

Fish Migration Vision

Essex Combined Catchment Partnership

Re-opening the Essex catchment for migratory fish, restoring healthy, connected and climate resilient rivers

Over many centuries, we have shaped and harnessed our rivers to meet our needs. From water mills and navigation to land drainage and water supply, we have modified our river channels and built structures that hold back or divert water. We have grown to realise that these structures can prevent fish and eels from moving freely in our rivers. It is important for species to reproduce and migrate to maintain healthy populations that are not isolated.

We want to work with others to remove redundant structures, modify those that need to stay in place, or bypass them to open up the migration highways throughout Essex.

Reimagining Our Rivers – key messages

- **Restoring our rivers from straight channels to a more natural river corridor.** For many, a manmade channel is seen as the ‘real river’ but actually a ‘stream’ or ‘back channel’ is often the real river. If we took the straight walls of the channel away it would revert to what it was. *We will build in solutions to re-connect the real river as it meanders and restore it to a state as natural as possible.*
- **As natural as possible is best** – not only because the river functions better and looks nicer, but because using natural solutions often means very little maintenance. *We will raise funds for the right solution, not just the cheapest.*
- **Natural water flows for resilience in wet and dry weather.** A natural river corridor requires little water management. In the face of a climate crisis, Essex will experience periods of dry weather and drinking water will be a priority. *We will restore or enhance rivers to function in wet and dry weather.*
- **Understanding our rivers.** Rivers do not flood, they follow a seasonal ebb and flow: in winter swelling to fill the river and floodplain, and in summer shrinking to a smaller river channel. *We will communicate with the wider community to improve the understanding of how a river runs.*
- **Partnership work is key.** No one organisation can achieve what needs to be done alone. Partnerships can pull in expertise and funds from across Government, charity and private sources and deliver more with less. *We will work in partnership to deliver fully connected rivers.*
- **Working with communities.** Change can be challenging, particularly for those who live nearby. *We will work with the community to build their understanding and needs into any plans.*

Why now?

Essex is set to see a large amount of development over next 10-20 years. To achieve sustainability in the face of the climate crisis, it is vital to work with natural processes and ensure that multiple benefits to the environment and to society are realised through economic development. The Catchment Partnership Plan is the key document for this and is linked into local initiatives, conservation strategies and County level development and regeneration plans.

The Fish Migration Roadmap provides an excellent opportunity to highlight where Net Gain can be achieved and maximised by developers and Local Authorities through barrier passage and habitat restoration work. With Green Finance becoming more accessible, the Vision can help to accelerate river restoration and climate resilience through blended private and public financial partnerships, including Net Gain and Flood Asset Management investments.

Why is it important?

- **People:** access to nature, health and wellbeing, education and recreation
- **Environment:** connected land and seascape for healthy wildlife populations and climate resilience
- **Economy:** working with natural solutions brings the best return on investment in the long term and makes better places for work and life