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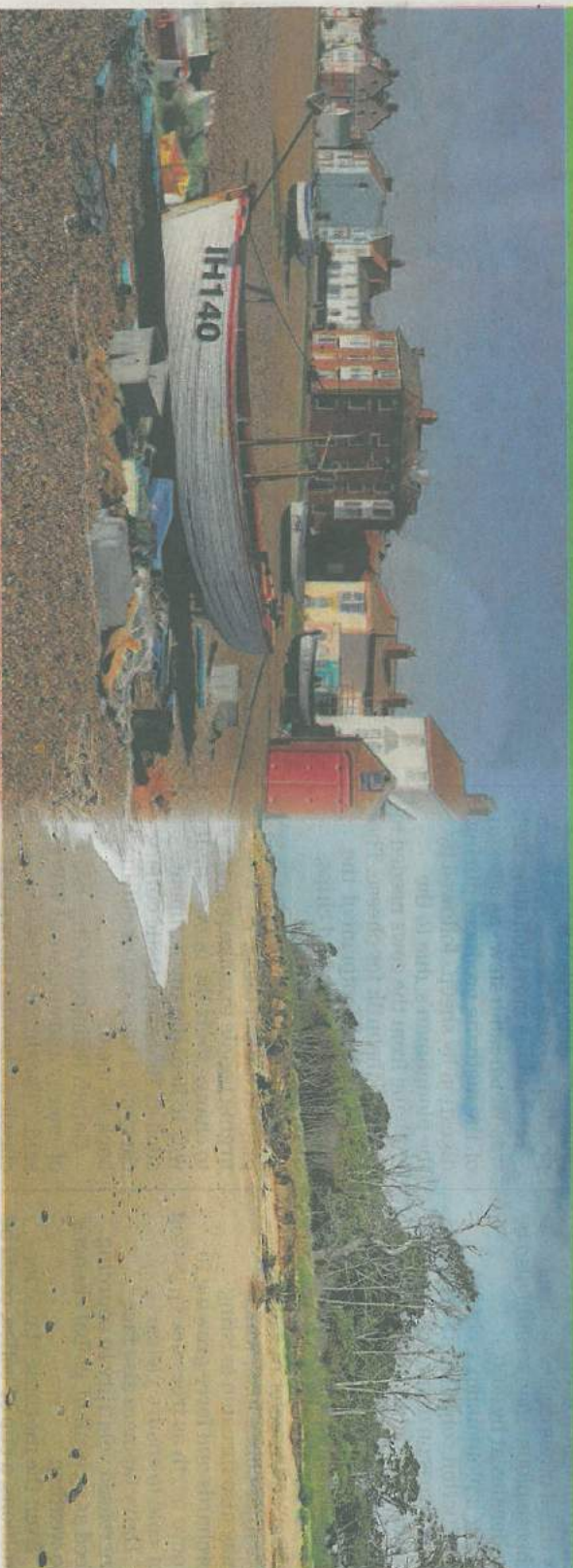
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Angles
on nature

Experiencing
East Anglia's
wealth of
wildlife, with

**Hannah Jones, of
the RSPB**



Despite the recent chilliness, there have been signs that spring is finally on its way at RSPB Minmere this week.

Daffodils are flowering around the visitor centre and waders such as avocet, black-tailed godwit and oystercatcher have been showing well on the Scraps, adding to the large numbers of wonderful wildfowl.

The obvious highlight remains our murmuration of 40,000 starlings, however. They are still putting on a fantastic show over the reedbed at dusk! Spring marks the start of an eventful season for the RSPB visitor team as we welcome increasing numbers of people to the reserve.

Our monthly Reedlings group for under-6s has been busy exploring the woods, discovering the wonder of mud, making birds' nests and learning 101 things you can do with a stick (actually, I'm sure there's more than that...).

Over the Easter holidays we are launching our Wild Things at Easter events. Follow the free Wild Things trail, complete wild challenges and enjoy photo opportunities, all encouraging your little ones to get close to the world around them.

We're also running regular Wild Things family events including pond dipping and bug safaris led by our wildlife experts. We'll also be adding to our minibeast mansion, and making clay bug prints for children to take home.

Waveney Bird Club's bird ringing demonstrations resume on April 5 and 12. For older children and adults we also have regular half-day walks.

There's plenty of ideas about how to get close to nature year-round on our Wild Challenge web pages. Visit www.rspb.org.uk/minmere or, better still, visit RSPB Minmere itself!

**giving
nature
a home**
rspb

Public is given chance to help shape future of outstanding landscape

The management of the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB is under review with a new five-year blueprint being drawn up. As **John Grant** reports, views are being sought on the way ahead

Nationally designated, universally loved - and locally vital. That's the visually stunning and economically significant Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

From Kessingland in the north to the Shotley Peninsula in the south - and potentially across the Stour Estuary into Essex if a proposed extension gets the go-ahead - these outstandingly beautiful 155 square miles attract four million visitors each year, support a tourism industry worth nearly £200million a year and underpin more than 3,000 jobs.

And that's not to mention the internationally important habitats within the area's bounds - such as wetlands, estuaries, vegetated shingle beaches and Suffolk Sandling heaths - that are home to a wealth of wildlife, many species of which are rare and highly specialised.

Rich and varied in its character, the AONB's importance to nature and Suffolk's economy cannot be over-estimated - and its management, its protection and its enhancement are key to its existence. Now members of the public are being asked not simply to enjoy and appreciate the AONB's quality - they are being asked to help shape its future.

A new five-year draft plan has been drawn up to guide the management of the AONB from this year to 2023 - and the public are being asked for their views on it.

The AONB officers' team, based at Melton, near Woodbridge, said this week: "We need your help to shape the future of the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB - do you think we could improve the way we care for the landscape? Is there a better way we can consider the people and businesses that use the AONB?"

"Whether you live or work in the area, or are visiting, if you value this exceptional landscape, then we want to hear from you." The team's "vision" for the designated area involved:

"Special wildlife, landscape, seascape and heritage qualities" being conserved and enhanced "in balance with the needs of people living, working and visiting the AONB"

Local communities being involved in caring for the area The "high-quality landscape and infrastructure" supporting sustainable access, tourism and business.

David Wood, who chairs the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB Partnership, said: "I am one of the many who live and work in this AONB and I care passionately about it, as I am sure we all do. Our natural places are enormously important to our well-being - these mosaics of habitats are vital to our wildlife and our natural and cultural heritage are of great importance to all who live in, work in and visit the area.

"We can all play a part in its conservation and enhancement - the key objectives of the national



designation of this landscape - and shaping the next five years is an excellent way of doing this. Your comments will support the AONB and its Partnership to focus its activities looking forward. Please take part."

Simon Amstutz, who manages the AONB and its Dedham Vale counterpart, added: "Like many things in life things develop and priorities change, and the new draft plan understands this. Since the last management plan the

State of Nature Report in 2016 has identified a continuing downturn in wildlife numbers and breadth, with over 50% of species in decline. The plan seeks to support work to reverse this decline. "Recent developments have seen the Government publish a 25-Year Environment Plan. The stated ambition of the plan is to improve the environment within a generation, leaving it in 'a better state than we found it'.

"It details how we in

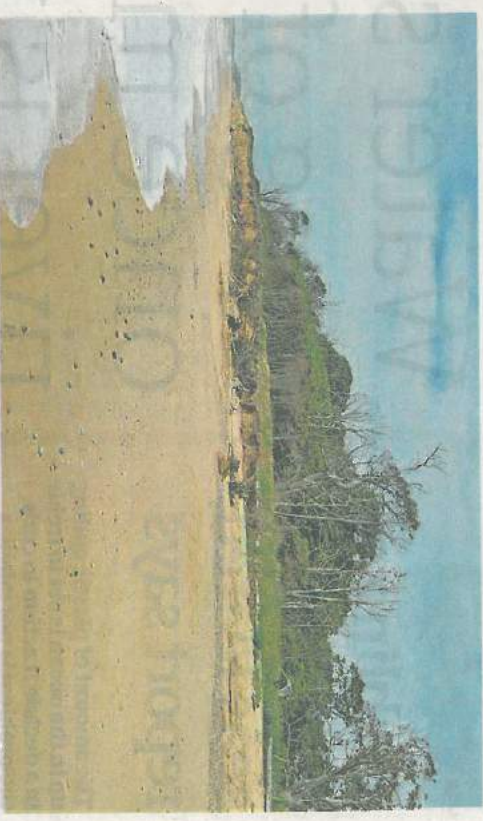
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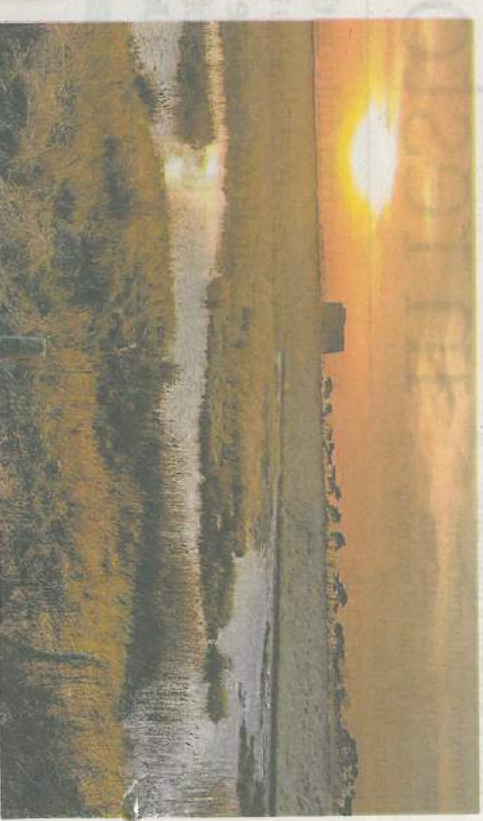


Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB Partnership chairman David Wood, left, and manager Simon Amstutz. The public's views are being sought on the future management of the AONB. Inset, a map of the nationally designated Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB.

Pictures: GREGG BROWN/ SUFFOLK COAST & HEATHS AONB



The beach at Benacre Broad - one of the many beautiful places in the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB. Picture: SARAH LUCY BROWN



The sun sets at Shingle street - a wild and remote part of the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB. Picture: PAUL TEMPLETON

Many benefits - for just 20p per head

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is one of 36 nationally designated AONBs in England - and despite their immense landscape, wildlife and economic importance, public spending on them amounts to less than 20p per person per year. Successes from the Suffolk AONB's 2013-2018 management plan include:

- Active engagement with the Suffolk Coast Forum
- Delivery of small-scale saltmarsh restoration and creation projects
- Increasing awareness of problems associated with marine litter
- Successful delivery of the £million Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership Scheme, Touching the Tide
- Facilitation of low-voltage undergrounding schemes at Sutton Hoo, Butley, and Shodley that invested over £1m in the AONB landscape
- Securing resource to run a Defra pioneer project on the value of natural capital in the marine environment
- Delivery of a £500,000

European-funded project on tourism

Support for ferry services across Suffolk's estuaries

Production of AONB Partnership position statements on responsible access, obtrusive lighting, development in setting of AONB and balloon releases

Production and distribution of walking and cycling guides

Securing and distribution of grant funds for projects that meet the aspirations of the AONB management plan worth an average of £75,000 per year. Nationally, AONBs cover 15% of England's land area. They are home to more than one million people. They are visited by about 156 million people each year - the visitors spending a total of more than £2billion in the local economies. AONBs contain about 256,000 hectares that are Sites of Special Scientific Interest, protecting many rare species. Volunteers contribute more than 457,000 work-days each year, worth £36.8m, to conserve AONB landscapes and improve access.

government will work with communities and businesses to do this. This is welcomed by the AONB and across the country we see AONB management plans as a template for delivering environmental gains for people and the environment.

"As the UK leaves the European Union during the life span of this management plan there may be an opportunity to focus future financial support for environmental and public good,

that has previously been targeted through programmes of agricultural support and rural development, to work that is compliant with AONB management plans.

"Such management plans have the advantage of being endorsed by a wide range of organisations representing local authority, business, environmental organisations and have the stated ambition of conserving and enhancing natural beauty and

delivering associated public good."

The draft management plan contains five main themes: landscape, coast and estuaries, land use and wildlife, enjoying the area and working together. Comments can be submitted until May 21.

A full set of consultation documents and an online survey is available at www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/about-us/aonb-management-plan



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