

The County of Essex and local area

The County

Essex is a county of fascinating contrasts. Many generations of people have settled in Essex and there are historic settlements to mark these.

Essex is expanding rapidly, with new industrial and housing developments taking shape alongside historical towns. The comprehensive rail network ensures that more than half of the stations are less than an hour's journey from London, and the M25 motorway links the county's roads with the national motorway system. Stansted Airport and the ferry port of Harwich connect Britain with the continent, spearheading our European community links.

The south of the county provides the bustle and excitement of life adjacent to London. To the north, the Essex countryside provides rolling scenery, dotted with charming villages, farms and country inns.

Beauty spots, such as Dedham Vale, contrast with beach resorts, many of which are suitable for water activities. Facilities for land sports are excellent and extensive throughout the county.

Shopping facilities range from the farm shop to major shopping centres in the larger towns.

The contrasts within Essex provide not only variety for residents and visitors alike but also balance to make the county an interesting and rewarding place to which to live. The county and district councils' policies have the aim of continuing to improve the quality of life in Essex, whilst safeguarding the proud Essex heritage and the environment for our own benefit and for the generations to come.

The administrative area of Essex comprises, since April 1998, 12 districts. On that date, Southend and Thurrock became unitary authorities, and thus LEAs in their own right, as a result of local government reorganisation. The LEA operates largely from Chelmsford, with some locally-based service delivery. For administrative and communication purposes, the districts are grouped as follows:

Central:	Braintree and Chelmsford
East:	Colchester, Tendring and Maldon
South:	Basildon, Castle Point and Rochford
West:	Brentwood, Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford

The county town

Chelmsford is the county town of Essex. It has a remarkable industrial heritage and is now recognised as the birthplace of broadcasting and the electronics industry. Today the county town is a major centre for commerce and industry. The town provides a thriving administrative and shopping focus for the whole

county. It is also the seat of Anglia Polytechnic University, including the Business School at Danbury Park.

Offices of the borough council, Essex County Council, Essex Police and Chelmsford Diocese are all located in the town. A number of financial institutions and companies have recently located here.

Chelmsford has a well-established retail market and shopping centre. The High Chelmer and Meadows developments feature under-cover shopping, whilst further department stores, smaller shops and cafes and some 5,000 square feet of office space are available close by in the pedestrianised high street.

Communications are excellent; the A12, M11 and M25 are close by, the train journey to London takes only 35 minutes, Stansted Airport is just 15 miles away and the ports of Harwich and Felixstowe are within easy reach.

A borough since 1888, Chelmsford comprises 27 parishes and the numerous historic villages surrounding the county town are well worth exploring. The distinct villages each have their own charm and history which can be traced back over the years.

Chelmsford has a wide range of leisure activities, catering for many interests. The Chelmsford and Essex Museum and the Essex Regiment Museum are located in Oaklands Park. Riverside Ice and Leisure Centre includes an international size ice rink, two indoor swimming pools with water flume and one outdoor heated pool, a multi-purpose sports hall, snooker room, squash courts, restaurant and bar facilities. There are also outdoor pitches available in the many parks throughout the borough. The major park within the borough is Hylands Park, situated to the south west of Chelmsford. A variety of activities takes place in the park including orienteering, walking, bird watching, scouting, fund days, antiques roadshows and car rallies. The town has a comprehensive network of cycle paths.

Central Essex comprises Braintree district to the north and, of course, the county town within Chelmsford borough. This part of the county is a fascinating mix of well-established, historical, rural parishes; including salt water villages along the Dengie peninsula and farming communities to the north and south of the river Blackwater. Apart from Chelmsford, the principal towns are Braintree, Halstead and Witham. The new town of South Woodham Ferrers lies to the south of the area, which is also a centre for commerce and industry.

Leisure facilities include an ice rink and Riverside Ice and Leisure Centre in Chelmsford; an equestrian centre in Braintree and water-based pursuits at Gosfield Lake. A popular annual event is the Chelmsford Spectacular, a series of outdoor concerts held in Hylands Park each July-August and catering for a range of musical tastes.