 3 seasonal posts, each of 6 months).

4.7 This will essentially provide the following coverage, although each team will have the flexibility to place ranger resource where it is needed:

- 1 ranger covering the Stour Estuary and Hamford Water – supported by 1 seasonal ranger.

- 1 ranger covering the Colne Estuary – supported by 1 seasonal ranger.
- 2 rangers covering the Blackwater Estuary – supported by 1 seasonal ranger.
- 1 ranger covering Dengie and Crouch and Roach Estuary.
- 1 ranger covering Foulness, Thames Estuary and Southend and Benfleet Marshes – supported by 1 or 2 seasonal rangers.
- 2 lead rangers, one for each team (i.e. 1 for Black-water – Stour and 1 for Blackwater – Thames).

4.8 This team size is necessary as in some locations/times there is a need for two rangers to be out together, due to health & safety concerns, effectiveness or for confidence building. The work is demanding and approaching strangers in relatively remote areas can be difficult; the larger team size ensures team morale and sufficient cover to ensure sickness, holidays etc will not compromise delivery. It may take some time for sufficient contributions to be collected to allow the team to reach this size and as the team builds it may be necessary for a different geographic breakdown.

4.9 The total length of coast covered by the ranger team is nearly 500km[9], giving around 53km per ranger (based team size of 9.5). This is a relatively large area for each staff member to cover and the physical difficulties in moving around the Essex Coast make this even more ambitious. The 500km estimate includes areas such as Foulness that are largely inaccessible to the public and some sections of shoreline are remote and seldom visited. Nonetheless, the extent of ranger coverage remains low or similar compared to other mitigation strategies. For example, the Severn Estuary has a level of provision of around 26km per ranger, the Solent (in 2022) around 36km per ranger and the Northumberland Coast around 37km per ranger (see Liley and Caals, 2024). A strategic review of mitigation provision on the Solent (D Liley et al., 2023) found rangers could speak to around 5-7 groups per hour on-site, depending on how busy the location was and the level of provision equated to around 30 minutes ranger time per new dwelling per winter. This was deemed low in the review.

[9] this is an approximate figure, derived using the shoreline within SPA boundaries (including islands with land above mean high water mark) and defined as the edge of selected habitats. The measurement reflects the shoreline rather than including any portions at sea or open water. The figure was derived from GIS layers used in the work of Ross *et al.* (2014).

4.10 Alongside the ranger team and delivery manager, the strategy includes provision for four further posts:

- A dog project officer, full time to run dog walker engagement at particular locations and provide resources/engagement material for dog walkers, in-line with projects elsewhere in the country[10]. The role will complement the ranger teams by working as a specialist ranger as required;
- A communications officer (part-time) responsible for leading campaigns (e.g. dogs on leads) and work around specific activities and audiences (e.g. watersports), supporting the delivery manager and ranger team with social media, press releases etc and overseeing the website content.
- An education/community engagement lead (full time) undertaking work with schools, leading site visits/school trips.
- A monitoring and data lead, this being a part time role responsible for overseeing the data collected by the rangers, collating data from other sources (such as bird data) and producing regular reports.

4.11 Specific work areas for the various staff in the team and that apply across the whole geographic area will include:

- Maintain and update updating the Bird Aware Essex website and general information provision raising awareness of the coast, its importance for nature conservation and risks from recreation use.
- Undertake dedicated work on watersports and water-based recreation, raising issues of disturbance and trampling damage to sensitive habitat. Potential to produce generic guidance for whole coast as to where to launch, where to go, how to behave (including speed limits) and this supported on the ground/water with signs and buoys. This should include activities that are growing in popularity such as wild swimming, paddleboarding etc).
- Gather evidence on particular activities and events to provide information that could support/assist enforcement action if the need arises (enforcement by relevant authority/police etc).
- Contact holiday parks (with static caravans, lodges, mobile homes etc) and exploring opportunities for outreach, including interpretation, signage, information on slipways and other information for residents. Potential for an information pack or

[10] such as Dorset Dogs https://www.dorsetdogs.org.uk/, Devon Loves Dogs https://www.devonlovesdogs.co.uk/ and Coast & Country Canines https://coastandcountrycanines.org/

similar to be distributed to residents at key sites and dog-focussed projects.[11]

- Develop work around education resources and work with children to raise awareness of disturbance issues and the wildlife interest of the coast – including education packs, lesson plans and budget to fund children visiting sites.
- Complete the parking audit and use it to identify and prioritise locations where changes necessary (such as formalising parking, reducing parking spaces, need for height restriction barriers or other infrastructure) and inform dialogue/consultation with relevant parties over parking charges, car park design etc;
- Log bird use in nearby areas outside the boundary of European sites where disturbance issues may be relevant, for example fields adjacent to footpaths. This information will provide scope to target rangers or other mitigation to such areas as necessary.
- Undertake dedicated work around wildlife photography to promote best practice. Options could include supporting professional photographers or keen amateurs to act as ambassadors at popular locations, production of a code of conduct, social media and other publicity around the issues.
- Undertake some dedicated awareness raising and communications around drone use.
- Establish a jet ski working group with remit to develop joint working to manage growing issue and oversight of co-ordination/support for measures at a coast wide level.
- Clear messaging around where to walk dogs, sites where dogs are welcomed off lead and effective information and engagement coast wide around dogs. This will mean the dog project officer, rangers, communications officer and education work all highlight issues around dogs off-lead and responsible dog walking.
- Produce of a monitoring strategy (with budget for consultancy input) to ensure data officer has clear guidance and monitoring data are effectively integrated into mitigation delivery.
- Check the condition of relevant people counters and other monitoring equipment, replacing baterries and overseeing repair/replacement as required.
- Collect and review of monitoring data as relevant and to inform mitigation delivery.

[11] The visitor survey results indicated that those staying away from home accounted for a high proportion of visitors at certain locations. Data from other parts of the country indicate those the number of recreational visits made to European sites per unit of accommodation were as high or higher for holiday accommodation when compared to residential units (Panter and Liley, 2017)

- Link up with neighbouring mitigation strategies (Suffolk and North Kent) to ensure no gaps in coverage and consistency of approach where any overlap or work in close proximity. Scope for joint messaging and campaigns on some issues (e.g. around jet skis).
- Link up with other mitigation strategies and visitor management/engagement projects around the country to share best practice, expertise and learn from others.

Measures specific to particular locations

4.12 Alongside the coast-wide measures set out above, there will be a need for a range of site specific and more local projects. These will include (but are not limited to):

- Changes to individual car parks to make them work better, perhaps reducing parking provision in some places or creating new parking in more robust locations;
- Fencing or screening to keep people/dogs on paths;
- Path work to create new routes or improve paths to improve access while ensuring impacts reduced (e.g. creating routes that provide options for people to walk away from the shoreline);
- New/replacement signage;
- New/replacement interpretation;
- Changes to slipways and access points to the water to make them work better or restrict particular types of user (e.g. provision of barriers and gated access);
- Infrastructure to restrict or limit access by off-road vehicles and motorbikes where a persistent problem;
- Funding to support existing work and projects that have responsibilities for visitor management or engagement;
- Zoning or ways to redistribute access, for example creating areas where access is discouraged or not promoted or areas where particular activities are encouraged/promoted such as dedicated spaces for watersports;
- Buoys or other measures to inform those on the water when approaching sensitive locations;
- Support for site based staff/projects involved in managing access, particularly those with a focus on waterbased activities (e.g. around enforcement of speed restrictions on the water);
- Projects with marinas, holiday parks or other locations where high density of users and boat activity in particular locations;
- Projects to improve visitor facilities at sites – particularly those aimed at providing for local recreational use (e.g. dog walking, exercise) – where they can absorb more visitors without recreation

impacts. Examples could include litter bins, viewpoints, dog bins, dog washing stations, off-lead exercising facilities, etc.
- Roost protection measures;
- Breeding bird protection measures (fencing, signage etc).

4.13 Most of these kinds of projects will need to be undertaken by relevant landowners and site managers. Many will be relatively opportunistic in that they might depend on circumstance. For example, flooding or storm events may result in the need to replace infrastructure (fencing, paths etc) and this could provide scope to upgrade some elements. Changes in ownership or in staff may lead to different management options. Other funding sources may lead to new projects and drive change, creating opportunities for additional measures that have a mitigation benefit. One key driver for change will be the Beneficial Use of Dredged Sediments (BUDS) and also managed realignments which will create new areas of habitat that have potential to draw birds and people.

4.14 It is therefore not possible to define a complete list of local projects within this strategy that can be relied on as mitigation. Appendix 1 provides an overview of local project ideas and opportunities around the Essex coast. These are indicative ideas only that were generated during a series of workshops in September 2025, with locally based staff (from a range of organisations) working around the Essex coast, including Bird Aware Essex staff. The appendix is not exhaustive and some of the projects and ideas may not necessarily be feasible or work as mitigation.

4.15 As the ranger team spends time on the ground and the project builds momentum with partners, the project list can be refined and specific proposals developed. The strategy provides funding on an annual basis for locally based projects. This funding will provide the flexibility and scope to allow relevant stakeholders and organisations to be able to bid for funds for small scale projects that have a clear mitigation benefit and fit with the strategy. Equally it will be possible for the Bird Aware Essex team to work with local parties on the ground to assist in developing ideas and implementing work on the ground.

4.16 The governance and detail of any such funding to stakeholders would need to be set out and agreed by the RAMS Steering Group and Project Board to ensure funds are appropriately authorised. This will also ensure that the funding does provide mitigation benefit and ensure good geographic

coverage. Strategic oversight will also ensure necessary monitoring is in place.

Evolution of SAMM and monitoring

4.17 The SAMM measures are able to shift and adapt with time, which is essential given likely changes at the sites, for example with respect to climate change. Ranger time can be focussed as appropriate and project funds can be directed to where they are needed through the locally-based projects. Engagement, for example through social media, provides further opportunity to reinforce messaging and influence behaviour in a targeted and dynamic way.

4.18 Monitoring will play an important role in supporting the strategy and mitigation delivery (ensuring mitigation is sufficient and keeping pace with housing growth). Data will be important to highlight changes in access, pick-up emerging trends and flag where new issues emerge. Mitigation delivery in terms of ranger time, levels of engagement and some ecological data will be important to inform future updates to the strategy. Some monitoring data will be useful to show how measures have worked, providing case studies and examples of successful interventions and best practice for others to adopt. Sharing these successes will be important to capacity building and the long-term success of the mitigation. Given the wide range of sites, range of issues and types of access, consistent and systematic data gathering will be a challenge. A monitoring strategy is therefore necessary (and costed within the SAMM measures) to ensure monitoring is integrated into mitigation delivery and the right data are collected to inform action on the ground.

4.19 Looking to the future, working with volunteers provides an opportunity to expand the work of the ranger team. Volunteers could act as ambassadors and potentially undertake tasks such as showing people birds, handing out information and so on. Some other bird disturbance mitigation projects involve extensive use of volunteers (e.g. Plovers in Peril on the Norfolk coast), where volunteers help with both engagement and with monitoring. By involving volunteers in monitoring there is the potential to raise understanding and appreciation of the bird interest among local people, which can then feed through into the engagement with other visitors.

4.20 There are also some clear risks to working with volunteers; influencing people's behaviour is difficult and the ranger team are carefully selected and receive considerable training. Any volunteer network would require

considerable effort to build, maintain and support, with training, rotas, equipment, transport and similar – meaning a need for greater staff input (e.g. a volunteer coordinator) to make sure it works. There may be a need to vet volunteers to minimise risks of reputational damage. As such, the potential use and role of volunteers requires careful review, consideration and resourcing. Volunteers certainly do not provide a cheap panacea and alternative to dedicated rangers. As such it is best that the ranger team is the focus in the short term and the role of volunteers is reviewed, with the scope to incorporate them into the mitigation delivery in the medium term.

4.21 Close working with relevant stakeholders and other mitigation schemes around the country will also be important. This will ensure the Bird Aware Essex team are aware of local issues, familiar with best practice, aware of the latest research, able to learn from others and share information across organisations.

Table 3: Overview of SAMM measures

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 to cover in-perpetuity
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, 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	Budget required for operational work, targeted comms planning, campaigns,	

Mitigation measure	Description	Justification	Notes
	social media, press, newsletters. Running campaigns relating to wildlife photography, drones, watersports etc.	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	Will cover resources to collate data from a range of different sources, including surveys and automated counters.
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 straetgy	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

Mitigation measure	Description	Justification	Notes
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 targeting 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	Potential to create a small project fund to help deliver mitigation. Delivery manager and Bird Aware team would work with local partners to develop ideas and suggest opportunities

5. Off-site green infrastructure & SANG

5.1 Off-site green infrastructure and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG) relate to additional greenspace, aimed at deflecting visitors away from the European sites (for example providing locations that welcome dog walking). These are widely used around the country to provide mitigation alongside SAMM measures and are positive measures in that they provide additional space for recreation. In many areas, such as around Ashdown Forest, the Exe Estuary, the Dorset Heaths and the Thames Basin Heaths SANGs have become popular destinations in their own right providing a popular and well-used resource for local communities. SANG, where applicable, can also fulfil a range of other functions, including biodiversity net gain and flood management.

5.2 There is a growing evidence base on the effectiveness of SANGs in coastal locations (e.g. Caals, Panter and Liley, 2022) and looking ahead there is a need to provide greater clarity about the level of SANG provision required from different developments in Essex and clear guidance on what SANG should look like and how it should work.

5.3 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. 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) or other targeted mitigation should be considered to avoid adverse effects on site integrity.

5.4 Broadly, developments that are 500+ dwellings are most likely to have alone impacts on the European sites, however development proposals for far fewer dwellings in close proximity to the designated site boundary will also pose particular risks. Any development that has impacts alone may be required to provide additional mitigation through the provision of SANG and will need to consult with Natural England.

5.5 Additional information about SANGs in Essex will be set out in an additional planning guidance note that will supplement this strategy. The additional guidance will cover the role of SANG in addition to a RAMS contribution, when SANGs might be required and how SANGs fit with the RAMS. Developers should consult this guide in addition to this strategy to ensure they are meeting their planning obligations.

6. Implementation

Types of development covered

6.1 This 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).

6.2 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). Table 4 lists the development types where LSEs are expected, or may be expected.

6.3 For the development types listed in Table 4, this strategy provides a consistent and effective mechanism to secure mitigation for in-combination recreational impacts arising from net new development within the ZOI. 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.

6.4 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 4: Relevant types of development

Use Type/Class	Likely Significant Effect	Mitigation requirements
Dwelling Houses (C3) including live work units *This applies to net new dwellings and excludes like for like replacement dwellings.*	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) 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
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

6.6 While residential development represents the primary source of recreational pressure, other land uses can also create significant impacts on European 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.

6.7 For C3 residential development, contributions will be calculated on a per-unit basis. However, this approach may not be directly applicable to other forms of development, such as tourist accommodation or visitor attractions.

6.8 For development types not falling within the standard per dwelling tariff model, the potential for LSEs must be assessed through project level

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and advice sought from Natural England where necessary, and any required mitigation confirmed through appropriate assessment. Where recreational impacts cannot be ruled out, the RAMS tariff may be used as an appropriate and proportionate mitigation measure for 'in-combination' impacts, including for hotels, holiday parks, other overnight accommodation and tourist attractions. Proposals that are deemed to have 'alone' impacts will require additional bespoke mitigation. In such cases, payment of the RAMS tariff covers residual impacts.

6.9 Project-level HRA for tourist attraction and hotel related proposals will need to take into account both the type of use and its proximity to European sites. For example, a business focused hotel in Chelmsford city centre is unlikely to generate the same recreational pressure as dog friendly holiday accommodation located adjacent to a designated site. Each proposal will therefore need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis to determine whether LSEs are likely and whether additional mitigation is required to address 'alone' impacts.

6.10 Further detail on development types covered and the application of tariffs and bedspace calculations will be provided within Supplementary Planning Guidance. Developers should refer to this guidance, alongside the Essex Coast RAMS, to ensure all planning obligations and HRA requirements are fully met.

Zone of Influence and the area covered by the strategy

6.11 The Zone of Influence is shown in Map 5. This is the established Zone of Influence, which was originally derived separately for each SPA and then merged, with values for each separate SPA ranging from 4.5 to 22km (see Table 4.4 in Place Services / Essex County Council, 2018). Recent postcode data from the 2025 visitor survey (Rush et al., 2025) is included on the map for context and demonstrates that the zone works to capture the majority of visitors and remains fit for purpose.

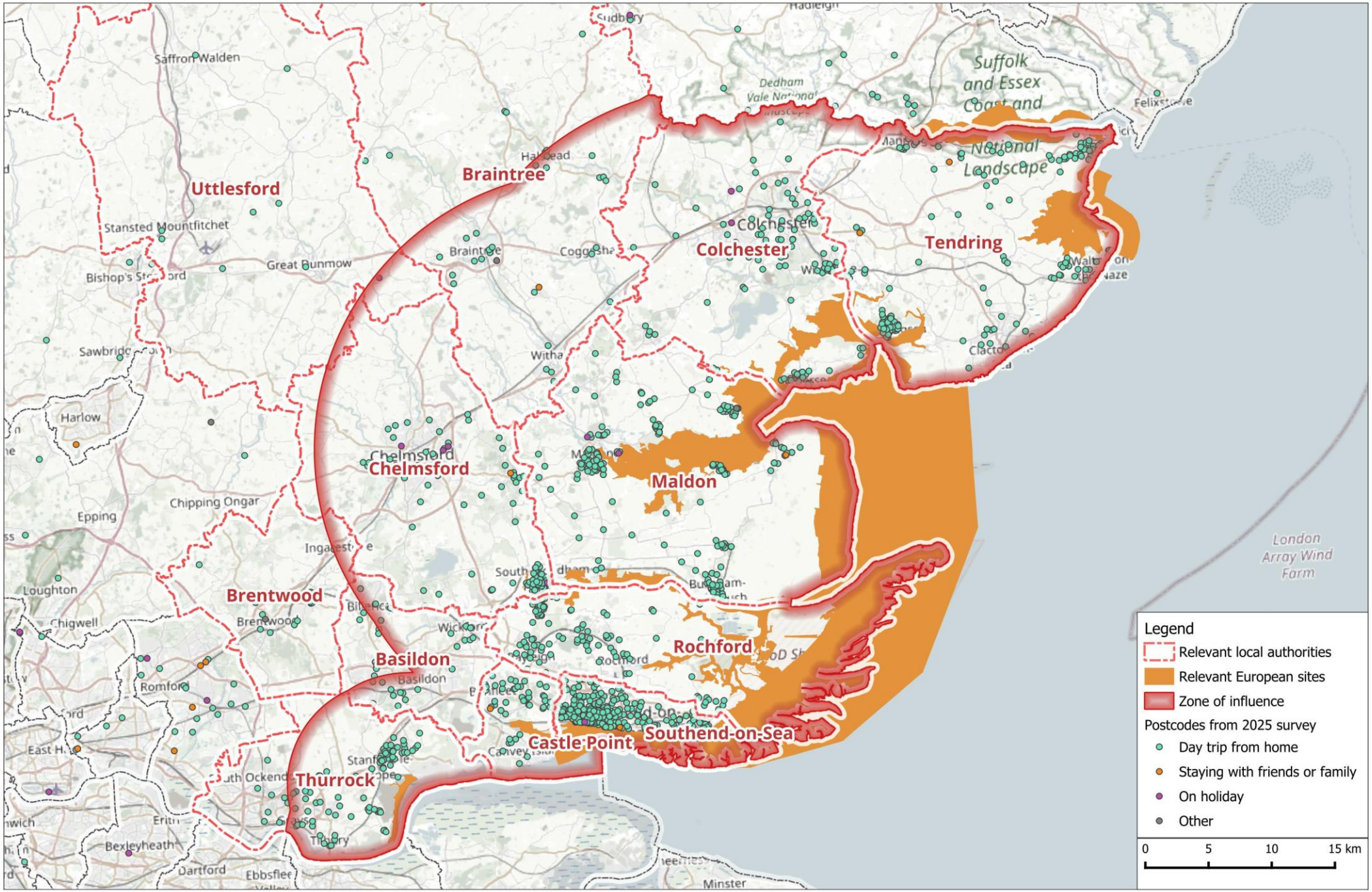
HRA matters and other assessment considerations

6.12 This strategy does not replace the requirement for HRA in relation to recreational impacts at plan or project level. Instead, it provides a mechanism to provide mitigation to support appropriate assessment and addresses the cumulative effects of recreation across a wide area. For most development types and locations, conformity with the strategy will

potentially allow a conclusion of no adverse effect on site integrity in respect of recreational pressure. In some cases, the strategic mitigation delivered through the RAMS may not however be sufficient. Developments in particularly sensitive locations—such as those immediately adjacent to European sites—may require additional, bespoke mitigation measures beyond the RAMS tariff. These will need to be identified and secured through project level HRA. As such the strategy does not remove the need to consider whether individual developments may also give rise to impacts alone.

6.13 It should also be noted that the strategy does not address other potential impact pathways, such as air quality or water quality, which must be considered separately where relevant to European sites. It should also be noted that recreation impacts to SSSI features may not necessarily be covered by the mitigation strategy (if those features are not qualifying features of the European sites). These may warrant separate consideration and mitigation in their own right.

Map 5: Zone of Influence and interviewee postcodes from visitor survey



Scale of future development

6.14 Around 148,309 new dwellings have been estimated as coming forward in future local authority plans and requiring mitigation. This total is broken down by authority in Table 5. The estimates take into account each authority's local plan housing requirement and discounts a proportion of the homes which are unlikely to make a fee contribution to the RAMS. This step removes homes which are already permitted or would be complete by the base date (April 2026). To keep the calculation simple, no discount was made for non-qualifying types of residential or lapse rates. Full details of how the different totals have been derived are provided in Appendix 2.

6.15 The estimates are therefore intended as an approximate guide and derived as a snapshot at a particular point in time. They may not necessarily be an accurate representation of future development. They are however sufficient to determine the scale of mitigation likely to be required and therefore to allow a tariff to be set.

6.16 In 2025 there were approximately 609,786[12] residential dwellings within the Zone of Influence shown in Map 5. The estimate of 148,309 new dwellings would therefore represent a 24% increase in the amount of housing within the Zone of Influence.

Table 5: Summary of housing growth potentially requiring mitigation, by authority (see Appendix 2 for further details). Note stage of plan preparation reflects a snapshot at the time of writing

LPA	Stage of Plan Preparation	Plan Period	Potential housing requiring mitigation
Basildon	Reg 18 Local Plan	2023-2043	21,667
Braintree	Reg 18 Local Plan Review – March 2026	2026-2041	11,493
Brentwood	Adopted 2022, Call for sites - Reg 18 2026	2026-2042	3,060
Castle Point	Plan was submitted for Examination in January 2026	2026-2043	5,457
Chelmsford	Reg 19 Local Plan Review, Submission 2026	2022-2041	19,755
Colchester	Reg 18 Local Plan Review - December 25	2026-2042	16,435
Maldon	Exploring options to transition into the new plan-making system in 2026	2023-2043	9,521
Rochford	Reg 18 consultation February – March 2026	2023/24 - 2042/43	12,456

[12] Total extracted from national postcode data and relates to the residential delivery points per postcode within the Zone of Influence.

LPA	Stage of Plan Preparation	Plan Period	Potential housing requiring mitigation
Southend	Preferred Approach Consultation 2025, Reg 18 summer 2025	2025-2050	25,444
Tendring	Reg 18 Preferred Options consultation	2025 – 2042	12,851
Thurrock	Local Plan Initial Proposals, Reg 19 2026	2024-2044	10,170
Uttlesford	Full Council in March 2026 to be invited to adopt the Local Plan	2021-2041	0
Total			**148,309**

Costs per new dwelling

6.17 The total cost of SAMM measures is estimated to be £72,594,500 (see Appendix 3 for details). Per dwelling costs are set out below, calculated using the housing growth figures from Table 5. Costs for SAMM will be adjusted to take into account any reserves held by the partnership at the point at which the new strategy supersedes the previous one, giving a cost per new dwelling of £475.70.

Total cost SAMM:	£72,594,500
Approx. RAMS monies held by accountable body[13]:	£2,043,416.31
Estimate of number of houses needing mitigation:	148,309
Cost per new dwelling:	£475.70

6.18 The tariff will be further adjusted on an annual basis to take into account RPI Index linked inflation, any administrative costs and any other adjustments necessary. Housing growth will also be monitored and taken into account as part of future adjustments.

[13] This figure includes RAMS tariff held by the Accountable Body, and the interest accrued on held funds to date

Long term delivery and in-perpetuity costs

6.19 Mitigation is secured for the duration of the impact, and it is assumed the implementation of the mitigation will run for as long as it is required, with money set aside to provide long-term stability and in-perpetuity delivery. The strategy will operate on a rolling basis into the future, adjusting as necessary to changing levels of house building and impacts arising. The inclusion of in-perpetuity costs is one of the factors behind the increase in tariff compared to the previous strategy.

6.20 Some measures in this strategy are short-term, one-off measures while others need to run for many years, often extending well outside the Plan period. Changes to access infrastructure, the provision of any SANGs (which are secured indefinitely) alongside the increased awareness raising and education work should ensure that the need and annual cost for SAMM can decrease with time. As behaviour change (such as responsible dog ownership) is more widely accepted, high levels of ranger time may no longer be so relevant. It will be important for regular review and revision of costs as necessary to adjust the amount set aside for long term funding of mitigation measures. As such, SAMM is unlikely to need to be constant over time. The measures have been costed for in perpetuity (taken to be a minimum of 80 years, see Appendix 3). Costs and timing can however be reviewed and adjusted on a 5 yearly basis, allowing resources to be targeted different as necessary. Where measures are short-term or one-off, such as small infrastructure projects, it is anticipated that further short-term or one-off measures in different locations around the coast would come forward in later years of the strategy and the costs are therefore spread over an 80 year period.

Governance

6.21 There is already an established approach to the governance and implementation of the Essex Coast RAMS via the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership, which consists of local authorities, Essex County Council, conservation organisations, landowners and statutory bodies. The partnership is governed by a project board and the RAMS steering group whose activities are underpinned by a Partnership Agreement. The Essex Coastal Forum (ECF) a members led forum that discuss and recommend action on coastal issues provides democratic oversight on the project. In addition, one of the partner authorities is nominated as the Accountable

Body for the project and are responsible for holding the RAMS funds from developments that have commenced across Essex and for providing the financial procedures and protocols in its management. They also act as the Lead Institution and employ the RAMS Delivery Manager and project rangers, the 'Bird Aware Essex Team', who are responsible for co-ordinating and delivering the mitigation on the ground.

6.22 Figure 3 sets out the governance roles and arrangements of the Essex Coast RAMS implementation and its Partnership.

6.23 There is flexibility in the structure to allow for additional working groups to be established to support the implementation of the Essex coast RAMS, such as the RAMS Delivery and Technical Group, a group of landowners and land managers, technical and specialist people that provide relevant coastal expertise, knowledge, experience and on the ground direction / support to the Bird Aware Essex Coast team.

6.24 It will be important, looking forward, that there is flexibility and regular review as to how the contributions are spent and to assess the scope and nature of any necessary future mitigation projects. It will be essential that the mitigation delivery can respond to change and shifting priorities. There is uncertainty as to how priorities might need to change in the future, and such uncertainty can only be addressed through good monitoring, adaptive mitigation and regular review.

6.25 The need for flexibility will relate to the changing coastline and the impact of extreme weather events which could affect the qualifying features, visitor behaviour and the coastline itself. The King Charles III England Coast Path will also provide new opportunities for access and may change how people use the coast. Changes in housing delivery may affect how much mitigation revenue is collected and the scale of mitigation required.

6.26 Certain elements within the mitigation package have the scope to adapt and flex as conditions and priorities change. Furthermore, it is possible that additional opportunities may arise, for example as a result of changing land ownership. It is important therefore that the governance is responsive enough to enable developer contributions to be shifted to different components of the strategy easily. Annual reviews of budgets and the ability for the Delivery Manager to adjust finances as appropriate will be key.

6.27 The partnership also highlight the importance of the various delivery partners, for example site managers and other staff in the RSPB, Essex

Wildlife Trust, the National Trust, Essex County Council and Natural England. It is essential for the RAMS Delivery Manager to work with such organisations on the Essex coast RAMS delivery.

6.28 Additional flexibility could be accommodated within the structure for relevant stakeholders and organisations to bid for small amounts of money for particular projects that have a clear mitigation benefit and fit with the strategy. The governance and detail of such an arrangement would need to be set out and agreed by the RAMS Steering Group and Project Board to ensure proper governance arrangements are put in place beforehand.

Review and timing

6.29 The strategy will operate indefinitely on a rolling basis, with this version running to around 2031. The strategy has, however, been written in the context of local plans and the likely levels of growth to around 2045. The strategy will need to be reviewed and updated approximately every 5 years, with these reviews checking housing numbers, delivery, costs and mitigation priorities. The reviews will inform the 1 year and 5-year business plan that underpins the work of the partnership and their staff.

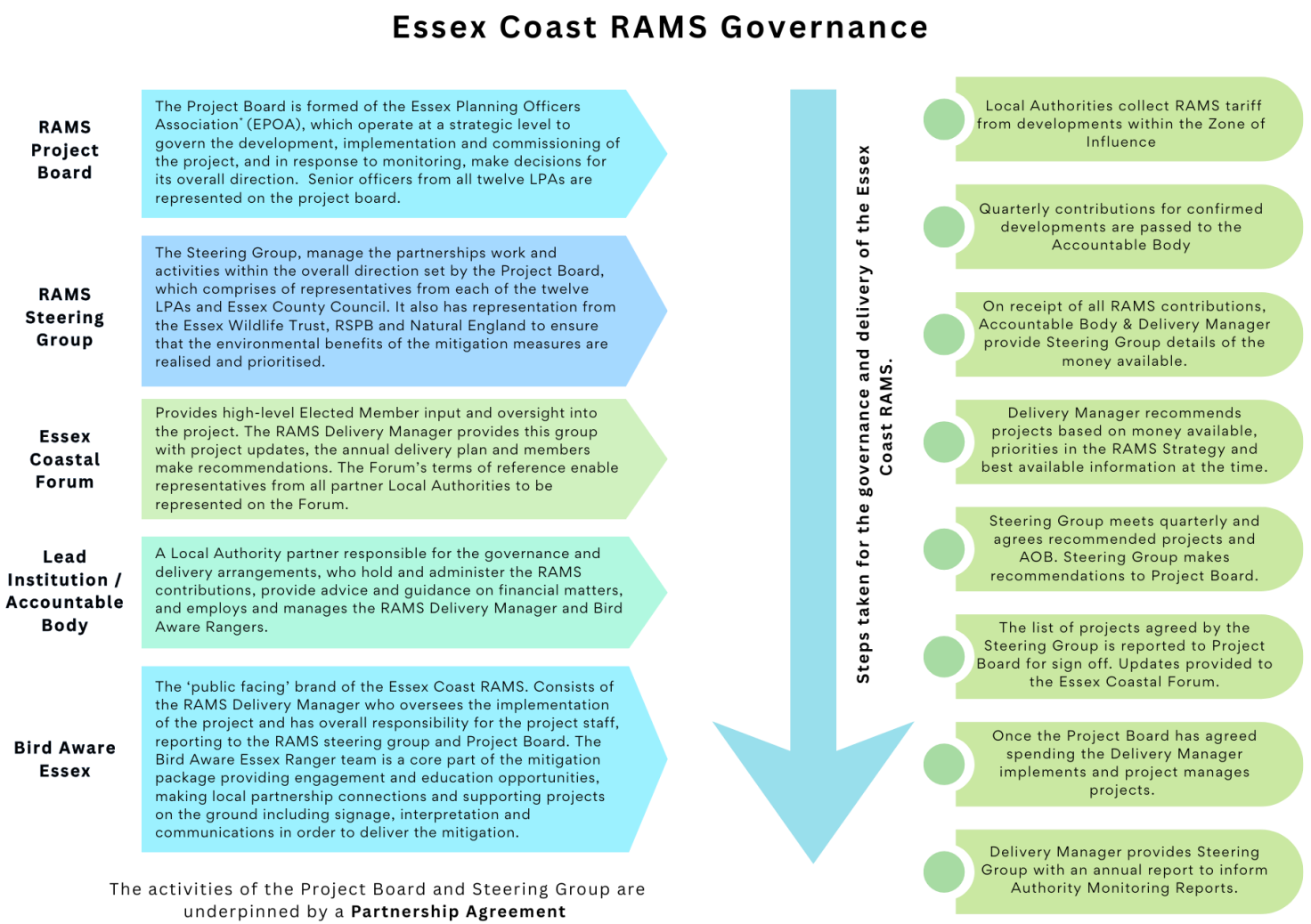


Figure 3: Summary of governance structure

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Glossary

Competent authority: A body authorising, permitting or giving consent. This can include a public body that decides to give a licence, permit, consent or other permission for work to happen, adopt a plan or carry out work for itself,; a statutory undertaker carrying out its work; a minister or department of government, or anyone holding public office, such as a planning inspector, ombudsman or commissioner.

EiP: Examination in Public. the final independent assessment of a local council's development plan before it can be formally adopted.

European site: A site protected by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended (known as the Habitats Regulations).

Green infrastructure: A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.

Habitats Site: Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites.

HRA: Habitats Regulations Assessment. A legal assessment process conducted by a competent authority to determine if a plan or project will adversely affect the integrity of a protected European site

LNRS: Local Nature Recovery Strategy. A statutory system of 48 spatial strategies covering the entire region of England, designed to reverse biodiversity decline.

Local plan: A plan for the future development of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community, under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. A local plan can consist of either strategic or nonstrategic policies, or a combination of the two.

MCCA: Mayoral Combined County Authority

RAMS: Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy

Ramsar site: Wetlands of international importance, designated under the 1971 Ramsar Convention.

Reg 18: Regulation 18 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 is the initial statutory stage of public consultation in the local plan-making process.

Reg 19: Regulation 19 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 defines the pre-submission stage of a Local Plan, where the final proposed plan is published for public consultation before submission to the Secretary of State.

SAC: Special Area of Conservation. Areas defined by regulation 3 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 which have been given special protection as important conservation sites.

SANG: Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace. New or enhanced greenspace, aimed at deflecting visitors away from the European sites and creating more space for recreation

SAMM: Strategic Access Management and Monitoring measures. Mitigation measures targeting behaviour change and visitor management measures on and around a European site.

SPA: Special Protection Area. 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.

SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest. Sites designated by Natural England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Sui Generis: buildings that do not fall within any particular use class for the purposes of planning permission

Zone of Influence: Area within which likely significant effects are triggered by new development and mitigation therefore required.

Appendix 1: Potential opportunities for site specific projects and opportunities

Potential opportunities for more site-specific projects were identified in a series of workshops hosted in September 2025. Opportunities are listed below and the numbers cross-reference to the corresponding map (see Maps 6 - 9 at the end of this Appendix). The opportunities listed are not intended to be exhaustive and neither do they reflect any specific commitment or firm proposal for any location. Many are suggestions only and will require further work by partners and Bird Aware Essex before the level of mitigation benefit can be confirmed.

Stour Estuary and Hamford Water

1 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement at launch points (note that point falls within Suffolk and has already been identified as a potential Suffolk Coast RAMS project location by Wildlife Wise).

2 - Potential to monitor EWT Hogmarsh Island for water users and disturbance.

3 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement on the Manningtree seawall – busy location used by dog walkers. Additional scope for signage & engagement in the nearby library and town, including installation of a leaflet box.

4 - Potential to enhance existing signage near Mistley at Manningtree Beach bathing area and engage with water-based activities in this area. Note that Wildlife Wise have also identified this location as a launch site for paddleboards and kayaks within the Suffolk Coast RAMS and have suggested the implementation of a range of signage/interpretation and/or guidance.

5 - Scope for continued ranger focus and engagement at Hopping point and where Mistley Walls road runs parallel to the estuary. The Mistley walls frontage towards Manningtree (from point 4) is a key engagement location, with dog focussed engagement also warranted here.

6 - Scope for engagement with pop-up camp site.

7 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement at private access/launch point. Raised by NE that they are concerned about disturbance from watercraft. Note that Wildlife Wise have also identified this location as a launch site for windsurfers and paddleboards within the Suffolk Coast RAMS and have suggested the implementation of a range of signage/interpretation and/or guidance.

8 & 9 - Scope for screening installation and signage between the two points to protect small roost, although note steps for beach hut access. Clarification of land ownership along this stretch of beach would also be beneficial. A people counter is already in place at Wrabness but may need upgrading at some point.

10 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement with land/business owners and holidaymakers/beach hut occupiers between Stone Point and Wrabness Point. Note also identified as such by Wildlife Wise in the Suffolk Coast RAMS.

11 - Potential to increase ranger coverage and update interpretation signage at Wrabness Nature Reserve, working with EWT. Also scope to undertake bird disturbance study to inform mitigation.

12 - Scope for engagement/promotional material targeting holidaymakers Wrabness Community Shop (by station): opportunity to engage with tourists/promotional material.

13 - Scope for (infrequent) dog-focussed pop-up events at Stour Woods. Site is part of a circular walking route, has a public car park, and is currently leafleted. Maybe also SANG potential (although note SSSI status).

14 - Potentially update RSPB signage at Copperas Creek and target ranger focus/engagement with kayakers and small boat users.

15 - Scope for engagement with seal boat trip operators running from Ha'penny Pier and with those undertaking the ferry crossing. The latter would benefit from a joined-up approach with Wildlife Wise on the Suffolk coast and the National Landscapes team.

16 - Scope for engagement with training providers on boating lake.

17 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement at public launch ramp used by jet skis.

18 - Scope for ranger focus, engagement, and increased signage at West End Lane car park (main access point).

19 - Compensatory habitat creation (via BUDS[14]?) already planned near Dovercourt. Comprises a good launch point and would benefit from increased ranger focus/engagement.

20 - Potential to install/update existing signage, carry out engagement, and install screening at Dovercourt Holiday Park, targeting unofficial access routes across

[14] Beneficial Use of Dredged Sediment project

saltmarsh. Note current concerns around Planning Consent conditions placed on the caravan site not being adhered too.

21 - Already a proposed compensatory habitat location and location of a new (lowered below seawall) Public Right of Way around inland of site. Also scope for signage and temporary (breeding season) fencing between points 18 and 19, which would require permission from the wildfowlers.

22 - Scope for continued ranger focus and engagement, or ideally signage and closing of access, at breeding/roost locations at the sensitive Irlam's Beach. Note that this is a very controversial area linked to proposed compensatory habitat at Bathside Bay.

23 - Scope for long-term support for water-based engagement/presence at Hamford Water, building on existing relationships, which would require boat access (currently provided via Tendring water officer)

24 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement at Beaumont Quay car park; sea wall facilitates access to rest of the coast.

25 - Potential to monitor EWT Skipper Island for water users and disturbance: an important roost site.

26 - Scope to ensure longevity of safe roost areas on Horsey Island via the use of BUDS.

27 - Potential ranger support/funding for summer wardens at Horsey Island Little Tern colony and ranger focus/engagement in winter at the important high tide roost.

28 - Scope for ranger focus and engagement (and signage?) at Stone Point.

29 - Scope to ensure longevity of safe roosting and breeding areas at Stone Point via the use of BUDS.

30 - Potential for fencing and engagement around entire spit area to protect breeding birds whilst maintaining access for local people.

31 - The Naze: key area for engagement across the day (car park, three cafes, etc). Also scope to work with schools or education groups and EWT, potentially including production of a dedicated education pack.

32 - Scope for engagement/ranger focus at Titchmarsh Marina, including with seal boat trip operators.

33 - Scope for engagement/ranger focus/signage at key access points for kite surfers along Island Lane and paralleling Quay Lane in Kirkby-le-Soken.

Blackwater and Colne Estuaries

34 & 35 - Circular walk around Howlands Marsh NR - currently inaccessible and protected for birds but with new UK Coast Path this area will be accessible during the summer. Will also include St Osyth Creek – scope to benefit from better engagement with Bird Aware ranger presence from the beginning. Shrangri-la Caravan Park is now designated for homes so potential for increased disturbance in this area – would benefit from advance signage and liaison with Essex Highways re: access. Also, an important opportunity to undertake monitoring before housing is built/progressed and before the coast path is opened, to measure the impact of both and target subsequent management.

36 - Designated water ski area up Brightlingsea Creek (past Cindery Island) towards Flag Creek; scope for engagement with private club.

37 - Colne Point seawall/Lee-over-Sands; disturbance from antisocial behaviour, quad bikes, and scramblers on the nature reserve. Suggestion that concrete bollards are being installed by resident's group, but Bird Aware influence may also be needed in the future.

38 - Brightlingsea Creek; Share our Shore signs have been effective here and closed one of the desire lines (would be great to replicate elsewhere) alongside ranger provision. Colchester City Council has jurisdiction on the River Colne rather than the Brightlingsea Harbour Master (who only manages Brightlingsea Creek).

39 - Scope for engagement with the caravan parks.

40 - Disturbance by people walking across to Sandy Point; a very popular area with watersports. The creek is silting up, giving bridging access from Point clear – a future concern calling for wider discussion and engagement with landowners to de-silt or identify other options to manage access. Scope to continue ranger presence on site for detailed beach-nesting bird monitoring, visitor engagement, and recreational disturbance reductions.

41 - Sandy Point (Colne Point) has the largest Ringed Plover and beach-nesting Oystercatcher populations – previous Bird Aware presence/signage at Point Clear was effective. The site is nearly joining up with Point Clear as a result of sediment deposition. Scope to continue the Share Our Shores project, with seasonal support, volunteers during the breeding season, better signage, improved fencing, and disturbance monitoring. Site would also potentially benefit from the zonation of seasonal access.

42 - Popular location for people to drop anchor and access the beaches, swim, etc. Existing signs advise not to stray to other areas, but need to be more obvious. Scope for 'interactive maps' – directing people to good places/encouraged for activities and identifying areas to avoid.

43 - Scope to work with the harbour master around speed restrictions and enforcement on the water. Could include buoys and engagement on the water, alongside potential resourcing of enforcement teams.

44 - Ferry Landing; watersports access point, although many people also access from the adjacent holiday park. Potential for summer signage about nesting birds and/or temporary fencing on the spit guiding walkers along a particular route to avoid nesting birds.

45 - Desire line here down to the salting/shoreline by existing sign. Opportunity to close it off.

46 - Scope to update signage by railway line (replace damaged Natural England signs).

47 - Scope to update signage in this area.

48 - Place services grant fund in place to excavate a Tudor fort – would benefit from discussion around timing and reducing disturbance. EA are also doing repairs in this area. Opportunity for future engagement, either when the works are finished or whilst it's happening (could include a story trail linked in with Bird aware, engagement alongside the Country Park, and signage across the site). Scope also for improved paths and dog-focussed engagement.

49 - Scope for targeted engagement with commercial dog walkers at Cudmore Grove Country Park. The second car park is also used by dog walkers and could benefit from engagement and signage (potentially including a community noticeboard). Also potential to identify circular routes to draw people away from certain areas at different times of year around Cudmore Grove Country Park, deflecting them from the beach/sea wall.

50 - Scope for engagement with the caravan park. Also, a launch point, so potential to target watersports too.

51 - Arlesford Lodge; water and beach access points, beach access would benefit from increased signage and ranger presence.

52 - Scope to increase buoys and signage (e.g. speed limited) for boats and other watercraft near Arlesford Creek, potentially working with the Harbour Master, as most of the disturbance in this area is water-based.

53 - Wivenhoe down to Arlesford Creek; launch points and jet ski's – scope for increased signage and ranger presence.

54 - Potential for signage and engagement at footpath by Wivenhoe Sailing Club.

55 - Potential for signage and engagement at moorings at Rowhedge.

56 - Potential for signage for jet skis/watercraft at managed realignment at Fingringhoe Wick EWT Reserve.

57 - Pyefleet Channel; seals loafing at the saltmarsh at this point (towards the Strood), with boats travelling to see them from Brightlingsea and elsewhere – scope for water-based engagement (limited onshore access).

58 - Waldegraves Farm Caravan Park; water sports launch point. Scope for signage, as well as engagement with the caravan park and watersports community.

59 - Shingle island located 200m offshore from Waldegraves Holiday Park is important for waders and gulls, terns, etc. It's currently a handy point to paddle out to from the holiday park. Scope to reduce landing and disturbance to the birds using the island via engagement and signage.

60 - Drones and kite surfers launch from West Mersea and cause disturbance around Old Hall Marshes and Tollesbury Wick; scope for engagement. Also scope to add bird information to Bathing Water signage at West Mersea Beach.

61 - Tom & Teds dog walking area on the Strood greenspace; scope for engagement with dog walkers/owners.

62 & 72 - (Route runs between) Feldy Marshes; there will be increased access via the coast path when it opens, running all the way to Salcott - opportunity for engagement. Would potentially be beneficial to include Bird Aware messaging on coast path signage/interpretation.

63 - Hammerhead Jetty is owned by Colchester City Council and is a public launch point; scope for engagement/signage.

64 - West Mersea Yacht Club owns/operates the moorings; opportunity for engagement/communications.

65- Packing Shed Marsh Trust; scope to provide continued support and engagement opportunities (note that this would require water-based access).

66 - Cob Marshes; good population of breeding waders and winter roost site. Scope for continued support and engagement opportunities.

67 - Old Hall Marshes; scope to extend and continue the work already being undertaken by Bird Aware (potentially with additional volunteer support), with planned work for next autumn. Seasonal ranger roles work well, but accessibility routes need to be considered. The combination of Share our Shores messaging, habitat creation, and the work of Bird Aware have all led to increases in on-site Ringed Plover activity and lowered levels of disturbance. Note that access across the site may require the use of an off-road vehicle, with associated time/costs associated with purchase/hire and staff training (one off cost per ranger renewed every 3 years).

68 - Copt Hall (National Trust); scope for Bird Aware Essex Coast to work with the Trust, potentially via signage and dog-focussed engagement in the site car park.

69 - Scope for engagement along seawall. Would potentially be beneficial to include Bird Aware messaging on coast path signage/interpretation. Potential to support current and future BUDS island creation in this area and provide dedicated ranger time.

70 - Disturbance from boats landing, anglers, low helicopters. Opportunity for a water-based ranger (or water-based access for the Bird Aware Essex Coast team) and scope to identify refuge areas. All islands within the Blackwater (e.g. Little Cob, Great Cob, etc.) have many roosting/wintering birds and monitoring would be beneficial here. A new BUDS location is also planned in the vicinity, with advance engagement with water users (concerning the importance of the new habitat for birds and requests not to land there) potentially also proving beneficial.

71 - Abbotts Hall Farm Nature Reserve will have an access point resulting from the opening of the UK Coast Path. It's likely that there will be no dog access into the farm, but the coast path will allow dogs – scope for ranger presence and visitor management, including signage and interpretation. A people counter is already in place here but may need upgrading at some point.

73 - Kayaks, stand-up paddleboards, and drones visit Old Hall Creek, although it's unclear where they are launching from. The whole area is important for birds, as it's usually relatively quiet. Also scope for engagement in the nearby Tollesbury Marina.

74 - Lauriston Farm and Goldhanger Creek area: potentially key location for engagement with both landowners and site users, and also important for birds. Scope for signage and targeted engagement with dog walkers on sea wall, with some potential scope for screening (although at a difficult location).

75 - Goldhanger pub; scope for engagement and important for birds.

76 - Osea Seawall also an important roost site towards Goldhanger, with scope for ranger stationing and patrols.

77 - Possible launch point; scope for ranger present and signage, etc.

78 - Osea Road Caravan Park & Heybridge Basin; scope for engagement at both. Note that the park is being extended which may lead to an increase in people accessing the seawall and estuary – need to consider future engagement.

79 - New BUDS project by roost at Northey Island. Would benefit from working alongside the National Trust to undertake monitoring and/or engagement with people on the water, with potential to enforce no landings.

80 - Planned enlargement at Osea Caravan Park; may affect Osea Island roost.

81 - Heybridge Basin and Gravel Pits likely comprise functionally linked land; scope for engagement with landowners about usage (although noted to be potentially contentious) and update of existing interpretation materials.

82 - Maldon Council funds the role of River Bailiff on the Blackwater. Scope for Bird Aware to support the service, which would be beneficial in the event of BUDS-related habitat creation.

83 - Promenade Park: key engagement location with potential for improved interpretation and dog-focused engagement.

84 - Northey Causeway; scope for renewed engagement and signage (although issues with vandalism) on access to the causeway, in partnership with the National Trust. Focus on Promenade Park also, as the main access point towards the causeway.

85 - Maylandsea is a popular site for boat and watercraft launches; scope for engagement. A people counter is already in place here but may need upgrading at some point.

86 - Steeple Point; popular for boat launching and watercraft – scope for engagement. Jet ski access from the slipway is also an issue which may benefit from targeted interventions, including partnering with the caravan park and council, alongside enforcement.

87 - St Lawrence supports intertidal seagrass (an SAC feature) subject to restoration activities; opportunity to ensure ongoing protection.

88 - Caravan park is subject to ongoing restoration works and will likely be busier in the future – would benefit from comms links, engagement, and partnership working. The location is an important access point for water-based activities , with scope for targeted visitor and landowner engagement.

89 - The slipway near the caravan park is likely to be more frequently used in the future. Also scope for engagement at rejuvenating saltmarsh area alongside Promenade Way.

90 - Opportunity for engagement with marina.

91 - Scope for engagement with Outdoor Essex at Bradwell Marina, alongside signage for paddlecraft at slipways, etc.

Dengie & Crouch and Roach Estuaries

92 - Scope for signage/ranger point at public car park near Bradwell Power Station.

93 - Opportunity to check for antisocial behaviour (e.g. off-road bikes), install barriers, or support landowners/liaise with police.

94 - Scope for signage to deter people walking out to the wader roost. Protection also of breeding birds, potentially including temporary fencing. Some monitoring along this stretch may also prove beneficial to allow for adaptive management/adjustment of the site-based approach.

95 - Potential for engagement with the Church of England and community settlement to the north re: info about birds/disturbance at St Peter's Chapel, with scope to install signage at the latter.

96 - Scope to install a new people counter at St Peter's Chapel car park and update the existing signage.

97 - Scope to reduce promotion/deter cyclists along the Dengie coastline – cyclists are not legally allowed along sea wall/public footpaths in this area already.

98 - Shell Bank; nesting site for Little Tern – scope for signage and additional monitoring.

99 - Potential paddlecraft launch point; scope for engagement with the landowner, alongside possible ranger presence and signage.

100 - Potential to work with local websites/operators to promote certain routes (hiking is currently promoted near Montsale).

101 - Potential paddlecraft launch point & angling location; scope to engage with the landowner, alongside possible ranger deployment and signage.

102 - Scope to engage with local landowners about access to the east of Burnham-on-Crouch.

103 - Scope for engagement with the new owners of the Wallasea Island foot ferry (potentially signage/info on ferry).

104 - Riverside Park; scope for engagement with dog walkers, with an aspiration to keep use within the park and off the intertidal area – possible SANG potential also.

105 - Scope for engagement with yacht clubs/marina at Burnham-on-Crouch.

106 - Creeksea launch area with road access; potential engagement point/liaison with landowners.

107 - Marina south of Althorne station; scope for community engagement and leafleting/engagement with visitors to the Crouch vineyards.

108 - Scope for engagement with the Bridgemarsh Island Trust (wildfowlers) and Crouch Harbour Master re: jet skis in the creeks.

109 - Blue House Farm; scope for providing information for dog walkers, including keeping out of waterbodies, reedbeds, and important bird areas.

110 - Blue House Farm; scope to engage in monitoring of low tide access, in terms of disturbance risk. Would also likely prove useful at a couple of other locations along the Crouch.

111 - Blue House Farm; potential to support grazing and lambing and roll out engagement alongside robust fencing to target dog attacks and related disturbance. Also scope for volunteer involvement seasonal support potential.

112 - Scope for engagement with yacht haven/marina/sailing club near Stow Creek.

113 - Stow Creek high tide roost; potential to maintain a watching brief.

114 - Potential for interpretation boards and bird hide in the future at Marsh Farm Country Park along footpath near the roost area.

115 - Opportunity to protect islands around wader roost (Clements Green Creek – Marsh Farm Country Park).

116 - Scope to institute speed restrictions/signage around Clements Green Creek for water-based access.

117 - Kayak/paddleboard launch point directly from housing near to Clements Green Creek; scope for engagement/signage.

118 - Opportunities for fencing to protect fields from access at Marsh Farm Country Park, particularly during winter months.

119 - Scope to support Marsh Farm Country Park with engagement and signage, particularly around dogs.

120 - Scope for (ongoing) engagement with local community and the Town Council at South Woodham Ferrers.

121 - Potential to engage with the Harbour Master/water police/community to reduce issues with jet skis.

122 - Scope for engagement alongside greenspace area.

123 - Two yacht clubs and water ski club at South Woodham Ferrers; potential engagement opportunity.

124 - Scope for engagement with Eyott Sailing Club.

125 - Woodham Fen wader roost; opportunity to reinstate people counter. A pressure point with Open Access, which adds to its vulnerability. Scope to support EWT here, potentially including increased ranger focus and access infrastructure.

126 - Scope for engagement with Hayes Country Park; residential access directly to the sea wall.

127 - West of Hullbridge and Kendal Park; opportunity to discourage dog access onto the saltmarsh via signage, screening, and engagement.

128 - Hullbridge; potential to upgrade people counter in Kendal Park. Also scope for engagement, signage, and interpretation.

129 – Scope for engagement at jet ski launch site near Hullbridge.

130 - Scope for engagement with the caravan park.

131 - East of Brandy Hole; key area for potential monitoring, as access may change in the future. Also, a (potentially occasional) jet ski launch point, which requires monitoring to confirm.

132 - East of Hullbridge; low levels of use from kayaks etc. Scope to maintain a watching brief.

133 - Lion Creek; narrow with a high risk of disturbance. Scope for ranger provision, screening, and/or signage to reduce disturbance here.

134 - Opportunity to run pop-ups at Wallasea Island with the RSPB, as necessary.

135 - Purdeys Industrial Estate; scope for ranger presence/engagement. There is a large boatyard here that may contain residential and visiting pleasure boats

Benfleet & Southend Marshes, Thames Estuary and Marshes, & Foulness

136 - Likely changes in access to Potton Island (MOD disposing of it); opportunity to maintain a watching brief.

137 - Likely changes in access to Rushley Island (MOD disposing of it); opportunity to maintain a watching brief. Scope to provide site-specific engagement and signage around seagrass with respect to trampling and mooring damage.

138 - Wakering Stairs; roosting waders, but recreational access to the saltmarsh - potential location for Ranger engagement, signage and leaflets. Scope to provide site-specific engagement and signage around seagrass with respect to trampling and mooring damage. There are popular guided walking tours to Foulness island via the Broomway from Wakering Stairs. Also note need for continued engagement with MOD over protection of Foulness SPA.

139 - Scope for engagement with kite surfing community on mudflats by East Beach. Scope to provide site-specific engagement and signage around seagrass with respect to trampling and mooring damage.

140 - Opportunity to produce a visitor management strategy for East Beach and Gunners Park, including focus on dog walkers, kite surfing, bait digging, and cockle digging, whilst ensuring engagement with local stakeholders (such as Coastwatch and Southend Association of Voluntary Services). Scope to provide site-specific engagement and signage around seagrass with respect to trampling and mooring damage.

141 - Increase in tourism (possibly from London) at East Beach via the train station; scope for engagement at the station and with other travel providers (e.g. C2C) and the bus stops around the site.

142 - Opportunity to enhance marker buoys around the accessible area of East Beach.

143 - Scope for additional resources, in terms of council (Bird Aware?) presence along Southend Foreshore.

144 - Near Gog's Berth; scope for jetty engagement with bait diggers, alongside signage and access management.

145 - Scope for engagement with Thorpe Bay Yacht Club.

146 - The car park behind Uncle Tom's Cabin is a key access point and engagement location, including with the members of the kite surfing club and beach hut group.

147 - Opportunities for engagement with organised events (fireworks in winter, runs in summer (e.g. RNLI September fun run), etc).

148 - Mullberry Harbour; running and other groups run over sea grass at low tide, accessing from Thorpe Bay Beach.

149 - Scope to stop the trampling of Eel Grass beds; potential to institute a voluntary non-anchoring zone?

150 - Southend Pier; huge scope for visitor engagement.

151 - Scope for discussions with commercial watersport providers around the entire Southend area.

152 - Scope for engagement with watersports enthusiasts and updated interpretation along Southend foreshore.

153 - Chalkwell/Leigh-on-sea area: scope for general ranger-led engagement and updating of signage, particularly at water sports launch points near café.

154 - Opportunity to support messaging and resources concerning dogs entering the water at Two Tree Island.

155 - Scope to collect data from the foraging community about their access and what they are gathering, with people accessing the saltmarsh. Also scope for signage.

156 - Two Tree Island; opportunity to provide better protection for the borrow dyke, with dogs and people currently entering the water.

157 - Two Tree Island; potential to institute a voluntary non-anchoring zone to protect the sea grass, alongside engagement and provision of better mooring options that don't damage the seabed.

158 - Scope to support EWT and the local authority with signage identifying Two Tree Island as a nature reserve before people access it.

159 - Scope for a redesign of parking to influence visitor movements, alongside a targeted reduction in antisocial behaviour.

160 - Scope for engagement, awareness raising, and signage at Two Tree Island.

161 - Scope for engagement with model aircraft operators flying at Two Tree Island.

162 - Potential to create a visitor management strategy for Two Tree Island.

163 - Scope for a redesign of parking to influence visitor movements, alongside a targeted reduction in antisocial behaviour.

164 - Paddlecraft, swimming and water entry point on slipway; opportunity for guidance, engagement, and signage.

165 - Canvey Point; access point to historical roost site. Opportunity to limit access, allow roost to re-establish, and carry out monitoring. The area down towards the seawall at the bottom of the point is also busy and has potential for engagement.

166 - Scope for improved signage and engagement (including leaflet boxes) at Canvey Heights Country Park.

167 - Jet skis and motorcraft an issue at Hadley Ray Creek; scope to work with the marine police to find the launch point.

168 - Scope for a watching brief, make sure the barriers to the lagoon are effective. Monty's Lookout also comprises a potentially useful engagement location.

169 - Hadleigh Country Park; scope for engagement with paddleboarders and also potential to create circular routes and SANG.

170 - Opportunity for information board (long walks from here to Two Tree Island). A people counter is already in place here but may need upgrading at some point.

171 - Opportunity for signage on community buildings and businesses near Thorney Bay.

172 - Scope for engagement and ranger focus at Thorney Bay.

173 - Scope for engagement with dog walkers and cyclists at Bowers Marsh, alongside installation of a people counter. A key roosting and feeding area at which it may be possible to provide support to the RSPB.

174 - Jet skis activity linked to Hadley Ray Creek; opportunity for speeding restrictions and limiting use.

175 - Slipway for jet skis at Wat Tyler Park; scope for engagement and signage.

176 - Bikes accessing seawall at Fobbing; opportunity to support actions to stop antisocial behaviour.

177 - Bikes accessing seawall at Fobbing; opportunity to support actions to stop antisocial behaviour.

178 - Functionally linked land near Great Garlands Farm; opportunity to protect it from development.

179 - Standford Wharf; scope to restrict off-road vehicle access and raise awareness around nature conservation issues, support improved or additional signage across the site and at access points, and to jointly identify engagement opportunities with the landowner.

180 - Scope to introduce more barriers at Stanford-le-Hope Marshes.

181 - Stanford Wharf; scope to restrict off-road vehicle access and raise awareness around nature conservation issues, support improved or additional signage across the site and at access points, and to jointly identify engagement opportunities with the landowner.

182 - Illegal fishing occurs on the spit onto Mucking Flats; opportunity to control antisocial behaviour.

183 - Thameside Nature Reserve Car Park; potential engagement point for rangers. The second car park at the entrance to the reserve connects with the walking route from Coalhouse Fort and would potentially benefit from engagement, signage, etc.

184 - Opportunity to maintain a watching brief for bird use as the landfill near Mucking Flats is decommissioned.

185 - Scope to support reductions in antisocial behaviour (fires, etc.) near the lake.

186 - Scope to create, promote, and maintain a circular route between Coalhouse Fort and Thameside.

187 - Lagoon; opportunity for engagement and signage.

188 - Scope for ranger focus at Coalhouse Fort, with potential for signage (although issues with permissions due to sensitive nature of the site). Also, a potential engagement location here (in association with the public car park), with on-site facilities, café, etc. and potential scope for dog-focussed activities. Important to note that Council Ranger resources have been reduced on site.

Additional sites and opportunities added after workshop

189 – Hullbridge, potential for signage at access point to the PROW (Dengie & Crouch and Roach Estuaries).

190 – Scope for engagement at Kingsman Point, Brandy Hole Yacht Club and Riverside Café (Dengie & Crouch and Roach Estuaries).

191 - Potential for signage at access point to the PROW to the river, potential for engagement with South Fambridge residents (Dengie & Crouch and Roach Estuaries).

192 - Signage and leaflets at Riverside Village (Dengie & Crouch and Roach Estuaries).

193 - Baltic Wharf Industry Estate and Essex Marina - increased monitoring and potential for engagement here (Dengie & Crouch and Roach Estuaries). Note - There is also a large boatyard here and may contain residential and visiting pleasure boats.

194 – Scope for engagement at Eastend, Paglesham. Visitors to local pub likely to travel down the River Roach (Dengie & Crouch and Roach).

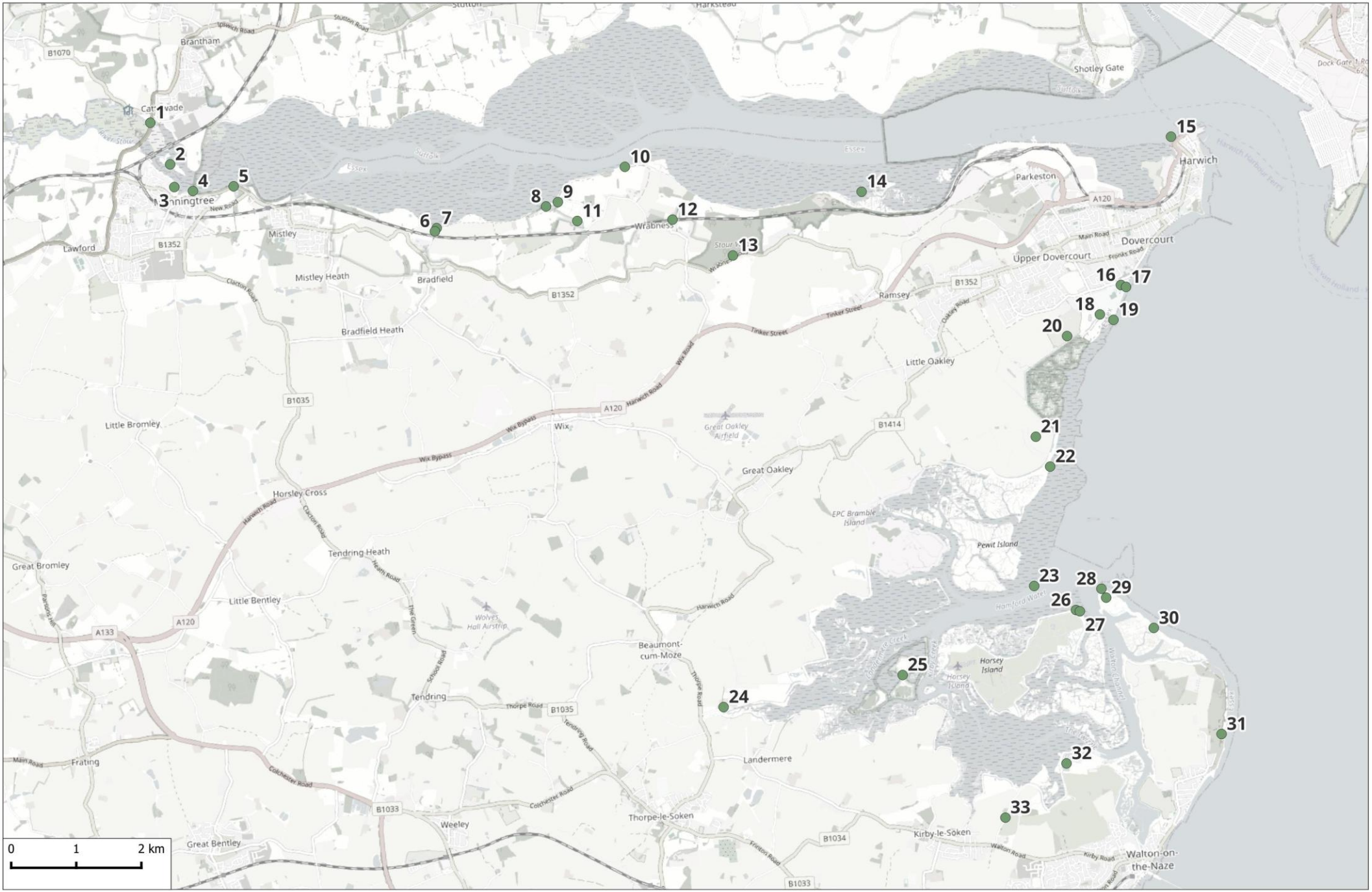
195 - Scope for engagement at Churchend, Paglesham. Visitors to local pub likely to travel down the River Roach (Dengie & Crouch and Roach).

196 - Scope for monitoring at Stannets Creek Reservoir (Dengie & Crouch and Roach).

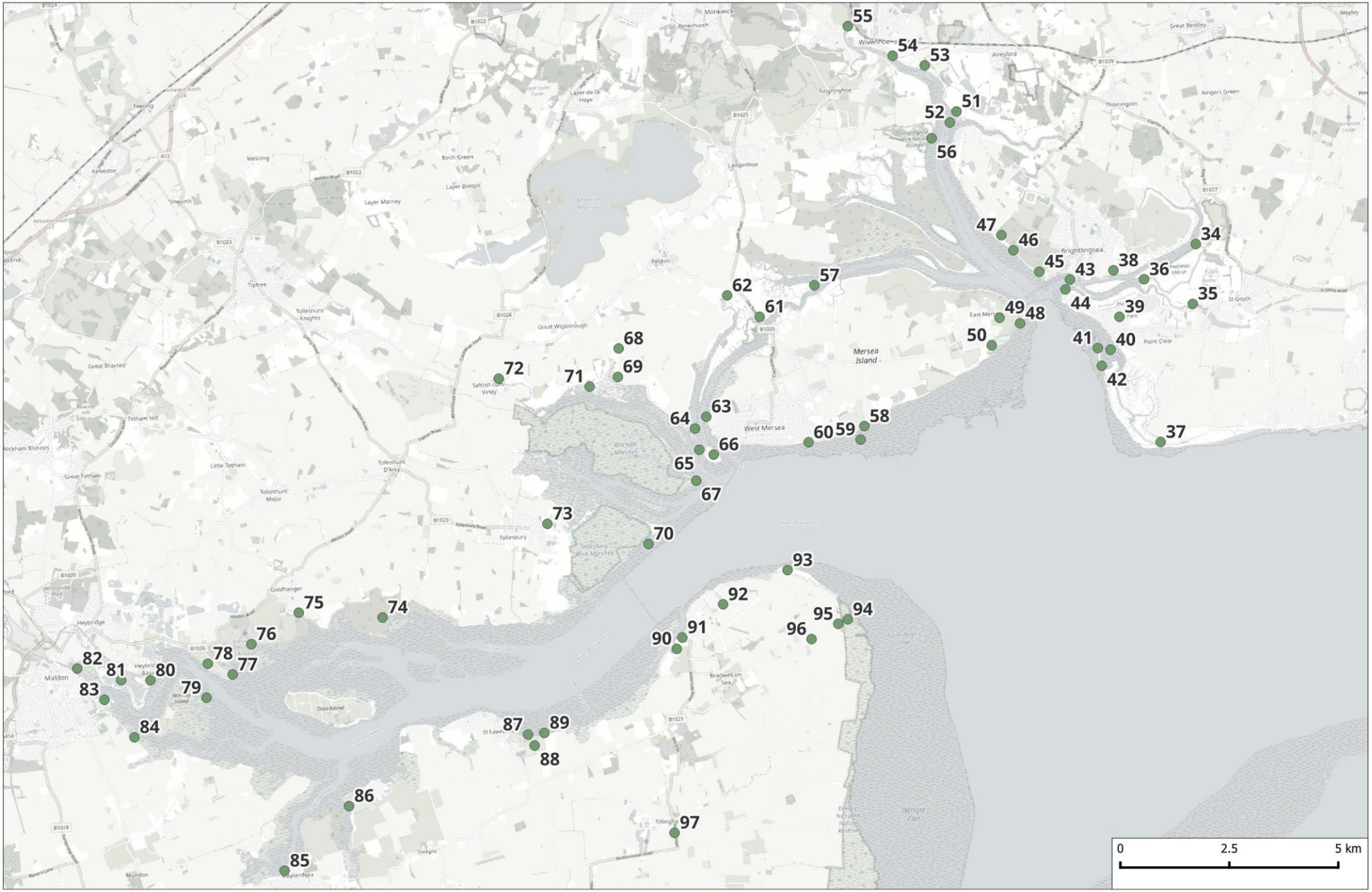
197 - Scope for ranger presence/engagement and signage/leaflets at Barling Magna Wildlife Reserve (Dengie & Crouch and Roach).

198 – Scope for engagement at Little Wakering / Barling (Dengie & Crouch and Roach).

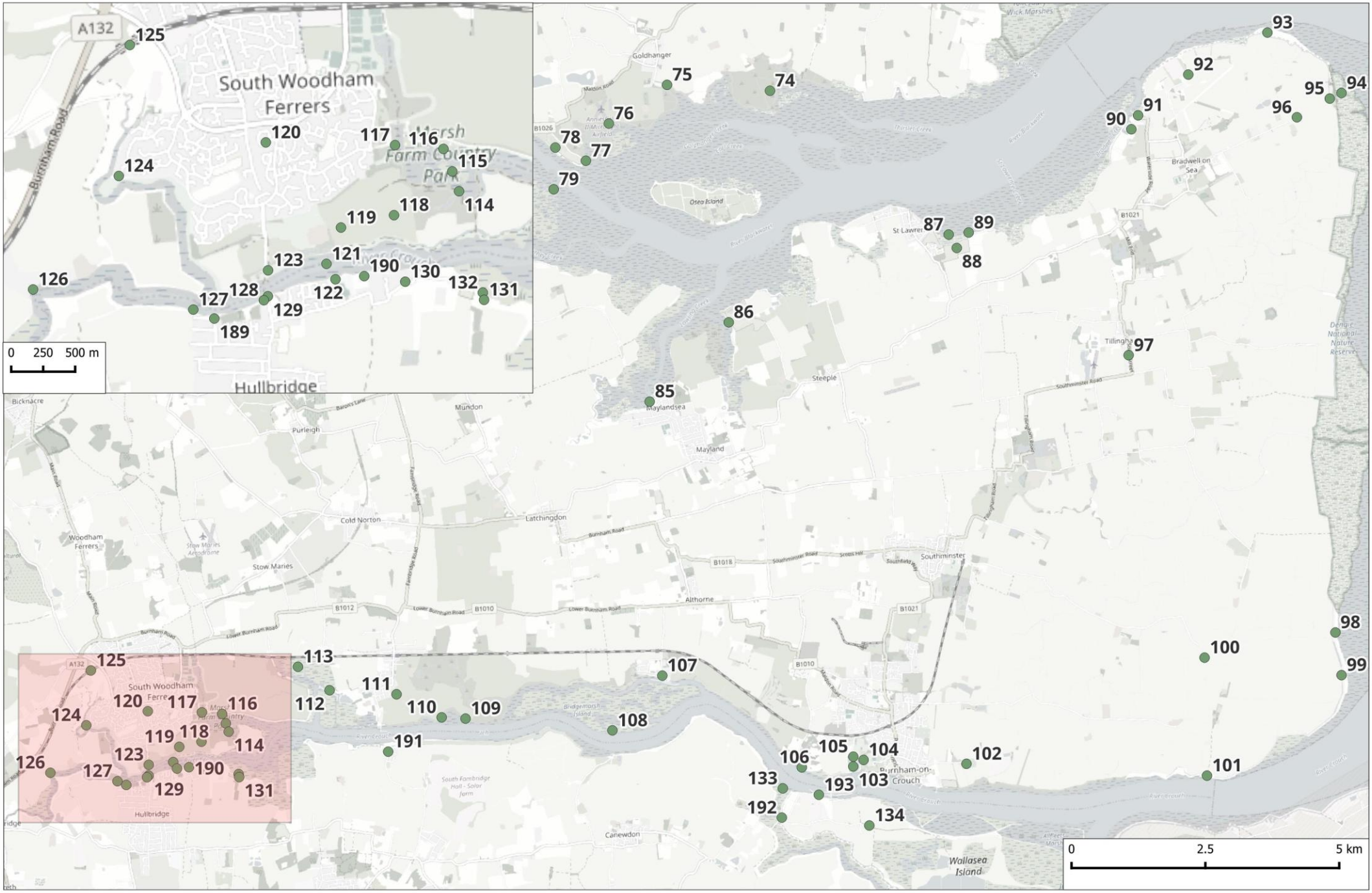
Map 6: Stour and Orwell Estuaries & Hamford Water workshop output (note the Orwell Estuary is dealt with under the Suffolk RAMS)



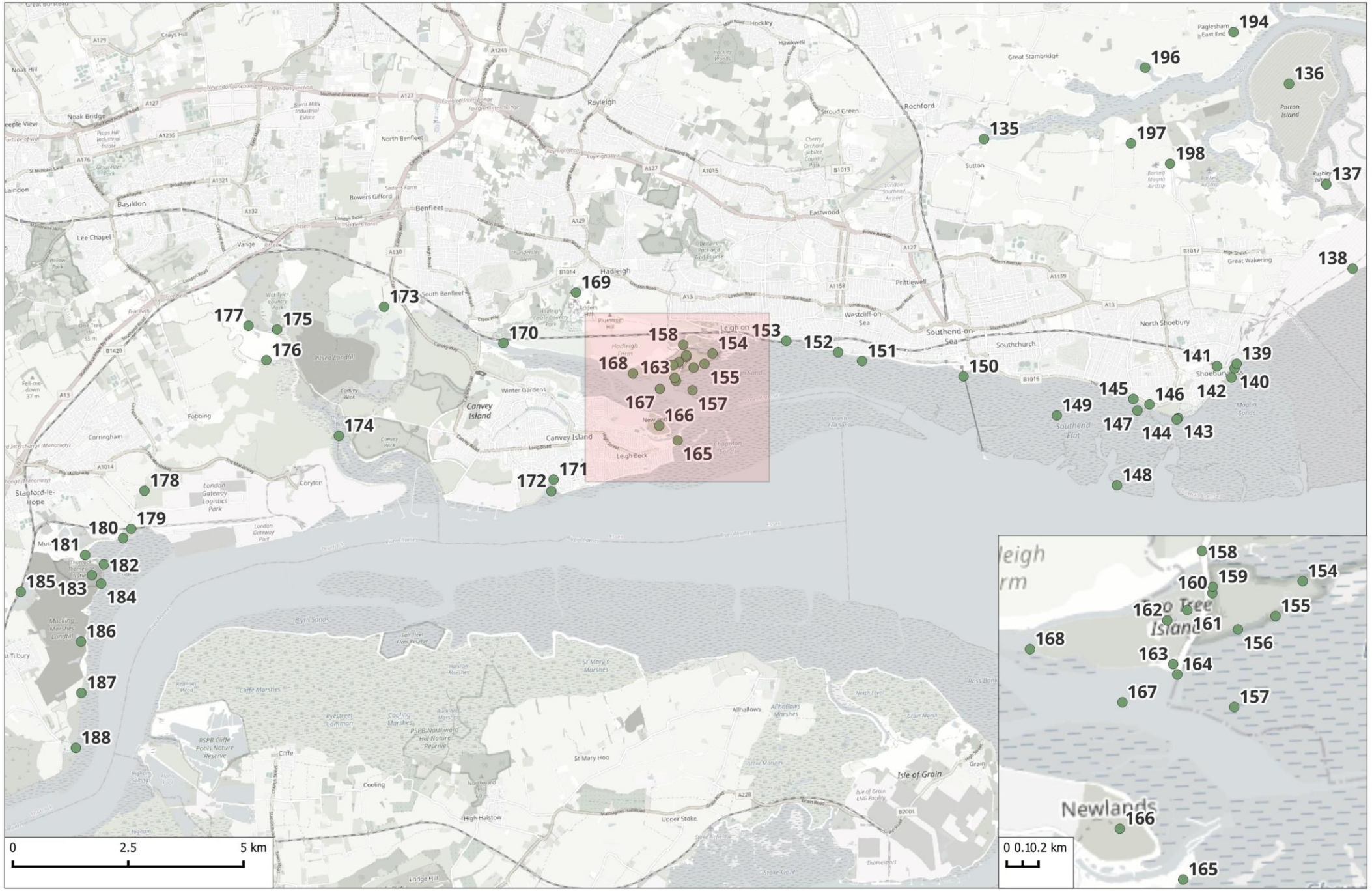
Map 7: Blackwater and Colne Estuaries workshop output



Map 8: Crouch and Roach Estuary & Dengie workshop output (inset refers to red shaded area on main map) - note that point 135 is shown on Map 9 (Benfleet and Southend Marshes, Thames Estuary and Marshes, & Foulness workshop output)



Map 9: Benfleet and Southend Marshes, Thames Estuary and Marshes, & Foulness workshop output (inset refers to red shaded area on main map) - note that point 135 is an output from the Crouch and Roach Estuary & Dengie workshop



Appendix 2: Estimates of housing growth potentially requiring mitigation

This appendix provides background on how the figures in Table 5 were derived. Notes on each column are provided after the table.

The basic formula applied for each authority is: (Local Plan Housing Requirement - Sites with PP and Completions) × % in RAMS ZOI

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
LPA	Stage of Plan Preparation	Plan Period	SM/Published Target per year	Housing Requirement for Plan Period (stated/calculated)	Sites with PP (April 2026)	and completions before 2026	% in RAMS ZOI	Result (E - F - G) * H
Basildon	Reg 18 Local Plan	2023-2043	1,400	28,005	3,342	589	90	21,667
Braintree	Reg 18 Local Plan Review – March 2026	2026-2042	1,115	17,840	5,070	0	90	11,493
Brentwood	Adopted 2022, Call for sites - reg 18 2026	2026-2042	456	7,752	1,632	0	50	3,060
Castle Point	Plan was submitted for Examination in January 2026	2026-2043	701	6,196	739	0	100	5,457
Chelmsford	Reg 19 Local Plan Review, Submission 2026	2022-2041	1,437	24,915	2,510	2650	100	19,755
Colchester	Reg 18 Local Plan Review - December 25	2026-2042	1,300	20,800	4,365	0	100	16,435
Maldon	Exploring options to transition into the new plan-making system in 2026	2023-2043	583	11,660	1,736	403	100	9,521
Rochford	Reg 18 consultation February – March 2026	2023/24 - 2042/43	689	14,469	2,013	0	100	12,456
Southend	Preferred Approach Consultation 2025, reg 18 summer 2025	2025-2050	1,181	29,525	4,081	0	100	25,444
Tendring	Reg 18 Preferred Options consultation	2025 – 2042	1,063	18,071	4,541	679	100	12,851
Thurrock	Local Plan Initial Proposals, reg 19 2026	2024-2044	1,077	21,540	1,200	0	50	10,170
Uttlesford	Full Council in March 2026 to be invited to adopt the Local Plan.	2021-2041	785	13,500	9,247	0	Minimal	0

Notes

B. Stage of Plan Preparation: The further away an LPA is from publishing a Local Plan (Regulation 18 or 19), the less certainty.

C. Plan period: while the plan period ends circa 2041 for most LPAs, there is one exception (Southend) which extends 10 years beyond until 2050.

E: Housing requirement figure (column D): In agreement with Natural England, the preferred approach was sourced from the Local Plan housing target. In some cases, a published figure is not available so a Standard Method calculation (annual SM x 15) is used. The final figure was confirmed with the LPA in most cases, with the exception of Thurrock.

- Additional note: Some LPAs will have published figures which are below SM, this means there could be some additional uncertainty until the Local Plan is examined. Some LPAs have stepped trajectories, meaning that delivery of housing is later in the plan period, for simplicity no adjustment was made to account for this.

F: Sites with planning permission: as of April 2026.

- Additional note: for simplicity no discount is made for lapse rates.

G: Completions that occurred before 2026: This cannot yet be calculated but an adjustment can be made later.

H: RAMS Zone of Influence (ZOI) Adjustment: percentage of the LPA's area within the RAMS ZOI.

- Student, care homes and specialist housing are accounted for in accordance with the Local Plan for simplicity. It is understood that each LPA will deliver these forms of housing which may attract a discount RAMS rate.

I: Result: Final Calculation

- (Local Plan Housing Requirement - Sites with PP and Completions) × % in RAMS ZOI

- (E - (F + G)) * H
- For Uttlesford, only a tiny area is within the Zone of Influence and no growth is anticipated within this area.

Appendix 3: SAMM costs

The table below summarises the mitigation measures as set out in the strategy and the relevant costs for each. These have been used to calculate the overall cost of mitigation. Costs are estimates only and intended to provide the overall level to set tariff, costs to be reviewed and updated as strategy implemented, and budgets adjusted according to housing growth. Where staff posts are referred to, 'fte' refers to full-time equivalent.

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).
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 or wider project vehicles. 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

Mitigation measure	One-off/ Capital cost	Rolling cost	Multiplier for rolling cost	Total cost	Notes on how cost calculated
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.
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 simply require money in a single year. 80 year time period provides scope for scattering of small projects around coast in a given year.

FOOTPRINT ECOLOGY

Essex Coast RAMS Visitor Survey 2025

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Footprint Ecology is a small ecological consultancy with an ethical focus. Founded in 2004 and based in Purbeck, Dorset we are catalysts for change, collaborating with organisations that share our commitment to sustainability and social responsibility. We create practical solutions to complex ecological challenges across a diverse portfolio including nature conservation, outdoor recreation and associated strategic planning.

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Summary

This report has been commissioned by Chelmsford City Council on behalf of the local authorities within the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership. It presents the results of visitor surveys undertaken across the Essex Coast, during the winter and summer 2025. Surveyors conducted face-to-face interviews with a random sample of visitors and also kept a tally count of everyone passing the surveyor. Interviews and tally counts were conducted over two days (16 hours) at 25 locations throughout the winter, and 16 survey locations during the summer – a total of 26 different locations were surveyed.

The aim of the survey was to better understand recreational use of the Essex Coast, as part of an update to the evidence base to inform the ongoing Essex Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) review. It follows on from previous visitor surveys to support the Essex Coast RAMS implementation in 2011-2013.

A summary of the survey results is provided below.

Tally counts:

- A total of 9,899 groups were recorded entering, leaving or passing a survey point.
- These groups contained 18,509 people, of which 2,371 were minors (under 18).
- A small percentage (448 people, 2%) were cycling / mountain biking.
- There was an average of 1 dog for every 2 people.
- From these figures, the mean group size was 1.9 people (of which 0.4 were minors).
- The number of people visiting on a weekend was often more than double those visiting on a weekday.
- Water-based activies (via a separate vantage point count) were recorded at 16 survey locations. These activites included boating (sailing or rowing), kayaking, paddleboarding and wind or kite surfing.

Interview data:

- A total of 1,793 interviews were conducted.
- Of these, 1,225 were conducted in winter and 568 during the summer.
- The majority of interviewees (93%) were on a day trip or had travelled directly from home. A further 4% were staying away from home or on holiday and 3% were staying with friends and family in the area.
- The most common activities undertaken by interviewees were dog walking (45%) and walking (35%).
- Over half of all interviewees stated that they visit the survey location at least once a week (56%) and of these 18% are visiting daily.
- Visits were relatively short, with approximately half (54%) of all interviewees spending less than an hour visiting the survey location. People tended to visit longer in the summer (typical visit duration around 102 minutes) compared to the winter (75 minutes).

- Most interviewees didn't show a preference in the time of day that they visited; of those that did show a preference, 22% said they would prefer to visit before 9am.
- Almost two-thirds of interviewees (60%) stated that they tend to visit all year round and 75% of dog walkers said the same. A further 19% of interviewees said that they would visit more during the summer months (June-August).
- Most interviewees arrived either by car (58%) or on foot (38%). The main mode of transport varied between survey points, for example all interviewees arrived by car at Blue House Farm while at St Lawrence and Kirby Quay most interviewees (83% and 75% respectively) arrived on foot.
- Close to home was the most commonly cited reason (39% of interviewees) for visiting the survey location on the day of the interview. Other reasons given included the scenery and views (20%), being good for the dog (11%) and for the rural feel/wild landscape features (7%).
- Routes were mapped as part of the interview, and of the 1,759 routes recorded, the median length of route taken on site was 3.0 km.
- The longest route was recorded by an interviewee who was sailing (34.2 km), there were also notably long routes mapped for a cyclist (32.3 km) and a walker (30.1 km).
- Interviewees provided 340 unique alternative locations that they also visit for their activity. These locations included Belfairs (including Park, Woods and Nature Reserve) given by 8% of interviewees, Maldon (3%) and Frinton (3%).
- 46% of interviewees could name a species or habitat present that were special to the area they had visited.
- Almost half of all interviewees were unsure how the area they had visited was protected for wildlife (48%). Of those that said they were aware of any protection in place for wildlife, 18% suggested there was a nature reserve, 8% suggested that the area was a SSSI and 7% mentioned the RSPB.
- Improvements that interviewees would like to see at the interview sites included better paths and surfacing (7%), more bins / less litter (6%) and more dog waste bins (6%).
- Factors that would encourage interviewees to visit a new park or greenspace in their area included creating spaces that were more natural / wild (16%), provision of an area to let dogs off lead (13%) and presence of a café (13%). A small proportion of interviewees (17%) said that they wouldn't change their visiting habits or indicated that nothing would make them visit a new park or greenspace.
- A total of 1,688 interviewees provided their full UK home postcode. The majority (89%) came from within Essex and a further 11% were visiting from outside the county.
- The median straight-line distance from home postcode to survey location was 3.2 km and the 75th percentile distance was 12.9 km.

Contents

Acknowledgements

This report has been commissioned by Chelmsford City Council on behalf of the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership. We are grateful to Leanne Brisland and Chloe Turner from Bird Aware Essex for their useful support and discussion during this project.

Survey work was coordinated by Fenella Lewin and undertaken by Joe Costley, Jain Davidson, Mark Ison, Jo Loman, Manuela Naprta, Marcus Turley and Phillip Precey. These data were entered by Manuela Naprta.

Cover photo © St Lawrence by Emily Rush.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report presents the results of a visitor survey along the Essex Coast during winter (February and March) and summer (June and July) 2025. The visitor survey has been commissioned by Chelmsford City Council, acting as the commissioning body for the Local Planning Authorities within the Essex Coast RAMS Partnership. These surveys provide evidence to support the update to the Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS).

The Essex Coast

1.2 The Essex Coast comprises an extensive complex of estuaries and intertidal sand and silt flats, including several islands, shingle and shell beaches and extensive areas of saltmarsh. The coastline spans nearly 500 km[1],and is adjacent in part to settlements such as Harwich, Walton-on-the-Naze, Clacton-on-Sea in the north of the county and Southend and Shoeburyness to the south.

1.3 The nature conservation importance of the coast is reflected in a series of national and international designations. These include a series of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) classified for a diverse range of birds, a single Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a number of Ramsar sites. The following European sites[2] form the network of protected sites along the Essex Coast and are shown in Map 1 below:

- Stour & Orwell Estuaries SPA/Ramsar (only the southern shore of the Stour falls within Essex)
- Hamford Water SPA/Ramsar
- Colne Estuary (Mid Essex Coast Phase 2) SPA/Ramsar
- Dengie (Mid Essex Coast Phase 1) SPA/Ramsar
- Blackwater Estuary (Mid Essex Coast Phase 4) SPA/Ramsar
- Crouch & Roach Estuaries (Mid Essex Coast Phase 3) SPA/Ramsar
- Foulness (Mid Essex Coast Phase 5) SPA/Ramsar

[1] This is an approximate figure, derived using the shoreline within SPA boundaries (including islands with land above mean high water mark) and defined as the edge of selected habitats. The measurement reflects the shoreline rather than including any portions at sea or open water. The figure was derived from GIS layers used in the work of Ross *et al.* (2014).

[2] We use the term 'European site' to refer to both Habitats sites (those afforded statutory protection under the Habitats Regulations) and Ramsar sites (which are afforded similar protection through government policy).

- Benfleet & Southend Marshes SPA/Ramsar
- Thames Estuary & Marshes SPA/Ramsar (Essex part – Mucking Flats & Marshes SSSI only)
- Essex Estuaries SAC (comprising the Colne Estuary, Blackwater Estuary, Dengie, Crouch and Roach Estuaries and Foulness)

1.4 The designation, protection and restoration of European wildlife sites, such as those along the Essex Coast, is embedded in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended, which are commonly referred to as the 'Habitat Regulations'. Importantly, amendments (the Conservation of Habitats and Species (amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019[3]) take account of the UK's departure from the EU.

Recreation

1.5 The Essex Coast provides a strong draw for a range of recreational activities such as walking, sailing, paddle and wind sports, birdwatching, jet skiing, dog walking and fishing. Panter & Liley (2016) noted the presence of at least 210 car parks within 1 km of the relevant European sites providing around 18,000 parking spaces. They also recorded nearly 2,000 km of paths within the same area and mapped 143 jetties, 146 slipways and 40 marinas on the relevant shorelines. As such there are numerous opportunities across a wide area for recreational access.

1.6 Visits to the natural environment have shown a significant increase in England as a result of the increase in population and a trend to visit the countryside more (O'Neill, 2019). The issues are particularly acute in southern England, where population density is highest and the Covid-19 pandemic has changed access; there was a marked increase in recreation use during the pandemic (Burnett et al., 2021).

1.7 There is a strong body of evidence showing how increasing levels of access can have negative impacts on wildlife. Issues are varied and include disturbance, increased fire risk, contamination and damage (Harris, 2023; Liley et al., 2010; for general reviews see: Lowen et al., 2008; Marion et al., 2016).

[3] The amending regulations generally seek to retain the requirements of the 2017 Regulations but with adjustments for the UK's exit from the European Union. See Regulation 4, which also confirms that the interpretation of these Regulations as they had effect, or any guidance as it applied, before exit day, shall continue to do so.

1.8 However, it is now increasingly recognised that access to the countryside is crucial to the long-term success of nature conservation projects, enforcing pro-environmental behaviours and a greater respect for the natural world (Richardson et al., 2016). Access also brings wider benefits to society that include benefits to mental/physical health (Keniger et al., 2013; Lee and Maheswaran, 2011; Pretty et al., 2005) and economic benefits (ICF GHK, 2013; ICRT, 2011; Keniger et al., 2013; The Land Trust, 2018). There is therefore a challenge to address the considerable overlap between nature conservation and recreation, responding to the increasing demand for public access without compromising the integrity of protected wildlife sites.

Essex Coast RAMS

1.9 In recognition of the issues relating to the in-combination effects of increased recreation from local housing growth and impacts to the Essex Coast, relevant local planning authorities (12 local planning authority partners) have established a strategic approach to mitigation, the Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) in 2019 (Essex County Council, 2018). An Essex Coast RAMS Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) followed in 2020. The RAMS is similar to a number of other strategic mitigation schemes around the country and sets out long-term strategic and proactive mitigation, ensuring relevant local planning authorities can deliver housing growth while meeting their statutory duties.

RAMS update and need for this survey

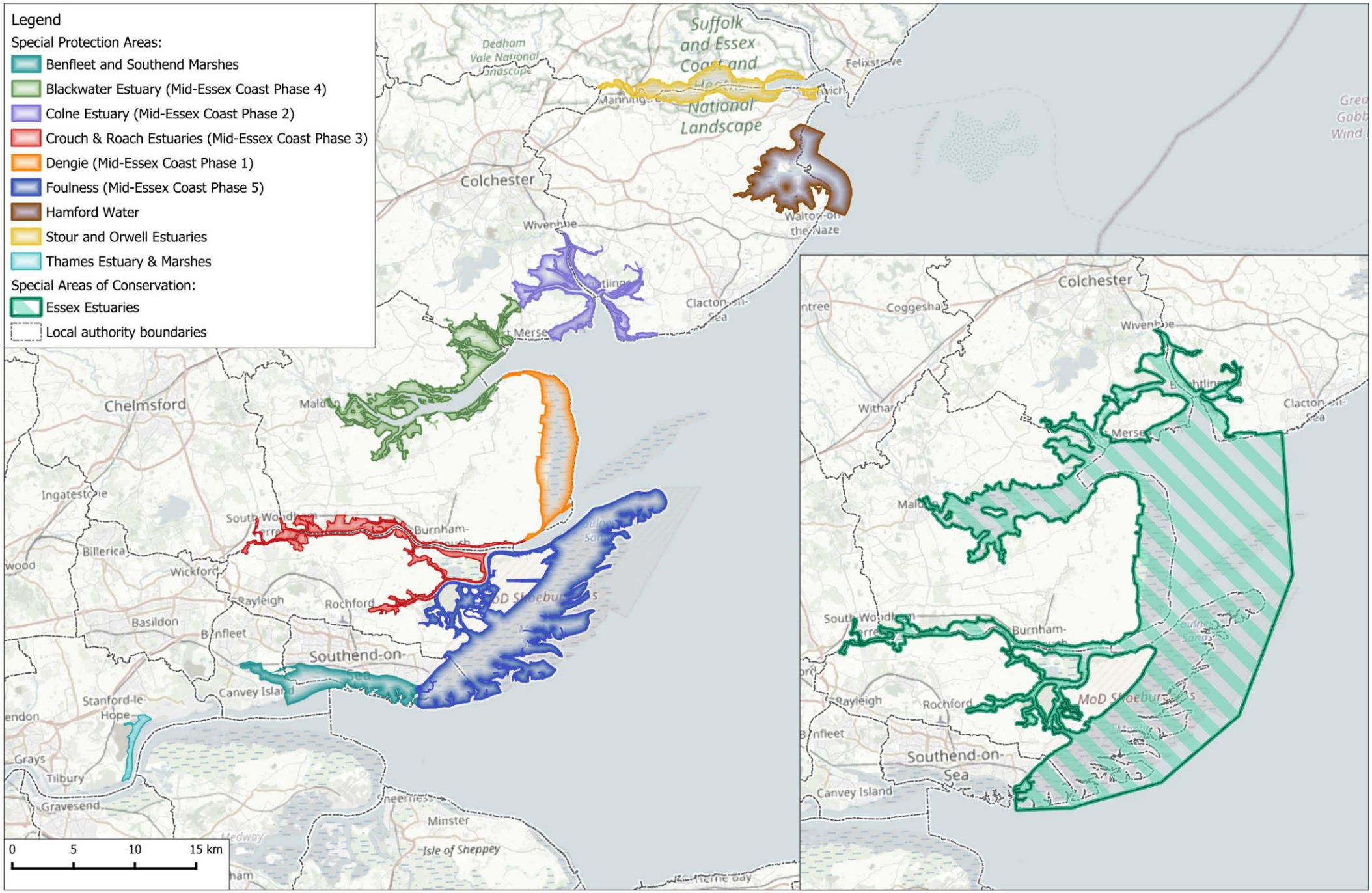
1.10 The RAMS will be updated in 2025/26 and this visitor survey was commissioned to help inform the evidence base underpinning the RAMS. Visitor data are relevant to:

- Identify current patterns of recreational use;
- Pick-up any changes in use, such as different types of recreation since the previous surveys;
- Provide information to inform design of mitigation, such as which types of access to target, how people behave;
- Gather information on where people come from and the links between local housing and recreation use.

1.11 In addition, the results will provide baseline information to allow future surveys to be able to explore how mitigation delivery has influenced visitor use, how awareness of the importance of the coast for nature conservation

has changed and where any future gaps may occur. This will facilitate any further reviews and updates.

Map 1: European sites covered by the RAMS. Main map shows SPAs, and inset map (same scale) shows SACs



2. Methods

Overview

2.1 Visitor surveys involved face-to-face interviews with a random sample of people on the coast and direct counts of the overall number of people at the same locations. The data provides a snapshot of use from a sample of access points across the coast and cover both the summer and winter period. The survey approach matches the standard approach used by Footprint Ecology across the country and the evidence used to support mitigation strategies at multiple other European sites.

Survey locations

2.2 Visitor surveys took place at 26 survey locations across the Essex Coast (see Map 2 and Table 1). These were selected to include a representative range of access points including main car parks, pedestrian access points and also to ensure a good geographical spread. The locations were selected following a review of GIS information, discussion with the RAMS project manager, a review of previous visitor surveys and extensive site visits.

2.3 Previous surveys were undertaken by Colchester City Council on behalf of North Essex authorities between 2010 and 2013 and by Southend City Council in 2018 (see the RAMs -Essex County Council, 2018 - for further detail). Of the 21 locations used in the previous visitor survey work, 15 have been retained, and two further locations moved but within a similar area. Nine new survey locations have also been added.

2.4 Survey work took place in two pulses, to capture visitor use relevant to the SPA qualifying features (which for some sites include both breeding and non-breeding birds). A total of 25 survey locations were surveyed in the winter (when the non-breeding bird interest is present) and 16 locations (15 of which were also surveyed during the winter) were surveyed in the summer – see Map 2 for locations.

Interviews

2.5 Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a random sample of visitors, by the surveyor approaching the next person they saw after completing the

previous interview. Only one person was interviewed per group and no minors (under 18s) were approached or interviewed.

2.6 The surveyor kept a record of the number of visitors who were approached for interview but declined to take part or were unable to take part for whatever reason. They also recorded the number of people who were approached but had already been interviewed, so that they were not re-interviewed.

2.7 The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was designed using Snap XMP survey software and was conducted using tablets running the Snap Offline Interviewer app. The app enables interviews to be conducted offline and then uploaded when the device is next connected to the internet.

2.8 It is important to note that some of the questions had pre-determined categories to facilitate data capture, however these were not shown to the interviewee or read out loud, in order to avoid any bias. Responses were categorised by the surveyor on the tablet as part of the interview process.

2.9 As part of the interview, visitors were asked to describe the route that they had taken on site (or were planning to take). This was captured by the surveyor on a paper map, using a unique reference number to match it to the corresponding questionnaire data, and these routes were subsequently digitised into GIS for analysis.

2.10 After each interview, the surveyor recorded additional information about the number of people in each interviewed group and the number of dogs that they had with them.

Visitor Counts

2.11 Alongside the interview data, surveyors maintained a tally of all people seen passing them, recording the number of groups (of any size), individuals (total headcount), minors, dogs and cyclists. These counts allow a comparison across survey points in terms of visitor volume/footfall and indicate the proportion of visitors that were interviewed at each location.

2.12 In addition to tally counts, surveyors were asked to keep a record of all activity on the water during each session. This includes people accessing the foreshore for bait digging for example, as well as any watercraft, paddlecraft or surfing activities observed. This was not possible in all locations, as not all

survey points overlook the water, and for Two Tree Island this took place at the end of the session as a single snapshot count from the lower slipway.

Map 2: Distribution of Survey Points and European sites

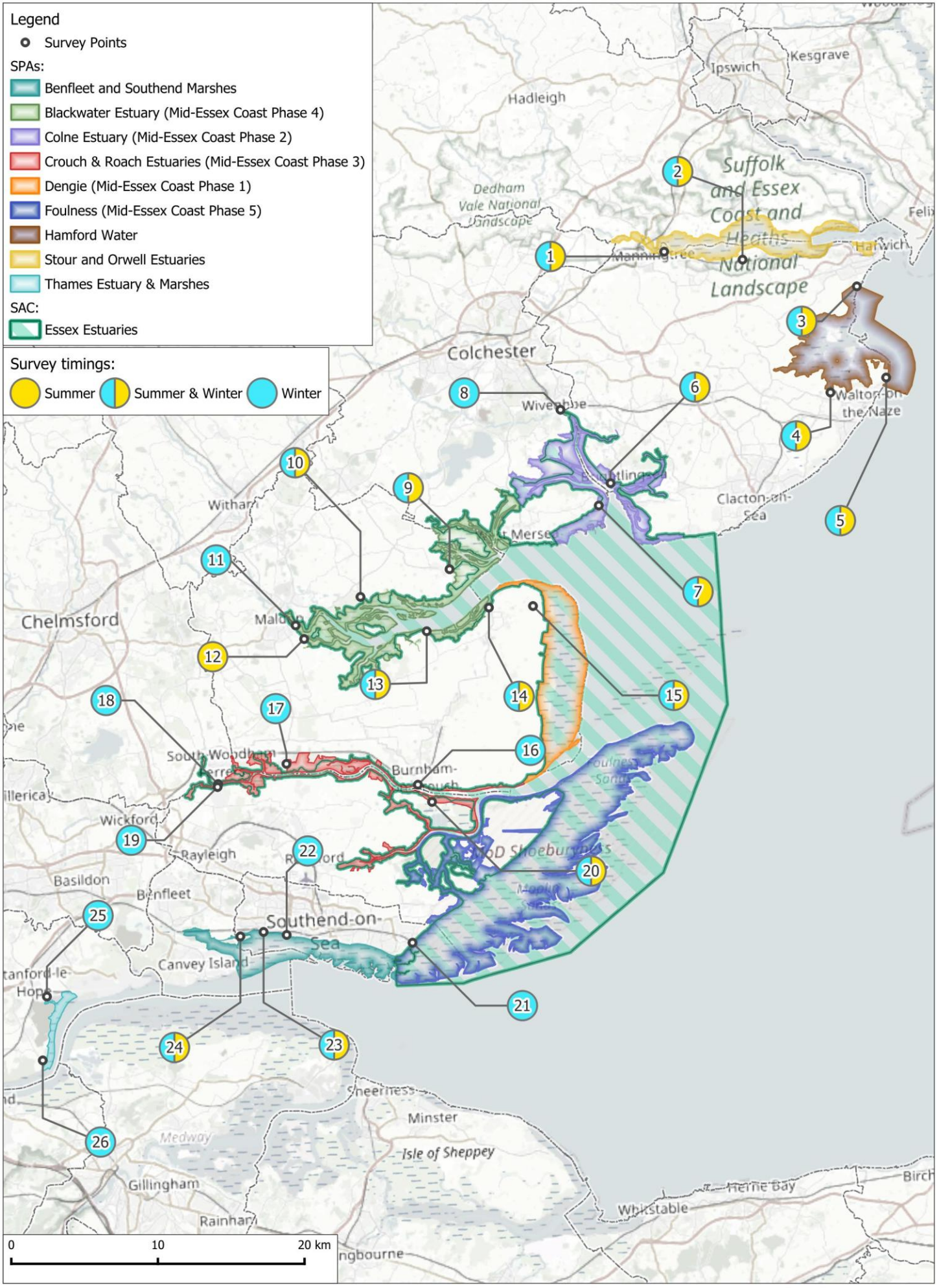


Table 1: Details of the survey locations across the Essex Coast.

ID	Location name	Grid reference	Description	Relevant SPA	Original RAMS Survey	Winter 2025	Summer 2025
1	Mistley Walls	TM11377320	Located to the side of the pedestrian path next to the estuary and bridge.	Stour and Orwell Estuaries	✓	✓	✓
2	Wrabness Nature Reserve	TM16722314	At the entrance to the nature reserve, by gate and signage.	Stour and Orwell Estuaries	✓	✓	✓
3	Irlams Beach	TM24522296	On coastal path by steps leading down to Irlams Beach.	Hamford Water	×	✓	✓
4	Kirby Quay	TM22723224	At path intersection towards the end of Quay Lane.	Hamford Water	✓	✓	✓
5	The Naze	TM26522234	Within the bounds of the car park, at the top of steps that lead down to beach/sea wall, by signage.	Hamford Water	✓	✓	✓
6	Brightlingsea Marsh	TM07721162	Located on slipway near Bateman's Café.	Colne Estuary	✓	✓	✓
7	Cudmore Grove Country Park	TM06916147	Located on coast path within country park, at the top of slipway leading down to the beach (path intersection).	Colne Estuary	✓	✓	✓
8	Wivenhoe Barrier	TM04302212	Located near signage and bench in front of Wivenhoe Sailing Club.	Colne Estuary	✓	✓	×
9	Tollesbury Wick (EWT)	TL96736103	Survey point is located through the gate behind the Harbour View Bistro.	Blackwater Estuary	✓	✓	✓

ID	Location name	Grid reference	Description	Relevant SPA	Original RAMS Survey	Winter 2025	Summer 2025
10	Goldhanger Creek	TL90658084	At path intersection on the coast path, behind the Goldhanger Parish Field.	Blackwater Estuary	×	✓	✓
11	Promenade Park	TL86234065	Within the park, located next to the gazebo by the 'boating lake' on the sea wall.	Blackwater Estuary	✓	✓	×
12	Northey Island Causeway	TL86818056	At base of causeway.	Blackwater Estuary	×	×	✓
13	St Lawrence	TL95473054	Survey point is located by steps leading to the beach, access from the road and coast path.	Blackwater Estuary	×	✓	✓
14	Bradwell Marina	TL99421077	Stand at the top of the slipway and intercept anyone passing.	Blackwater Estuary	✓	✓	✓
15	St Peter's Chapel	TM02428078	Survey point at the end of car park by main gate and access point to nature reserve.	Dengie	✓	✓	✓
16	Riverside Park, Burnham on Crouch	TQ94579956	Survey point at path intersection along sea wall, within Riverside Park.	Crouch and Roach Estuaries	✓	✓	×
17	Blue House Farm (EWT)	TQ85609970	Tallies and interviews within the bounds of the car park, roaming survey point.	Crouch and Roach Estuaries	✓	✓	×
18	Marsh Farm Country Park	TQ80947957	On edge of car park, next to signage along sea wall / coast path.	Crouch and Roach Estuaries	×	✓	×

ID	Location name	Grid reference	Description	Relevant SPA	Original RAMS Survey	Winter 2025	Summer 2025
19	Kendal Park	TQ80909955	Located at the path intersection along the estuary, near the entrance to Kendal Park.	Crouch and Roach Estuaries	×	✓	×
20	Wallasea Island (RSPB)	TQ95542944	At edge of car park by shelter, roaming where necessary.	Crouch and Roach Estuaries	✓	✓	✓
21	East Beach	TQ94209848	Stand on edge of grassy area near signage and access onto beach.	Foulness	×	✓	×
22	Chalkwell Beach	TQ85625854	Survey point along sea wall, near beach access and bowling green.	Benfleet and Southend Marshes	×	✓	×
23	Cinder Path	TQ84048856	Located at the beginning of sea wall, adjacent to access onto Bell Wharf Beach.	Benfleet and Southend Marshes	✓	✓	✓
24	Two Tree Island	TQ82465853	Located at entrance to nature reserve, opposite first car park on the island.	Benfleet and Southend Marshes	✓	✓	✓
25	Stanford Wharf (RSPB)	TQ69267812	Survey point along Wharf Road, at road intersection where vehicle access to estuary is restricted.	Thames Estuary and Marshes	×	✓	×
26	Coalhouse Fort	TQ68983768	Survey point on edge of car park, at entrance to fort complex and path intersection.	Thames Estuary and Marshes	✓	✓	×

Survey timings

2.13 Surveys took place between 1st February and 28th March (winter pulse) and 1st June and 20th July (summer pulse) 2025. Two survey days were spent at each survey location during each survey pulse, comprising of one weekday and one weekend day. Each survey day comprised eight hours of survey effort, split into two-hour sessions to provide breaks for the surveyors and to cover daylight hours. This ensures comparable survey windows across all locations. The session timings were adjusted through the survey to fit with daylight, such that:

- Winter: 07:00-09:00, 09:30-11:30, 12:30-14:30 and 15:00-17:00 (February) or 07:00-09:00, 10:00-12:00, 13:00-15:00, 16:00-18:00 (March).
- Summer: 07:00-09:00, 10:30-12:30, 14:00-16:00 and 17:00-19:00.

2.14 A total of (652.25) hours of survey effort were undertaken, with one session abandoned due to heavy rain and thunderstorms, and a further 1 hour 45 minutes lost across survey points due to access issues and inclement weather. During the winter surveys, days were generally dry and cold, with little rainfall (16% of sessions). Conditions varied during the summer surveys, with slightly more inclement weather (17% sessions with some rainfall) as well as some days with very high temperatures (up to 30 degrees) and dry, sunny weather. A summary of weather and total hours by survey point is provided in Appendix 2.

2.15 Bank holidays, large sporting events and other circumstances where visitor behaviour may be atypical were avoided.

3. Results: Tally counts

Overview of data

3.1 Tally data are summarised in Table 2. In total, 9,899 groups were recorded entering, leaving or passing the surveyor. These groups contained a total of 18,509 people (of which 2,371 were minors) and 448 of these people were on bikes. A total of 4,804 dogs were recorded with groups. From these figures, the mean group size was 1.9 people (of which 0.4 were minors) and 0.5 dogs. There was an average of 1 dog per every 2 people. Overall, 13% of the total people counted were minors (under 18s) and cyclists made up 2% of the people counted.

3.2 Few cyclists were recorded, accounting for 2% of people overall. However, cyclists were notable at Wivenhoe Barrier, and at St Lawrence, where they accounted for 14% of people counted.

3.3 Cinder Path was the busiest location, with almost 4,500 people passing the surveyor during the survey period (32 hours total). Chalkwell Beach was the second busiest (124.3 people per hour, 1,988 total people passing the surveyor) followed by Promenade Park (68.5 people per hour). Surveyors recorded the most minors present at The Naze, where 33% of people present were under 18, followed by Irlams Beach (26% were minors) and Kendal Park (17% were minors).

Winter and summer comparison

3.4 There was some variation in tallies between seasons. Whilst overall it appears that survey points were busier in winter (7,045 groups compared to 2,854 in summer), this is likely accounted for by the greater survey effort and different survey points. When compared by the average people per hour, survey locations in winter were busier, with an average of 32.1 people per hour compared to 22.5 people per hour in the summer, with the exception of The Naze and Brightlingsea Marsh which were notably busier in the summer compared to the winter. Group size was marginally larger, during the summer (2.0 vs. 1.8 in the winter) and there were also a greater proportion of minors present in the summer (16% vs. 11% in the winter).

Table 2: Summary of tally data by survey location. This includes all people and dogs passing the surveyor in any direction. 'Groups' includes lone individuals. 'People' is a total headcount, including minors (under 18s) and anyone using a bicycle. The highest three values in each column are highlighted in red. A total of 16 hours were spent at locations surveyed in only one season, 32 hours at locations surveyed in both summer and winter (see Table 1 for details).

Survey location	Groups	People	Dogs	Minors	Bicycles	People per group	Dogs per group	% minors	% on bicycles	People per hour: Winter	People per hour: Summer
1 - Mistley Walls	175	311	65	33	7	1.8	0.4	11%	2%	10.6	8.8
2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve	158	283	156	27	4	1.8	**1.0**	10%	1%	12.1	5.6
3 - Irlams Beach	130	286	106	73	1	2.2	0.8	**26%**	0%	9.1	8.8
4 - Kirby Quay	60	100	45	10	1	1.7	0.8	10%	1%	4.1	2.5
5 - The Naze	532	**1,366**	201	**447**	9	**2.6**	0.4	**33%**	1%	32.1	**53.3**
6 - Brightlingsea Marsh	**737**	1,197	233	151	**39**	1.6	0.3	13%	3%	35.2	**39.6**
7 - Cudmore Grove Country	394	892	339	128	8	**2.3**	0.9	14%	1%	23.1	34.1
8 - Wivenhoe Barrier	192	284	72	26	**41**	1.5	0.4	9%	**14%**	17.8	-
9 - Tollesbury Wick (EWT)	116	197	73	10	9	1.7	0.6	5%	5%	7	5.3
10 - Goldhanger Creek	251	472	188	39	22	1.9	0.7	8%	5%	16.2	13.3
11 - Promenade Park	551	1,096	288	143	22	2.0	0.5	13%	2%	**68.5**	-
12 - Northey Island Causeway	115	203	68	10	12	1.8	0.6	5%	6%	-	12.7
13 - St Lawrence	108	140	72	18	19	1.3	0.7	13%	**14%**	4.8	3.9
14 - Bradwell Marina	130	223	44	26	2	1.7	0.3	12%	1%	3.6	10.4
15 - St Peter's Chapel	124	242	72	18	26	2.0	0.6	7%	**11%**	6.4	8.7
16 - Riverside Park	248	401	115	33	13	1.6	0.5	8%	3%	25.1	-
17 - Blue House Farm (EWT)	23	29	14	1	0	1.3	0.6	3%	0%	1.8	-

Survey location	Groups	People	Dogs	Minors	Bicycles	People per group	Dogs per group	% minors	% on bicycles	People per hour: Winter	People per hour: Summer
18 - Marsh Farm Country	399	923	209	76	24	**2.3**	0.5	8%	3%	57.7	-
19 - Kendal Park	377	712	198	118	8	1.9	0.5	**17%**	1%	44.5	-
20 - Wallasea Island (RSPB)	257	431	67	18	2	1.7	0.3	4%	0%	23.2	4.4
21 - East Beach	384	616	231	58	37	1.6	0.6	9%	6%	38.5	-
22 - Chalkwell Beach	**1,188**	**1,988**	**387**	**174**	27	1.7	0.3	9%	1%	**124.3**	**-**
23 - Cinder Path	**2,305**	**4,497**	**669**	**578**	**58**	2.0	0.3	13%	1%	**152.3**	**128.8**
24 - Two Tree Island	471	709	**547**	31	13	1.5	**1.2**	4%	2%	27.5	16.8
25 - Stanford Wharf	121	189	115	13	12	1.6	**1.0**	7%	6%	11.8	-
26 - Coalhouse Fort	353	722	230	112	32	2.0	0.7	16%	4%	45.1	-
Winter tallies	*7,045*	*12,801*	*3,628*	*1,460*	*296*	*1.8*	*0.5*	*11%*	*2%*	-	-
Summer tallies	*2,854*	*5,708*	*1,176*	*911*	*152*	*2*	*0.4*	*16%*	*3%*	-	-
Total tallies	**9,899**	**18,509**	**4,804**	**2,371**	**448**	**1.9**	**0.5**	**13%**	**2%**	**32.1**	**22.5**

Weekend and weekday comparison

3.5 Visitor numbers tended to be higher at weekends compared to weekdays. Overall, across all survey locations and both pulses of survey effort there were 65% of visitors counted on a weekend compared to 35% on a weekday. Visitor numbers were higher at weekends than weekdays at 23 of the 25 locations surveyed in the winter and 13 of the 15 locations surveyed in the summer (see Figure 1). Brightlingsea and East Beach were notable in having more visitors on weekdays than weekends during the winter and the same could be said of Cudmore Grove CP in the summer.

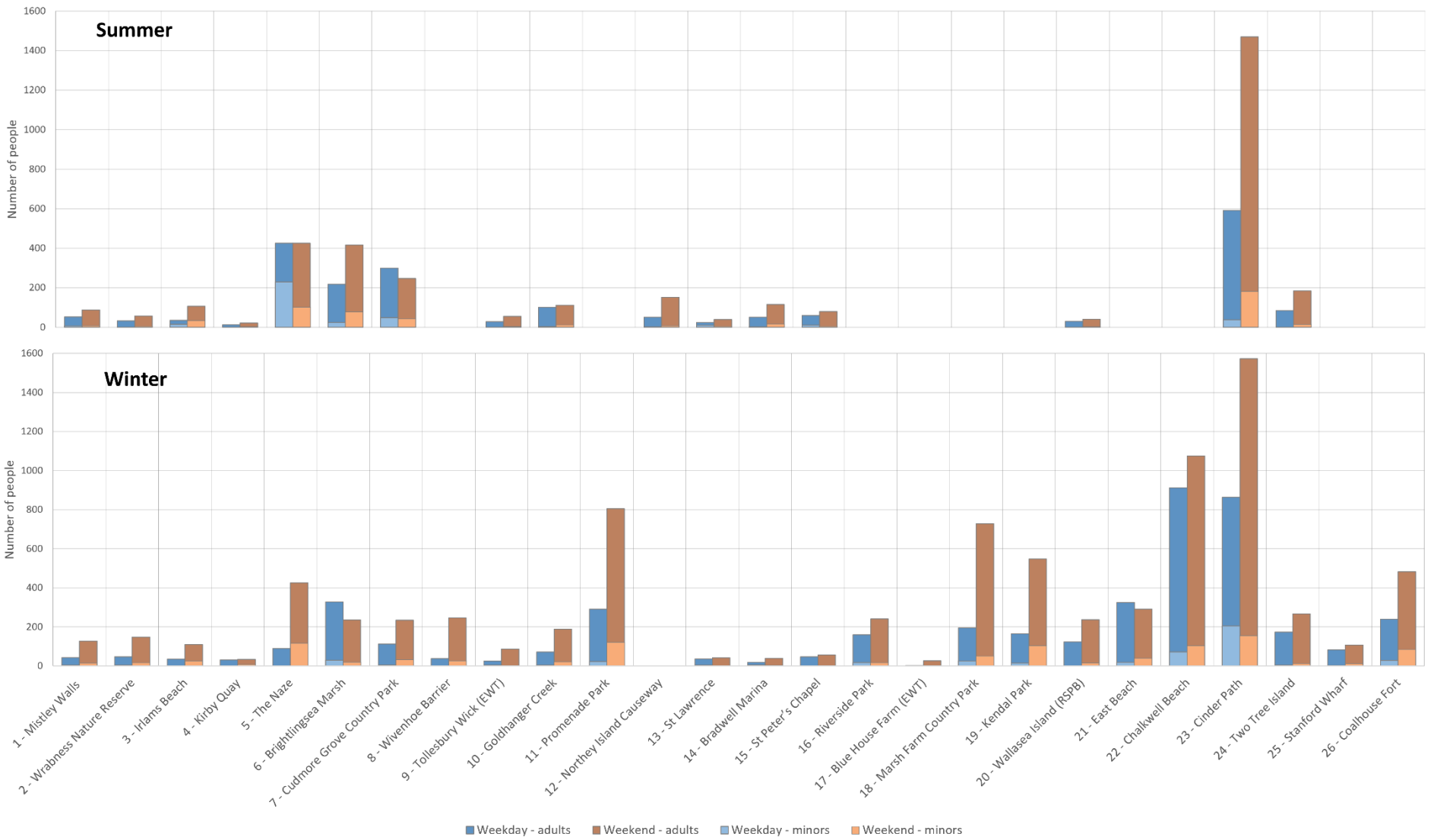


Figure 1: Number of people (adults and minors) counted at each survey location on weekdays and weekends. Note that Cinder Path total tallies were 3,043 people at the weekend and therefore was considerably busier than other sites (bar off scale).

Water Activity counts:

3.6 Where possible, surveyors kept a record of any activities taking place on the water. This was only feasible at 18 survey locations, as some did not directly overlook the water, e.g. Wallasea Island. At Two Tree Island the surveyor undertook a count from the slipway at the end of the survey session (i.e. moved location) whereas at the other survey points the counts were done from the interview location during the survey (and therefore are only approximate given the challenge of watching a wide area while interviewing).

3.7 These additional counts at the selected locations included any boats, watercraft, wind or kite surfing and activity along the foreshore. The data are summarised in Figure 2 below and in more detail in Appendix 3.

3.8 Water-based activities were noted most frequently at Two Tree Island, with activities present during 69% of sessions, and also at Chalkwell Beach (63% of sessions) and The Naze (44% of sessions).

3.9 Across all survey points, the data combined comprised:

- 39 observations of boats (either sailing – 16, rowing – 6 or otherwise undetermined):
- 10 kayakers;
- 9 paddleboarders;
- 5 wind or kite surfing; and
- 3 people accessing the mudflats for bait digging or metal detecting.

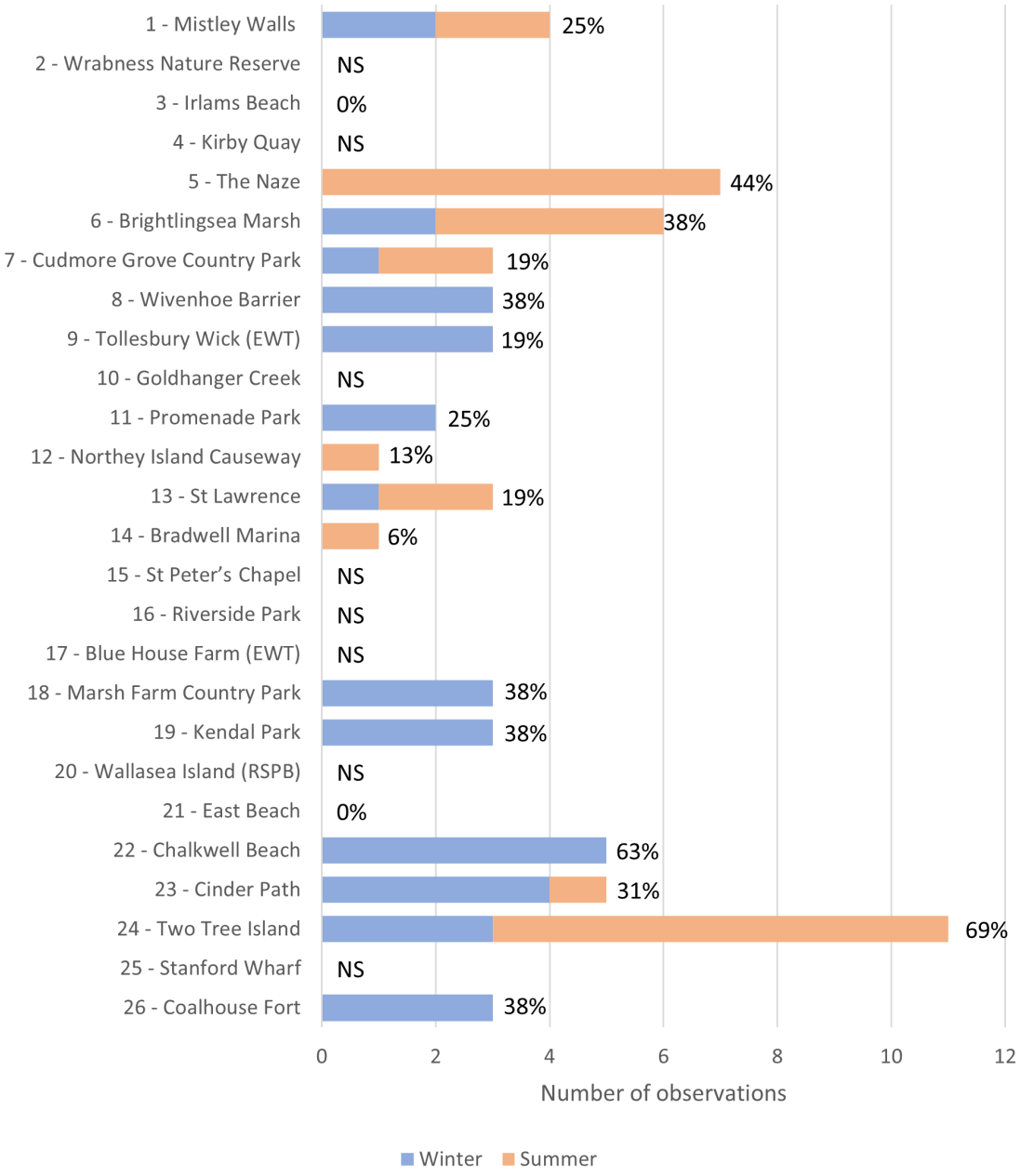


Figure 2: Summary of water activities recorded by survey location. Observations refer to individuals (including individual boats, kayaks etc). Percentages show the proportion of sessions during which water activities were observed (number of sessions differed per survey point). 'NS' is used where it was not possible to observe any water activities and therefore the survey point was 'Not Surveyed'.

4. Results: Interviews

Overview

4.1 A total of 1,793 interviews were conducted, with 1,225 in the winter and a further 568 in the summer. Of these 44% (796 interviews) took place on weekdays and 56% (997 interviews) on weekends (see Table 3). The median interview time was just over 6 minutes per interview.

4.2 Most interviewees were on their own (845 interviewees, 47%) or with one other person (722 interviewees, 40%). Most remaining groups were of between 3 and 14 people, with a notable exception of a school group of 130 people visiting at Cinder Path. The mean group size (including those on their own) was 1.8, and 165 groups had minors with them.

4.3 846 interviewees had 1 or more dogs with them, with a total of 1,092 dogs, roughly 0.6 dogs per interviewee (across all interviewees). At least 380 (35%) of the dogs were noted by the surveyor as off the lead at the time of interview.

4.4 A further 1,106 (36%) were approached for interview but declined for a variety of reasons. These included 386 runners/joggers/walkers (31%) who weren't prepared to stop, 332 individuals (26%) who said they had very little time and 159 (13%) who said they were not interested. A further 129 individuals (10%) cited other reasons for not participating in the survey and for 59 individuals (5%) the reasons for refusal were unclear. A number of people also cited the weather (e.g. being too hot, cold, rainy) for their reason of being unable to participate (41 individuals, 3%).

4.5 There were also 25 individuals who were approached for interviews, who stated that there was a language barrier which meant they felt unable to participate (1%) and a further 131 individuals who were approached for an interview but had already participated (4%).

4.6 Of those who did not participate, 450 (36%) were walking without a dog, 394 people (31%) were dog walking, 281 people (22%) were jogging, and a small number were either cycling (39 people) or appeared to be commuting (23 people).

Table 3: Summary of total interviews and refusals by survey location. Shading indicates survey season, blue for locations surveyed in winter only, orange indicates locations surveyed in summer only and unshaded (green styling) indicates locations surveyed in both seasons.

Survey Point	Weekday	Weekend	Total interviews	Already interviewed	Language issues	Refusals
1 - Mistley Walls	14	21	35	0	6	57
2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve	18	27	45	4	1	20
3 - Irlams Beach	12	21	33	3	3	30
4 - Kirby Quay	10	14	24	2	0	15
5 - The Naze	29	55	84	9	1	55
6 - Brightlingsea Marsh	46	44	90	8	3	78
7 - Cudmore Grove	55	53	108	1	0	39
8 - Wivenhoe Barrier	13	26	39	4	2	29
9 - Tollesbury Wick	22	31	53	2	0	26
10 - Goldhanger Creek	35	46	81	24	0	30
11 - Promenade Park	22	20	42	1	0	58
12 - Northey Island Causeway	15	24	39	3	0	14
13 - St Lawrence	17	29	46	11	3	26
14 - Bradwell Marina	21	30	51	1	0	28
15 - St Peter's Chapel	27	38	65	1	0	19
16 - Riverside Park	30	32	62	3	0	33
17 - Blue House Farm	1	13	14	1	0	2
18 - Marsh Farm Country Park	34	48	82	1	0	18
19 - Kendal Park	33	45	78	1	0	27
20 - Wallasea Island	40	53	93	5	0	12
21 - East Beach	40	47	87	2	1	62
22 - Chalkwell Beach	44	38	82	0	1	156
23 - Cinder Path	98	102	200	2	2	194
24 - Two Tree Island	58	85	143	31	0	26
25 - Stanford Wharf	25	21	46	10	0	26
26 - Coalhouse Fort	37	34	71	1	2	26
Total	**796**	**997**	**1,793**	**131**	**25**	**1,106**

Type of visit (Q1)

4.7 Most interviewees (1,665 interviewees, 93%) were on a day trip or had travelled directly from their home (Table 4). A further 70 interviewees (4%) were staying away from home (e.g. static caravan, mobile home) or on holiday in the area and a further 47 interviewees (3%) were staying with friends or family. A few interviewees (11, <1%) didn't fit into any of these categories. Interviewees on holiday accounted for a greater proportion of visitors in the summer compared to the winter. Locations where tourists accounted for a particularly high percentage of visitors in the summer were St Peter's Chapel (34% of visitors staying away from home), Irlams Beach (33%), St Lawrence (26%) and Cudmore Grove (25%).

Table 4: Numbers (%) of visitors by type of visit and season

Type of visit	Summer	Winter	Total
On a day trip/short visit and travelled directly from home	490 (86)	1,175 (96)	1,665 (93)
Staying away from home, e.g. static caravan, mobile home or on holiday	54 (10)	16 (1)	70 (4)
Short trip/short visit & staying away from home with friends or family	19 (3)	28 (2)	47 (3)
None of the above	5 (1)	6 (0)	11 (1)
Total	**568 (100)**	**1,225 (100)**	**1,793 (100)**

Main activity (Q2)

4.8 The main activities interviewees stated they were undertaking (see Figure 3) were dog walking (800 interviewees[4], 45%) and walking (619 interviewees, 35%).

4.9 There was some variation between seasons, with 50% (616 interviewees) stating that they were dog walking in the winter compared to 32% (184 interviewees) in the summer (across all survey points). More interviewees stated that they were visiting for photography during the winter (22 interviewees, 2% in the winter and only one interviewee (<1%) in the summer). More interviewees stated they were undertaking water-based activities in the summer, including sailing/accessing boat (22 interviewees,

[4] Note that 846 interviewees had dogs with them at the time of the interview – 46 of these stated that their main activity wasn't dog walking but some other activity instead.

4% in summer vs 6 interviewees, <1% in winter) and swimming (10 interviewees, 2% in summer vs. 3 interviewees, <1% in winter).

4.10 Some interviewees stated 'other' activities which did not fit into pre-determined categories. These included 'Visiting the chapel' (12 interviewees, <1%) which occurred almost exclusively at St Peter's Chapel, feeding the birds (13 interviewees, <1%), fossil hunting (11 interviewees, <1%) as well as exercising, admiring the scenery and accessing the beach.

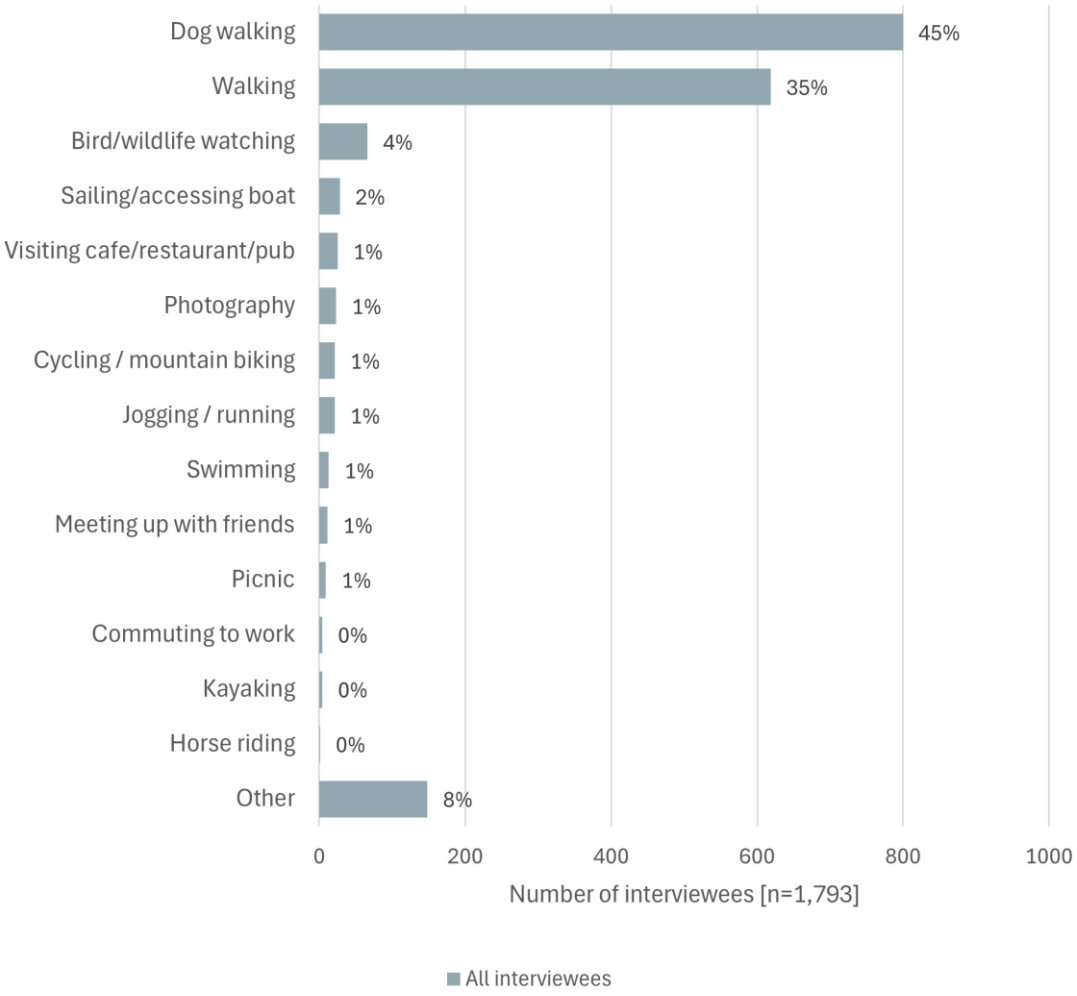
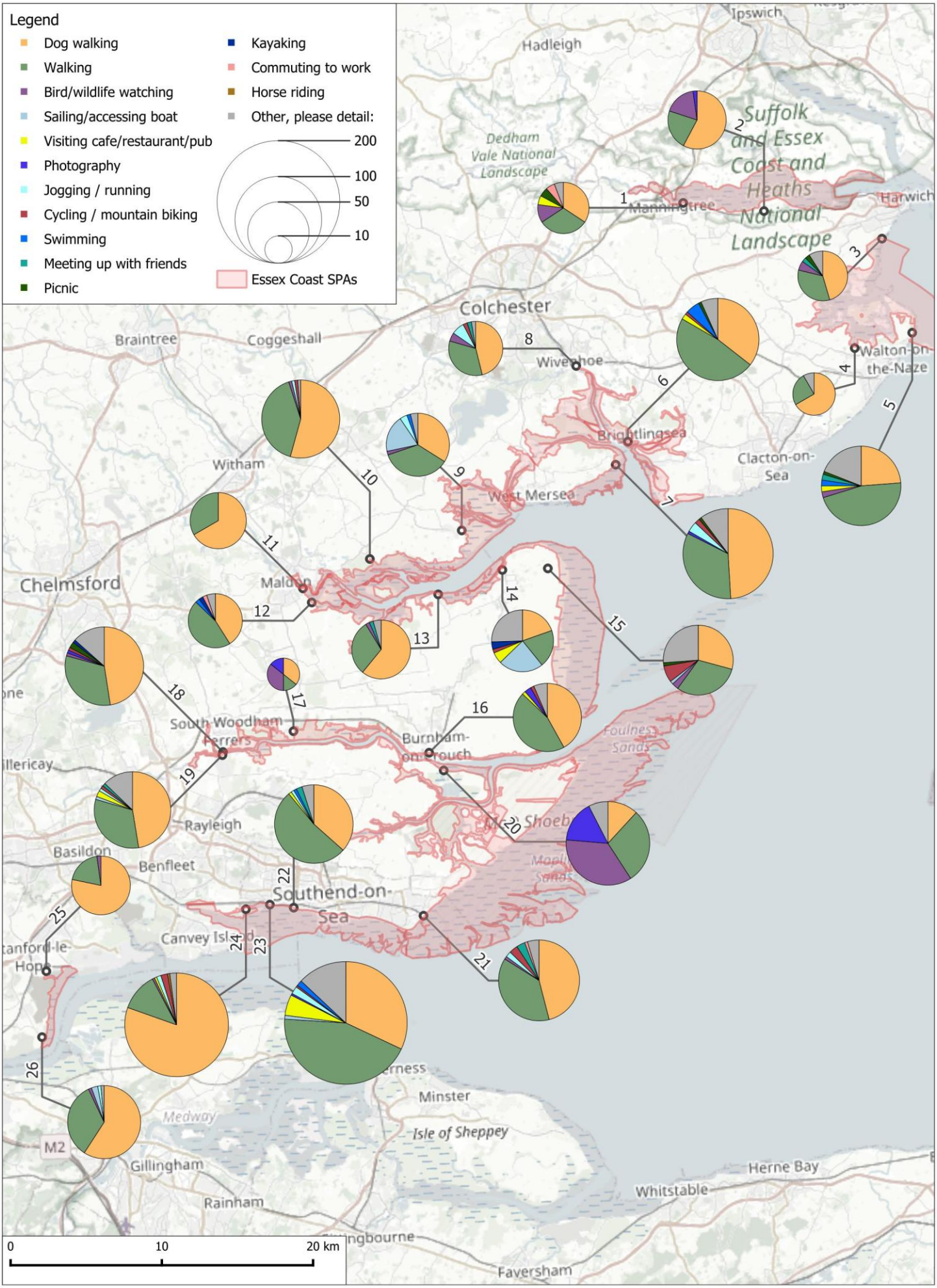


Figure 3: Main activity given by interviewees. Data from all seasons and all survey points combined.

4.11 There was variation between locations in the relative proportions of different activities (see Map 3 and Appendix 3). While dog walking and walking were typically the most frequently given activities, dog walkers accounted for a higher percentage at Two Tree Island (where dog walkers accounted for 80%

of interviewees) and Stanford Wharf (78%). Walkers accounted for a high proportion at Chalkwell Beach (52%) and Brightlingsea Marsh (48%). At Wallasea Island many interviewees were bird/wildlife watching or visiting for photography (35% and 16% respectively). Blue House Farm and Wrabness Nature Reserve were also popular locations for bird/wildlife watching (36% and 18% respectively). Cycling was more popular at St Peter's Chapel (8% of interviewees) than any other location, and Bradwell Marina was notable for the number of interviewees going sailing or accessing their boat (24% of interviewees).

Map 3: Main activity undertaken at each survey point by interviewees



4.12 Interviewees were also asked to consider any secondary activities undertaken on their visit or by other members of the group (Q3). Of the 897 (50%) that said they were undertaking a second activity, 270 interviewees (30%) stated that they were also visiting a café/restaurant, 209 interviewees (23%) were also walking and 106 interviewees stated that they were also bird/wildlife watching (12%).

Temporal visit patterns

Frequency of visit (Q4)

4.13 Across all survey points and seasons, over half of all interviewees stated that they visited the location where interviewed at least once a week (1,004 interviewees, 56%). Of these, 329 interviewees (18%) were daily visitors. A number of interviewees were also on their first visit (218 interviewees, 12%).

4.14 Responses varied by season (Figure 4), with daily visitors accounting for a higher proportion of interviewees in the winter (258 interviewees, 21%) compared to the summer (71 interviewees, 13% visiting daily). By contrast, the proportion of those on their first visit was higher in the summer (111 interviewees, 20%) compared to the winter (107 interviewees, 9%).

4.15 The frequency with which interviewees visited also varied by survey location (see Figure 4). Locations such as Riverside Park (52 interviewees, 84%), St Lawrence (38 interviewees, 83%) and Wivenhoe Barrier (30 interviewees, 77%) attracted a higher proportion of at least weekly visitors in contrast to St Peter's Chapel (8 interviewees, 12%) and Wallasea Island (16 interviewees, 17%). Both these less frequently visited locations also attracted a higher proportion of first-time visitors (35 interviewees, 54% and 23 interviewees, 25% respectively) as did The Naze (23 interviewees, 27%).

4.16 Based on the categorical responses relating to visit frequency, interviewees had visited the interview location around 122 times on average over the past year, equivalent to roughly 2.3 visits per week[5].

[5] 'Daily' = 350 visits; 'Most days' = 200 visits; '1 to 3 times a week' = 110 visits; '2 to 3 times per month' = 27.5 visits; 'Once a month' = 10.5 visits; 'Less than once a month' = 3 visits; 'First visit' = 1 visit. Typical visit frequency is then the average based on the number of interviewees that gave each of the above categories.

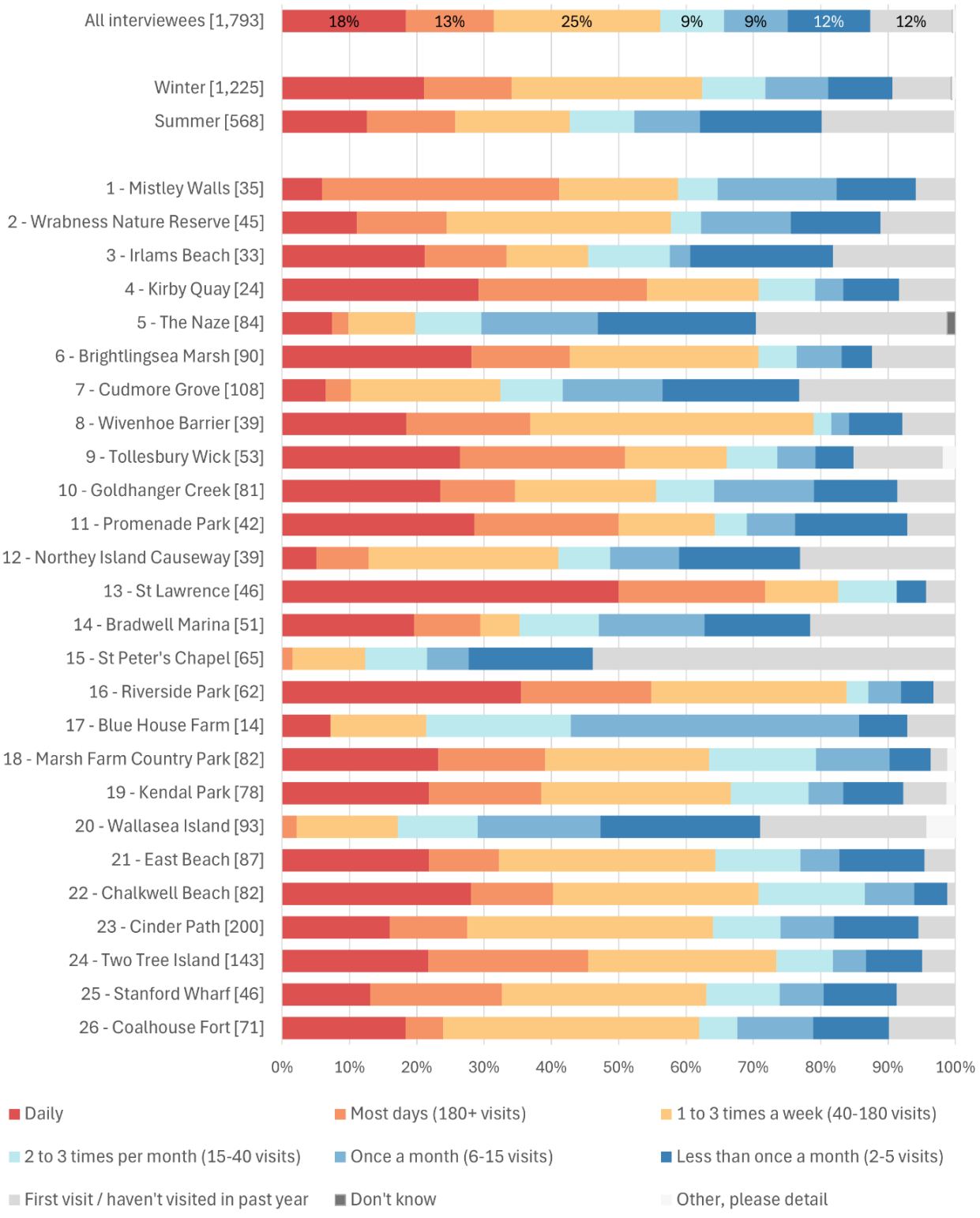


Figure 4: Visit frequency for all data combined and also by season and survey location.

4.17 There was some variation in visit frequency comparing those undertaking different main activities. Dog walkers tended to visit the sites where

interviewed frequently, with 238 interviewees who were dog walking (30% of dog walkers) visiting daily and 595 (74%) visiting at least weekly. Interviewees who were visiting for bird/wildlife watching were more likely to be visiting for the first time (19 interviewees, 29%).

Visit duration (Q5)

4.18 Visit duration is shown by season and survey location in Figure 5.

4.19 Approximately half of all interviewees had spent (or intended to spend) less than an hour visiting the location where they were interviewed, with most visitors spending between 30 minutes and one hour on site (719 interviewees, 41%). The visit duration varied between the seasons, with the tendency for longer visits in the summer. For example, 96 interviewees (6%) were visiting for 3 hours or more in the winter compared to 74 interviewees (17%) in the summer.

4.20 Survey locations where many interviewees were only visiting for a short period (up to an hour) included: Kendal Park (66 interviewees, 85% visiting for up to an hour), Two Tree Island (115 interviewees, 80%) and Mistley Walls (27 interviewees, 77%). In contrast, 26 interviewees (51%) at Bradwell Marina stated that they would spend over 4 hours on site. Interviewees at The Naze were also inclined to visit for longer, with 23 interviewees (27%) stating that they would visit for over 3 hours.

4.21 Based on the categorical responses relating to visit duration the typical visit duration to the Essex Coast across all seasons and survey points is around 83 minutes [6]. Those interviewed in the summer tended to visit for around 102 minutes compared to an average of 75 minutes for those interviewed in the winter.

[6] Less than 30 minutes = 20 mins; 30 minutes to 1 hour = 45 mins; 1 to 2 hours = 90 mins; 2 to 3 hours = 150 mins; 3 to 4 hours = 210 mins and more than 4 hours = 300 mins. Typical visit duration is then the average based on the number of interviewees that gave each of the above categories.

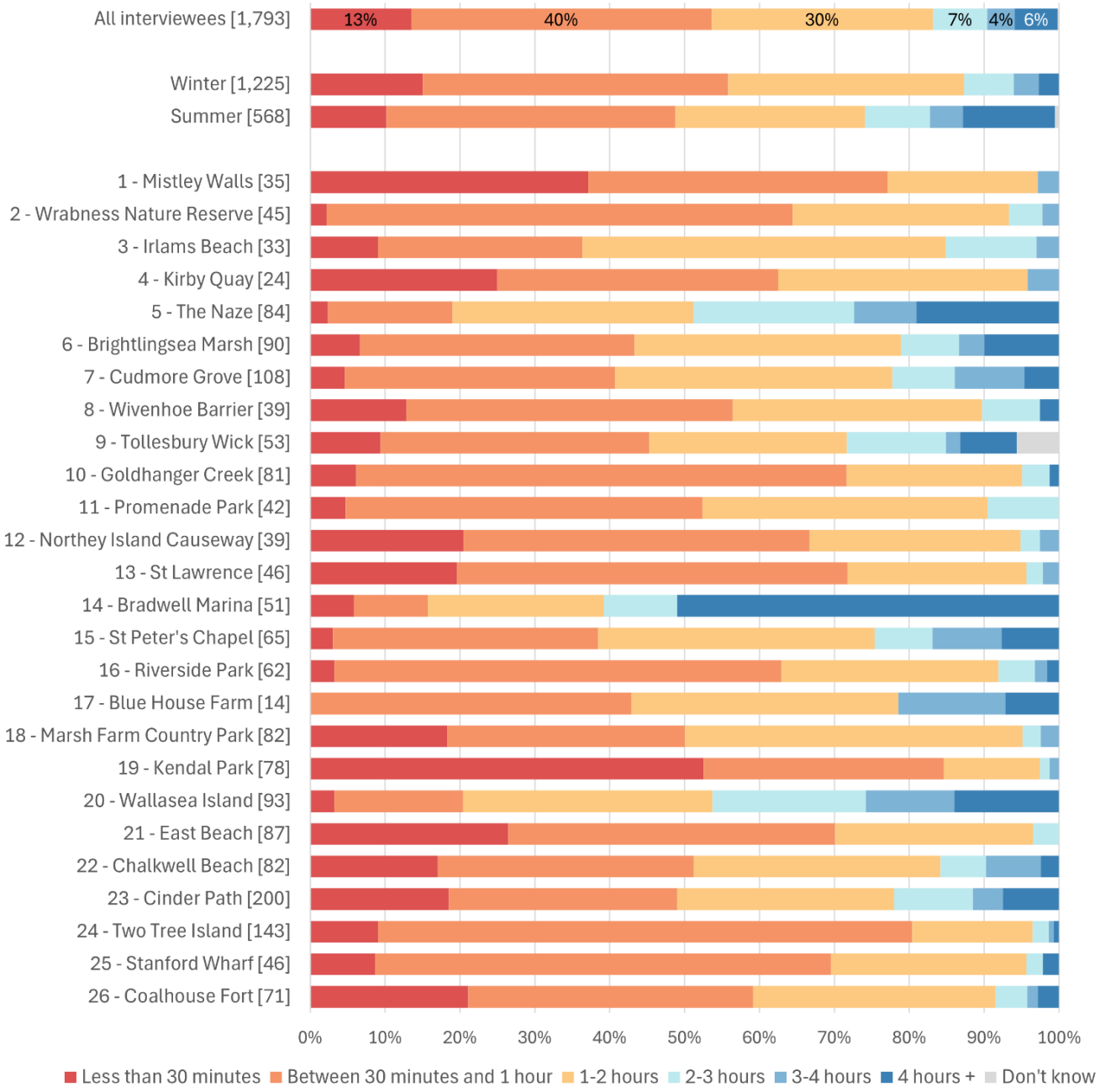


Figure 5: Comparison of duration of visit by interviewees, by survey location and season.

4.22 Visit duration varied between activities, with those interviewees who said they were commuting or horse riding all spending less than 30 minutes on site. Dog walkers (542 interviewees, 68%) and interviewees who were running/jogging (16 interviewees, 76%) both tended to visit for short periods, with 542 interviewees (68%) of dog walkers and 16 of those running/jogging (76%) spending less than an hour at the location at which they were

interviewed. In contrast, three interviewees who were kayaking (75% of those kayaking) said they would spend over 3 hours on site, as did 18 interviewees (64%) of those who were sailing or accessing their boat.

Time of day (Q6)

4.23 Most interviewees (671 interviewees, 37%) did not tend to visit at a particular time of day and said that the time at which they usually visit varies. Of those that did show a preference, approximately a fifth (403 interviewees, 22%) said they preferred to visit before 9am.

4.24 There was little seasonal variation in the time of day interviewees tended to visit. However, there were some patterns evident when comparing between activities, A high proportion of those dog walking (270 interviewees, 34%), indicated they were more likely to visit before 9am and people sailing or accessing their boat was much more evenly spread throughout the day than any other activity. This even spread is also reflected at Bradwell Marina where a greater proportion of interviewees were sailing compared to other sites.

4.25 Of the interviewees that showed a preference, there was some difference between survey locations (see Table 5). Early morning was the most commonly given response at Marsh Farm Country Park (where given by 31 interviewees, 38%) and Stanford Wharf (16 interviewees, 35%) while at Promenade Park later morning was the most common response (given by 12 interviewees, 29%). At Wallasea Island there was a preference for late afternoon visits (24 interviewees, 26%), perhaps reflecting those wildlife watching or taking photographs timing their visit to coincide with the bird interest (raptors and owls) while at Bradwell Marina there was a relatively even spread across the day, potentially linked to the high proportion of people sailing and accessing boats at this location.

Table 5: Number (%) of interviewees by survey point and the time of day interviewees tended to visit. Note that interviewees could provide multiple responses so percentages will not add up to 100. The highest value in each row is highlighted in dark red and the second highest value highlighted in a lighter red.

Survey location [number of interviews}	Early morning	Late morning	Early afternoon	Late afternoon	Evening	Varies / Don't know	First visit
1 - Mistley Walls [35]	**9 (26%)**	5 (14%)	5 (14%)	2 (6%)	1 (3%)	**13 (37%)**	2 (6%)
2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve [45]	**12 (27%)**	5 (11%)	1 (2%)	6 (13%)	2 (4%)	**21 (47%)**	5 (11%)
3 - Irlams Beach [33]	6 (18%)	**7 (21%)**	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (9%)	**14 (42%)**	6 (18%)
4 - Kirby Quay [24]	5 (21%)	**7 (29%)**	0 (0%)	4 (17%)	1 (4%)	**10 (42%)**	2 (8%)
5 - The Naze [84]	10 (12%)	5 (6%)	1 (1%)	4 (5%)	0 (0%)	**39 (46%)**	**25 (30%)**
6 - Brightlingsea Marsh [90]	**21 (23%)**	11 (12%)	2 (2%)	5 (6%)	4 (4%)	**37 (41%)**	11 (12%)
7 - Cudmore Grove [108]	24 (22%)	19 (18%)	13 (12%)	8 (7%)	8 (7%)	**35 (32%)**	**25 (23%)**
8 - Wivenhoe Barrier [39]	**12 (31%)**	3 (8%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	3 (8%)	**17 (44%)**	4 (10%)
9 - Tollesbury Wick [53]	**16 (30%)**	5 (9%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	7 (13%)	**24 (45%)**	7 (13%)
10 - Goldhanger Creek [81]	**24 (30%)**	17 (21%)	9 (11%)	9 (11%)	17 (21%)	**25 (31%)**	7 (9%)
11 - Promenade Park [42]	**10 (24%)**	**12 (29%)**	2 (5%)	3 (7%)	9 (21%)	**12 (29%)**	3 (7%)
12 - Northey Island Causeway [39]	6 (15%)	3 (8%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	4 (10%)	**19 (49%)**	**9 (23%)**
13 - St Lawrence [46]	7 (15%)	4 (9%)	2 (4%)	7 (15%)	5 (11%)	**26 (57%)**	2 (4%)
14 - Bradwell Marina [51]	10 (20%)	**12 (24%)**	11 (22%)	11 (22%)	9 (18%)	**20 (39%)**	11 (22%)
15 - St Peter's Chapel [65]	8 (12%)	6 (9%)	2 (3%)	4 (6%)	0 (0%)	**16 (25%)**	**35 (54%)**

Survey location [number of interviews}	Early morning	Late morning	Early afternoon	Late afternoon	Evening	Varies / Don't know	First visit
16 - Riverside Park [62]	**8 (13%)**	5 (8%)	5 (8%)	4 (6%)	3 (5%)	**41 (66%)**	2 (3%)
17 - Blue House Farm [14]	**5 (36%)**	2 (14%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	**7 (50%)**	1 (7%)
18 - Marsh Farm Country Park [82]	**31 (38%)**	19 (23%)	8 (10%)	9 (11%)	14 (17%)	**25 (30%)**	2 (2%)
19 - Kendal Park [78]	10 (13%)	**19 (24%)**	8 (10%)	12 (15%)	3 (4%)	**28 (36%)**	5 (6%)
20 - Wallasea Island [93]	19 (20%)	15 (16%)	11 (12%)	**24 (26%)**	20 (22%)	22 (24%)	**23 (25%)**
21 - East Beach [87]	**16 (18%)**	**16 (18%)**	8 (9%)	11 (13%)	2 (2%)	**33 (38%)**	4 (5%)
22 - Chalkwell Beach [82]	**20 (24%)**	**20 (24%)**	4 (5%)	9 (11%)	5 (6%)	**33 (40%)**	1 (1%)
23 - Cinder Path [200]	**44 (22%)**	37 (19%)	16 (8%)	13 (7%)	21 (11%)	**80 (40%)**	11 (6%)
24 - Two Tree Island [143]	**42 (29%)**	35 (24%)	14 (10%)	10 (7%)	19 (13%)	**43 (30%)**	7 (5%)
25 - Stanford Wharf [46]	**16 (35%)**	7 (15%)	7 (15%)	5 (11%)	**9 (20%)**	8 (17%)	4 (9%)
26 - Coalhouse Fort [71]	12 (17%)	**16 (23%)**	10 (14%)	12 (17%)	4 (6%)	**23 (32%)**	7 (10%)
All interviewees [1,793]	**403 (22%)**	**312 (17%)**	**143 (8%)**	**176 (10%)**	**173 (10%)**	**671 (37%)**	**221 (12%)**

Time of year (Q7)

4.26 Most interviewees (1,078 interviewees, 60%) stated that they tended to visit the location where interviewed equally all year round. Of those that did show a preference, 332 interviewees (19%) said that they tended to visit more in the summer (June – August). A further 220 interviewees (12%) were on a first visit and therefore did not show a preference.

4.27 A relatively high proportion of interviewees who were dog walking stated they tended to visit equally all year round (600 interviewees, 75%) compared to all other activities. Interviewees who were bird/wildlife watching showed the greatest preference for visiting in the winter (14 interviewees, 21%) and interviewees going sailing or accessing their boat preferred to visit in the summer (15 interviewees, 56%).

Mode of Transport (Q8)

4.28 Overall, most interviewees arrived at the survey point either by car (1,058 interviewees, 58%) or on foot (676 interviewees, 38%). A small percentage arrived by bicycle (28 interviewees, 2%) and train (23 interviewees, 1%), while the remaining interviewees arrived by bus, motorbike, mobility scooter, sailing boat or ferry (all approximately 1% of interviewees).

4.29 Mode of transport differed slightly between survey points (see Figure 6 below). At Blue House Farm (14 interviewees, 100%) all arrived by car/van, while the majority of interviewees had arrived on foot at St Lawrence (38 interviewees, 83%), Kirby Quay (18 interviewees, 75%) and Wivenhoe Barrier (29 interviewees, 74%).

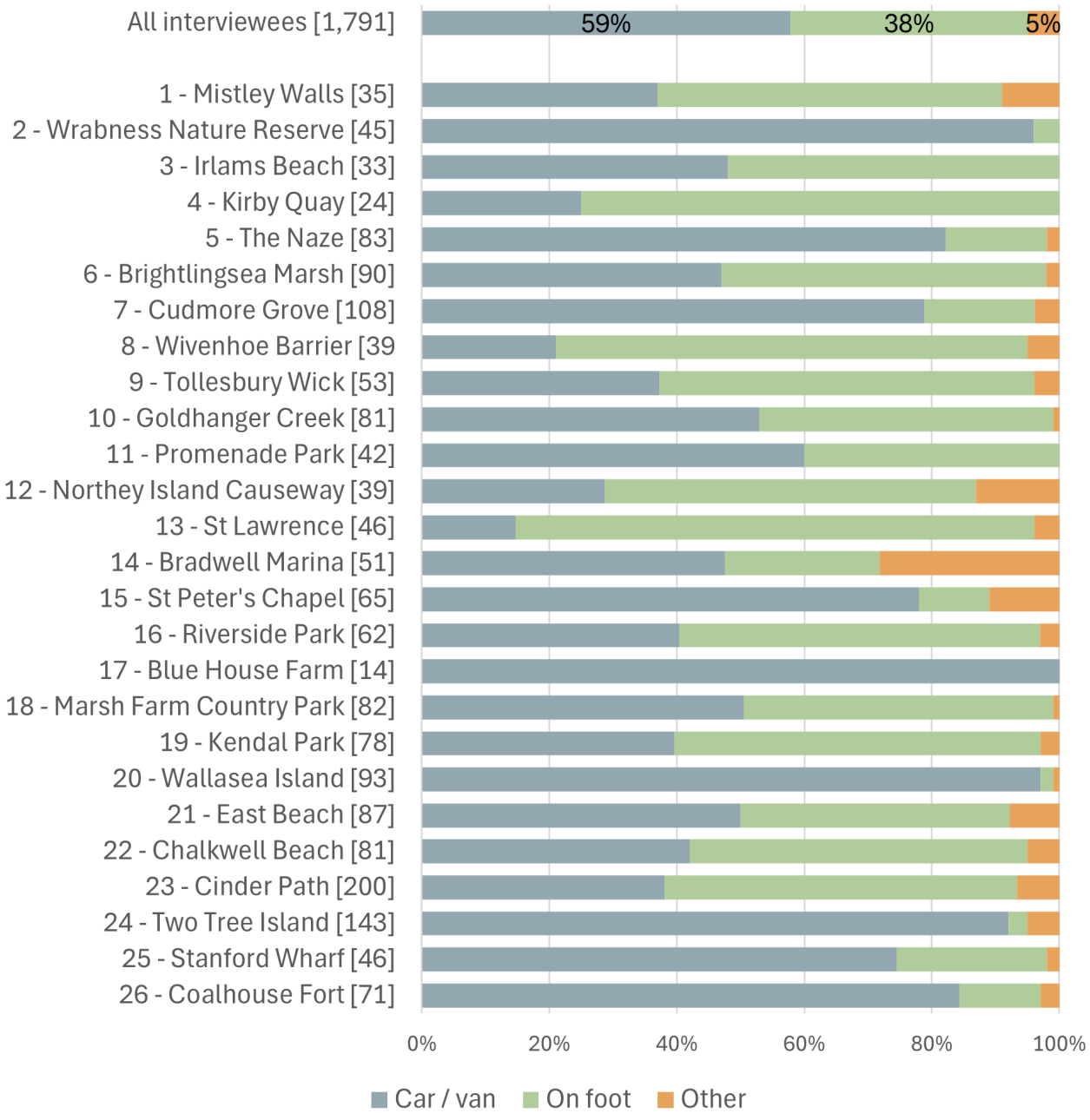


Figure 6: Mode of transport used by survey point. Numbers in square brackets reflect sample size.

Choice of location (Q9 & Q10)

4.30 Interviewees gave a variety of reasons for choosing to visit the location where they were interviewed, rather than another site (Figure 7). Some interviewees gave multiple reasons for their choice and where more than one reason was given, interviewees were also asked to select a single main reason (Q10). Being 'close to home' was by far the most common reason (both overall and as the main reason), given by over a third of interviewees (695, 39%). Other common responses included the scenery/variety of views (356, 20%) and the location being good for the dog or the dog enjoys it (190 interviewees, 11%).

4.31 A total of 470 interviewees (26%) gave 'other' reasons outside of the pre-determined categories, for example seeing family, being by the water, visiting the beach and being quiet or peaceful to visit.

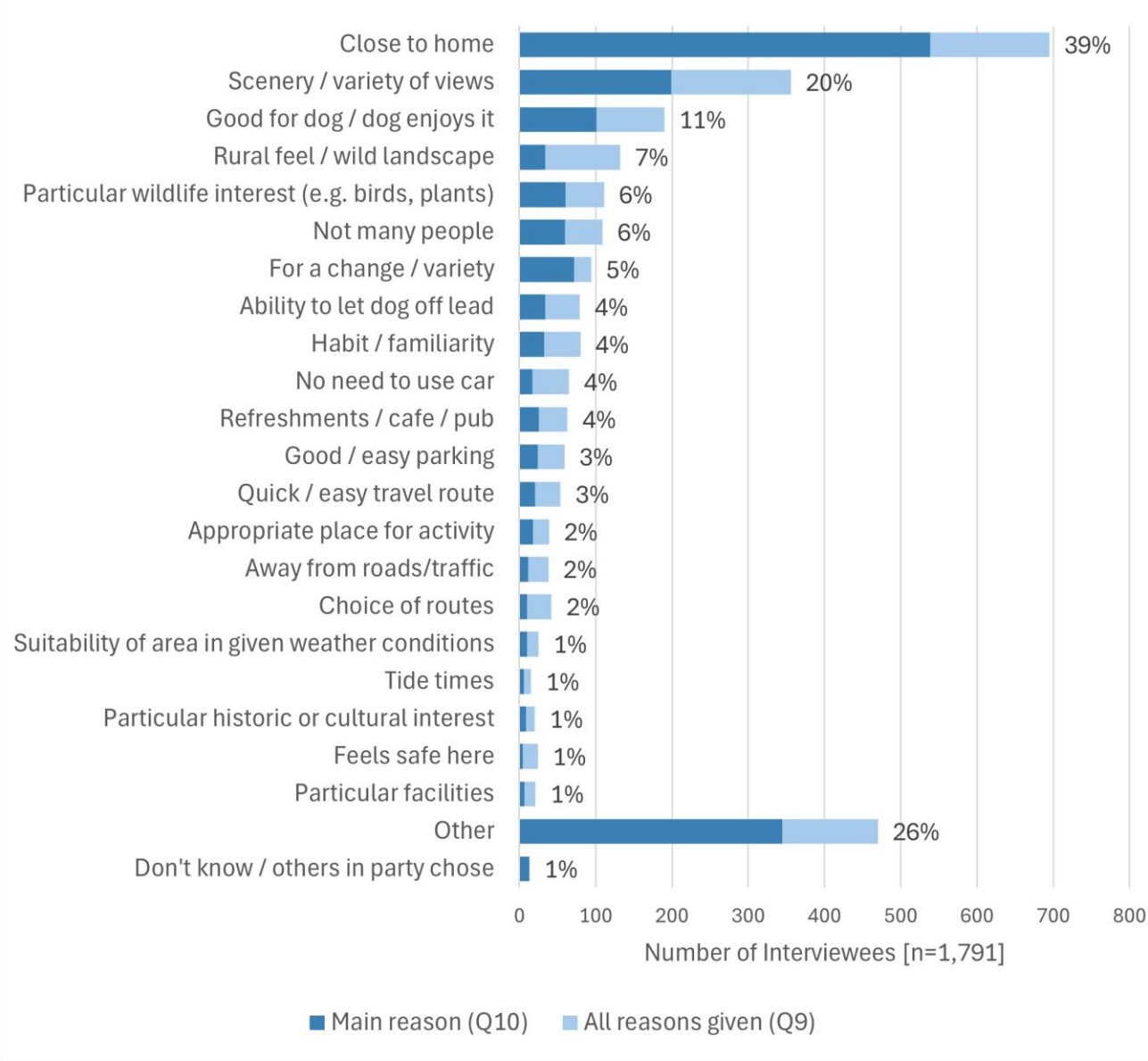


Figure 7: Reasons for visiting the specific location where interviewed that day rather than somewhere else. Interviewees were asked for one main reason and could give multiple other reasons. Responses categorised by surveyor and additional categories added following a review of free text responses. Value labels give the percentage of all interviewees who cited the reason (main or other).

4.32 In Figure 8 dog walkers are compared with all other activity types and it can be seen that for dog walkers proximity to home, being good for the dog and the ability to let the dog off the lead is of particular importance for site choice compared to all other interviewees.

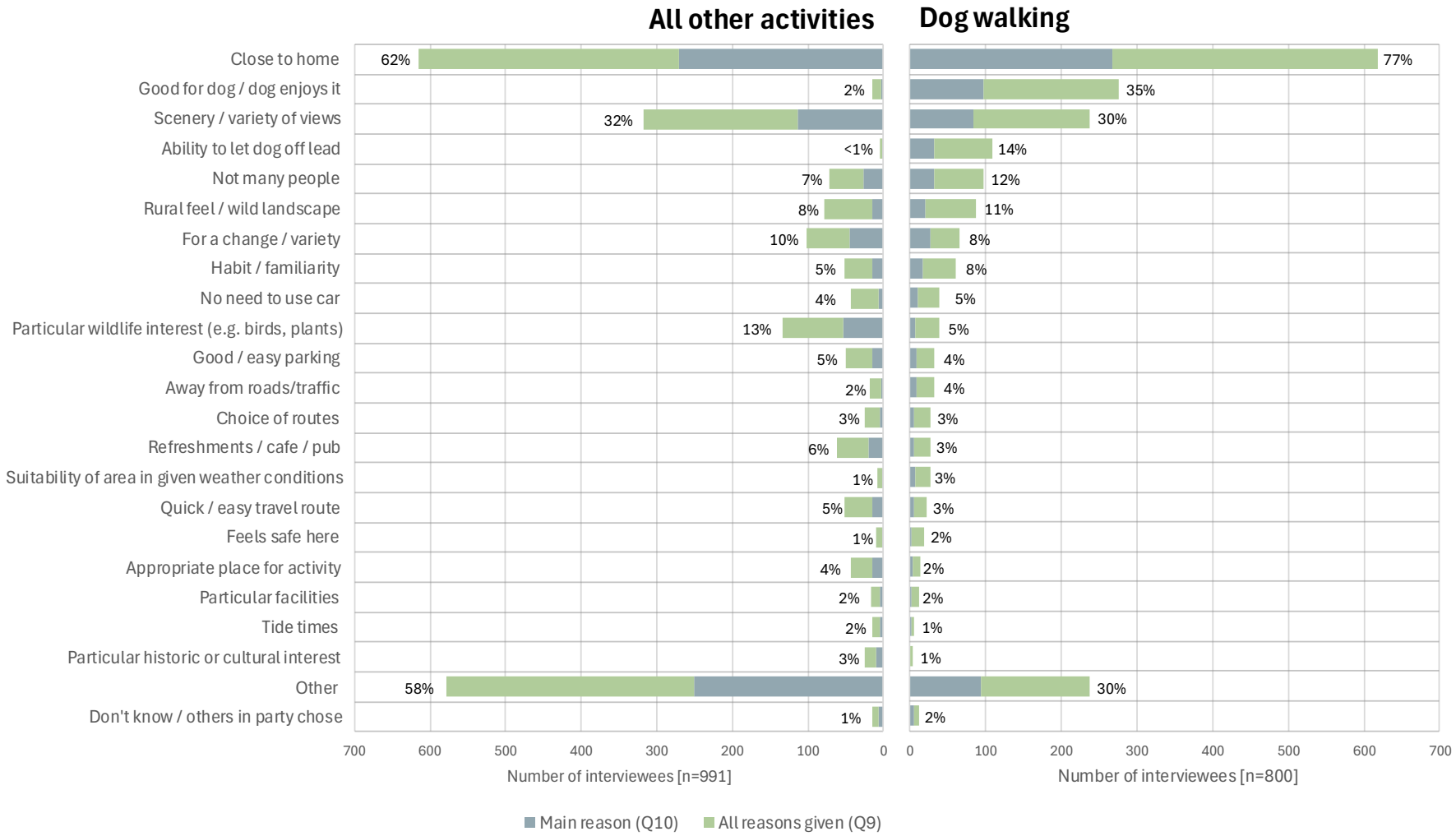


Figure 8: Reasons for visiting the specific location where interviewed that day rather than somewhere else comparing dog walkers and interviewees undertaking all other activities on site. Interviewees were asked for one main reason and could give multiple other reasons. Responses categorised by surveyor and additional categories added following a review of free text responses. Value labels give the percentage of all interviewees who cited the reason (main or other).

Routes taken on site (Q11 -13)

4.33 Routes were drawn on a paper map by surveyors during the interview and then later digitised, with the length calculated in GIS. A total of 1,759 routes were mapped (see Map 4 and 5). As can be seen from the data, many routes extend along considerable lengths of shore and include areas outside the European sites. Some routes extend well inland.

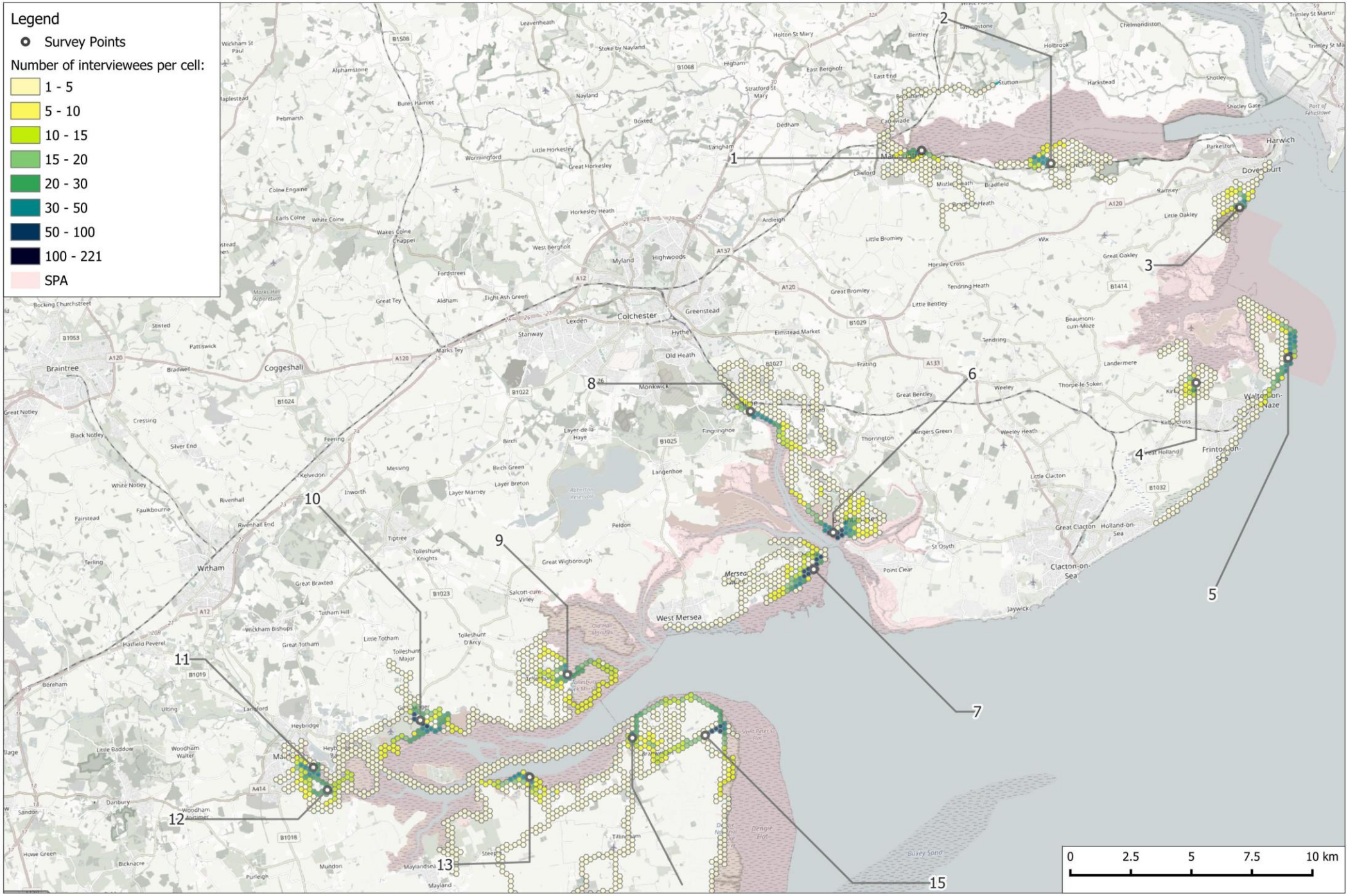
4.34 The median route length across all 1,759 interviewees was 2.96km, indicating that 50% of visitors tend to cover around 3km or more.

4.35 There was some variation between survey points (see Maps 4 and 5, and Figure 9). The median route length was highest at Northey Island Causeway (5.07km) and lowest at Bradwell Marina (1.24km).

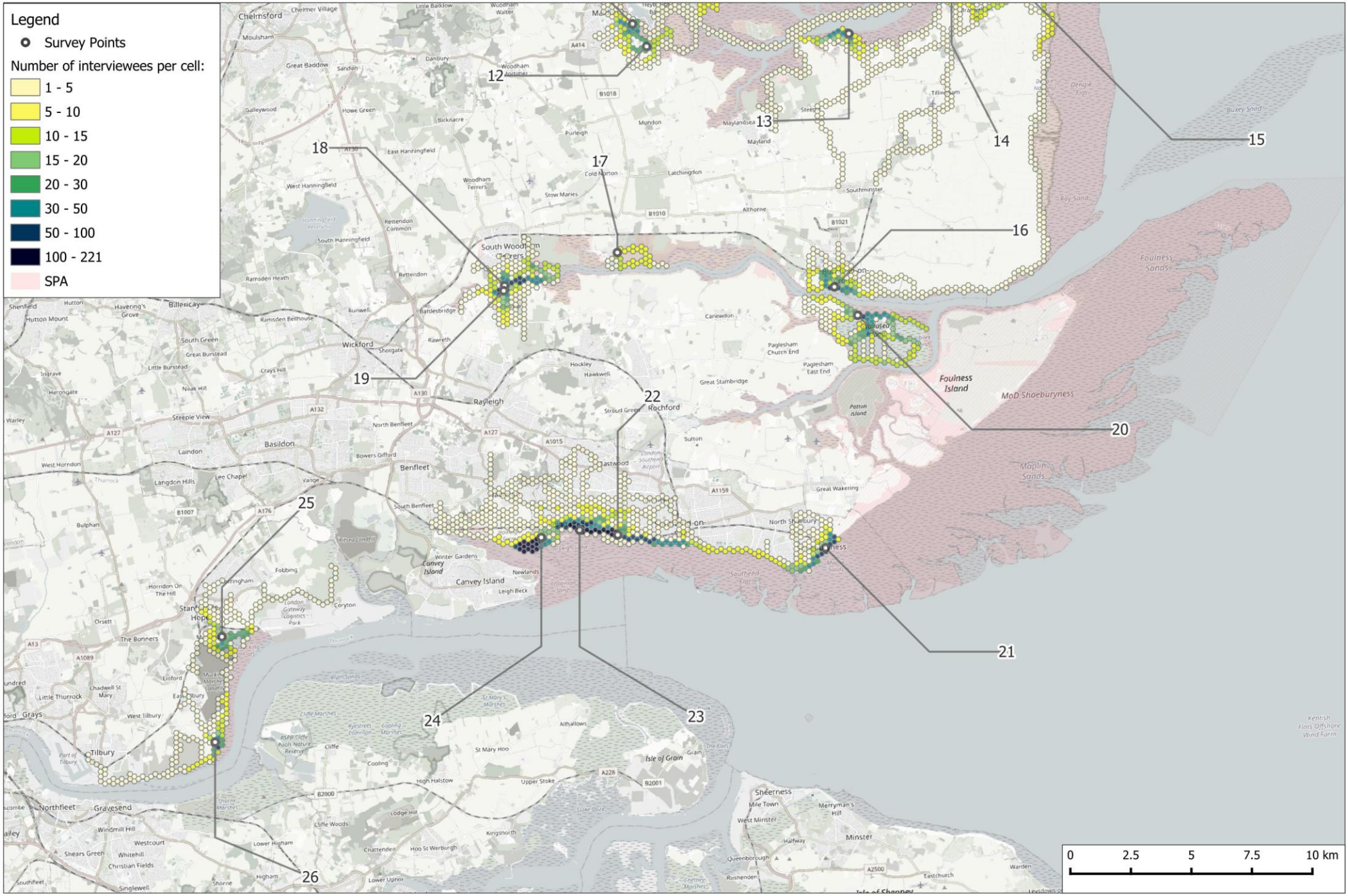
4.36 Values for particular activities (Figure 10) indicate that cyclists/mountain bikers tend to cover the longest distances (13.86km median distance) and while the longest route was taken by someone sailing (34.2km), interviewees who were sailing/accessing their boat tend to cover shorter distances (0.98km median distance).

4.37 Most interviewees (1,115 interviewees, 71%) said that the route they had taken was typical of their usual visit, and of a similar length. A small proportion said that the route taken that day was much shorter than normal (226 interviewees, 14%) or longer than normal (196 interviewees, 13%).

Map 4: Interviewee routes shown using a 100m grid categorised by the number of routes per cell



Map 5: Interviewee routes shown using a 100m grid categorised by the number of routes per cell



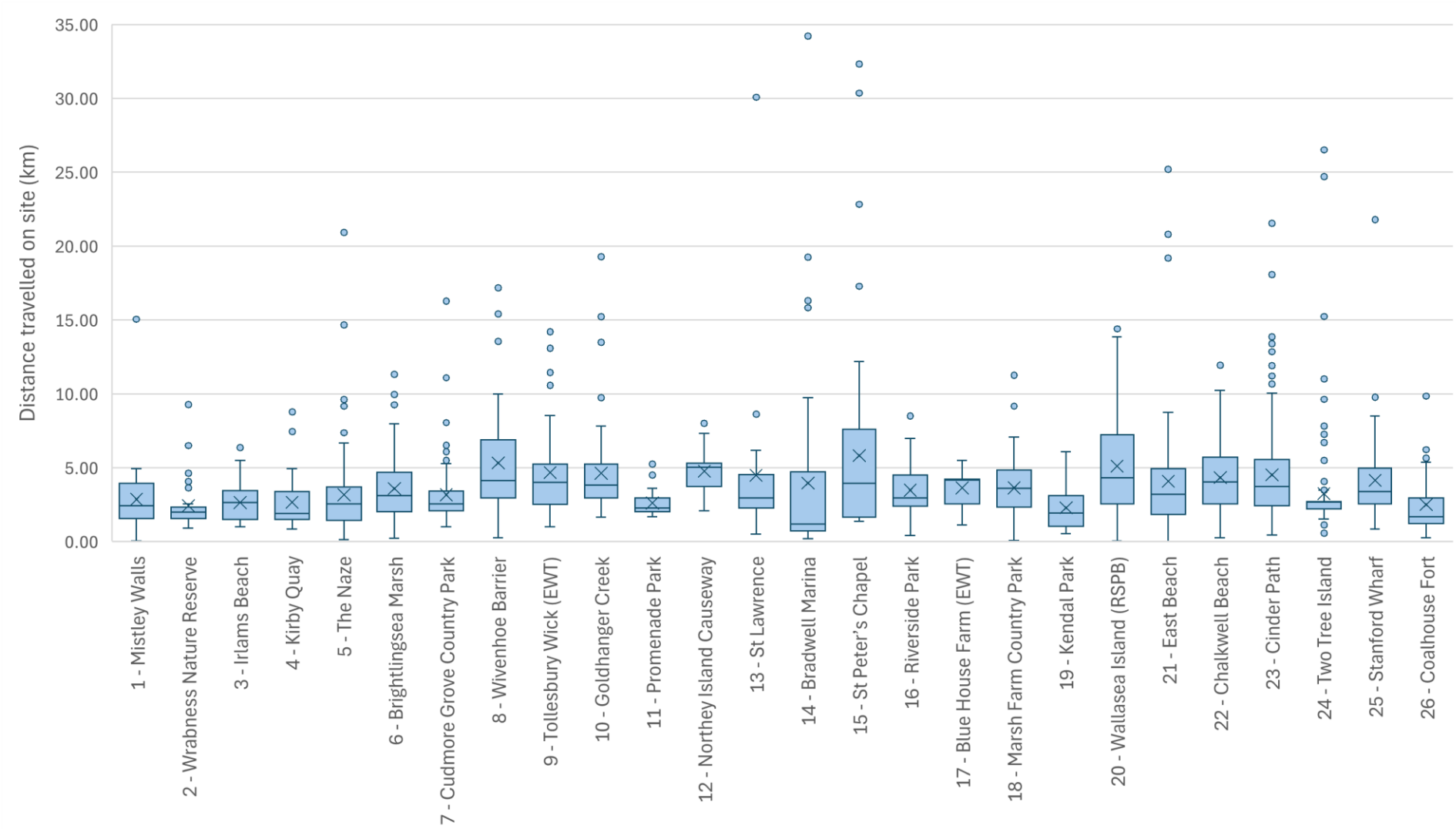


Figure 9: Box and whisker plot showing route length by survey point. Horizontal lines show the median, the 'x' shows the mean, boxes show the interquartile range, and the lines (or whiskers) are the maximum and minimum values. Dots represent any outliers.

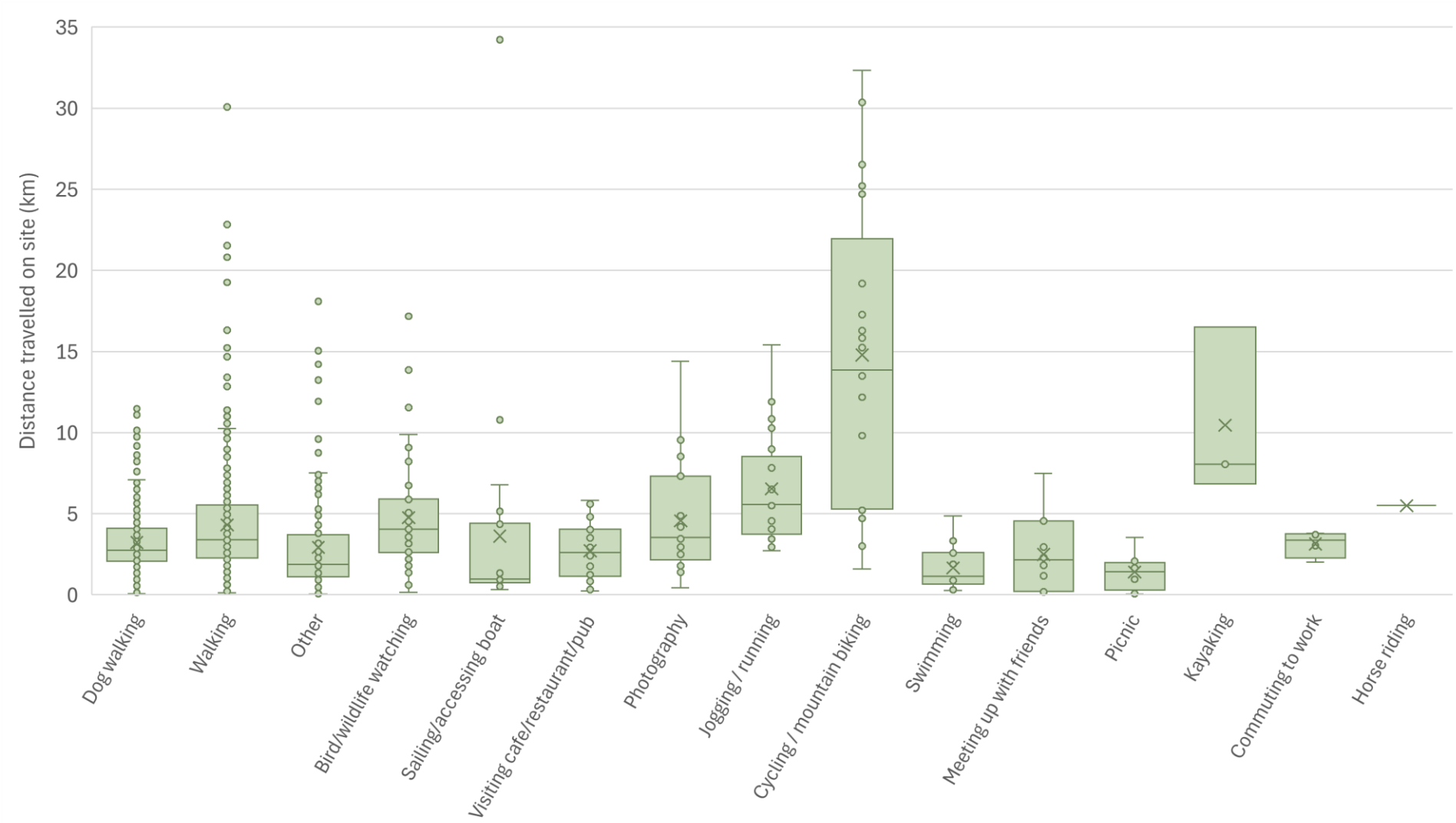


Figure 10: Box and whisker plot showing route length by main activity on site. Horizontal lines show the median, the 'x' shows the mean, boxes show the interquartile range, and the lines (or whiskers) are the maximum and minimum values. Dots represent any outliers.

4.38 When asked if anything had influenced their choice of route, approximately a third (588 interviewees, 34%) said that it was habit or their usual route. A further 15% (264 interviewees) said the weather affected their route (e.g. being too hot, cold, windy etc) followed by a small proportion (166 interviewees, 11%) who said that time was a limiting factor.

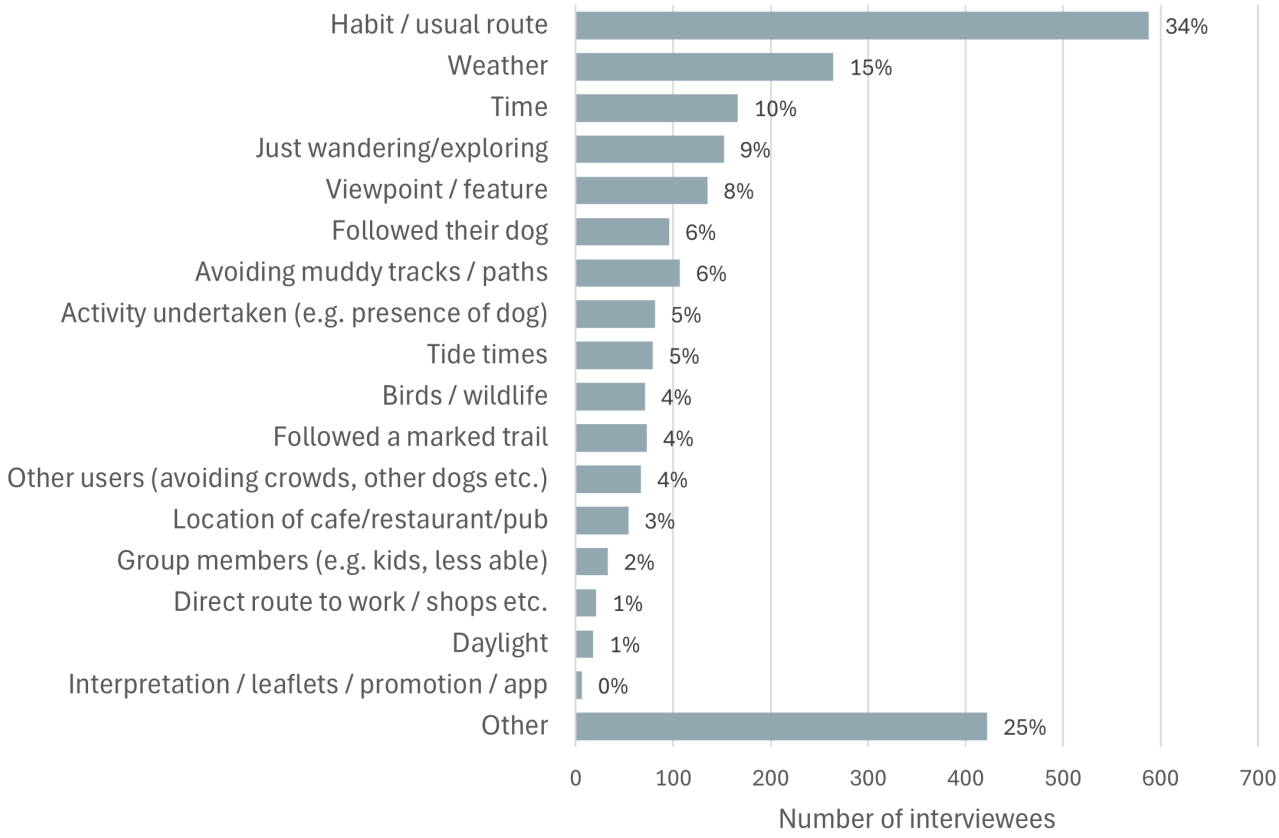


Figure 11: Summary of factors affecting choice of route by interviewees (Q13). Percentages show the total interviewees who gave that response.

4.39 There was limited variation between seasons regarding choice of route with the exception of more interviewees changing their route to avoid muddy paths/ tracks in the winter (102 interviewees, 9%) compared to the summer (5 interviewees, 1%).

Alternative sites (Q14-15)

4.40 When asked to name one location aside from the interview location that they would have visited that day if they had not visited the Essex Coast, 334 interviewees (19%) stated that they would not have gone anywhere else and

a further 108 interviewees (6%) were not sure or didn't know. In total, 1,351 interviewees (75%) named an alternative location.

4.41 The list of alternatives, as given by interviewees, was reviewed and standardised to give a specific site where possible. For example, some responses were clearly the same location but given different names – for example "Belfairs" and "Belfairs Park" or "Belfairs Nature Reserve" and therefore have been grouped as such. For some locations, such as "further along the coast", "seafront" or "local" no specific site was assigned. The standardised locations (given by at least 15 interviewees) are summarised in Figure 12.

4.42 Belfairs (which included the Park, Woods and Nature Reserve) appeared the most popular named alternative site given by interviewees (177 interviewees, 6%) followed by Maldon (77 interviewees, 3%). A total of 340 unique alternative sites were given in responses.

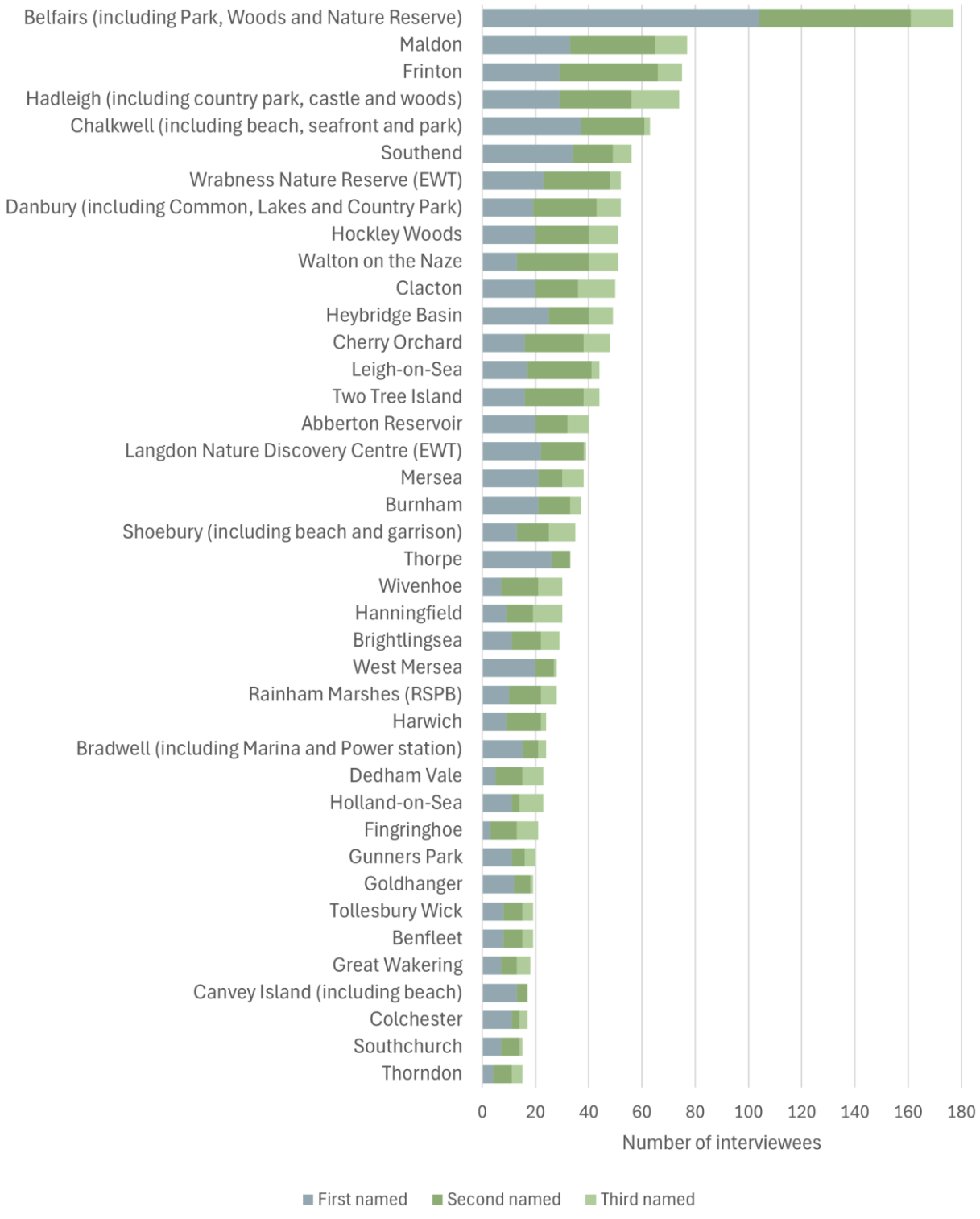


Figure 12: Summary of alternative site names given by interviewee. All locations given by at least 15 interviewees are shown.

Awareness of nature conservation (Q16-17)

4.43 Interviewees were asked whether they knew of species or habitats that were special to the area they visited, as a proxy to gauge visitor's awareness of the nature conservation importance of the site. They could give multiple responses for species or habitats. Responses were coded by the surveyor and just under half of all interviewees (819 interviewees, 46%) could name a species or a habitat (Figure 13). A further 714 (40%) made a general mention of wintering or breeding birds or habitats and 489 interviewees (27%) were not aware of any at all. Some responses (549 interviewees, 31%) were categorised as 'other' reflecting species such as 'squirrel' that aren't necessarily relevant to the coast.

4.44 A relatively high proportion of interviewees at The Naze (45 interviewees, 45% of responses) stated that were not aware of the any species or habitats that were special (Figure 13). In contrast, at Wrabness Nature Reserve, Kirby Quay and Wallasea Island a greater proportion of interviewees were likely to name specific habitats or species special to the area (all over 50%).

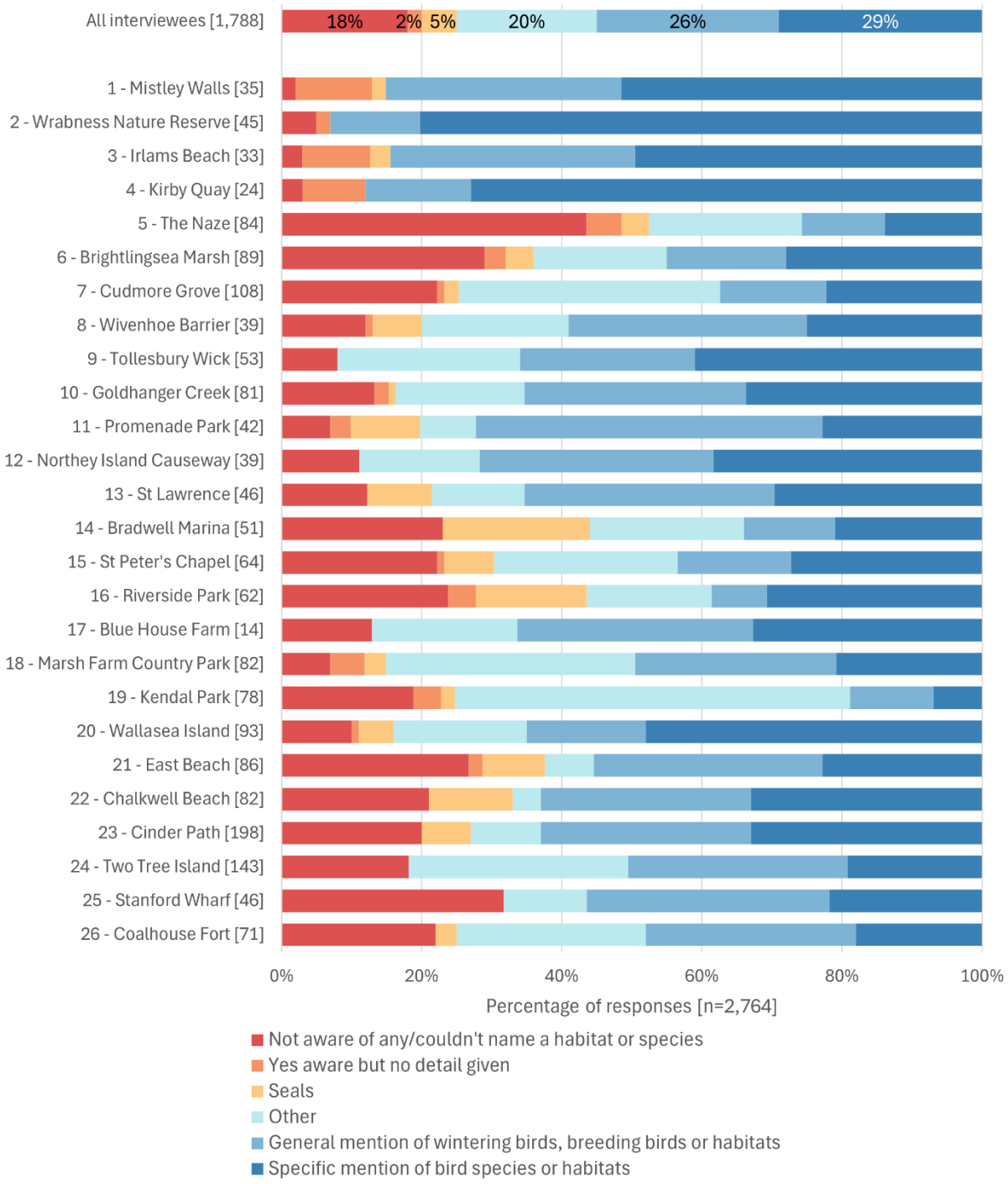


Figure 13: Percentage of interviewees and awareness of habitats or species special to the area (Q16), by survey point. Note that interviewees could give multiple responses and these have been grouped for the purposes of this graph, therefore percentages will not always add up to 100%.

4.45 Overall, almost half of all interviewees were unaware of ways in which the survey location was protected for wildlife (852 interviewees, 48%), see Figure

14. Of those that were aware of protection in place for wildlife, 18% suggested that there was a nature reserve (316 interviewees), 8% (141 interviewees) suggested the survey location was a SSSI and a total of 217 interviewees mentioned the RSPB (7%) or the Wildlife Trusts (6%) in general.

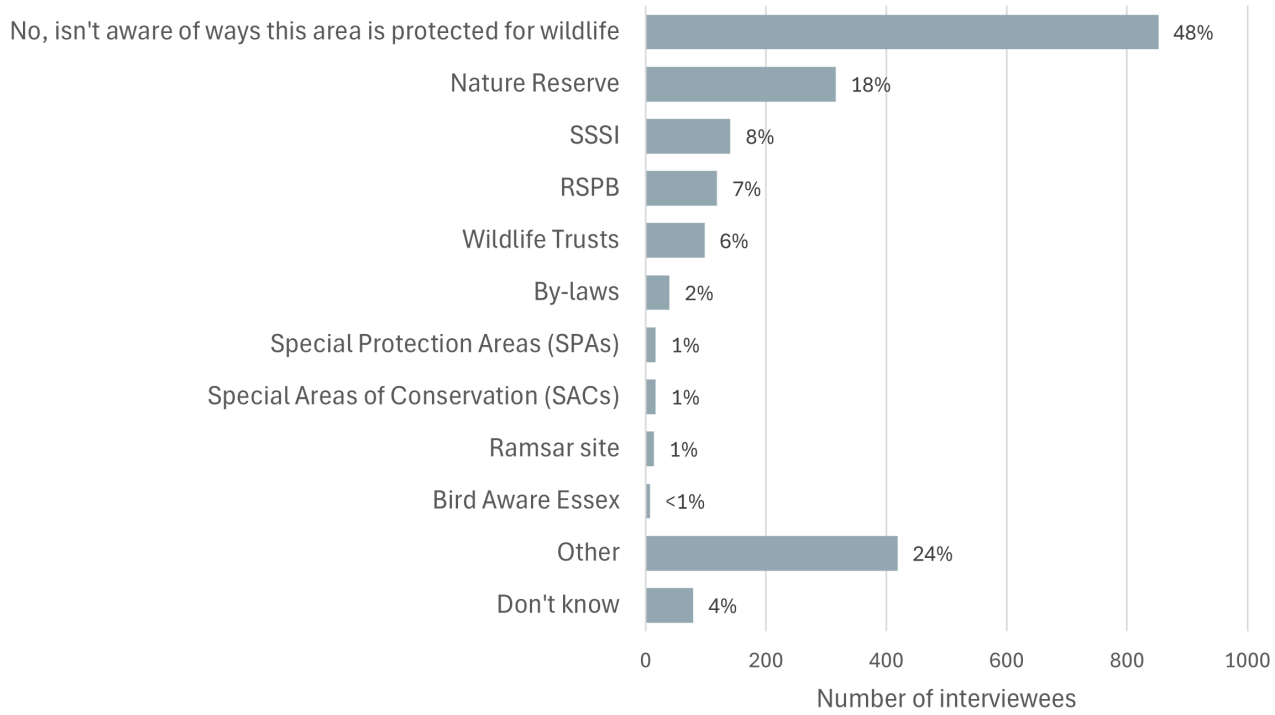


Figure 14: Interviewee responses to ways in which the survey location is protected for wildlife. Interviewees could provide multiple responses and answers were coded by the surveyor.

Site improvements (Q18)

4.46 Almost half of all interviewees (850 interviewees, 48%) stated that there were no changes or improvements they would like to see with respect to how the site (where the interview took place) is managed for access. Of the interviewees that did make a suggestion, 120 interviewees wanted better paths or surfacing on paths (7%), 111 interviewees would like to see less litter or more bins available (6%) and more dog bins available (101 interviewees, 6%), and 5% wanted to see more controls on dogs (such as dogs on lead/restrictions in when dogs can access the beach) or dog fouling (85 interviewees). A further 552 interviewees (31%) made suggestions which fell outside of pre-determined categories within the questionnaire. These included suggestions like 'cutting back vegetation along paths' and 'fixing

access road' and 'less anti-social behaviour'. Some interviewees were complementary and simply commented how 'lovely' or 'clean' the site was.

4.47 Interviewees could provide multiple responses, and as with previous questions, they were not prompted by the surveyor. Responses regarding how the area is managed for access is shown in Figure 15.

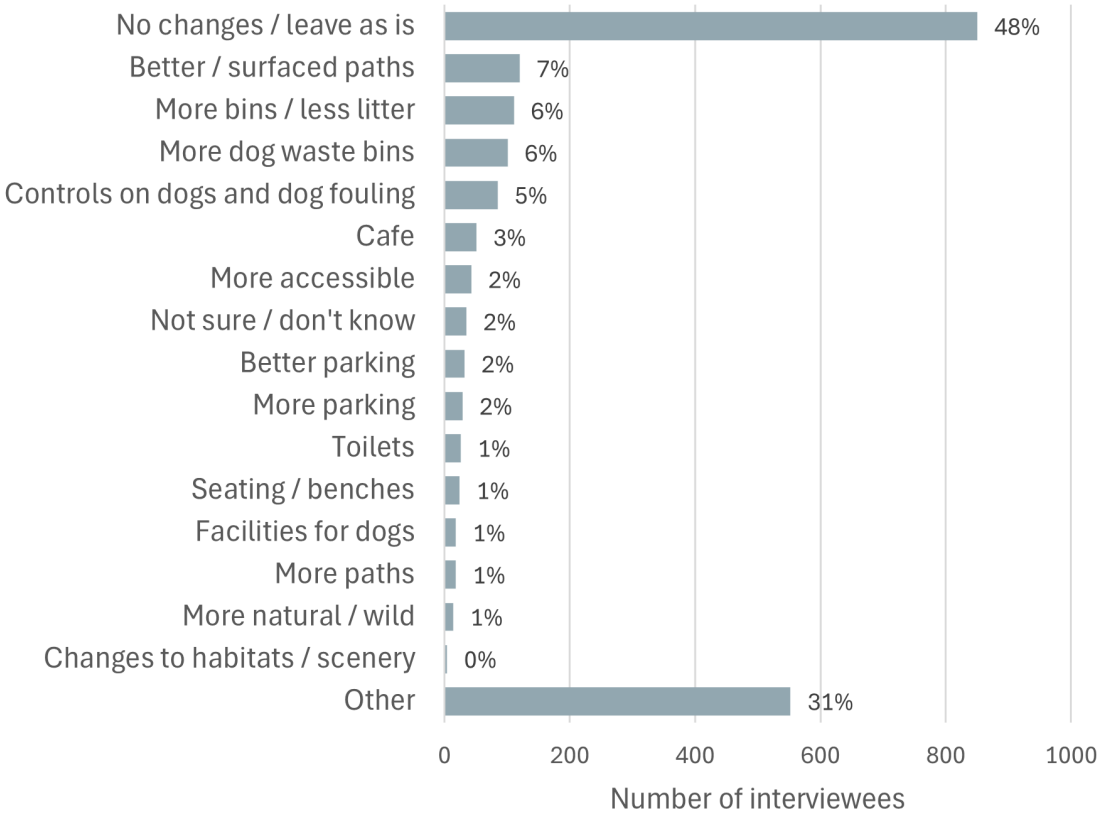


Figure 15: Summary of responses by interviewees regarding improvements in how the area is managed for access. Percentage of interviewees is shown [n=1,784].

New Greenspace (Q19)

4.48 When asked what factors would make the interviewee want to visit a new greenspace or park in their area, 295 interviewees (17%) stated that no changes were relevant, many commenting that a new park or greenspace wouldn't replace walking by the coast. Some said they would visit a new greenspace or park if it was more natural / wild (285 interviewees, 16%), while 226 interviewees (13%) would visit if there was a dog off lead area and (225 interviewees, 13%) if there was a café. A further 26% of interviewees

gave 'other' responses which did not fit the pre-determined categories. Interviewee responses are summarised in Figure 16.

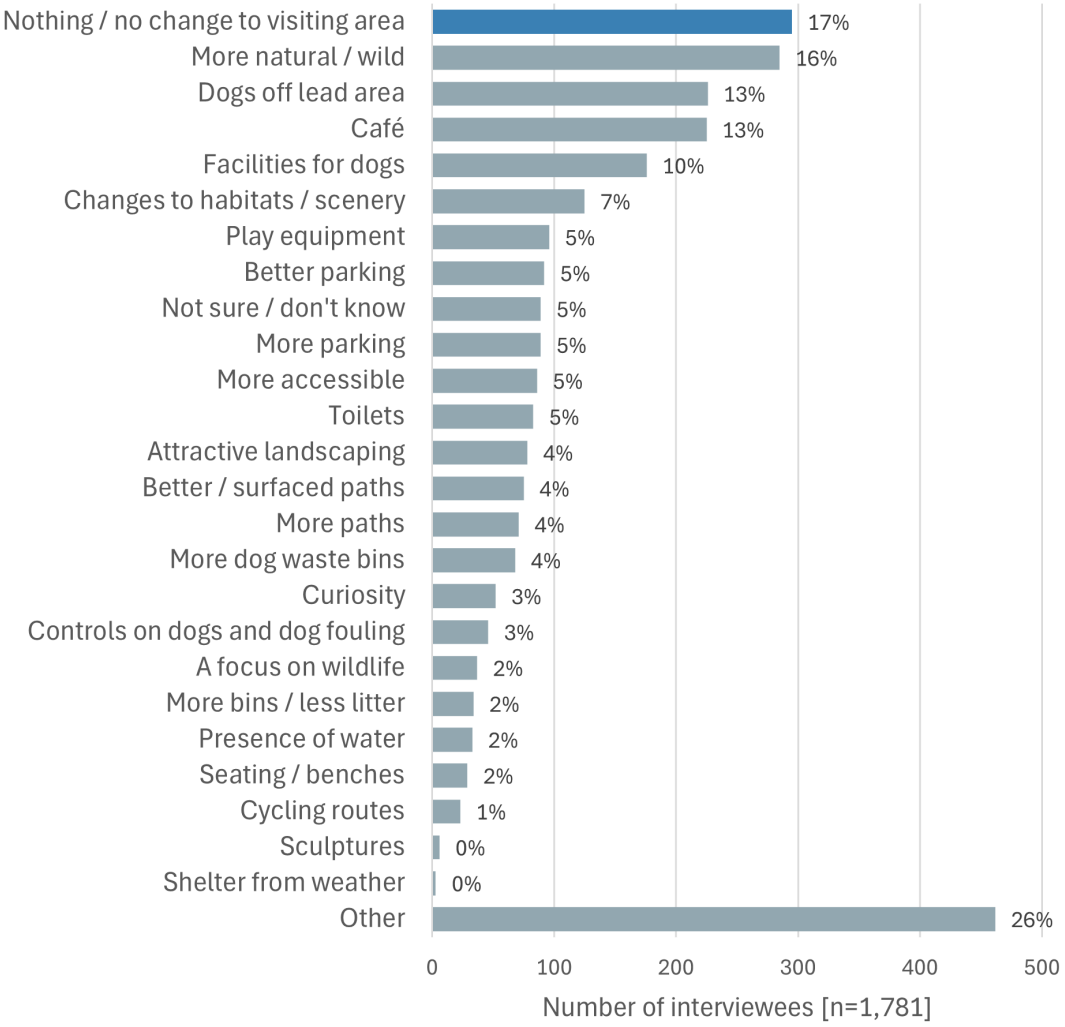


Figure 16: Factors that would affect the interviewees likelihood to visit a new park or greenspace. Interviewees could give more than one response and percentages reflect percentage of interviewees.

Home postcodes of interviewees (Q25)

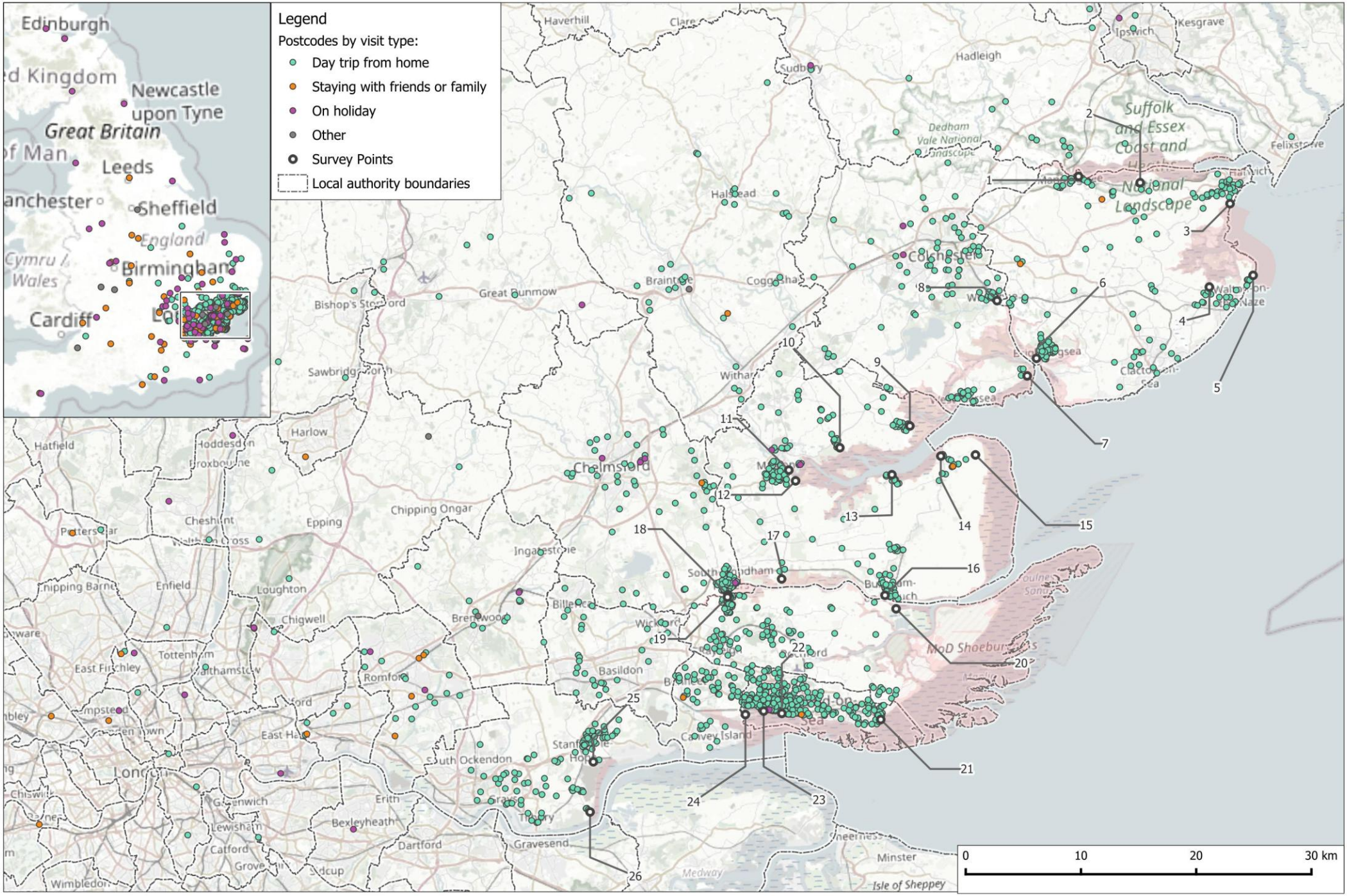
4.49 1,688 interviewees provided a full, valid UK home postcode that could be matched with the national database and therefore the location determined in GIS. These postcodes are shown by visit type in Map 6, by season in Map 7 and 8 and by season in Map 9. For each map it is important to note that postcodes will overlap, particularly near urban areas.

4.50 The majority of interviewees were from within Essex (1,508 interviewees, 89%). Interviewees came from 103 different local authority areas, with the top 15 shown in Table 6. The top three were Southend-on-Sea, Maldon and Tendring, which accounted for just over half of all interviewees. Map 10 shows the proportion of each SPA visited by local authority, relative to the number of interviewees.

Table 6: Number (%) of interviewees by local authority area. Postcode data covered 103 different local authorities, however only those with at least 5 interviewees listed (these data also shown in Map 10).

Local authority	Number of interviewees (%)
Southend-on-Sea	410 (24.3%)
Maldon	278 (16.5%)
Tendring	203 (12.0%)
Rochford	130 (7.7%)
Colchester	117 (6.9%)
Chelmsford	113 (6.7%)
Thurrock	109 (6.5%)
Castle Point	50 (3%)
Basildon	34 (2%)
Braintree	34 (2%)
Havering	20 (1.2%)
Babergh	17 (1%)
Brentwood	15 (0.9%)
Uttlesford	9 (0.5%)
East Hertfordshire	8 (0.5%)
Buckinghamshire	5 (0.3%)
Epping Forest	5 (0.3%)
Barking and Dagenham	5 (0.3%)

Map 6: Interviewee home postcodes categorised by visit type



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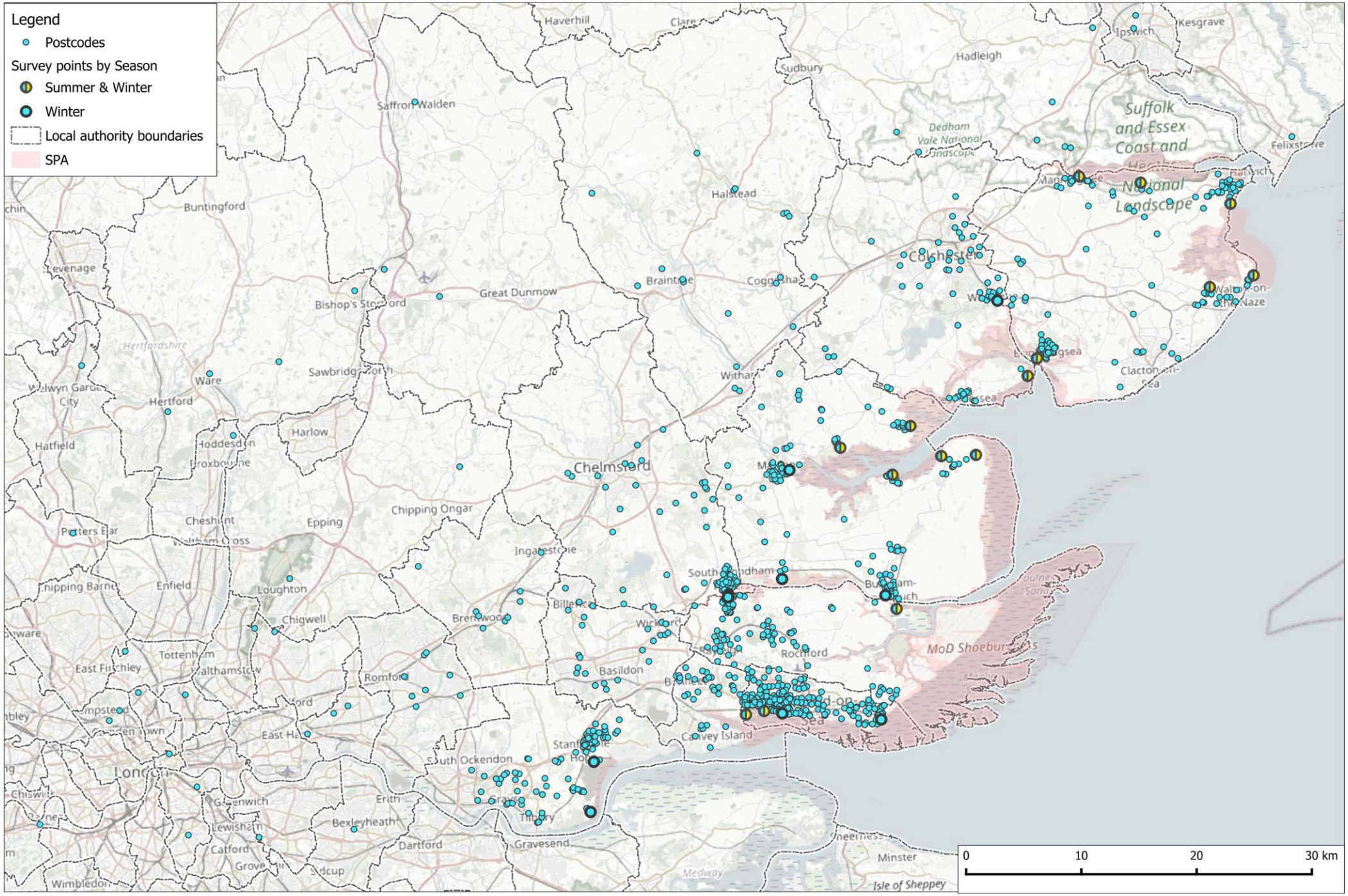
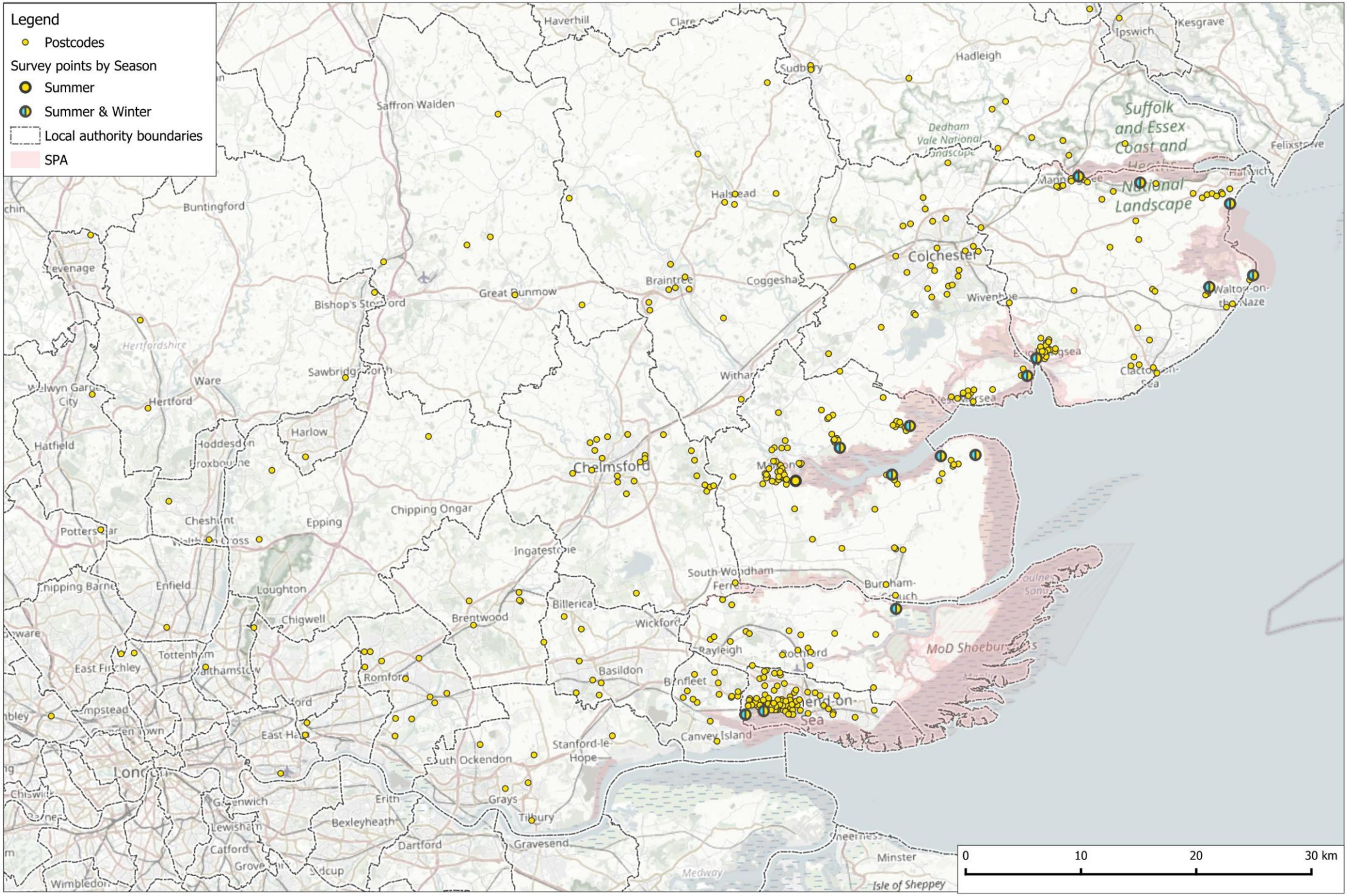
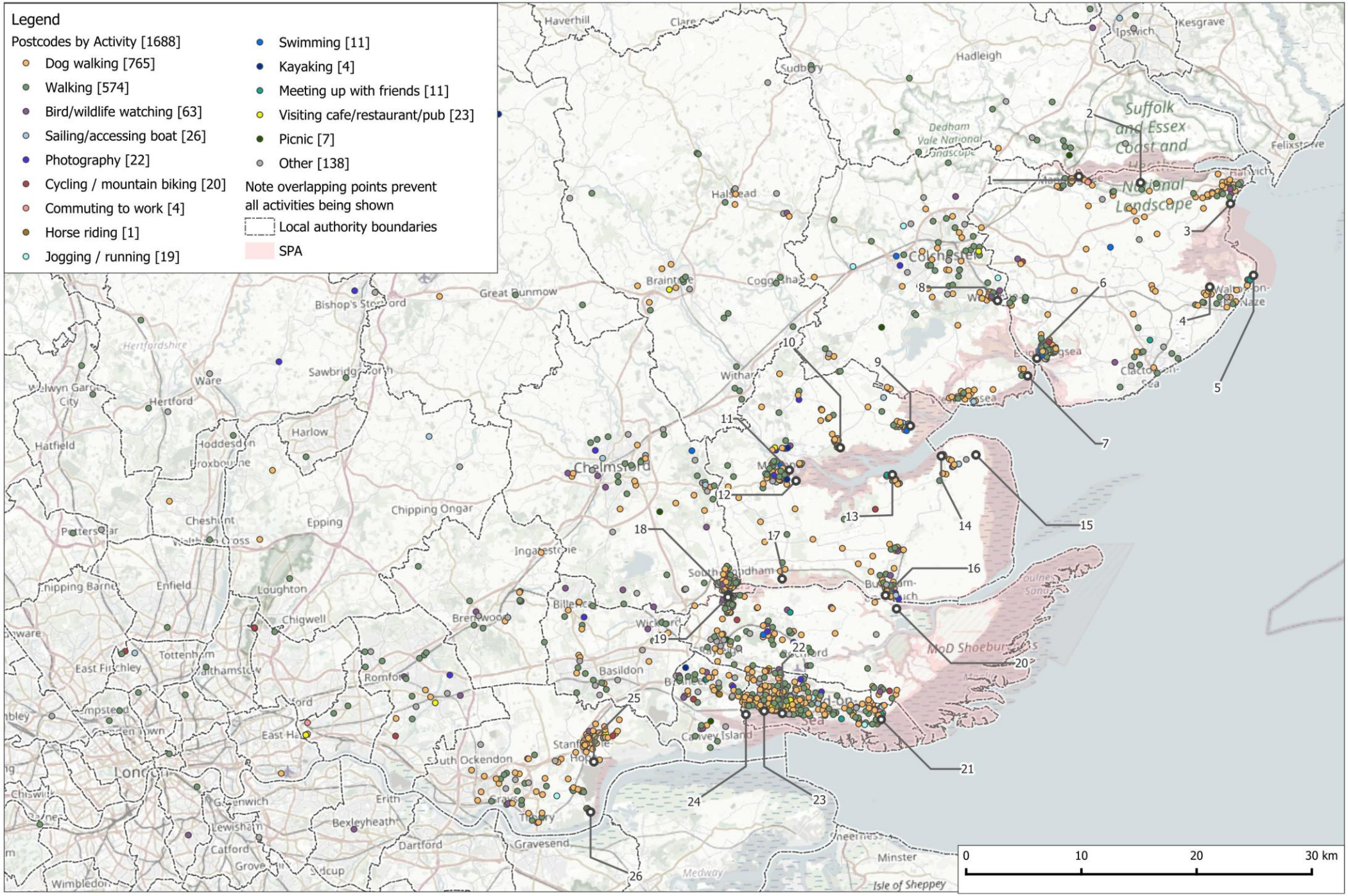
Map 7: Interviewee home postcodes from the winter surveys



Map 8: Interviewee home postcodes from the summer surveys



Map 9: Interviewee home postcodes categorised by visitor activity



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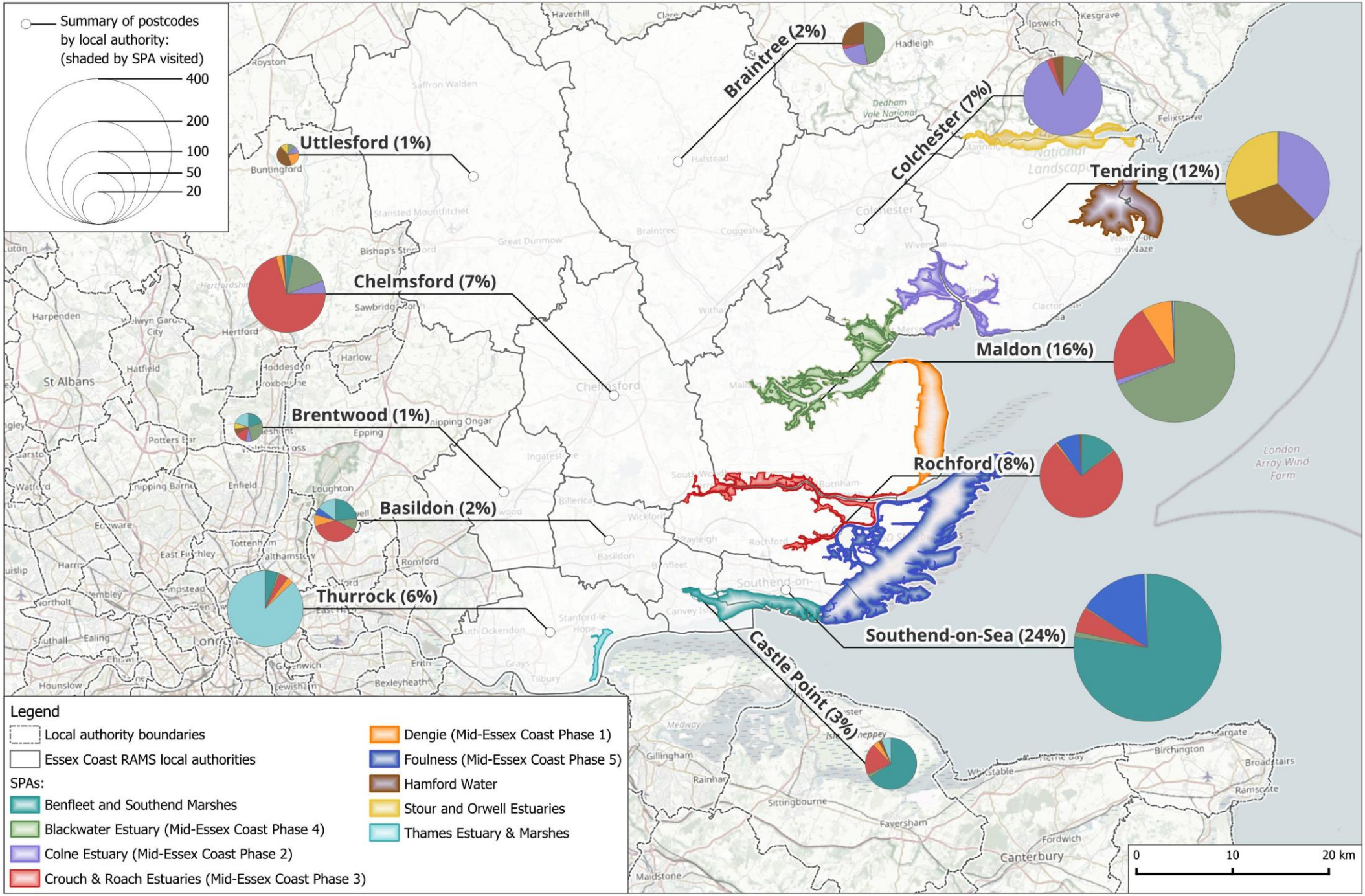
Map 10: Summary of interviewees by Local Authority and SPA



4.51 For each interviewee postcode the linear distance (from the home postcode to the survey point at which the interview took place) was calculated in GIS. Data are summarised for different types of visitors in Table 7 and by survey location in Appendix 3. The distances ranged from 30 m to 570 km, with around half of all interviewees giving home postcodes within just over 3 km of the survey location and around 75% originating within 13 km. Taking just those on a short visit directly from home, around half came from within 3 km and around 75% within 10 km.

Table 7: Summary statistics for the straight-line distance (km) from interviewee home postcodes to survey location, by different categories of interviewee.

Category		N	Mean (±SE)	Range	Median	Q3
All interviewees		1,688	17.32 (±1.06)	0.03 - 571.3	3.2	12.9
Winter		1,165	12.45 (±1.01)	0.09 - 535.6	2.4	9.2
Summer		523	28.18 (±2.52)	0.03 - 571.3	6.7	28.4
Day trip/short visit from home		1,575	9.93 (±0.49)	0.03 - 245.3	2.8	9.9
Main activity (all interviewees)	Dog walking	765	7.86 (±0.86)	0.03 - 343.3	2.1	5.7
	Walking	574	21.48 (±2.13)	0.11 - 535.6	5.0	17.9
	Bird/wildlife watching	63	36.4 (±7.03)	0.19 - 279.6	16.2	36.5
	Sailing / accessing boat	26	34.82 (±9.82)	0.06 - 211.4	13.2	45.4
	Visiting café / restaurant	23	30.6 (±11.2)	0.7 - 184.3	3.7	27.7
	Other	237	29.55 (±3.79)	0.06 - 571.3	9.3	33.2

5. Discussion

Key findings

5.1 Visitor survey results show the Essex Coast is primarily visited by dog walkers and walkers (without a dog), these two activity types accounting for around 80% of interviewees. Visitors tend to visit frequently making on average around 122 visits per year, and visits are typically short (53% visiting for an hour or less than an hour). Almost all interviewees (93%) were visiting directly from their home, and the majority of interviewees (around 75%) lived within 15 km of the survey point. Most interviewees either arrived by car (58%) or on-foot (38%) with only a small number using public transport to access the coast. The coastal sites were typically chosen by interviewees because they were close to home (39%), because of the scenery and variety of views (20%) or because the location was perceived to be good for the dog (11%).

5.2 The awareness of nature conservation, in terms of the interviewee's awareness of habitats or species that were special to the area or in naming protections in place for nature conservation varied. Many interviewees (46%) could specifically name a habitat or species present (although note that these weren't necessarily those the Essex Coast is designated for) or provide a general mention of wintering birds, waders or habitats (40%). Fewer interviewees could name how the area was protected for nature conservation, with almost half stating that they didn't know or were unaware of any protections (48%).

Limitations

5.3 The data provides an overview and a snapshot in time and space. Access patterns will change and can vary markedly according to weather, local conditions and a suite of other factors that the survey design inevitably cannot comprehensively cover. The data are intended to provide a strategic overview rather than comprehensive data from all access points, across all tide conditions and times of year.

5.4 It should be noted that some types of access may be hard to capture in the interviews, for example runners, cyclists and horse riders can be difficult to intercept and may be reluctant to pause to be interviewed. Activities that take place on the water may be highly visible and have particular impacts in

terms of disturbance to birds etc. yet again may be under-represented in the data. For example, someone on a jet ski or a kayak may travel many kilometres and be out on the water for an extended time, but the only likelihood of capturing interview data for such activities is to intercept the user at the launch point or when they land. Where specific information is required from such users, then a targeted survey approach is likely to be necessary.

5.5 We have provided counts of water-based activities made by the surveyors, however these were only possible where the survey point provided a good vantage point across open water. The data therefore are a simple snapshot of water-based activities and numbers are likely to vary markedly according to tide, wind and other weather conditions. A large number of counts are likely to be necessary to get accurate count data where there is lots of variability in the levels and types of use. Again, targeted surveys may be necessary if such information is required.

Differences between seasons

5.6 There were some difference between seasons with those interviewed in the winter visiting more regularly (e.g. 21% visiting daily compared to 13% in the summer), tending to live closer to the survey point (median distance from postcode to survey point of 2.5km in the winter compared to 6.7km in the summer) and making shorter visits (typical duration 75 minutes in the winter and 102 minutes in the summer).

5.7 It is important to note that the above figures are drawn from all the summer data compared to all the winter data. Throughout the report we have presented all the data in this way rather than limit the comparison to the 15 survey points that were surveyed in both seasons. For this reason we have refrained from detailed statistical analysis comparing the summer and winter data as different survey points were covered in each season. For completeness key metrics are summarised in Table 8 below, with the data filtered to the 15 survey points covered in each season and therefore directly comparable. The totals indicate higher visitor numbers in the winter and people coming from further afield in the summer.

Table 8: Summary of key metrics by season, across the 15 comparable survey points.

Metric	Winter 2025	Summer 2025
Total people counted (from tally data)	5,841	5,505
Number of interviews	622	529

Metric	Winter 2025	Summer 2025
Number of interviews (home only)	585	452
Average group size (interview data, home only)	1.9	1.8
% of interviewees visiting on their own	289	208
% dog walking stated main activity (home only)	52%	35%
% walking stated main activity (home only)	28%	38%
% visiting daily (home only)	20%	15%
% visiting at least weekly (home only)	61%	49%
% on first visit (home only)	10%	12%
% arriving by car (home only)	63%	64%
Median route length (km)	3.2	2.9
% stating close to home main reason for site choice (home only)	26%	22%
Median distance survey point to home postcode (km) (home only)	1.8	2.0
75th percentile survey point to home postcode (km) (home only)	6.1	20.1

Differences between survey locations

5.8 The level of busyness and visitor profile varied by survey location and are summarised in Table 9. While locations around Southend-on-Sea were largely the busiest (4,500 people passed the surveyor at Cinder Path and a further 1,988 people at Chalkwell Beach) other busy locations were well known coastal destination sites such as The Naze Tower and Promenade Park. The Naze also provided a location for 'family' type visits, with 33% of minors (under 18s) recorded with groups. Irlams Beach to the north and Kendal Park were also popular with groups with minors. As above, weekends were often busier than weekdays, with the exception of Kirby Quay, Brightlingsea, Cudmore Grove Country Park and Stanford Wharf where visits were more evenly distributed between weekdays and weekends. East Beach was the only location where weekdays were busier than weekends.

5.9 Dog walking as an activity was particularly popular at Two Tree Island and Stanford Wharf, with walking (without a dog) popular also at many locations, although Brightlingsea and Chalkwell Beach in particular. Perhaps as expected, sites that are associated with nature conservation such as Wrabness Nature Reserve, Wallasea Island (RSPB) and Blue House Farm (EWT) were popular with interviewees who were bird/wildlife watching or doing photography. Although only a small proportion of interviewees arrived

on a bike (2% overall), cycling was a popular activity undertaken at St Peters Chapel. The same could be said of those who were sailing or accessing their boat, with Bradwell Marina and Tollesbury Wick locations where this activity was often encountered (both have marinas and/or boat storage).

5.10 Visit frequency varied by survey location, with regular weekly visitors attracted to Riverside Park, St Lawrence and Wivenhoe Barrier and spending less than an hour on site. In contrast, locations such as Wallasea Island and St Peter's Chapel had a small proportion of weekly visitors, but interviewees spent longer at these locations. Interviewees preferred an early morning visit to Stanford Wharf and Marsh Farm Country Park, while Wallasea Island was more often visited in the late afternoon. The longest routes were over 30km and were recorded at Bradwell Marina, St Peters Chapel and St Lawrence. On average across all sites however, half of all routes taken on site were less than 3km (median). At Northey Island half of all routes were often longer than this (5.07 km median value) and often shorter at Bradwell Marina (1.24 km median) and Coalhouse Fort (1.6km median value).

5.11 Awareness of nature conservation at survey locations varied, however the most northern survey locations (Mistley Walls, Wrabness Nature Reserve, Irlams Beach and Kirby Quay) all had less than 3% of interviewees who said that they couldn't name any habitats or species that were special to that area. In contrast, interviewees at The Naze (45%) were the most likely to say they didn't know of any habitats or species. Specific habitats or species were most mentioned at Wallasesa Island, Tollesbury Wick and Blue House Farm as well as the four most northern sites previously mentioned.

5.12 Overall, 75% of all visitors originated from within 12.9 km of the survey point. This increased significantly at The Naze where 75% originated from within 81.5 km, Irlams Beach (77.9 km), St Peter's Chapel (74.2 km) and Bradwell Marina (48.8 km). Each of these sites had a greater proportion of visitors who were not visiting directly from home. When considering those visiting from home only (see Table 13 in Appendix 3), the 75th percentile for each of those four sites decreases to 60.3 km (The Naze), 8.46 km (Irlams Beach), 41.8 km (St Peter's Chapel) and 41.8 km (Bradwell Marina) respectively. More locally used sites (with a shorter 75th percentile distance from home) across all interviewee data appear to be St Lawrence (0.95 km), Kirby Quay (2.7 km), Stanford Wharf (3.14 km), Kendal Park (3.94 km) and Two Tree Island (4.12 km).

Comparison across SPAs

5.13 A summary of the key metrics across the different SPAs is provided in Table 9 below. The number of survey points per SPA is small and as such meaningful comparison at an estuary level is challenging. The Benfleet and Southend Marshes survey points were by far the busiest (89.9 people visiting per hour, more than double any other SPA), likely due to the survey locations proximity to Southend. In contrast, the survey points on the Crouch and Roach Estuaries appear the quietest with approximately 26 people visiting per hour. Walking (without a dog) was popular near the Hamford Water SPA, the Colne Estuary and at Foulness, whilst dog walking appeared the most popular activity undertaken near the Thames Estuary and Marshes (again likely due to its popularity as an activity at Two Tree Island and Coalhouse Fort). People choosing to visit the Stour and Orwell Estuary SPA (survey points all on the south side of the Stour) were doing so because it was close to home (51%), more so than near any other SPA. The Dengie and Hamford Water SPAs appeared to have the largest draw for people visiting, with the data showing 75% of all interviewees originating from beyond 70km from the survey points (and 75% of those who had travelled directly from home living 41-42km away, see Table 9). Benfleet and Southend Marshes in contrast appeared to have the most local draw, with 75% of all visitors originating from within approximately 4.5km.

Comparison to previous surveys

5.14 Previous surveys were undertaken by Colchester City Council on behalf of the North Essex authorities (2010-2013) and by Southend City Council (2018) to form the baseline study underpinning the RAMS strategy. Results from these previous surveys are summarised in the Appendices of the original RAMS (Essex County Council, 2018). A total of 21 survey locations were used of which 15 were replicated in this study, however the survey methodology largely differs and the raw data from the previous surveys are not available. As such, caution should be taken when making direct comparisons. There is some evidence to suggest however, that the Essex Coast is busier in 2025 compared to the original surveys, for example in the number of people or groups passing the survey point per hour and in the increase in people who say they visit the Essex Coast all year round.

Table 9: Summary of selected metrics from the 2025 survey data, compared by season and by SPA. A brief summary is provided of the 2010-2013 North Essex Surveys baseline RAMS data, however, these are only a rough estimate where the raw data wasn't available. Comparisons to the 2018 survey data also were not possible due to the lack of raw data.

Metric	2010 – 2013 North Essex Surveys	2025 Survey Data (All interviewees)	Winter	Summer	Benfleet & Southend Marshes	Blackwater Estuary	Colne Estuary	Crouch & Roach Estuaries	Dengie	Foulness	Hamford Water	Stour & Orwell Estuary	Thames Estuary & Marshes
Number of survey points (winter, summer)	21	26	25	16	3 (3,2)	6 (5,5)	3 (3,2)	5 (5,1)	1 (1,1)	1 (1,0)	3 (3,3)	2 (2,2)	2 (2,0)
Number of interviews	1,521	1,793	1,225	568	425	312	237	329	65	87	141	80	117
Number of people counted (people per hour of survey)	7 groups per hour	28.4	32.1	22.5	89.9	14.6	30	26.1	7.6	38.5	18.7	9.3	28.5
% of interviewees with main activity of dog walking	-	45	50	32	49	46	43	36	29	46	36	48	67
% of interviewees with main activity of walking	107 groups, 7% of total	35%	33%	38%	35	35	39	33	31	38	40	26	28
% visiting daily	-	18%	21%	13%	20	26	16	18	0	22	14	9	16
% visiting all year round	213 groups,	60%	66%	48%	66	65	51	55	31	66	51	74	70

Metric	2010 – 2013 North Essex Surveys	2025 Survey Data (All interviewees)	Winter	Summer	Benfleet & Southend Marshes	Blackwater Estuary	Colne Estuary	Crouch & Roach Estuaries	Dengie	Foulness	Hamford Water	Stour & Orwell Estuary	Thames Estuary & Marshes
	14% of total												
% arriving by car/van	-	59%	58%	62%	58	43	59	62	78	51	65	70	82
% stating close to home as most important reason for site choice	-	39%	43%	29%	41	43	30	45	14	41	28	51	33
Median distance from home postcode to survey point – All interviewees (km)	-	3.2	2.5	6.7	2.26	2.49	5.78	3.76	38.4	2.09	17.68	5.54	3.37
Median distance from home postcode to survey point – Home only (km)	-	2.8	2.4	4.8	2.21	1.64	5.13	3.15	20.5	2	9.98	5.12	3.29
75th percentile distance from home postcode to survey point – All interviewees (km)	-	12.9	9.1	28.4	4.49	17.51	16.79	12.51	74.2	7.66	76.48	7.8	7.86
75th percentile distance from home postcode to survey point – Home only (km)	-	9.9	7.8	17.3	4.4	13.27	12.19	11.42	41.82	6.23	40.64	7.67	7.35
Original Zones of Influence (km):	-	-	-	-	4.3	22	9.7	4.5	20.8	13	8	13	8.1

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Good morning/afternoon. I am conducting a visitor survey on behalf of some local authorities in Essex, to find out how people use this area for recreation. Can you spare me a few minutes to take part in the survey please?

Q0
- ◯ **Interviewee happy to take part in the survey (this will commence the survey)**
- ◯ **Person refuses to be interviewed (this option will allow you to log details about the refusal)**

Q0a Where a refusal... **Log reason for refusal, if given or can be assertained from behaviour**
- ◯ Already approached or participated in the survey
- ◯ Language issue
- ◯ Not prepared to stop (cyclist, jogger etc)
- ◯ Weather (e.g. rain, heat)
- ◯ In a hurry / no time
- ◯ Not interested
- ◯ Uncertain / not clear
- ◯ Other (give details):

Further details

Q0b Where a refusal... **Activity of person who refused to be interviewed.** *Based on your observation log the activity of the person who refused:*
- ◯ Dog walking
- ◯ Walking without a dog
- ◯ Jogging
- ◯ Cycling
- ◯ Commuting
- ◯ Other

Further details

INTERVIEW

Q1 **Firstly I'd like to ask about the type of visit you are making today.**

- ◯ **Are you on a day trip/short visit and have travelled directly from your home today**... *if no*
- ◯ **Are you on a short trip/short visit & staying away from home with friends or family** ... *if no*
- ◯ **Are you staying away from home, e.g. static caravan, mobile home or on holiday**
- ◯ If none of the above, **How would you describe your visit today?**

Further details

Q2 **What is the main activity you are undertaking today?** *Tick closest answer. Do not prompt. Single response only. Record any additional activities on the next page (Q3).*

- ◯ Dog walking
- ◯ Walking
- ◯ Jogging / running
- ◯ Cycling / mountain biking
- ◯ Bird/wildlife watching
- ◯ Photography
- ◯ Meeting up with friends
- ◯ Visiting cafe/restaurant/pub
- ◯ Picnic
- ◯ Horse riding
- ◯ Commuting to work
- ◯ Swimming
- ◯ Paddleboarding
- ◯ Kayaking
- ◯ Sailing/accessing boat
- ◯ Other, please detail:

Further details

Q3 **Are there any other activities that you (or members of your group) are doing whilst you are here today?** *Tick all that apply. Do not prompt. Leave blank if not applicable.*

- [ ] Dog walking
- [ ] Walking
- [ ] Jogging / running
- [ ] Cycling / mountain biking
- [ ] Bird/wildlife watching
- [ ] Photography
- [ ] Meeting up with friends
- [ ] Visiting cafe/restaurant/pub
- [ ] Picnic
- [ ] Horse riding
- [ ] Commuting to work
- [ ] Swimming
- [ ] Paddleboarding
- [ ] Kayaking
- [ ] Sailing/accessing boat
- [ ] Other, please detail:

Further details

Q4 **Over the past year, roughly how often have you visited this location?** *Tick closest answer, single response only. Only prompt if interviewee struggles.*

- ○ Daily
- ○ Most days (180+ visits)
- ○ 1 to 3 times a week (40-180 visits)
- ○ 2 to 3 times per month (15-40 visits)
- ○ Once a month (6-15 visits)
- ○ Less than once a month (2-5 visits)
- ○ First visit / haven't visited in past year
- ○ Don't know
- ○ Other, please detail

Further details:

Q5 **How long have you spent / will you spend here today?** *Single response only. Do not prompt.*

- ◯ Less than 30 minutes
- ◯ Between 30 minutes and 1 hour
- ◯ 1-2 hours
- ◯ 2-3 hours
- ◯ 3-4 hours
- ◯ 4 hours +
- ◯ Don't know

Further details:

Q6 **Do you tend to visit this location at a certain time of day?** *Tick closest answers. Multiple answers ok. Do not prompt.*

- ☐ Early morning (before 9am)
- ☐ Late morning (between 9am and 12pm)
- ☐ Early afternoon (between 12pm and 2pm)
- ☐ Late afternoon (between 2pm and 4pm)
- ☐ Evening (after 4pm)
- ☐ Varies / Don't know
- ☐ First visit

Q7 **Do you tend to visit this location more at a particular time of year for [***insert given activity***]?** *Multiple answers ok. Do not prompt.*

- ☐ Spring (Mar-May)
- ☐ Summer (Jun-Aug)
- ☐ Autumn (Sept-Nov)
- ☐ Winter (Dec-Feb)
- ☐ Equally all year
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ First visit

Q8 **How did you get here today?** *If necessary prompt with:* **What forms of transport did you use?** *Multiple response possible - e.g. train and bicycle.*

- ☐ Car / van
- ☐ On foot
- ☐ Bicycle
- ☐ Bus
- ☐ Train
- ☐ Ferry
- ☐ Motorbike
- ☐ Other, please detail

Further details:

Q9 **Why did you choose to visit this specific location today, rather than somewhere else?** *Tick all responses given. Do not prompt, tick closest answers.*

- [ ] Don't know / others in party chose
- [ ] Close to home
- [ ] No need to use car
- [ ] Quick / easy travel route
- [ ] Good / easy parking
- [ ] Particular facilities
- [ ] Refreshments / cafe / pub
- [ ] Choice of routes
- [ ] Away from roads/traffic
- [ ] Feels safe here
- [ ] Not many people
- [ ] Scenery / variety of views
- [ ] Rural feel / wild landscape
- [ ] Particular wildlife interest (e.g. birds, plants)
- [ ] Particular historic or cultural interest
- [ ] Habit / familiarity
- [ ] Good for dog / dog enjoys it
- [ ] Ability to let dog off lead
- [ ] Appropriate place for activity
- [ ] Tide times
- [ ] Suitability of area in given weather conditions
- [ ] For a change / variety
- [ ] Other, please detail

Further details:

Q10 **Which of those reasons would you say had the most influence over your choice of location to visit today?** *Single choice, tick their main reason only. List is based on their answers to Q9.*

- ◯ Don't know / others in party chose
- ◯ Close to home
- ◯ No need to use car
- ◯ Quick / easy travel route
- ◯ Good / easy parking
- ◯ Particular facilities
- ◯ Refreshments / cafe / pub
- ◯ Choice of routes
- ◯ Away from roads/traffic
- ◯ Feels safe here
- ◯ Not many people
- ◯ Scenery / variety of views
- ◯ Rural feel / wild landscape
- ◯ Particular wildlife interest (e.g. birds, plants)
- ◯ Particular historic or cultural interest
- ◯ Habit / familiarity
- ◯ Good for dog / dog enjoys it
- ◯ Ability to let dog off lead
- ◯ Appropriate place for activity
- ◯ Tide
- ◯ Suitability of area in given weather conditions
- ◯ For a change / variety
- ◯ Other reason (Further details:)

Q11 **Now I'd like to ask you about your route today. Looking at the area shown on this map, can you show me where you started your visit today, the finish point and your route please.** *Probe to ensure route is accurately documented. Use **P** to indicate where the visitor parked (if applicable), **E** to indicate where they started and **X** to indicate where they finished. Mark the route with a solid line for the route already taken and a dotted line for the expected or remaining route, with arrows to indicate the direction.*

Enter the map reference below, or write 'no map' if no route map completed.

Q12 Question only asked of those not visiting for first time **Is / was your route today the normal length when you visit here for [***insert given activity***]?** *Tick closest answer, do not prompt. Single response only.*

- ◯ Yes, normal
- ◯ Much longer than normal
- ◯ Much shorter than normal
- ◯ Not sure / no typical visit
- ◯ First visit

Q13 **What, if anything, influenced your choice of route here today?** *Tick closest answers, do not prompt. Multiple responses ok.*

- [ ] Weather
- [ ] Daylight
- [ ] Time
- [ ] Habit / usual route
- [ ] Tide times
- [ ] Other users (avoiding crowds, other dogs etc.)
- [ ] Group members (e.g. kids, less able)
- [ ] Avoiding muddy tracks / paths
- [ ] Followed a marked trail
- [ ] Location of cafe/restaurant/pub
- [ ] Activity undertaken (e.g. presence of dog)
- [ ] Birds / wildlife
- [ ] Followed their dog
- [ ] Interpretation / leaflets / promotion / app
- [ ] Viewpoint / feature
- [ ] Direct route to work / shops etc.
- [ ] Just wandering/exploring
- [ ] Other, please detail

Further details:

Q14 **Which single location would you have visited today for [given activity] if you could not have visited here?** *Do not prompt. Ask for spelling if necessary.*

- ◯ Nowhere / wouldn't have visited anywhere
- ◯ Not sure / don't know
- ◯ Alternative site:

Q15 **Please could you tell me the name of two other locations that you also visit for [*given activity*]?** *Do not prompt. Ask for spellings if necessary.*

2nd site name:

3rd site name:

Further details:

Q16 **Can you name any species (plants or animals) or habitats (where they live) that are special to this area?** *Do not prompt. Tick all that apply.*

- ☐ Not aware of any / couldn't name any species or habitats
- ☐ Yes aware but no detail given
- ☐ General mention of wintering waders / waterbirds / shorebirds / wildfowl (e.g. Geese, but not a specific species)
- ☐ General mention of breeding birds
- ☐ General mention of habitats without specifically naming any
- ☐ Specific bird species mentioned (e.g. Brent Goose, Curlew etc)
- ☐ Seals
- ☐ Specific habitat named (e.g. estuary, mudflats, saltmarsh)
- ☐ Other, give further details

Q17 **Are you aware of any ways in which this area is protected for wildlife?** *Do not prompt. Tick all that apply.*

- [ ] No, isn't aware of ways this area is protected for wildlife
- [ ] Don't know
- [ ] SSSI
- [ ] Nature Reserve
- [ ] Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- [ ] Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
- [ ] Ramsar site
- [ ] By-laws
- [ ] Mentions Wildlife Trusts
- [ ] Mentions RSPB
- [ ] Mentions Bird Aware Essex
- [ ] Other

Further details:

Q18 **Are there any changes you would like to see here with regards to how this area is managed for access?** *Do not give options or prompt. Tick closest option(s).*

- [ ] No changes / leave as is
- [ ] More parking
- [ ] Better parking
- [ ] More paths
- [ ] Better / surfaced paths
- [ ] More bins / less litter
- [ ] More dog waste bins
- [ ] Controls on dogs and dog fouling
- [ ] Facilities for dogs (e.g. training areas, washing facilities)
- [ ] More accessible
- [ ] Seating / benches
- [ ] Toilets
- [ ] Cafe
- [ ] Changes to habitats / scenery
- [ ] More natural / wild
- [ ] Not sure / don't know
- [ ] Other, please detail below

Further details:

Q19 **What would make you want to visit a new park or greenspace if created in the area?**
Do not give options or prompt. Tick closest option(s).

- [ ] Nothing / no change to visiting area
- [ ] More parking
- [ ] Better parking
- [ ] More paths
- [ ] Better / surfaced paths
- [ ] More bins / less litter
- [ ] More dog waste bins
- [ ] Controls on dogs and dog fouling
- [ ] Dogs of lead area
- [ ] Facilities for dogs (e.g. training areas, washing facilities)
- [ ] More accessible
- [ ] Seating / benches
- [ ] Toilets
- [ ] Cafe
- [ ] Play equipment
- [ ] Cycling routes
- [ ] Attractive landscaping
- [ ] Sculptures
- [ ] Shelter from weather
- [ ] Changes to habitats / scenery
- [ ] More natural / wild
- [ ] Not sure / don't know
- [ ] Other, please detail below

Further details:

Q20 **Do you have any further comments or general feedback about your visit and access to this area?**

Q21 **Finally, to identify how far people have travelled, what is your full home postcode?** *This is an important piece of information, please make every effort to record correctly. If necessary, reassure them that we don't want their full address, and it will only be used to work out where people are coming from.*

Q22 *If visitor is unable or refuses to give postcode:* **What is the name of the town or area where you live?**

Q23 *If visitor is on holiday ask:* **Which town / area are you staying in?**

Q24 *If visitor is on holiday ask:* **What type of accommodation are you staying in?** *Do not prompt. Tick closest*

- ◯ Hotel
- ◯ B&B
- ◯ Self-catering
- ◯ Glamping
- ◯ Camping
- ◯ Other:

Further details (other accommodation type):

That is the end. Thank you very much indeed for your time.

Appendix 2: Summary of survey locations

Survey sessions were each 2hrs, with four sessions completed on a survey day. Target hours reflect the intended level of survey effort and actual hours the level of survey work actually completed. Tide state was not recorded during sessions, however we recognise that this may also influence visitor behaviour as well as the weather.

Table 10: Summary of the weather conditions during the survey period.

Survey location	Winter	Summer	Sessions with rainfall: Winter	Average temp (°C) : Winter	Sessions with rainfall: Summer	Average temp (°C) : Summer	Total sessions with rainfall	Target hours	Actual hours	Notes
1 - Mistley Walls	✓	✓	0	6.5	0	19.8	0	32	32	
2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve	✓	✓	0	4.3	0	20.3	1	32	32	
3 - Irlams Beach	✓	✓	0	5.4	1	19.1	1	32	32	
4 - Kirby Quay	✓	✓	0	8.4	2	19.5	2	32	29.75	Thunderstorms & one session curtailed early due to torrential rain. Other session abandoned completely due to Met Office Yellow weather warnings for storms. (Both in summer).
5 - The Naze	✓	✓	2	5.3	0	20.5	2	32	32	
6 - Brightlingsea Marsh	✓	✓	1	8.1	0	21.6	2	32	32	
7 - Cudmore Grove Country Park	✓	✓	0	7.3	2	21.3	3	32	31	Car park delayed opening, session started at 8am (winter).
8 - Wivenhoe Barrier	✓	✗	2	6.6	-	-	2	16	16	

Survey location	Winter	Summer	Sessions with rainfall: Winter	Average temp (°C) : Winter	Sessions with rainfall: Summer	Average temp (°C) : Summer	Total sessions with rainfall	Target hours	Actual hours	Notes
9 - Tollesbury Wick (EWT)	✓	✓	0	4.6	4	19.4	4	32	32	
10 - Goldhanger Creek	✓	✓	0	4.5	0	19.8	0	32	32	
11 - Promenade Park	✓	×	0	3.5	-		3	16	16	
12 - Northey Island Causeway	×	✓	-		2	22.1	2	16	16	
13 - St Lawrence	✓	✓	1	4.8	4	17.3	5	32	32	
14 - Bradwell Marina	✓	✓	0	-	0	-	4	32	32	
15 - St Peter's Chapel	✓	✓	1	-	1	-	1	32	32	
16 - Riverside Park	✓	×	2	-	-	-	2	16	16	
17 - Blue House Farm (EWT)	✓	×	0	-	-	-	6	16	16	
18 - Marsh Farm Country Park	✓	×	2	5.6	-	-	0	16	16	
19 - Kendal Park	✓	×	0	10.3	-	-	3	16	16	
20 - Wallasea Island (RSPB)	✓	✓	0	5.5	3	18.7	3	32	31.5	Frost on sensors inhibited gate sensors working for the first half hour of a session (winter).
21 - East Beach	✓	×	2	5.4	-	-	0	16	16	
22 - Chalkwell Beach	✓	×	0	8.5	-	-	2	16	16	
23 - Cinder Path	✓	✓	0	5.0	1	18.5	1	32	32	

Survey location	Winter	Summer	Sessions with rainfall: Winter	Average temp (°C) : Winter	Sessions with rainfall: Summer	Average temp (°C) : Summer	Total sessions with rainfall	Target hours	Actual hours	Notes
24 - Two Tree Island	✓	✓	1	11.3	0	24.6	0	32	32	
25 - Stanford Wharf	✓	×	0	12.0	-	-	1	16	16	
26 - Coalhouse Fort	✓	×	14	4.9	-	-	0	16	16	

Appendix 3: Supporting data tables

Water activities by survey location

Table 11: Activities observed by surveyors by survey location. A 'tick' indicates when the activity has been observed (numbers unspecified). Note that for boats, rowing/sailing/motorised craft have been ticked where specified, with boats 'ticked' to cover any instances where the type of boat observed was unspecified.

Survey location:	Boats	Rowing	Sailing	Motorised boats	Jet skis	Kayaks	Paddleboarding	Swimming	Wind or kite surfing	Metal detecting	Bait digging	Fishing	Flying model aircraft/drones
1 - Mistley Walls	✓	✓				✓							
2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve													
3 - Irlams Beach													
4 - Kirby Quay													
5 - The Naze	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓					
6 - Brightlingsea Marsh	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓				
7 - Cudmore Grove Country Park	✓		✓		✓								
8 - Wivenhoe Barrier	✓	✓	✓										
9 - Tollesbury Wick (EWT)	✓												
10 - Goldhanger Creek													
11 - Promenade Park	✓			✓		✓	✓						
12 - Northey Island Causeway	✓											✓	
13 - St Lawrence	✓		✓		✓							✓	

Survey location:	Boats	Rowing	Sailing	Motorised boats	Jet skis	Kayaks	Paddleboarding	Swimming	Wind or kite surfing	Metal detecting	Bait digging	Fishing	Flying model aircraft/drones
14 - Bradwell Marina	✓												
15 - St Peter's Chapel													
16 - Riverside Park													
17 - Blue House Farm (EWT)													
18 - Marsh Farm Country Park	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓							
19 - Kendal Park							✓						
20 - Wallasea Island (RSPB)													
21 - East Beach													
22 - Chalkwell Beach	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓		
23 - Cinder Path	✓		✓				✓	✓		✓			
24 - Two Tree Island	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓						✓
25 - Stanford Wharf													
26 - Coalhouse Fort	✓		✓										✓

Main activity by survey location

Table 12: Main activity of interviewees by survey location and by season, with percentage (per location or season) given in parentheses.

Survey location:	Dog walking	Walking	Bird/wildlife watching	Sailing/accessing boat	Visiting cafe/restaurant/pub	Photography	Jogging / running	Cycling / mountain biking	Swimming	Meeting up with friends	Picnic	Kayaking	Commuting to work	Horse riding	Other
1 - Mistley Walls	12 (34%)	11 (31%)	4 (11%)	0 (0%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	2 (6%)
2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve	26 (58%)	10 (22%)	8 (18%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
3 - Irlams Beach	15 (45%)	11 (33%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (9%)
4 - Kirby Quay	16 (67%)	6 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)
5 - The Naze	20 (24%)	39 (46%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	16 (19%)
6 - Brightlingsea Marsh	32 (36%)	43 (48%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	5 (6%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (7%)
7 - Cudmore Grove	53 (49%)	36 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	4 (4%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11 (10%)
8 - Wivenhoe Barrier	18 (46%)	13 (33%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (8%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
9 - Tollesbury Wick	18 (34%)	19 (36%)	1 (2%)	10 (19%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)

Survey location:	Dog walking	Walking	Bird/wildlife watching	Sailing/accessing boat	Visiting cafe/restaurant/pub	Photography	Jogging / running	Cycling / mountain biking	Swimming	Meeting up with friends	Picnic	Kayaking	Commuting to work	Horse riding	Other
10 - Goldhanger Creek	44 (54%)	33 (41%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
11 - Promenade Park	28 (67%)	14 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
12 - Northey Island Causeway	16 (41%)	18 (46%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)
13 - St Lawrence	28 (61%)	14 (30%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)
14 - Bradwell Marina	10 (20%)	10 (20%)	0 (0%)	12 (24%)	3 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	13 (25%)
15 - St Peter's Chapel	19 (29%)	20 (31%)	2 (3%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	17 (26%)
16 - Riverside Park	26 (42%)	28 (45%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (6%)
17 - Blue House Farm	5 (36%)	2 (14%)	5 (36%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
18 - Marsh Farm Country Park	39 (48%)	26 (32%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11 (13%)
19 - Kendal Park	37 (47%)	25 (32%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	10 (13%)
20 - Wallasea Island	11 (12%)	27 (29%)	33 (35%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (16%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (8%)

Survey location:	Dog walking	Walking	Bird/wildlife watching	Sailing/accessing boat	Visiting cafe/restaurant/pub	Photography	Jogging / running	Cycling / mountain biking	Swimming	Meeting up with friends	Picnic	Kayaking	Commuting to work	Horse riding	Other
21 - East Beach	40 (46%)	33 (38%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	4 (5%)
22 - Chalkwell Beach	30 (37%)	43 (52%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (5%)
23 - Cinder Path	64 (32%)	88 (44%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	11 (6%)	1 (1%)	4 (2%)	1 (1%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	26 (13%)
24 - Two Tree Island	115 (80%)	17 (12%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	3 (2%)
25 - Stanford Wharf	36 (78%)	9 (20%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
26 - Coalhouse Fort	42 (59%)	24 (34%)	1 (1%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Winter	616 (50%)	401 (33%)	55 (4%)	6 (0%)	12 (1%)	22 (2%)	11 (1%)	10 (1%)	3 (0%)	7 (1%)	2 (0%)	1 (0%)	2 (0%)	0 (0%)	77 (6%)
Summer	184 (32%)	218 (38%)	11 (2%)	22 (4%)	13 (3%)	1 (0%)	10 (2%)	11 (2%)	10 (2%)	4 (1%)	7 (1%)	3 (1%)	2 (0%)	1 (0%)	71 (13%)
Grand Total	**800 (45%)**	**619 (35%)**	**66 (4%)**	**28 (2%)**	**25 (1%)**	**23 (1%)**	**21 (1%)**	**21 (1%)**	**13 (1%)**	**11 (1%)**	**9 (1%)**	**4 (0%)**	**4 (0%)**	**1 (0%)**	**148 (8%)**

Distance from home postcode to survey location

Table 13: Summary of distance to home postcodes by survey location. Note that shading reflects the relevant SPA, with colours to match those seen in Map 1.

Category	N	Mean (±SE)	Range	Median	Q3	N	Mean (±SE)	Range	Median	Q3
	All interviewees					Visiting directly from home only				
Stour & Orwell Estuary	**75**	**11.29 (±2.77)**	**0.17 - 153.62**	**5.54**	**7.8**	**72**	**7.14 (±1.28)**	**0.17 - 64.89**	**5.12**	**7.67**
1 - Mistley Walls	31	13.83 (±6.16)	0.29 - 153.62	1.98	6.34	28	3.42 (±0.9)	0.29 - 16.43	1.31	4.36
2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve	44	9.5 (±1.94)	0.17 - 64.89	6.76	7.82	44	9.5 (±1.94)	0.17 - 64.89	6.76	7.82
Hamford Water	**129**	**45.42 (±5.27)**	**0.03 - 366.07**	**17.68**	**76.48**	**105**	**24.94 (±3.2)**	**0.03 - 150.79**	**9.98**	**40.64**
3 - Irlams Beach	28	45.4 (±15.3)	0.6 - 366.1	5.2	77.9	20	5.69 (±1.75)	0.58 - 29.92	1.75	8.46
4 - Kirby Quay	22	18.2 (±11.6)	0 - 212.8	0.6	2.7	20	1.64 (±0.62)	0.03 - 11.8	0.58	1.67
5 - The Naze	79	52.99 (±5.66)	0.5 - 233.33	41.06	81.47	65	38.04 (±4.42)	0.5 - 150.79	29.03	60.32
Colne Estuary	**224**	**21.53 (±3.53)**	**0.26 - 456.96**	**5.78**	**16.79**	**197**	**9.3 (±0.93)**	**0.26 - 81.15**	**5.13**	**12.19**
6 - Brightlingsea Marsh	82	7.14 (±1.48)	0.53 - 63.18	1.4	6.68	79	5.64 (±1.16)	0.53 - 59.99	1.38	5.37
7 - Cudmore Grove Country Park	104	39.32 (±7.1)	0.52 - 456.96	13.54	33.76	82	16.16 (±1.65)	0.52 - 81.15	11.78	19.79
8 - Wivenhoe Barrier	38	3.93 (±2.19)	0.26 - 84.1	0.7	2.78	36	1.7 (±0.35)	0.26 - 7.34	0.69	1.82
Blackwater Estuary	**284**	**17.6 (±2.66)**	**0.06 - 535.56**	**2.49**	**17.51**	**260**	**10.68 (±1.29)**	**0.06 - 165.94**	**1.64**	**13.27**
9 - Tollesbury Wick (EWT)	46	23.9 (±12.5)	0.2 - 535.6	1.2	14.3	41	7.11 (±2.58)	0.19 - 96.47	1.16	3.99
10 - Goldhanger Creek	77	12.59 (±3.68)	0.28 - 236.55	3.8	11.6	73	6.67 (±1.02)	0.28 - 45.45	3.64	9.9
11 - Promenade Park	40	8.79 (±1.64)	0.4 - 46.54	5.07	15.75	39	7.83 (±1.36)	0.4 - 29.53	5	15.08
12 - Northey Island Causeway	35	18.47 (±6.27)	0.8 - 165.94	2.03	20.06	35	18.47 (±6.27)	0.8 - 165.94	2.03	20.06
13 - St Lawrence	38	6.5 (±2.73)	0.15 - 84.85	0.49	0.95	35	2.9 (±1.13)	0.15 - 24.5	0.47	0.86

Category	N	Mean (±SE)	Range	Median	Q3	N	Mean (±SE)	Range	Median	Q3
14 - Bradwell Marina	48	35.07 (±5.92)	0.06 - 211.38	27.36	48.79	37	25.55 (±4.76)	0.06 - 116.74	14.47	41.81
Dengie	**61**	**66 (±12.5)**	**0.9 - 571.3**	**38.4**	**74.2**	**46**	**33.14 (±6.3)**	**0.92 - 245.32**	**20.5**	**41.82**
15 - St Peter's Chapel	61	66 (±12.5)	0.9 - 571.3	38.4	74.2	46	33.14 (±6.3)	0.92 - 245.32	20.5	41.82
Crouch & Roach	**310**	**14.41 (±2.16)**	**0.17 - 333.92**	**3.76**	**12.51**	**300**	**10 (±1.19)**	**0.17 - 176.48**	**3.15**	**11.42**
16 - Riverside Park	54	14.52 (±5.85)	0.29 - 252.18	1.11	5.58	51	9.28 (±3.93)	0.29 - 176.48	1.11	4.02
17 - Blue House Farm (EWT)	14	8.95 (±2.36)	0.88 - 36.46	8.63	10.35	14	8.95 (±2.36)	0.88 - 36.46	8.63	10.35
18 - Marsh Farm Country Park	77	3.37 (±0.48)	0.45 - 15.44	1.25	4.19	77	3.37 (±0.48)	0.45 - 15.44	1.25	4.19
19 - Kendal Park	78	5.07 (±2.24)	0.17 - 172.92	0.91	3.94	77	4.76 (±2.25)	0.17 - 172.92	0.9	3.86
20 - Wallasea Island (RSPB)	87	33.35 (±6.01)	1.97 - 333.92	14.94	29.81	81	21.92 (±2.47)	1.97 - 154.85	13.18	27.89
Foulness	**82**	**8.79 (±2.17)**	**0.2 - 106.47**	**2.09**	**7.66**	**78**	**5.83 (±1.43)**	**0.2 - 97.76**	**2**	**6.23**
21 - East Beach	82	8.79 (±2.17)	0.2 - 106.47	2.09	7.66	78	5.83 (±1.43)	0.2 - 97.76	2	6.23
Benfleet & Southend Marshes	**408**	**6.4 (±0.78)**	**0.11 - 184.28**	**2.26**	**4.49**	**404**	**5.53 (±0.56)**	**0.11 - 112.07**	**2.21**	**4.4**
22 - Chalkwell Beach	80	5.37 (±1.16)	0.11 - 51.2	1.56	6.05	80	5.37 (±1.16)	0.11 - 51.2	1.56	6.05
23 - Cinder Path	189	7.54 (±1.37)	0.16 - 184.28	2.02	4.78	186	6.35 (±0.97)	0.16 - 112.07	1.96	4.72
24 - Two Tree Island	139	5.42 (±1.17)	0.85 - 133.81	2.78	4.12	138	4.49 (±0.71)	0.85 - 69.92	2.78	4.08
Thames Estuary & Marshes	**115**	**7.78 (±1.58)**	**0.25 - 173.13**	**3.37**	**7.86**	**113**	**6.06 (±0.58)**	**0.25 - 26.58**	**3.29**	**7.35**
25 - Stanford Wharf	46	7.41 (±3.76)	0.52 - 173.13	2.28	3.14	45	3.73 (±0.79)	0.52 - 26.58	2.26	3.04
26 - Coalhouse Fort	69	8.02 (±0.86)	0.25 - 36.62	6.08	9.79	68	7.6 (±0.76)	0.25 - 26.04	6.07	9.72

75th percentile distance from home postcode to survey location by season

Table 14: Summary of 75th percentile distance to survey location and estuaries overall, compared between seasons.

Survey location	N	Winter Q3	Summer Q3	Combined Q3	N	Winter Q3	Summer Q3	Combined Q3
	All interviewees				Visiting directly from home only			
Stour & Orwell Estuary	75	7.82	6.86	7.8	72	7.76	6.75	7.67
1 - Mistley Walls	31	11.05	5.03	6.34	28	6.34	3.51	4.36
2 - Wrabness Nature Reserve	44	7.83	12.1	7.82	44	7.83	12.1	7.82
Hamford Water	129	41.08	83.73	76.48	105	19.92	62.53	40.64
3 - Irlams Beach	28	36.6	87.2	77.9	20	5.03	13.86	8.46
4 - Kirby Quay	22	2	42.4	2.7	20	1.98	2.85	1.67
5 - The Naze	79	55.49	89.25	81.47	65	41.06	77.26	60.32
Colne Estuary	224	9.07	33.41	16.79	197	7.37	20.66	12.19
6 - Brightlingsea Marsh	82	4.96	14.97	6.68	79	3.91	10.07	5.37
7 - Cudmore Grove Country Park	104	16.79	37.2	33.76	82	13.3	26.94	19.79
8 - Wivenhoe Barrier	38	2.78	-	2.78	36	1.82	-	1.82
Blackwater Estuary	284	11.43	22.16	17.51	260	8.22	17.56	13.27
9 - Tollesbury Wick (EWT)	46	3	17.47	14.3	41	1.4	12.35	3.99
10 - Goldhanger Creek	77	10.21	13.15	11.6	73	8.3	11.98	9.9
11 - Promenade Park	40	15.75	-	15.75	39	15.08	-	15.08
12 - Northey Island Causeway	35	-	20.06	20.06	35	-	20.06	20.06
13 - St Lawrence	38	2.07	0.83	0.95	35	0.86	0.83	0.86
14 - Bradwell Marina	48	42.49	49.32	48.79	37	30.95	47.56	41.81
Dengie	61	69.4	78.2	74.2	46	39.26	48.3	41.82
15 - St Peter's Chapel	61	69.4	78.2	74.2	46	39.26	48.3	41.82
Crouch & Roach	310	11.47	18.8	12.51	300	10.97	13.18	11.42
16 - Riverside Park	54	5.58	-	5.58	51	4.02	-	4.02
17 - Blue House Farm (EWT)	14	10.35	-	10.35	14	10.35	-	10.35
18 - Marsh Farm Country Park	77	4.19	-	4.19	77	4.19	-	4.19

Survey location	N	Winter Q3	Summer Q3	Combined Q3	N	Winter Q3	Summer Q3	Combined Q3
19 - Kendal Park	78	3.94	-	3.94	77	3.86	-	3.86
20 - Wallasea Island (RSPB)	87	32.21	18.8	29.81	81	30.07	13.18	27.89
Foulness	82	7.66	-	7.66	78	6.23	-	6.23
21 - East Beach	82	7.66	-	7.66	78	6.23	-	6.23
Benfleet & Southend Marshes	408	3.86	5.73	4.49	404	3.86	5	4.4
22 - Chalkwell Beach	80	6.05	-	6.05	80	6.05	-	6.05
23 - Cinder Path	189	4.24	7.3	4.78	186	4.36	6.69	4.72
24 - Two Tree Island	139	3.6	4.66	4.12	138	3.6	4.59	4.08
Thames Estuary & Marshes	115	7.86	-	7.86	113	7.35	-	7.35
25 - Stanford Wharf	46	3.14	-	3.14	45	3.04	-	3.04
26 - Coalhouse Fort	69	9.79	-	9.79	68	9.72	-	9.72

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 *This applies to net new dwellings and excludes like for like replacement dwellings*	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) *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
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.

Appendix 4: RAMS Tariff calculation table

Total cost mitigation package in perpetuity:	£ 72,594,500.00
Approximate number of houses requiring mitigation:	148,309
Cost per dwelling before adjustment:	£ 489.48
Adjustments	
Approx. RAMS Monies held by accountable body:	£ 1,813,464.31
Interest Accrued to date for in perpetuity:	£ 229,952.00
Adjusted cost of all mitigation in perpetuity:	£ 70,551,083.69
Approximate number of houses requiring mitigation:	148,309
Proposed RAMS Tariff per new dwelling or qualifying development (rounded to the nearest £):	**£476.00**