

Green Essex Strategy: Consultation Report

Research and Citizen Insight

Organisations & Community Groups

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Introduction

Essex County Council have produced a draft Green Essex Strategy that raises the importance of developing quality green infrastructure and green spaces across Essex to accompany planned growth in the county over the next twenty years.

Green infrastructure is made up of natural and semi-natural assets and habitat types, of green and blue spaces, and of other environmental features that maintain and enhance ecosystem services. It provides multi-functional benefits integral to the health and wellbeing of our communities and to the ecology and economy of the county.

Green infrastructure for this strategy includes the following assets:

- Parks and gardens
- Natural and semi-natural open spaces
- Ancient Woodlands
- Reservoirs, lakes and ponds
- Coastal features
- Waterways (watercourses)
- Greenways (Public Rights of Way, footpaths, cycleways and tracks, byways, bridleways)
- Outdoor Sport Facilities (Sport pitches)
- Open spaces and premises (Educational premises open space and sport pitches)
- Cemeteries and churchyards
- Allotments, community gardens and city farms
- Agricultural land and meadows
- Public realm/civic spaces (urban greening - urban and street trees, road verges, green walls, sustainable urban drainage and natural flood management)

The strategy aims to take a positive approach to enhance, protect and create an integrated network of high-quality green infrastructure in Essex. Just as importantly, it will help ensure funding opportunities are maximised in the delivery of multi-functional natural assets which will provide a range of benefits, including

- helping mitigate the impact of climate change
- improving public parks, play areas and other green spaces,
- the development of greenways (e.g. Public Rights of Way)
- enabling active travel and recreational opportunities
- contributing to the attractiveness of a place to attract new businesses to the area.

The Strategy has been prepared by an Essex County Council cross directorate Steering group and a range of key stakeholders have been engaged at various stages to inform the initial consultation version.

In order to gain the views and feedback of Essex residents about the strategy a questionnaire was developed. This questionnaire was open to all Essex residents for a period of 9 weeks.

The consultation was open to all Essex residents, Organisations, Community groups and users of green spaces within Essex. This report considers the responses from organisations and community groups.

Key Conclusions

Of the 39 organisations and community groups that responded to the Green Essex survey, 28 (71.79%) advised that easier access would increase green space use. Feeling safe is an important factor in using green spaces more, with 20 (51.28%) organisations and community groups selecting this option.

Of the 39 respondents, 35 (89.74%) agreed with both the vision and the objectives of the Green Essex Strategy.

When asked for the 2 main pressures or threats to Green Infrastructure in Essex, 23 (58.97%) selected fragmentation of habitats due to increases in housing and transport development and 22 (56.41%) selected development growth.

When asked for the most important proposal within the PROTECT objective, 12 (30.76%) people believe supporting the recognition and appropriate designation of new green infrastructure to be the best course of action.

Of the 39 respondents, 15 (38.46%) believe that better management of green infrastructure to benefit locally native species, focussing on recognised nature conservation priorities would best meet the IMPROVE objective.

When asked which proposal is most important within the CREATE objective, 14 (35.89%) believe using planning policy to secure multi-functional green spaces within and beyond development site boundaries through the application of biodiversity net gain, biodiversity off-setting and the creation of compensation habitat to be the best proposal.

Of the 39 respondents, 18 (46.15%) believe restoring and promoting the Essex promoted paths (The Forest Way, The St Peter's Way, The Essex Way, The Roach Valley Way, The Stour Valley Path, The Thames Estuary Path, The Fitch Way, The Saffron Way, Black Water Rail Trail, John Ray Walk, Emerging Coast Path) would be the best proposal to meet the CONNECTIVITY objective.

When asked which proposal is most important within the INCLUSIVITY objective, 18 (46.15%) believe exploring environmental therapies and challenges aimed at developing young people to be the most important.

Of the 39 respondents, 27 (69.23%) believe that developing and promoting Healthcare and Wellbeing through green infrastructure activities is the most important proposal within the HEALTH objective.

When asked which proposal is most important within the SUSTAINABILITY objective, 26 (66.66%) believe that the development of new facilities to generate income would be the most important.

When asked if the overall objectives and proposals are deliverable, 28 (71.79%) organisations and community groups believe that they are.



Community Groups

48.71%



Councillors

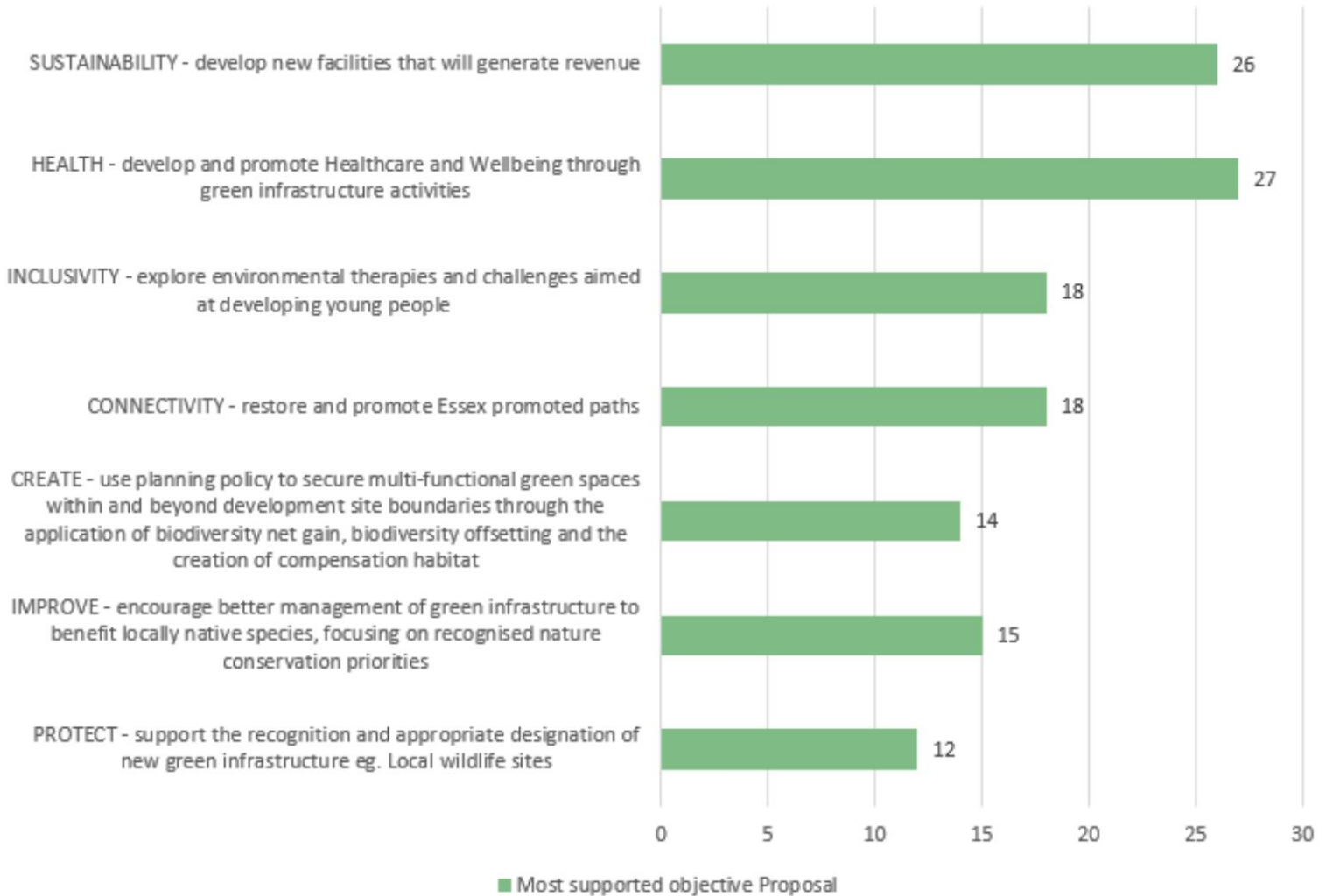
43.58%



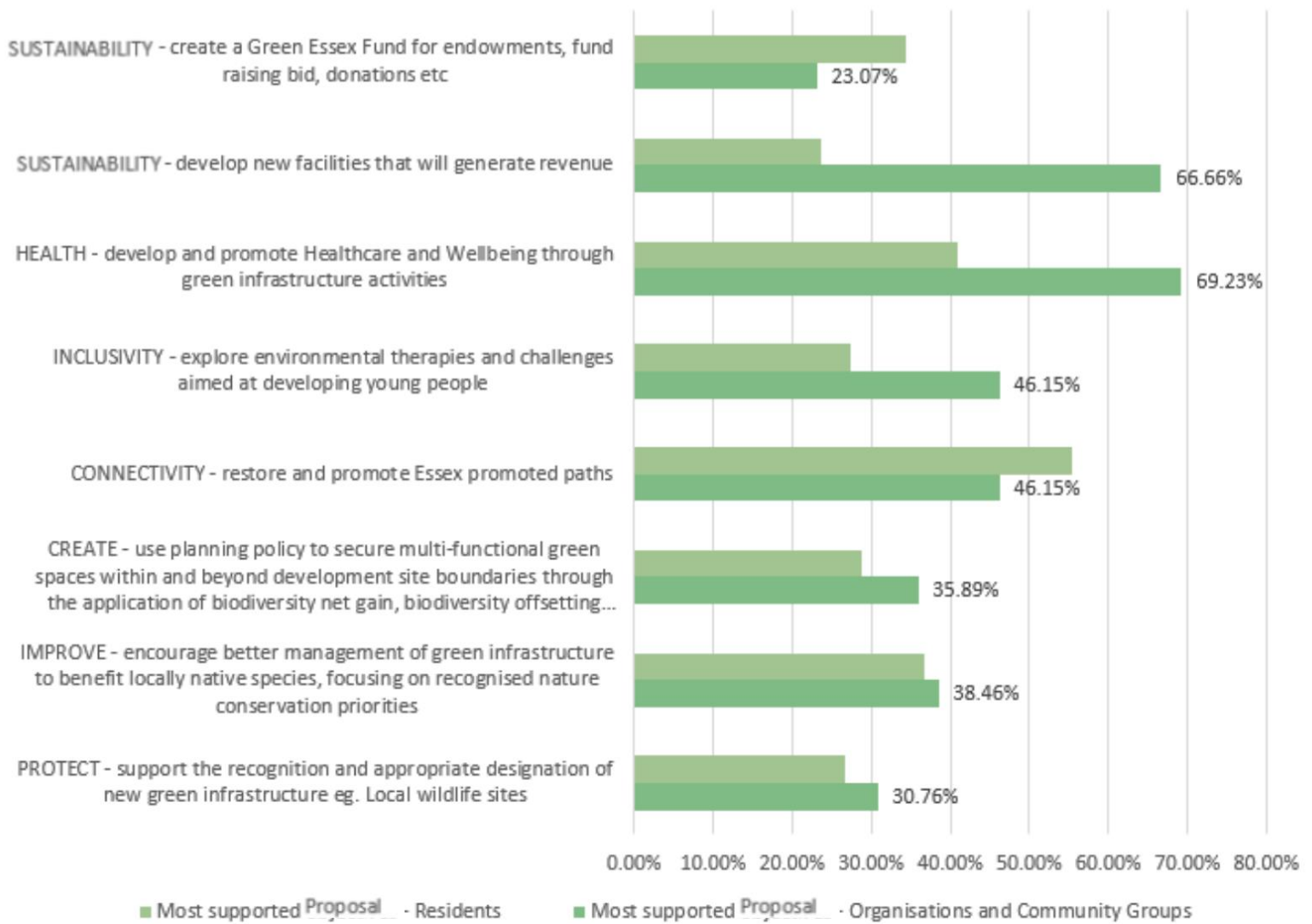
Businesses

7.69%

Most Popular Objective Proposal



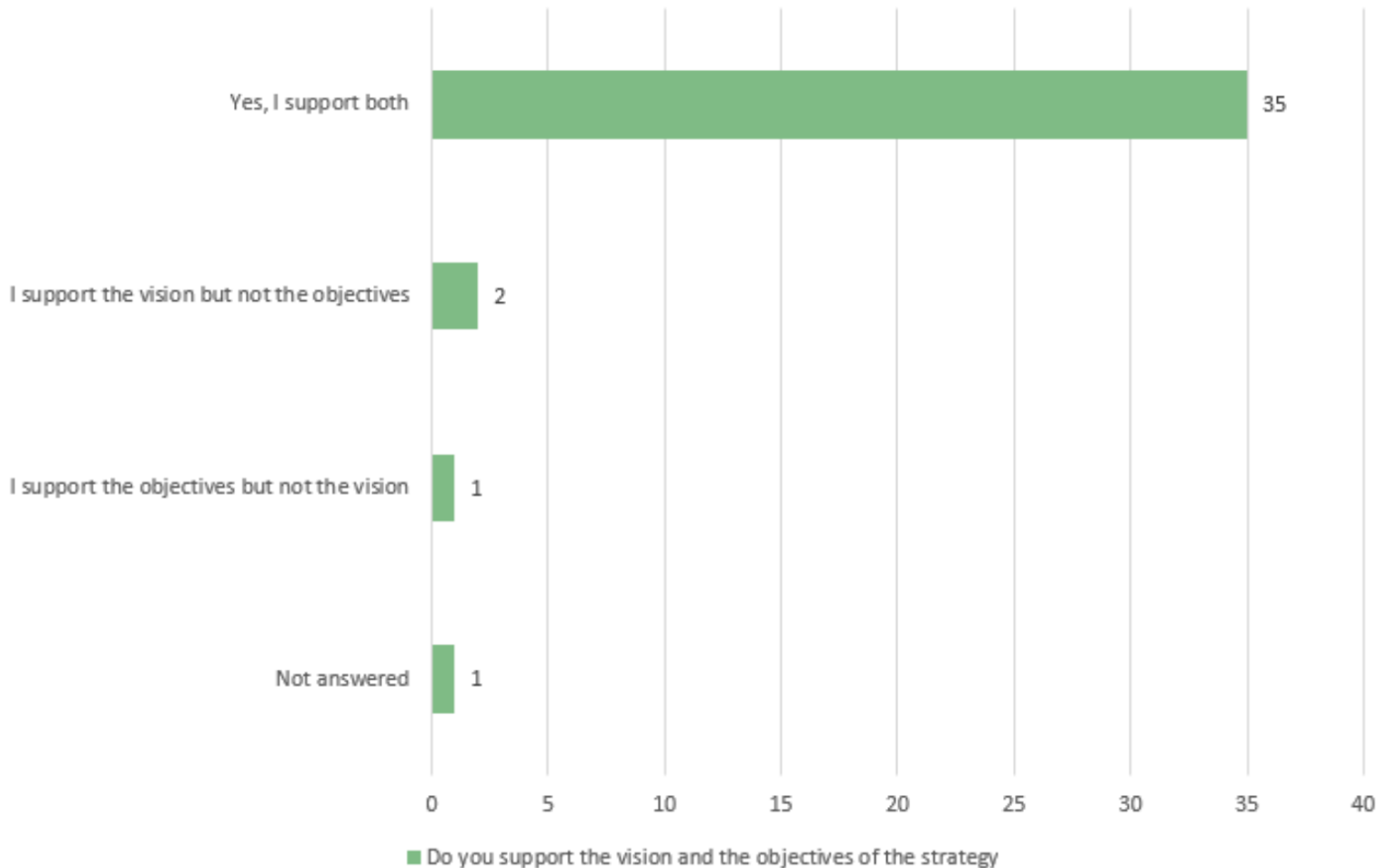
When asked which of the proposals for each of the seven objectives were most suitable, the responses from organisations and community groups almost mirrored the proposals selected by residents, as seen below:



Residents felt that setting up a Green Essex Fund would be the preferred proposal under "Sustainability", Organisations and Community Groups were more in favour of developing new facilities to generate revenue.

Objectives & Vision

Do you support the vision and the objectives of the strategy



Whilst 35 respondents agreed with both the vision and the objectives of the Green Essex Strategy, 2 disagreed with objectives and 1 disagreed with the vision. 1 Respondent did not answer the question.

Respondents were able to provide a comment for why they did not agree with either the vision or the objectives, with 9 of the groups / organisations sending detailed feedback.

This feedback covered areas such as terminology used within the strategy, improvements to the strategy, general concerns and additions.

Vision

"It's not that I don't support it or I'm against it but development is inevitable and I would much rather city's are developed and existing green space of towns and villages are retained with more rigour as that is why people chose to live in them."

Objectives

"Without knowing specifics of what things like 'Improve the connectivity of green infrastructure' its hard to say I support the objectives. A lot of things could be achieved in the overarching view of the objectives which would be ultimately detrimental to other aspects of life."

"I would like to see the 'wildlife' section of the vision more explicitly reflected in the objectives so that activities and outputs will flow from this.

Specifically to reflect considerations around green spaces often being shared spaces for people and wildlife so that thought is given to:

1. use of pesticides
2. leaving grass and verges to grow to promote wildflowers/insects/pollinators
3. leaving hedgerows for nesting birds
4. protecting sites where badgers/foxes and other mammals live.
5. educating the public about these initiatives in parks and other public spaces with information signage etc"

Comments

"It is important to make sure that the Strategy complements and adds value to Chelmsford's and any other district's GI Strategies, such as Maldon as these strategies should not be seen in isolation. Currently it is not clear how or whether such strategies have helped inform this Strategy."

"Chapter 11 refers to a 'future action plan' but it also includes an action plan on the subsequent pages. This could maybe be reworked a bit. There needs to be target dates and indications of how the actions will be prioritised. Further implementation plans are also needed. This will make the aspirations more realistic. It is also not clear whether the Strategy covers a particular time period. A longer-term strategy, up to 50 years, with interim target dates is preferable."

"It may be helpful for the Strategy to consider links to neighbouring authorities to consider what happens at the borders and whether there are opportunities to link up with neighbouring GI plans or projects. This should include those beyond Essex."

"The monitoring of the Strategy requires further work and should include some metrics to measure the success of the GI Strategy in delivering all of the key actions and has achieved the stated objectives."

"All habitats created or enhanced as compensation measures should be protected from future development and managed in perpetuity. Only this will help secure net gain, value for money and public trust. A lesser duration risks the later loss of biodiversity gain."

"It is important to note that some newly created habitats will take many decades to develop and cannot be considered at full value before this time. Furthermore, many habitats rely on regular management to retain status and target condition e.g. species rich semi-improved neutral grassland. Therefore, long-term management for any net gain site must be secured if the net gain is to be retained."

"In the first paragraph the Strategy 'sets the scene' as it were and advocates to '...enhance, protect and create an inclusive and integrated network of high-quality green infrastructure...' With this we agree, although it is very evident from the detail contained within the document that its aims are far from inclusive to all user groups. Equestrians are not mentioned at all, and the document only contains a scant number of references to bridleways."

"The objective should be re-named 'Funding', as the aim to secure funding for Green Infrastructure (GI) is not related to 'economy' as a topic.

An additional objective related to the title 'Economy' should be considered, to recognise the importance of GI to the wider economy (eg tourism)."

"The RSPB recognises the important role GI can play for health & wellbeing and for supporting a thriving, sustainable economy, but as an environmental strategy first and foremost, it is important that this is given more prominence in the Foreword."

"Clarity is needed between the terms 'green infrastructure' 'greenspace' and 'open space'. All of these have developed established meanings through long use, including in the planning system, and diversion from established practice or tradition will likely cause confusion and error when the document comes into use. Within the strategy document there appears to be occasions when greenspace and GI are used interchangeably even though they have been defined in slightly different ways elsewhere."

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