

Visit us

The Thorndon Countryside Centre, which is jointly owned and managed with the Essex Wildlife Trust, has a gift shop and display area. Light refreshments are available here, in the South Pavilion and in King George's Park Café.



For visitors with walking difficulties, a four wheel battery-powered scooter is available through the Parkmobiltiy scheme by registering and pre-booking. Telephone: 01277 232944.

Both Brentwood Countryside Management Service and Essex Ranger Service co-ordinate school visits and projects, guided walks and volunteer tasks.

For more information please contact the **Ranger Service:** 01277 211250.

Email:

thorndon.country.park@essexcc.gov.uk

Website:

www.essexcc.gov.uk EnjoyingEssex/CountryParks

Or telephone:

Essex Wildlife Trust: 01277 232944

Brentwood CMS: 01277 261111 ext. 504.

Opening times

Park open: 8am until dusk (check entrance boards to find daily closing time)

Pay and display at all times.

Countryside Centre open:

Summer: 10am to 5pm

Winter: 10am to dusk. Closed Mondays.

Open on Bank Holidays and every day in school holidays

How to find us:

By rail: Brentwood Station is about 3 miles from the Countryside Centre.

By Bus: No. 151 – Brentwood Town Centre to Halfway House;
No. 73 – Brentwood Town Centre to East Warley.



Thorndon country Park and Hartswood

wander through the woods



Welcome

Thorndon Country Park and Hartswood, linked with the treasures of lesser-known sites, provide a large area of countryside for you to enjoy. Walk in precious woods, historic parkland and timeless commons. Experience atmospheric places, charged with a sense of history and filled with the scent of wildflowers and the call of birds. Whether on foot, bicycle or horseback you can enjoy the peace and wildlife of the Brentwood countryside.



Walk through the woods

For non-stop action in the winter visit the conifer and beech trees of The Forest which serve as a feeding station for birds. Watch for the red flash of crossbills in the treetops and the orange splash of bramblings as they feed on seeds and nuts. Indulge your senses with a stroll through Childerditch Field. See the display of butterflies across the medieval ridges and furrows. Hear the trilling of the skylark. Smell the fresh scent of water mint wafting from the marsh. In autumn you can taste the rich dark blackberries.

The Meek and the Mighty

It is easy to imagine times gone by as you wander through the Deer Park. It has changed little since the 1500s when the Lords Petre hunted deer across the turf and their servants collected firewood.

The trees are ancient and magnificent, supporting many species of wildlife, especially rare invertebrates. This is an important place – from the tiniest insect to the tallest oak – and it receives our special attention.

Recorded in 1598, Mill Wood has had time to develop an amazing variety of wildflowers. You will see old favourites, including the much loved bluebell and the smile-at-the-sun wood anemone.



A historic park

In the area surrounding Old Thorndon Hall, the 8th Lord Petre planned a vast garden. He was a gardening pioneer and even had hot houses growing exotic fruits such as pineapples. In what is now the damp and shady Menagerie Plantation, he housed a miniature zoo which probably contained animals such as terrapins, hummingbirds and squirrels. Can you imagine it? We have taken the Walker Map of 1598 as our snapshot of history for planning the layout of the hedges on Old Thorndon Pastures.



Sylvia's beauty

Away from the bustle of King George's Park you will find tranquillity in Hartswood. Oak and sweet chestnut trees tower overhead and twisted hornbeams create unusual shapes. In spring imagine swimming through a sea of bluebells. Watch columns of marching wood ants, often carrying leaves bigger than they are. This ancient wood was once owned by John Evelyn who was inspired to write the first ever book on forestry, 'Sylva', in 1664.



Old grassland and new woods

Although most is now woodland, until the end of the 19th century local commoners grazed their animals on Little Warley Common. You can get an impression of how the common would have looked where there are fewer trees and bracken growing beneath them.

In the wood off Warley Gap the statuesque beech trees create a cathedral-like atmosphere, their leaves casting a dappled green light on the woodland floor. If you stand on the grassy common beside Childerditch Lane you have splendid views across the Thames Valley to Kent.

A working woodland

Donkey Lane Plantation was planted with sweet chestnut trees over 150 years ago. Local woodsmen coppiced the trees every twenty years to provide wood and fencing materials. After re-coppicing in the 1980s we now have a very dense woodland.