

Green Essex Strategy: Consultation Report

Research and Citizen Insight

Residents

July 2019



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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.

This consultation was open to all Essex residents, Organisations, Community groups and users of green spaces within Essex. This report considers the responses from residents, people that work in Essex but don't live here and people who didn't declare who they were responding as.

Key Conclusions

Of the 931 people that responded to the Green Essex survey, 705 (75.72%) people stated that they use green spaces for leisure time. 627 (67.34%) use green spaces for health reasons, whilst 397 (42.64%) use green spaces for dog walks.

There were 216 people that selected other. Of these, 108 people stated that they use green spaces for horse riding or caring for a horse.

When asked what would encourage you to use green spaces more often, 542 (58.21%) advised that easier access would increase their use. Feeling safe is an important factor in using green spaces more, with 453 (48.65%) people selecting this option.

Of the 931 respondents, 493 (52.95%) 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, 317 (34.04%) selected fragmentation of habitats due to increases in housing and transport development, 314 (33.72%) people selected deficiencies in green spaces provision as the population grows and 302 (32.43%) people selected development growth.

When asked for the most important proposal within the PROTECT objective, 248 (26.63%) people believe supporting the recognition and appropriate designation of new green infrastructure to be the best course of action.

Of the 931 respondents, 341 (36.62%) 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, 267 (28.67%) 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.

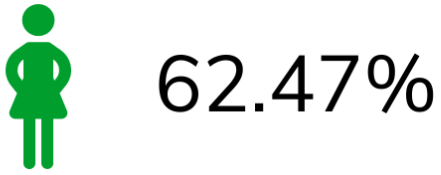
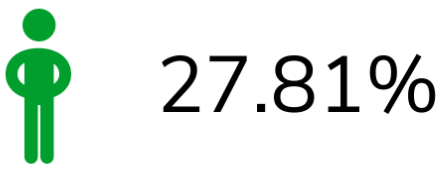
Of the 931 respondents, 515 (55.31%) believe restoring and promoting the Essex promoted paths (The Forest Way, The St Peter's Way, The Essex Way, The Roach Valley Way, The Stour Valley Path, The Thames Estuary Path, The Fitch Way, The Saffron Way, Black Water Rail Trail, John Ray Walk, Emerging Coast Path) would be the best proposal to meet the CONNECTIVITY objective.

When asked which proposal is most important within the INCLUSIVITY objective, 254 (27.28%) believe exploring environmental therapies and challenges aimed at developing young people to be the most important.

Of the 931 respondents, 381 (40.92%) believe that developing and promoting Healthcare and Wellbeing through green infrastructure activities is the most important proposal within the HEALTH objective.

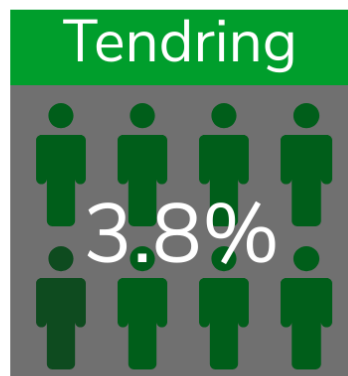
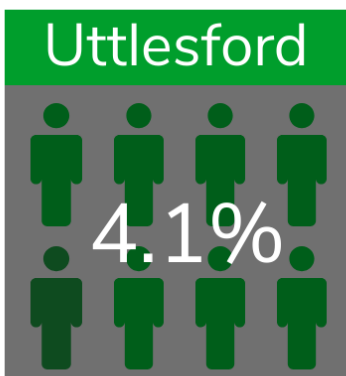
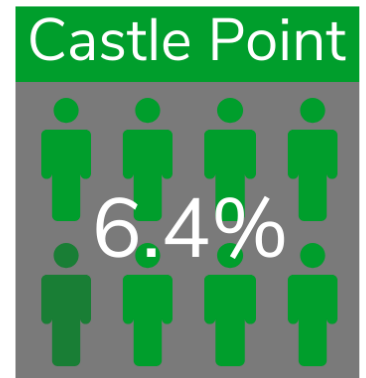
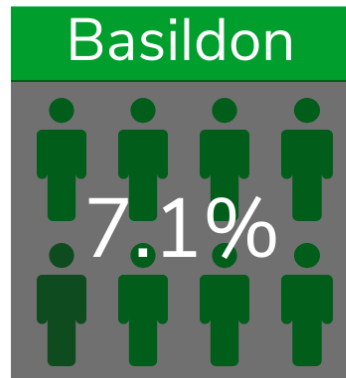
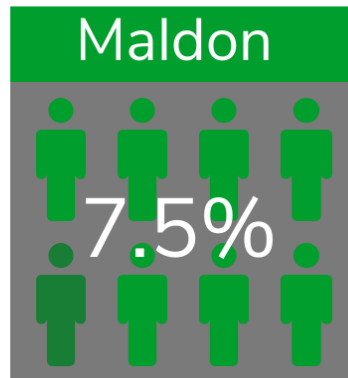
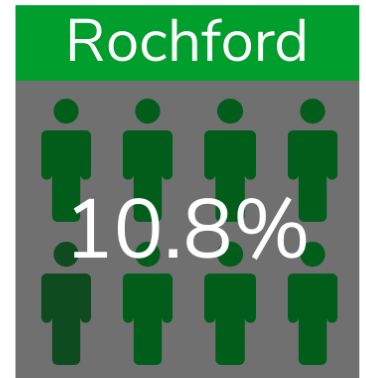
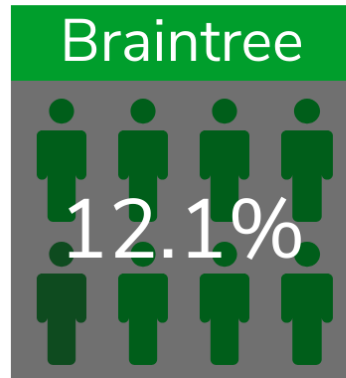
When asked which proposal is most important within the SUSTAINABILITY objective, 321 (34.47%) believe that creation of a Green Essex Fund for endowments, fund raising and donations would be the most important.

When asked if the overall objectives and proposals are deliverable, 378 (40.60%) people believe that they are, with 111 believing that they are not.



- Under 18 0.31%
- 18-29 2.45%
- 30-39 12.88%
- 40-49 20.35%
- 50-59 23.21%
- 60+ 35.07%
- NA 5.73%

Where are they From?



10.02% of respondents did not state where they live



Residents

97.9%



Works Here, Doesn't Live Here

0.9%

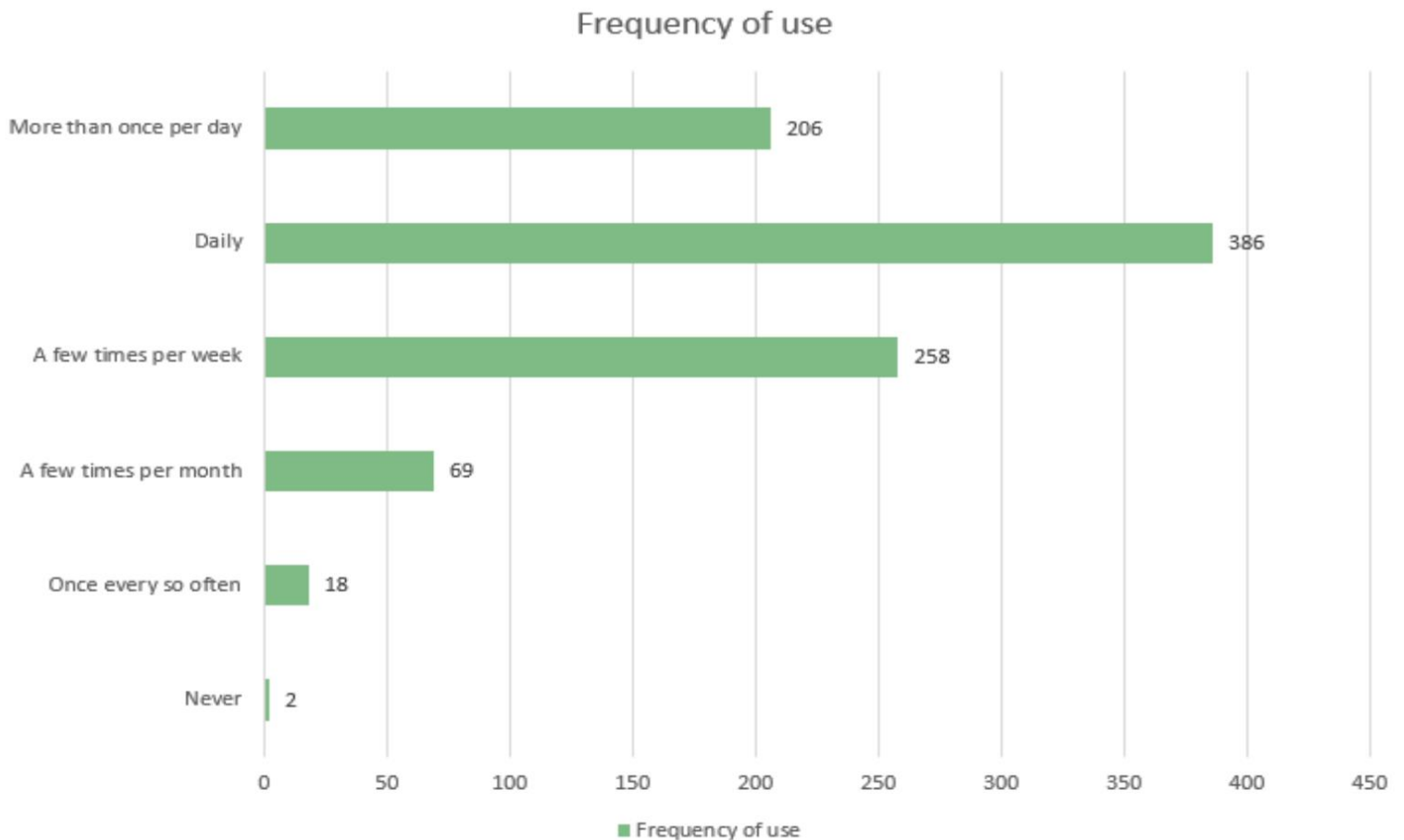


Not Answered

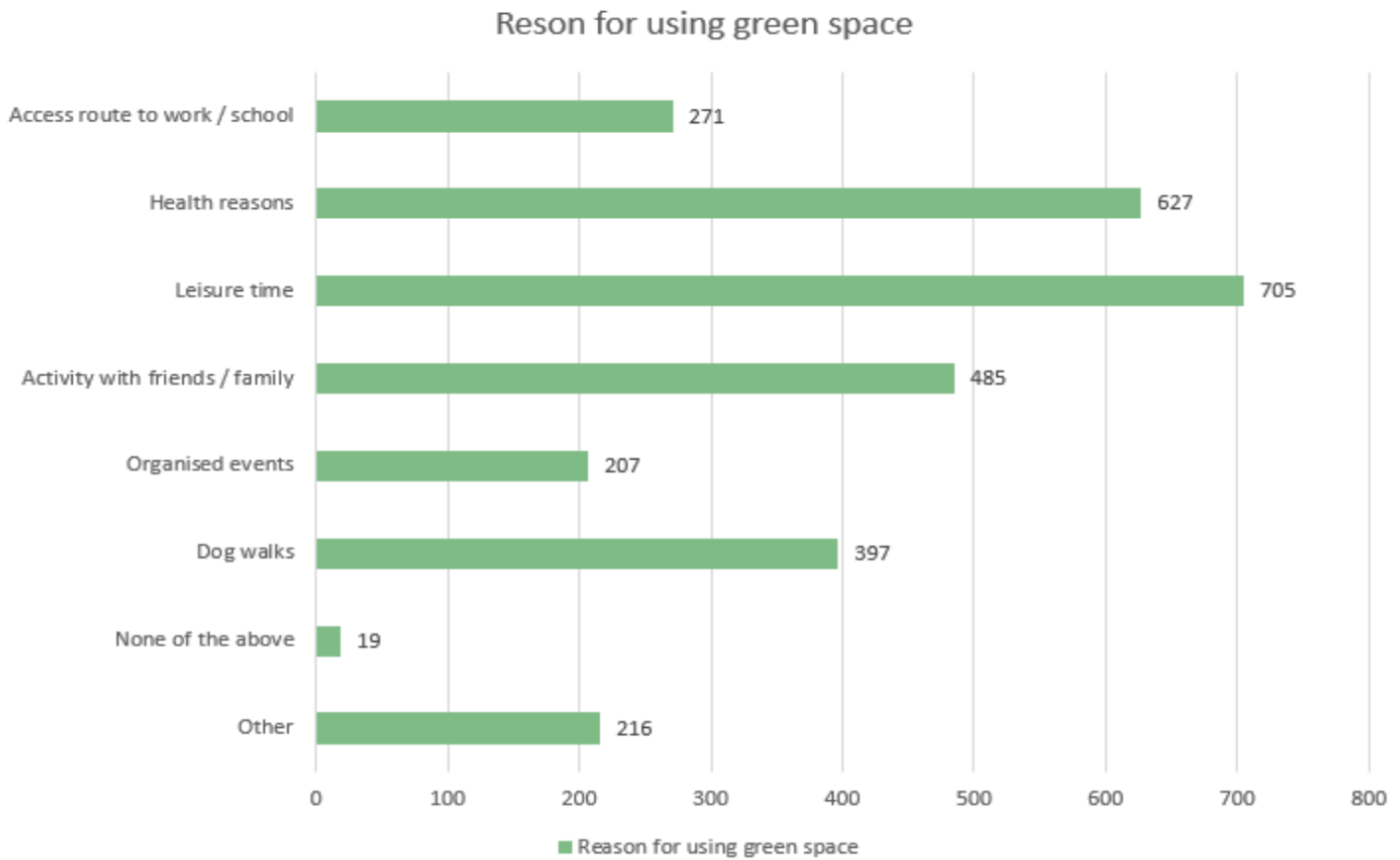
1.3%

Frequency of Use

A total of 931 people completed the Green Essex Survey, 386 of which use green spaces on a daily basis. 258 respondents use green spaces a few times per week and 206 respondents use green spaces more than once per day.




Why is it Being Used?



When asked what are the main reasons for using green spaces, 705 respondents selected leisure time, 627 stated health reasons, 485 advised it was to spend time with friends and family and 397 use green spaces to take their dog for a walk.

Of the 931 total respondents, 216 selected other. This provided a free type box to capture further detail. Of the comments received, 80 were split across the above categories. 130 comments were split into the categories below:




Equestrian

108



Wildlife

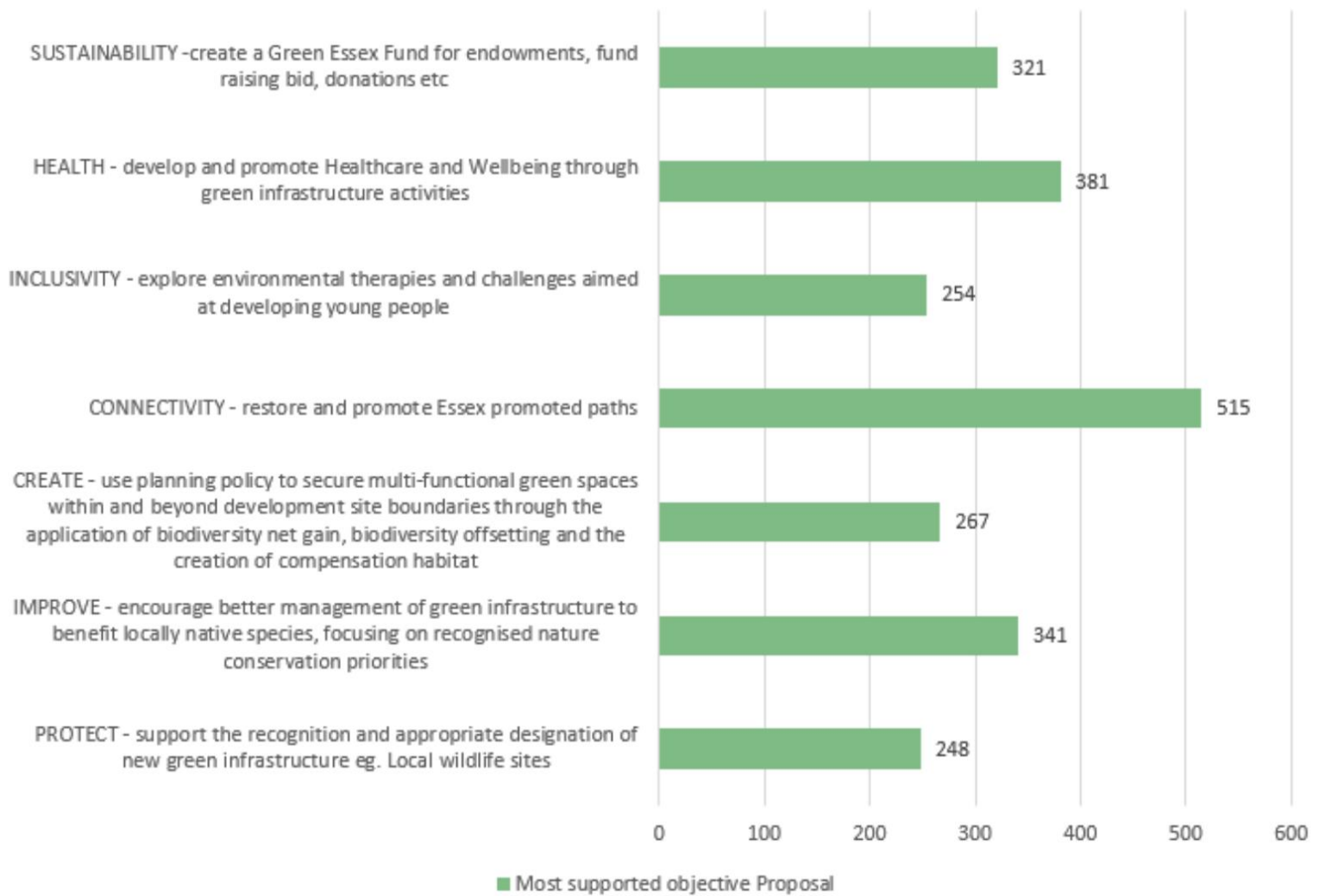
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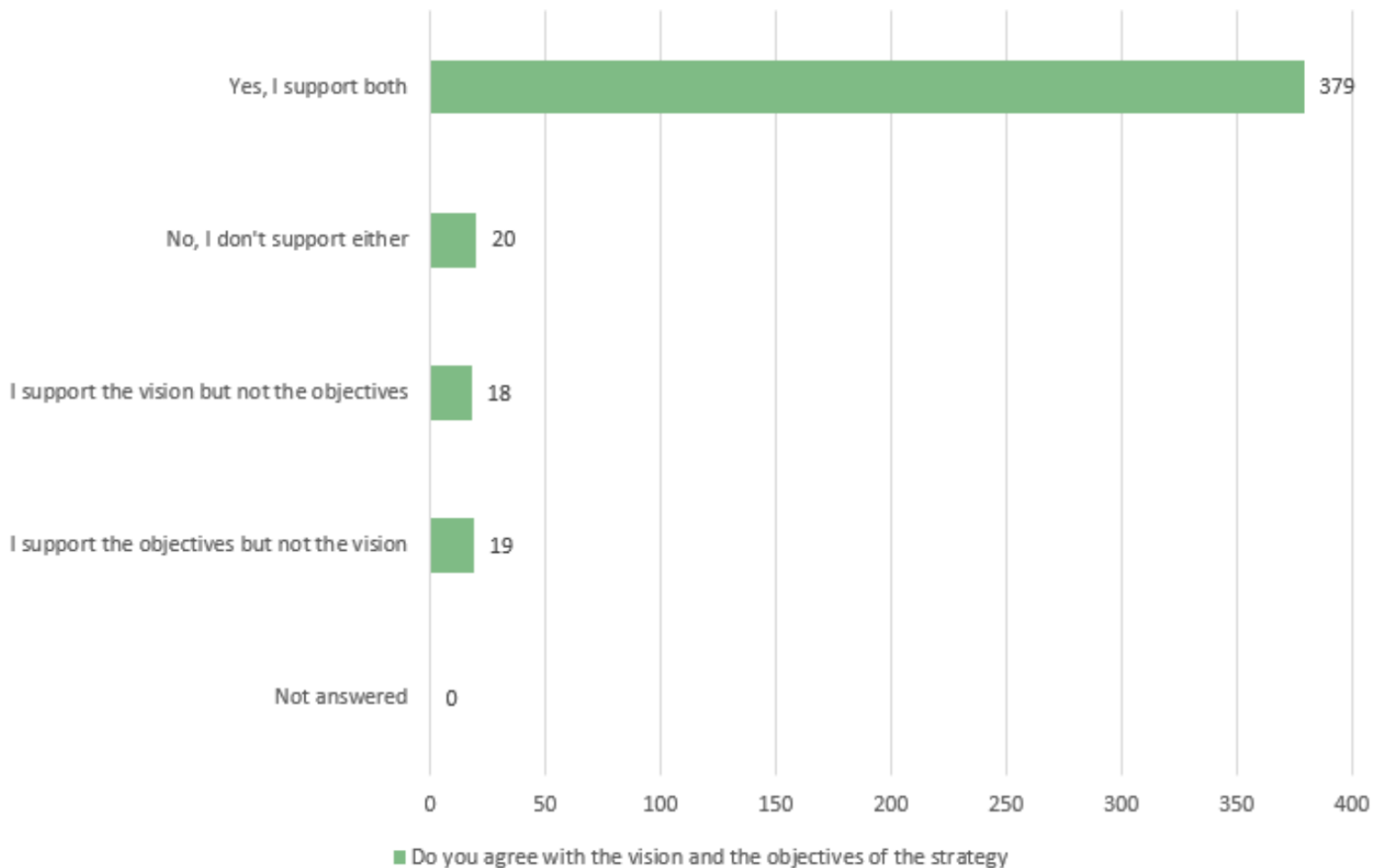
Work

23

Most Popular Objective Proposal



Objectives & Vision



Whilst 379 respondents agreed with both the vision and the objectives of the Green Essex Strategy, 18 disagreed with the objectives, 19 disagreed with the vision and 20 respondents disagreed with both.

Respondents were able to provide a comment for why they did not agree with either the vision or the strategy.

Comments could be grouped into the following categories:

- Jargon / unclear
- Resource (including money)
- New building
- Wildlife

Comments included:

"No mention on how self-sustainability is achieved with no further comments on that".

"I think both statements are rather jargon heavy".

"the objectives should include identifiable outcomes (metrics) to ensure they are capable of monitoring".

Objectives & Vision

"No mention on how Self-Sustainability is achieved with no further comments on that - I could envisage the council adding in charges to access these areas which contravenes the main reason why people use them."

"Vision strategy could end up funding small strips of green land, that are in less than ideal places and may see little use, but will cause funds to be diverted from enjoyable green spaces."

"The Objectives should include identifiable outcomes (metrics) to ensure they are capable of monitoring. For example the Strategy should set a target for the number of trees planted throughout the County - people remember these things more than anything else. For example if the Objectives said "we will oversee the planting of one million trees in Essex by 2025" that would capture people's attention.

Essentially there needs to be headline deliverables rather than just "improve, protect, connect" which are noble objectives but also very forgettable."

"I think both statements are rather jargon heavy but the objective do not address the serious need to curb the amount of house building which is ruining and seriously undermining the future for our county. You need to include limiting building to brown field sites only, then they might be more effective."

Opportunities

"Green roofs on new builds and incentives for existing buildings, green roof incentives on existing beach huts and eco walls on public buildings such as libraries, factories, office blocks, etc. which, with fast growing creepers, would soon form good habitat for insects, and birds.

Planning restrictions on all development to ensure gardens are not covered in non-permeable materials; i.e. paving slabs, as this reduces available water (runs off to drains instead of seeping into the water table) and reduces habitat, thus insects, birds, plants."

"By connecting PROW's and maintaining the paths on a more regular basis than currently done. Ensuring waymarkers, footbridges and finger posts are replaced when required not on a 5 year maintenance programme.

Fingerposts to contain more information ie Distance to next village. Many people do not read maps so have no idea where they might end up by following a sign that just says Public Footpath. This is especially helpful for visitors to the area and would encourage people to explore a wider area."

"Bridleways being reinstated or improved. Essex has the highest population of horses than any other county yet riders are not supported, either because of misconceptions about horse owners or the greater voice of other user groups.

Bridleways benefit walkers, cyclists and riders and with fantastic organisations such as Essex Bridleways would know precisely where opportunities are. The coast path is an amazing idea and as a path serves all groups, this would be such a fantastic boost for locals and tourists."

Opportunities

"Green Spaces need to have good access and parking available, we don't mind paying."

"Encourage guardianship and maintenance of hedgerows, gardening for wildlife, work with voluntary groups/charities plus parish councils and schools on looking for local gaps in the footpath network, creating pocket parks, allotments etc . As well as the biggies like the coast path"

"Every local authority's Local Plan should identify and promote these opportunities throughout the county, following an agreed strategic plan co-ordinated by the County Council."

"Instead of creating expensive new areas, smaller measures everywhere and all the time would make a big difference for wildlife:

- All new buildings should have green roofs, solar power etc
- Business parks and industrial areas could easily be greened up
- Plant more trees. Everywhere. And make it more difficult for mature trees and hedges to be felled
- Create ponds
- Create wildlife corridors and bridges to avoid the current road casualties
- Clear litter
- Stop mowing verges and hedges so brutally. Be aware of the needs of wildlife in terms of food, shelter etc
- Embed wildlife friendly principles in all planning decisions"

Contact Us

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