



PRESS RELEASE

4 May 2020

Life in Lockdown: the challenge of starting a new job in self isolation

Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust has recently appointed a new Director in a move to expand the development of the Trust's work and to raise its profile.

Brendan Joyce OBE took up the role in March 2020. He comes with 30 years of experience working in the voluntary nature conservation sector, having served for 23 years as Chief Executive Officer for Norfolk Wildlife Trust. In that role, he led on very significant developments within the Trust including several major land acquisitions, the building of a visitor and education centres at Cley Marshes and Weeting Heath and the expansion of the Trust's education programmes.

"I am delighted to be working for Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust. Established in 2014, the Trust has done a great deal of valuable work on river restoration, natural flood management and improving water quality on a number of rivers in Essex and Suffolk" said Mr. Joyce "Appreciating these are extremely challenging times for us all, I am keen to take things to the next level, to increase our capabilities, undertake further vital conservation work in the river catchments and establish a higher profile within the two Counties"

Within 10 days of starting the role, he had to "lock down" and remain isolated at home due to the Covid-19 pandemic. "I had a life-saving liver transplant some 10 years ago and although I am fit and well, I am in the high-risk category – one of the so called "shielded". In line with Government advice, I have been staying at home and have not yet been able to get out and about meeting people and looking at potential new projects. I recognize that everyone is experiencing huge difficulties and, in many cases, heart-breaking losses in these distressing times. For me, it has been a very strange situation in which to start a new job, but information technology has enabled me to maintain contact and keep our work going."

A key part of the Trust's work has been the delivery of two major projects under the EU Topsoil project. The first project, in the Sandlings area of East Suffolk, has involved Managed Aquifer Recharge trials to replenish water in the aquifer by creating an underground reservoir using winter spray irrigation. The aim is to develop methods to help alleviate seasonal pressure on water quantity for farming and the environment. The second project centers on Layer Brook, Essex. This river feeds into Abberton Reservoir, part of which has become silted and polluted. Survey and sampling work was undertaken to establish the sources of the problem and find ways to mitigate the effects. These projects have been supported by Suffolk County Council, the Environment Agency and the AONB, along with water companies which help fund the Trust's work. They form part of a collaborative project in the North Sea region, which seeks to research and test innovative approaches to managing groundwater and topsoil as the climate changes.

"I have been pulling together the various strands of these projects, talking to partners and working out the next steps" said Mr. Joyce. "I am looking forward to when this crisis is over so that I can get out and meet people properly. The health of our rivers in Essex and Suffolk is vital for farming, for wildlife habitats and for our water supply. There are huge pressures on water availability and water quality. When the time is right, we will be working again with our partners and the farming community to address these problems and take steps to restore our rivers. With that in mind, we are very keen to contact farmers and landowners who might be interested in working with us on new projects going forward".

"We are very pleased indeed that Brendan has joined us" said Andrew Davies, Chairman of Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust. "He brings with him a wealth of previous experience which we hope to put to good use to further our aims and work for the benefit of the environment and people of Essex and Suffolk"

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General Information

Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust was formed in 2014 and is part of a network of some 60 local Rivers Trusts throughout the UK supported by the National Rivers Trust.

The aims of Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust (ESRT) are:

- To conserve, protect, rehabilitate and improve the rivers, streams, watercourses, ground-waters and water impoundments of the catchments comprising the rivers in Essex and Suffolk, including adjacent estuarine and coastal areas, for the advancement of environmental protection or improvement for the benefit of the public.
- To advance the education of the public, or any association, institution, voluntary organisation, company, local authority, administrative or governmental agency or public body or representative body in: –
 - The understanding of rivers, river corridors, and river catchments, including their fauna, flora, biodiversity, economic or social activity, and river catchment management.
 - The need for, and benefits of, conservation, protection, rehabilitation and improvement of aquatic environments.

Brendan Joyce joined the Trust on 3 March 2020. Previously he worked for the Royal Society for Wildlife Trusts (6 years) Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (1 year) and as CEO for Norfolk Wildlife Trust (23 years). In 2017 he was awarded an OBE for services to nature conservation.

The projects in the Sandlings, East Suffolk and Layer Brook in Essex are part of the Topsoil project involving a collaboration of 26 organisations in 5 countries. The EU Interreg programme provides 50% of the funding with the remaining 50% being raised and provided by the organisations delivering the projects. The Topsoil project relates to the climate challenge of soil and water conservation in the near subsurface of land and brings together a wide range of projects looking at innovative ways to conserve water in the upper layers of soil, to improve groundwater resources and to reduce pollution and soil erosion.

[The Topsoil project video explains the project: https://www.theriverstrust.org/projects/topsoil/](https://www.theriverstrust.org/projects/topsoil/)

In Essex and Suffolk, the projects have brought together a range of partners and supporters including:

- Essex and Suffolk Water
- Anglian Water
- Environment Agency
- Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Suffolk County Council
- The Broxted Estate
- East Suffolk Water Abstractors Group
- Sustainable Water Solutions LLP
- Suffolk Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.

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