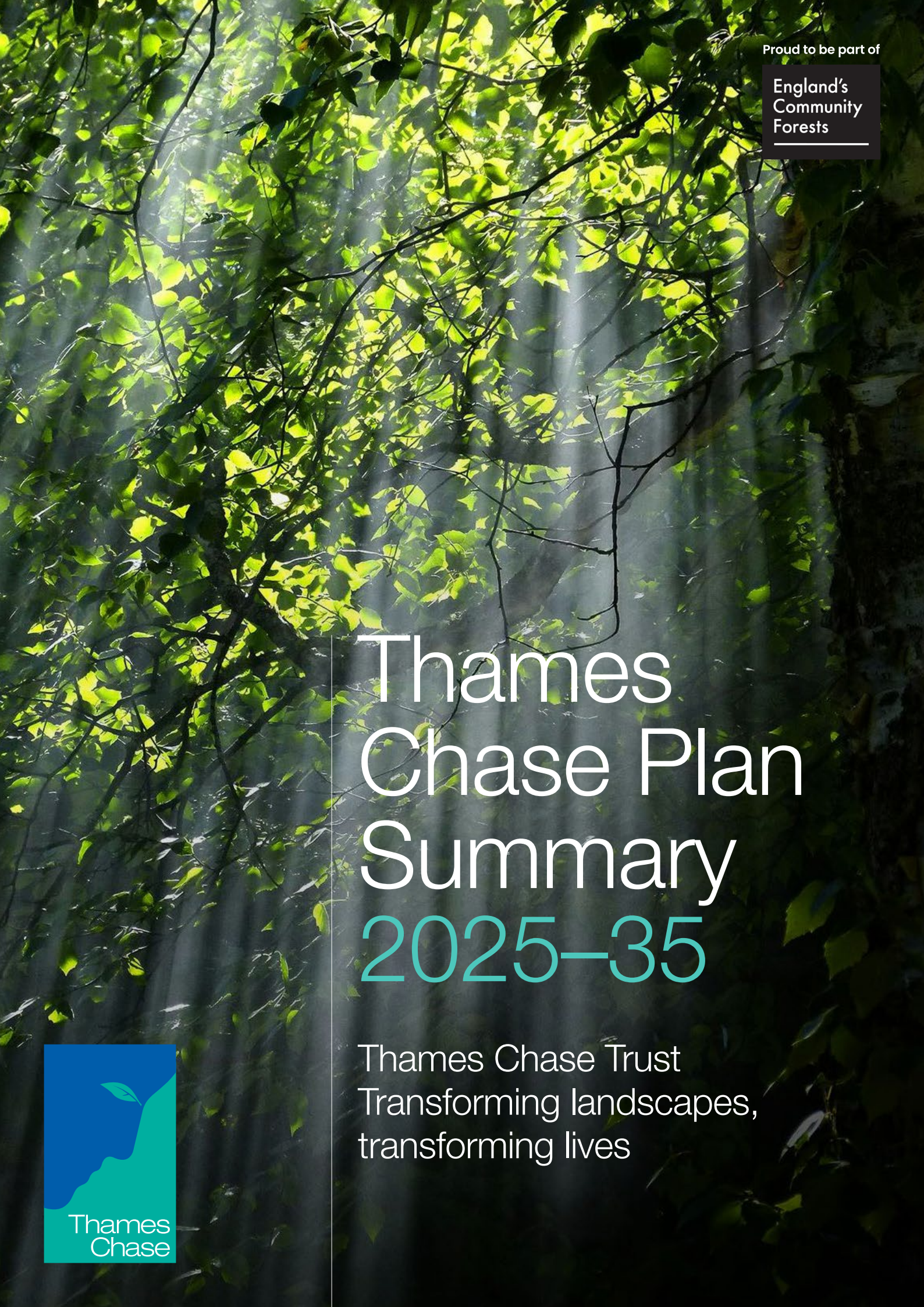


Proud to be part of

England's Community Forests

Thames Chase Plan Summary 2025–35

Thames Chase Trust
Transforming landscapes, transforming lives

Thames Chase

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Thames Chase Trust
The Forest Centre
Pike Lane, Upminster
RM14 3NS

enquiries@thameschase.org.uk
01708 641880

thameschase.org.uk

Charity No.1115627
Company No.5687558

Foreword

There is an old quoted Chinese proverb which fits Thames Chase at this moment in time. **“The best time to plant a tree was 30 years ago. The second best time is now,”** Thames Chase did start planting trees 30 years ago and it continues to carry on the tree planting mission now!

Over the past three decades, the world has witnessed unprecedented environmental challenges, from rising global temperatures to the loss of biodiversity and increasingly extreme weather patterns. The United Kingdom, East London and Essex has not been immune to these changes. Our landscapes have felt the strain of hedgerow removal, deforestation, pollution, and urban expansion, while communities have grappled with air quality concerns and the urgent need for green spaces. Yet, amidst these challenges, England’s Community Forests have emerged as beacons of resilience, restoring woodlands, enhancing biodiversity, and reconnecting people with nature. Thames Chase led the way in 1990 as one of the three “Lead Forests”.

As we look ahead to the next thirty years, the work of Thames Chase will be more critical than ever. Climate change is set to intensify, bringing new pressures on our ecosystems and communities. By expanding tree cover, restoring habitats, and promoting sustainable land use, we can mitigate carbon emissions, improve air and water quality, reduce flooding and create thriving spaces for both wildlife and people. The role of Thames Chase will not only be about protecting nature but also fostering social and economic wellbeing – offering places for recreation, education, and mental health support while driving local green economies.

It is with great optimism that we embrace the new Thames Chase Plan for the future. The efforts of volunteers, landowners, businesses, and environmental champions will shape the legacy of the Community Forest, ensuring that generations to come inherit landscapes rich in beauty, diversity, and resilience. Together, we can turn vision and ambition into action and safeguard our environment for the decades ahead.

I commend the 2025 Thames Chase Plan to you all.



John Meehan
Chair of the Thames Chase Trust
On behalf of Thames Chase Trustees

Introduction

The new Thames Chase Plan is a strategic document that sets out the Vision and Objectives of Thames Chase for the next 10 years.

This is the 4th Plan since Thames Chase was established in 1990 and its mission is more important now than at any other time in its history. The Plan is a critical document in shaping and influencing this part of east London and south-west Essex, as Thames Chase straddles the boundary and has already transformed these areas out of recognition – from degraded wastelands to wooded recreation landscapes, alive with people and nature.

This Plan is about continuing the change Thames Chase has made and, as such, it is about influencing and informing those in the best positions to make that change.

These are:

- Local Planners
- Public sector (The Government, Local Authorities, the Mayors, Public health, Climate change, Nature recovery strategy deliverers etc)
- Voluntary sector (Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, National Trust, Sustrans etc)
- Developers
- Land Owners
- Businesses
- Local Communities

This is the successful Thames Chase Partnership which has achieved enormous landscape transformation over the last 35 years and this Plan seeks to show the route map to further accelerated change. The Plan's function is to enable these partners to understand the Thames Chase Vision and Objectives and engender their continuing support allowing Thames Chase to deliver these. The public are welcome to read the full, more detailed and technical version of the Thames Chase Plan but this summary version helps to set the scene, introduce Thames Chase and the Thames Chase Plan and provide contact details for the Thames Chase Trust.

The Thames Chase Plan sets out 6 Programmes, namely:

Forestry and Landscape

People

Nature

Climate

Access and Connectivity

Resources

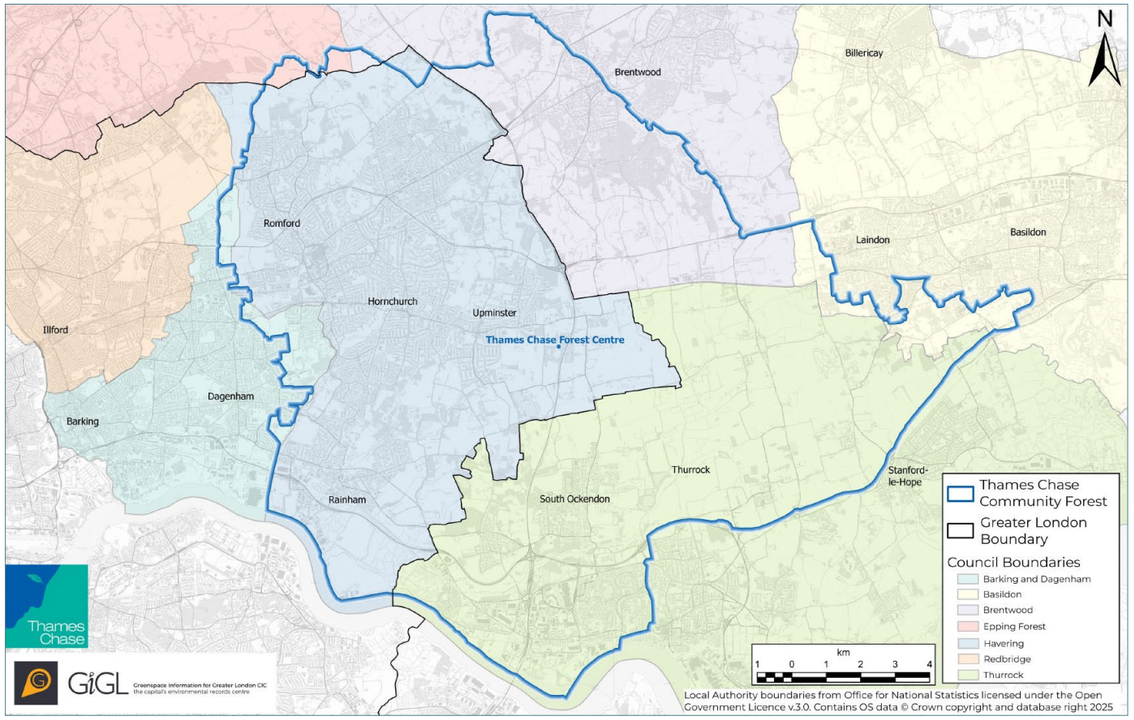
These Programmes list the vital Core Actions that will be taken, who the Core Partners are and the Core Funding that the Thames Chase Partnership is seeking to support these transformational changes. Finally, the Plan sets out how we will monitor these changes to evaluate the Plan's success.

> "This Plan is about continuing the change Thames Chase has made and, as such, it is about influencing and informing those in the best positions to make that change."



Thames Chase

Thames Chase



Map 1: Thames Chase (98 square miles)

Thames Chase covers 98 square miles and the boundary is shown in blue outline in Map 1 above. It spans the edge of east London and south-west Essex and it is estimated that at least 650,000 people live in and around the area. Thames Chase is one of England's fifteen Community Forests.

The Thames Chase Trust works across and/or abuts the administrative boundaries of seven local authorities, Essex County Council, and the Greater London Authority (See Map 1). At the time of writing, the Essex Authorities are in the process of Local Government Reorganisation and the creation of an Essex Mayor is programmed for 2026 and the new Unitary Authorities in 2027.

Throughout Thames Chase, development pressure continues with new housing developments, light industry, mineral extraction, widening of the M25, and the granting of development consent to build the Lower Thames Crossing.

^ Map produced by Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC on behalf of Thames Chase, June 2025

Placemaking and Planning

The Thames Chase Plan provides the opportunity for planning authorities and landowners to give the objectives of the Plan a higher profile in land use planning and management.

Development and the planning system have a key role to play in creating Thames Chase. The Thames Chase Plan provides the framework for driving forward an environmentally-led approach to strategic placemaking.

Thames Chase remains as relevant today (if not more given the nature and climate crisis) as it was in 1990. This is clear in how close the objectives of Thames Chase reflect those of partner organisations and in particular, the local authorities. The Thames Chase Plan objectives are:

1. **To protect, improve and expand the woodland character of Thames Chase**
2. **To use Thames Chase to improve local health and wellbeing, volunteering, learning, employment, diversity and equality; and to recognise the historic environment, heritage and culture**
3. **To positively influence the natural integrity of Thames Chase's air, land and water including wildlife**
4. **To integrate climate change adaptation and mitigation responses into Thames Chase**
5. **To develop a connected network of links and accessible, vibrant greenspaces throughout Thames Chase**
6. **To enable effective partnership working from national to local level to maximise the impact of available resources**

Community Forests use trees and woodlands to transform landscapes and transform lives. With a focus on strategic, landscape-scale placemaking, areas are redefined and prospects transformed.

The Thames Chase Plan is a non-statutory document and presents an agreed framework and approach to the ongoing creation of Thames Chase.

> "The Thames Chase Plan provides the framework for driving forward an environmentally-led approach to strategic placemaking."

How the Thames Chase Plan will be Delivered

This section identifies how the Thames Chase Plan will **'transform landscapes and transform lives'** across Thames Chase. This will be achieved by implementing the Vision and Objectives, which will drive the six Programmes to create the Annual Delivery Plan across the local and county administrative boundaries within and around the Thames Chase boundary.



Figure 7: How the Thames Chase Plan will be delivered

Vision, Programmes and Objectives

Vision

'By 2050, Thames Chase will be recognised as an inspirational example of landscape regeneration where enhanced, connected woodland and green space has made a clear difference to wildlife and peoples' lives'.

Programmes and Objectives

Forestry and Landscape

Objective:
To protect, improve and expand the woodland character of Thames Chase.

People

Objective:
To use Thames Chase to improve local health and wellbeing, volunteering, learning, employment, diversity and equality; and to recognise the historic environment, heritage and culture.

Nature

Objective:
To positively influence the natural integrity of Thames Chase's air, land and water including wildlife.

Climate

Objective:
To integrate climate change adaptation and mitigation responses into Thames Chase.

Access and Connectivity

Objective:
To develop a connected network of links and accessible, vibrant greenspaces throughout Thames Chase.

Resources

Objective:
To enable effective partnership working from national to local level to maximise the impact of available resources.



Forestry and Landscape Core Actions

Core Actions

Our Core Actions for the Forestry and Landscape Programme are that we will work with partners, funders, landowners, and local communities:

F1: to advise partners for woodland creation and management, identifying and prioritising areas of greatest need

F2: to increase tree planting through a diversity of planting schemes. We will maximise the opportunities provided through the Trees for Climate programme

F3: to implement UKFS compliant multi-purpose forestry as our means of woodland creation and establishment, seeking social, cultural heritage, environmental and economic returns from Thames Chase

F4: to seek to convert the substantial brownfields (Gravel Extraction and Landfill Sites) in the south of Thames Chase to new accessible wooded sites

F5: to create a rich mosaic of wooded habitats including farms, leisure enterprises, nature areas, and public open space that will form a well-wooded landscape for wildlife, work, recreation and education within and on the edges of our towns and cities. We will encourage agroforestry, productive landscapes including food production, orchards, and biomass

F6: to deliver Trees Outside Woodlands projects including the historic environment/heritage landscape, street trees, hedgerow trees, parks and garden trees, and small wood features in both agricultural and urban landscapes.

F7: to build a programme of active woodland establishment across Thames Chase, employing best practice to achieve tree survival rates of at least 95%

F8: to sustainably establish and manage woodlands – young, mature and ancient. This is vital to ensuring their health, resilience, recreation value, ability to capture and store carbon, and their biodiversity value. We will work with partners to monitor and manage threats, including climate, invasive species, pests and diseases, and be at the forefront of discussions



People Core Actions

Core Actions

Our Core Actions for the People Programme are that we will work with partners, funders, landowners, and local communities:

P1: to promote Thames Chase and other community volunteer groups through our website and social media

P2: to fully develop the health benefits which result from Thames Chase and participation in it and other community groups. This will help to improve people's health and wellbeing (mental and physical) through an active health walks programme encouraging participation in volunteering and events and activities, social prescribing, and Nature for Health

P3: to provide opportunities for education, training, knowledge and skills sharing, and employment. Consider a programme to engage and secure the next generation of Community Foresters

P4: to celebrate the historic environment, art, heritage and culture of Thames Chase. This will include the Arts Exhibition at the Forest Centre, connecting communities to the heritage of the landscape (natural and built) through the programme of Heritage Walks, and celebrating the diverse cultures of our communities acknowledging pride of place, and the importance of connection by creating a Community Forest for all

P5: to further establish the Forest Centre complex as the information and recreation hub for Thames Chase, with an accessible path network for cycling and walking, self-guided easy access trails and interpretation

P6: to encourage diversity, equality, participation and engagement, truly creating a Community Forest for all



Nature Core Actions

Core Actions

Our Core Actions for the Nature Programme are that we will work with partners, funders, landowners, and local communities:

N1: to deliver against Local Nature Recovery Strategies. These ensure Thames Chase plays its role in landscape recovery for London and Essex through the respective Local Nature Recovery Strategies and associated multi-agency partnerships. We will work to make more space for nature and seek to halt its decline. We will support the proposal set out in the Tree and Woodland sections of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies

N2: to ensure that habitats are connected across Thames Chase and adjoining landscapes e.g. LNRS for London priorities for large-scale rewilding and green corridors

N3: to encourage wildlife-friendly farming and help to increase habitats and habitat connectivity

N4: to secure Biodiversity Net Gain and Nutrient Neutrality across Thames Chase

N5: to plant more trees and hedgerows through the Trees for Climate programme to help tackle the nature emergency

N6: to secure Nature Based Solutions across Thames Chase

N7: to improve the biodiversity and riparian landscapes of the rivers, waterways and wetlands across Thames Chase for the benefit of nature, also recognising and integrating the landscape of the River Thames into Thames Chase, in doing so, helping to enhance the mosaic of habitats across the landscape and deliver LNRS priorities for waterbodies and waterways

N8: to deliver catchment-scale river restoration and improved water quality



Climate Core Actions

Core Actions

Our Core Actions for the Climate Programme are that we will work with partners, funders, landowners, and local communities:

C1: to reduce river pollution and water scarcity and to use Nature Based Solutions and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to reduce flooding

C2: to deliver projects and programmes that lock-up carbon and improve water and air quality

C3: to address the Urban Heat Island effect Tree planting and urban nature areas are proven to cool urban areas

C4: to plant more trees and hedgerows to help tackle the climate emergency Working with partners to plant and care for climate and drought resilient species, utilising the Community Tree Nursery network

C5: to educate people about the environment with topics such as history, heritage and culture, reducing waste, recycling, and more thoughtful use of resources



Access and Connectivity Core Actions

Core Actions

Our Core Actions for the Access and Connectivity Programme are that we will work with partners, funders, landowners, and local communities:

A1: to improve geographic links between Thames Chase and the historic forests of Hainault Forest (managed by The Woodland Trust, owned by Essex County Council and in London Borough of Redbridge/Essex CC) Epping Forest (The City of London Corporation and Epping Forest District Council). This will improve connectivity, community engagement, and habitat creation and management

A2: to improve the Forest Circle (including connecting it to the Thames Path, England Coast Path and new urban and rural parts of Thames Chase); creating Tree Lined Greenways; and strengthening pan-forest links to neighbouring boroughs

A3: to create more and actively promote the network of access and connectivity opportunities across the Thames Chase area, including Greenways, Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and to use green and blue spaces and Community Woodlands to support this

A4: to connect strategic routes to Thames Chase e.g. Thames Path, LOOP, Sustrans National Cycle Routes, England Coast Path

A5: to increase the information about accessing Thames Chase and developing connections and relationships between the Thames Chase Forest Centre and other key visitor hubs and centres across Thames Chase

A6: to improve the access and visitor signage to Thames Chase sites

A7: to improve the setting and integration of towns into Thames Chase, with a focus on tree planting, recreation, and improving access

A8: to establish a bold vision for the future of the Beam Valley, Ingrebourne Valley and Mardyke Valley. This will seek to achieve nature conservation, access, landscape and recreation objectives, by coordinating the management of the rivers as part of their corresponding Catchment Plan, integrating the management of adjacent land and woodland, and improving collaboration between delivery partners



Resources Core Actions

Core Actions

Our Core Actions for the Resources Programme are that we will work with partners, funders, landowners, and local communities:

R1: to create effective partnerships helping to connect individuals and organisations to deliver and to maximise available resources. Continue to seek input from Essex and London Mayors

R2: to identify the regular big fundraising opportunities to build on the success of the Trees for Climate programme

R3: to manage Biodiversity Net Gain, Nutrient Neutrality, Woodland Carbon Code, s106 and CiL across Thames Chase

R4: to deliver the "strategic opportunities" for nature and woodland, meadow and river habitats in the Local Nature Recovery Strategies

R5: to create a funded programme of innovation and research across Thames Chase

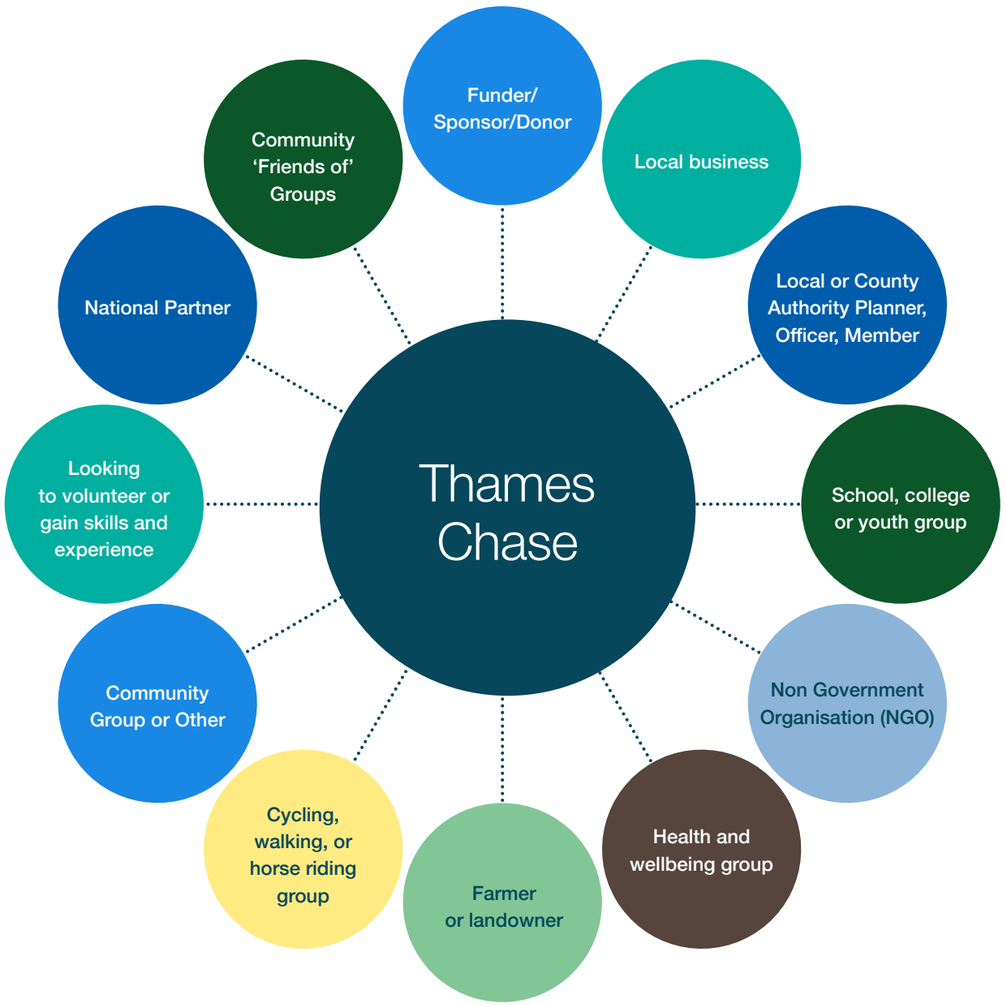
R6: to embed the Thames Chase Plan in partners' key strategies, plans and policies. Recent examples include Local Plans, Parks and Open Space Strategies, the London Urban Forest Plan, and the London Green Infrastructure Framework

R7: to explore opportunities for acquiring land across Thames Chase

R8: to increase the number of funded Trees for Climate, Countryside Stewardship, EWCO, WCPG and Agroforestry tree and hedgerow planting schemes in Thames Chase

Your Connection with Thames Chase

There are many ways in which you can connect with Thames Chase. Figure 6 below identifies the importance of the relationship between Thames Chase and the wealth of partners, businesses, and community groups that have the opportunity to connect with and benefit from it. If you would like to become involved with the work of Thames Chase, you can find out more via our website **www.thameschase.org.uk**



If you would like to know more about what a Community Forest is or the England's Community Forests network, please refer to the Appendices in the main Plan.

thameschase.org.uk

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