



Have yourself a Greensand Country cycling adventure

Greensand Country Cycleways: **Abbey Way**

Beginning in the car park at the church of St Laurence at Old Warden, this route is largely across the undulating countryside of the Greensand Ridge with a mix of plantation woodland, arable fields, and open parkland. This route is a great introduction to the Greensand Ridge that includes some of the most beautiful countryside and villages in Bedfordshire. Distinctive features are the parkland landscapes of large estates such as Shuttleworth, Moggerhanger, Ickwell Bury and Southill. Each has a unique history. The estate villages of Old Warden, Southill and Broom contain many fine examples of architecture and the village of Ickwell Green, with its classic English scene of cottages around the village green, cricket pitch, maypole and large oak tree is one of the finest in the UK. The landscape around the hamlets of Thorncote and Budna is particularly attractive with quiet lanes, small rolling fields and passes close to Moggerhanger House – a Sir John Soane's designed country house.

Key facts:

Route marker:



Length: 15 miles (24km)

Route type: Mix of on and off road

Options: Three

Links to other routes: Greensand Cycleway, Forest Way, Vale Way, Thatcher's Way

Terrain: Undulating

Car park: There is a car park available at St Leonard's church in Old Warden. Please respect the fact that this is primarily for church use including services and other events and should be used accordingly.

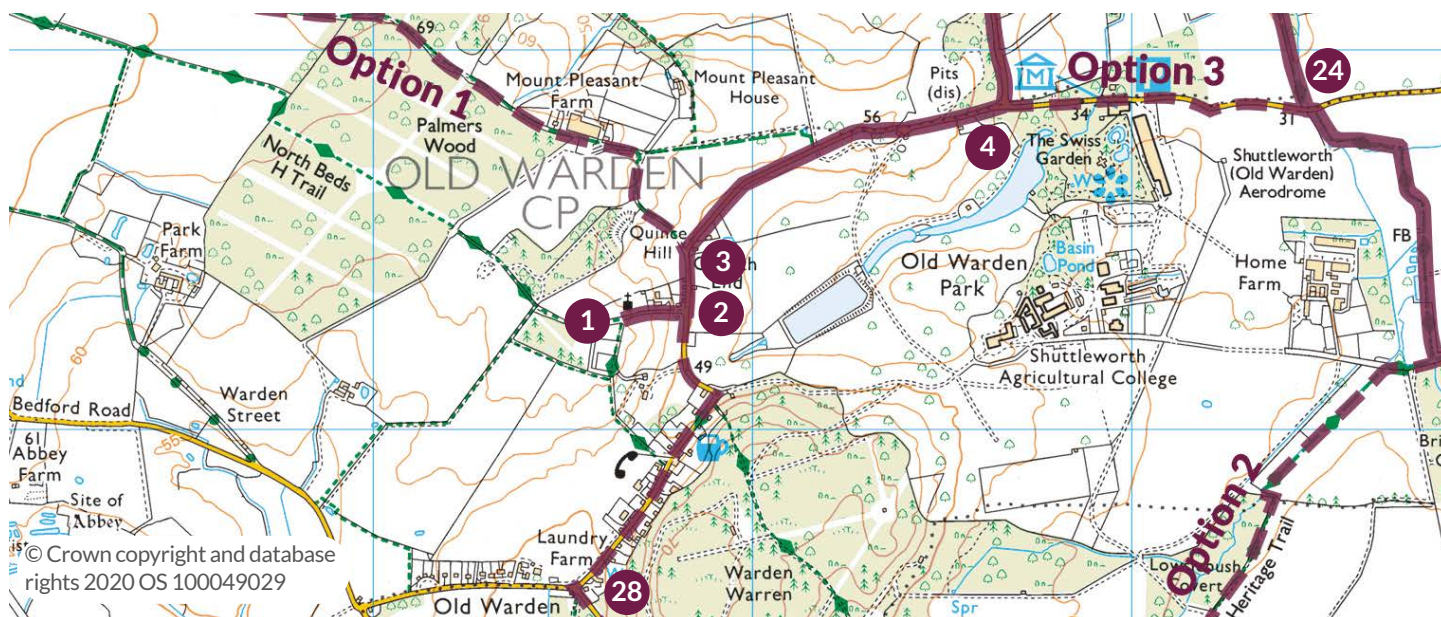
SG18 9HD

OS Explorer maps: 208
(Orange 1:25,000)



Route map





- 1 Start from St Leonard's Church car park in Old Warden. From here cycle down the short, steep hill to the metalled road.



St Leonard's Church

Church of Laurence at Old Warden is worth a visit as one of the most historic churches in Bedfordshire. Built as the parish church connected to the Cistercian Abbey at Warden, construction was begun not long after the Domesday Book in the 12th c. A stained-glass window in the church thought to have come from the Abbey Church clearly shows a Cistercian monk. The beautifully carved wooden church furniture was installed by the local estate owner Robert Henley-Ongley in the 19th c using material shipped from Europe.

- 2 Turn left and head along the road out of Old Warden.



Shuttleworth estate

Turning left the ride follows the boundary of the Shuttleworth estate, now well known for the historic collection of vintage aircraft. The adjacent airstrip is used occasionally to fly these valuable airplanes, and the Swiss Garden on the same site has an equally interesting and valuable plant collection.

- 3 If you are taking option 1 turn left onto the brideway.



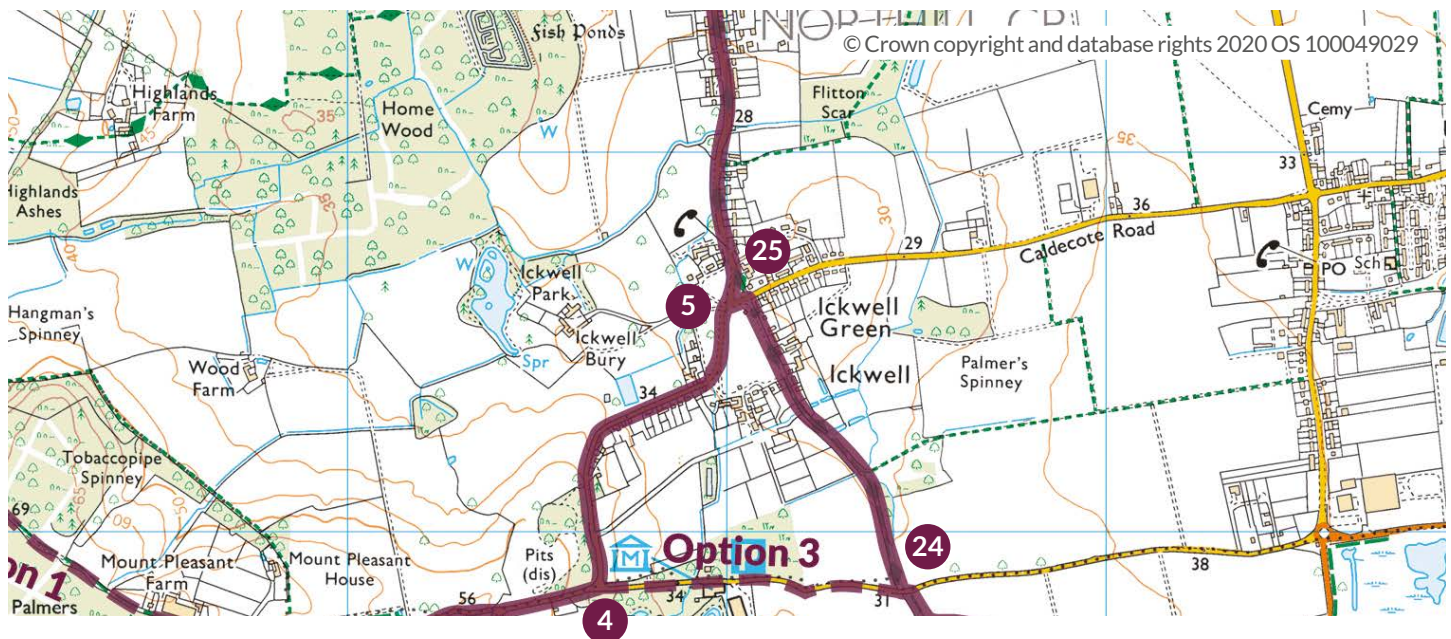
Shuttleworth College

At the heart of this estate is the former residence of the Shuttleworth family built at the end of the 19th c, which is now a further education college specialising in land-based qualifications. This is an important asset to the rural economy of Bedfordshire offering qualification in subjects such as equine studies and practical agriculture.

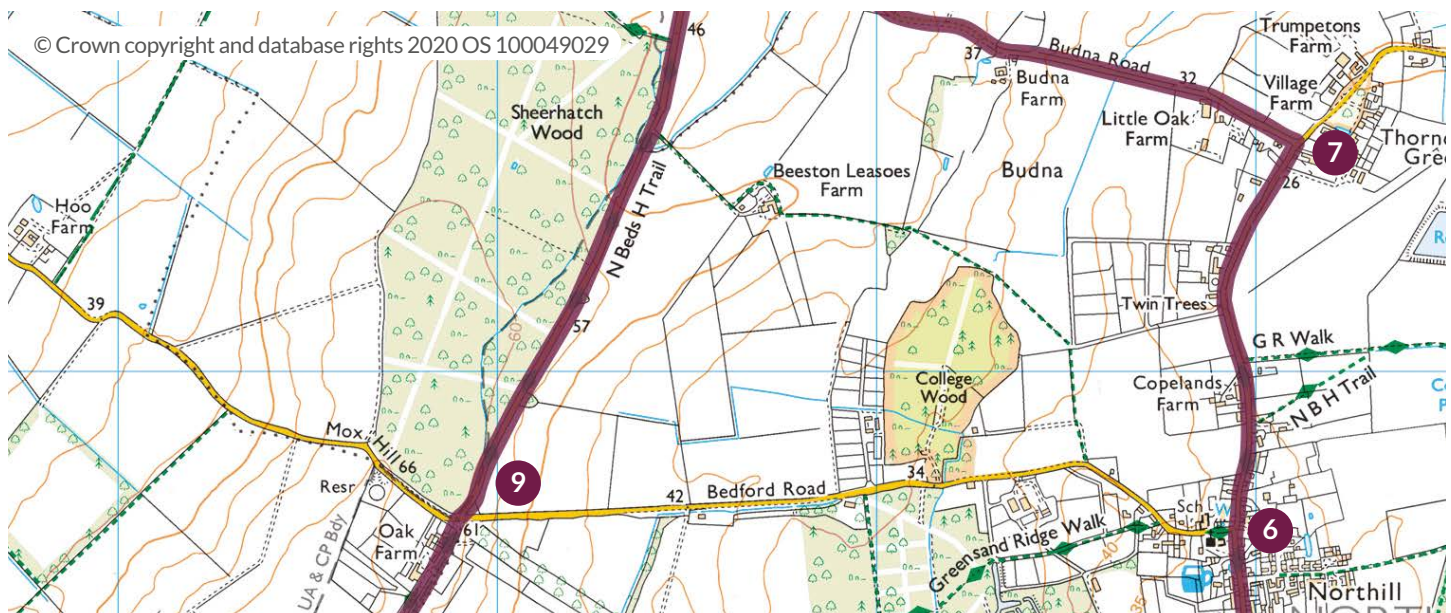
- 4 Otherwise continue and turn left at the T junction towards Ickwell Green.

Ickwell Green and Northhill

Approaching the village of Ickwell Green the road drops off the Greensand Ridge and crosses the flatter terraces of the River Ivel. The wooded landscape of the Ridge is replaced by large flat arable fields and intensive agriculture. This landscape of the river terraces has in the past been favoured for market gardens. These villages are characterised by large and attractive village greens around which are grouped a variety of interesting building. Ickwell Green has one of the oldest cricket clubs in the region with records of games played here for over 125 years.



- 5** Go past the cricket pitch and maypole.



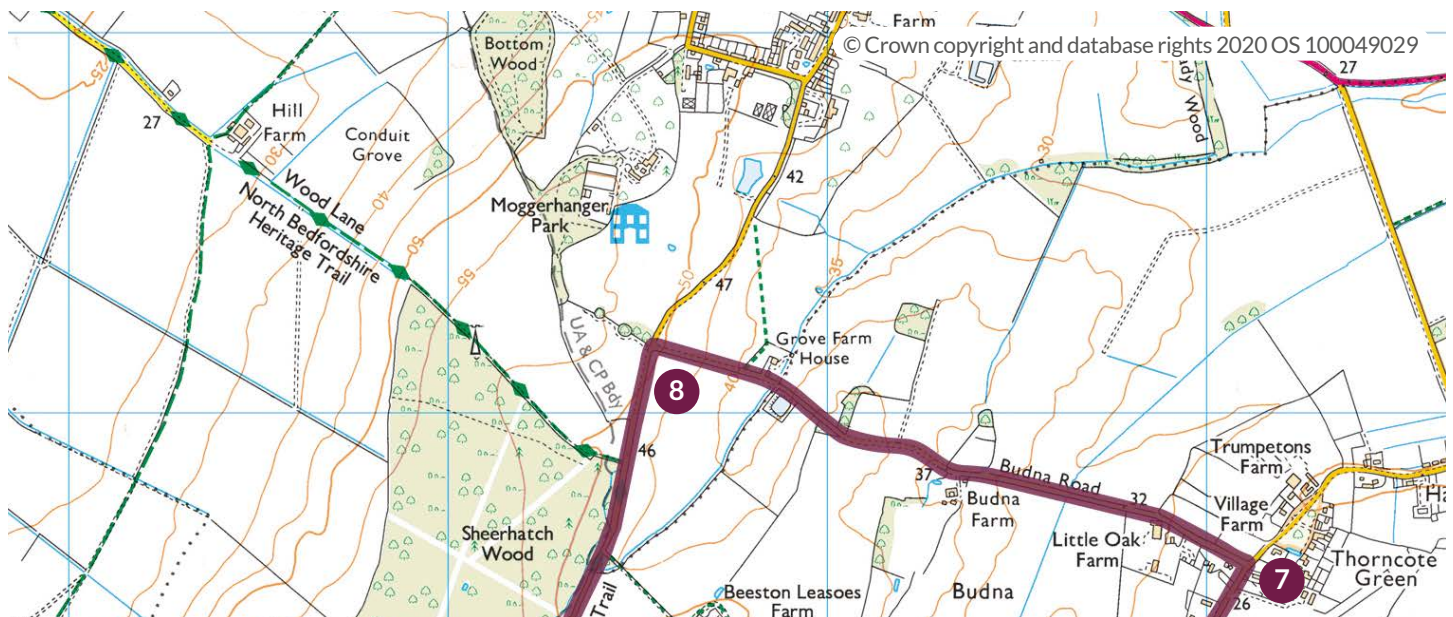
- 6** At the T junction by St Mary the Virgin church an option of the main Greensand Cycleway branches off on the left. Otherwise, head through Northhill on the Thorncote Road.

- 7** Turn left just past 'Kilchoan'

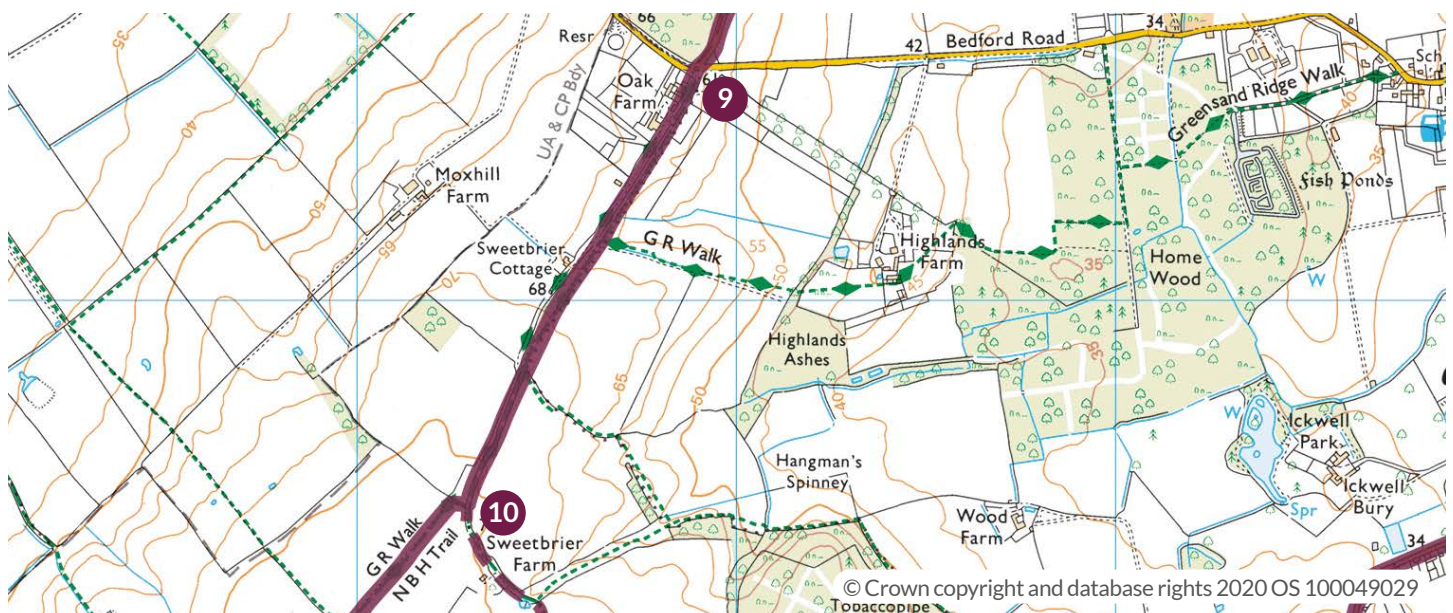


Moggerhanger estate

A gentle climb through the hamlet of Budna is rewarded with a view of the Moggerhanger estate another of these extensive Bedfordshire estate properties. The house here is often open to the public and has an interesting history with modifications to the original house and a redesign of the land around by Humphrey Repton a leading English garden designer of the 18c. Designs by Repton were based on his art work presented to the client in a formal 'Red Book' with clever flaps showing the before and after appearance of the landscape. Repton was puzzled by this commission at Moggerhanger, deciding this house was too grand to be a simple farmhouse; not grand enough to be an important country house; too distanced from London to be a villa; and he finally decided this was best described as a 'sporting estate'.



- 8** Head up Budna Road, through the tiny hamlet of Budna and then turn left at the T junction. Head along the lane which runs alongside Sheerhatch Wood (on the right).

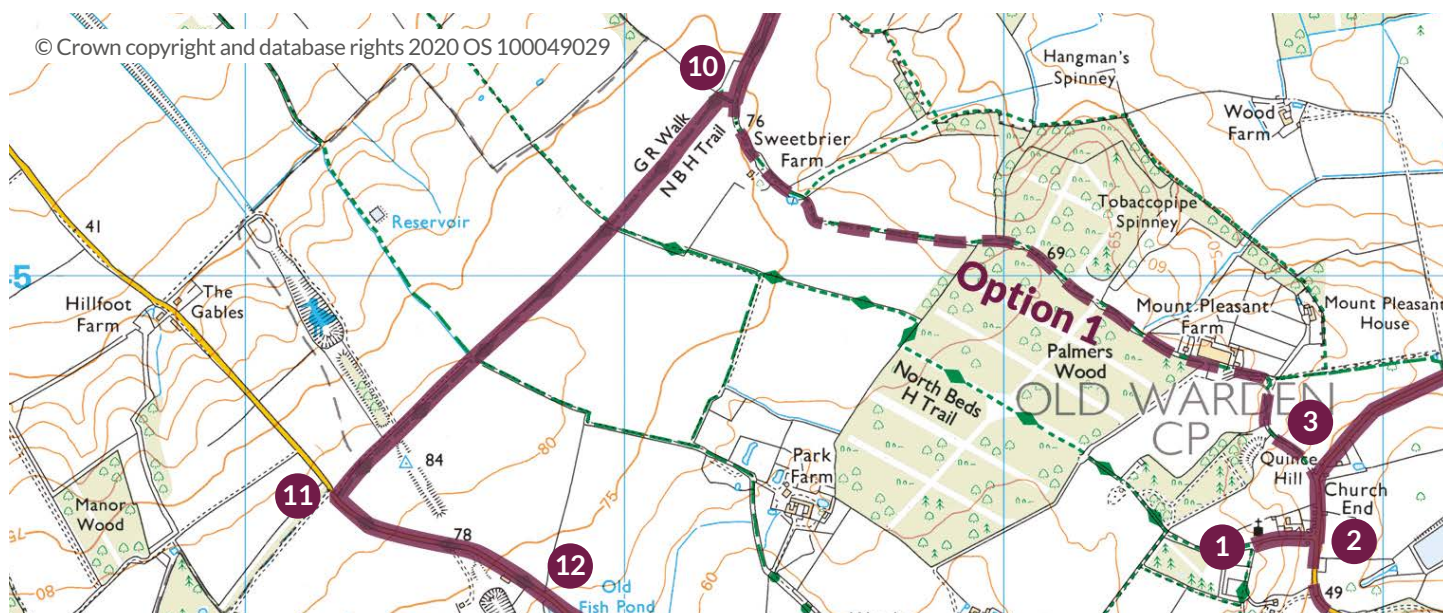


- 9 At the T junction with the Northhill – Cople road head (carefully) straight across the road and along the bridleway, an off-road section using an old trackway, and now part of the Greensand Ridge Walk. This may be very muddy. Continue to follow the bridleway along the field edges to Bedford Road.

- 10 Option 1 starts at the T junction with the bridleway.

Bedford to Hitchin railway

At waymark 10 the route joins the well-used long distance Greensand Ridge Walk and crosses the track of the former Bedford to Hitchin rail line which operated from 1857 to 1961. This line opened up large areas of rural Bedfordshire and providing access to markets for rural industries such as market gardens, the brewing industry and agricultural machinery. The road crosses an old tunnel on this line which was some 875 m in length. The land above this tunnel is now a dedicated nature reserve.

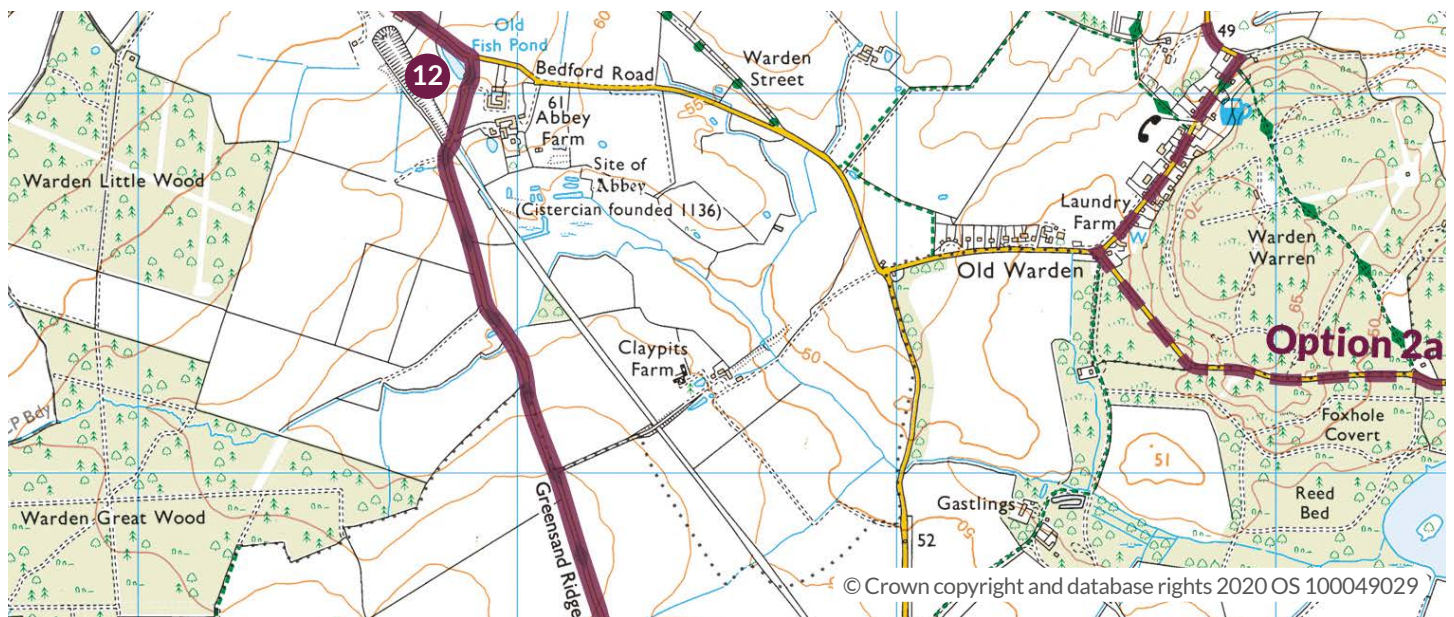


- 11 Turn left onto the road.

Warden Abbey

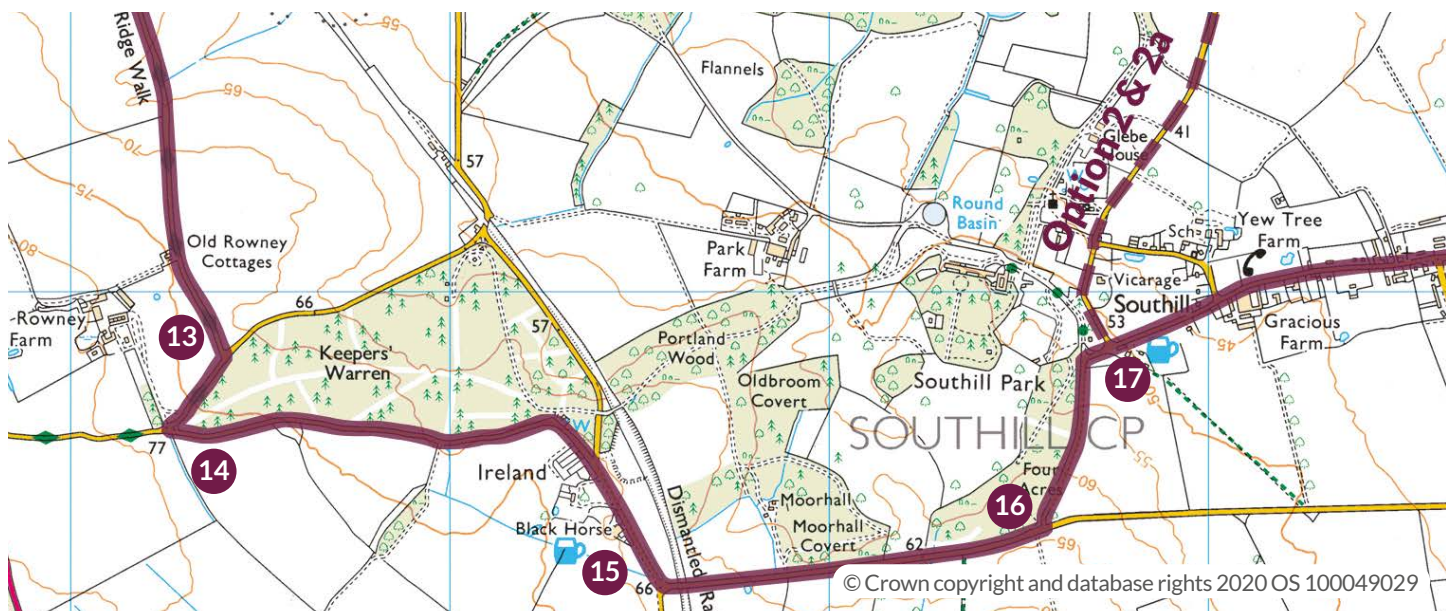
The road junction at waymark 12 offers a view of the site of the former Warden Abbey, adjacent to the present Abbey farm. The only remaining building is a Tudor fragment of a larger house built by John Gostwick who was gifted the land of the abbey after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s. The Cistercian Abbey was a substantial complex of buildings and traces of the former fish ponds, an important part of the medieval diet, can still be seen in the fields. Adjacent to the road junction is a small reservoir which is thought to be a relic of the header tank which fed these fish ponds.

- 12 Just past the cottages on the right, turn right down the small lane.



Ireland and rabbits

The route crosses and re-crosses the dismantled rail way, and runs beside the Keepers Warren as the village of Ireland is approached. This part of the Greensand Ridge has sandy soils ideal for rabbits which were a valued commodity in the medieval economy. Rowney Warren which today has a challenging off road bike track is a similar site and both these former warrens have been planted with conifers.



- 13** Go past Warden Manor Farm on the left. Follow the lane all the way to the T junction and turn right.
- 14** Turn left at the fork around the point of Keeper's Warren Wood. Follow the road to Ireland,
- 15** Go past the Black Horse PH then bear left along the straight section of road.

Southill estate

The route follows the boundary of the extensive Southill estate which is now a commercial farming, forestry, and game shooting enterprise. This parkland is one of the most interesting in the area crafted by another of the great English gardeners of the 18th c, Lancelot "Capability" Brown. Now owned by the Whitbread family the house was remodelled in the 1790s to become what has been called, 'one of the most exquisite English understatement'. The grounds are occasionally open to the public.

- 16** Continue along this road and turn left towards the village of Southill.

Southill

The ride descends once again off the Ridge to the flat open fields of the level terraces around the village of Broom, which also had in the past a thriving horticultural industry, specialising in onions.

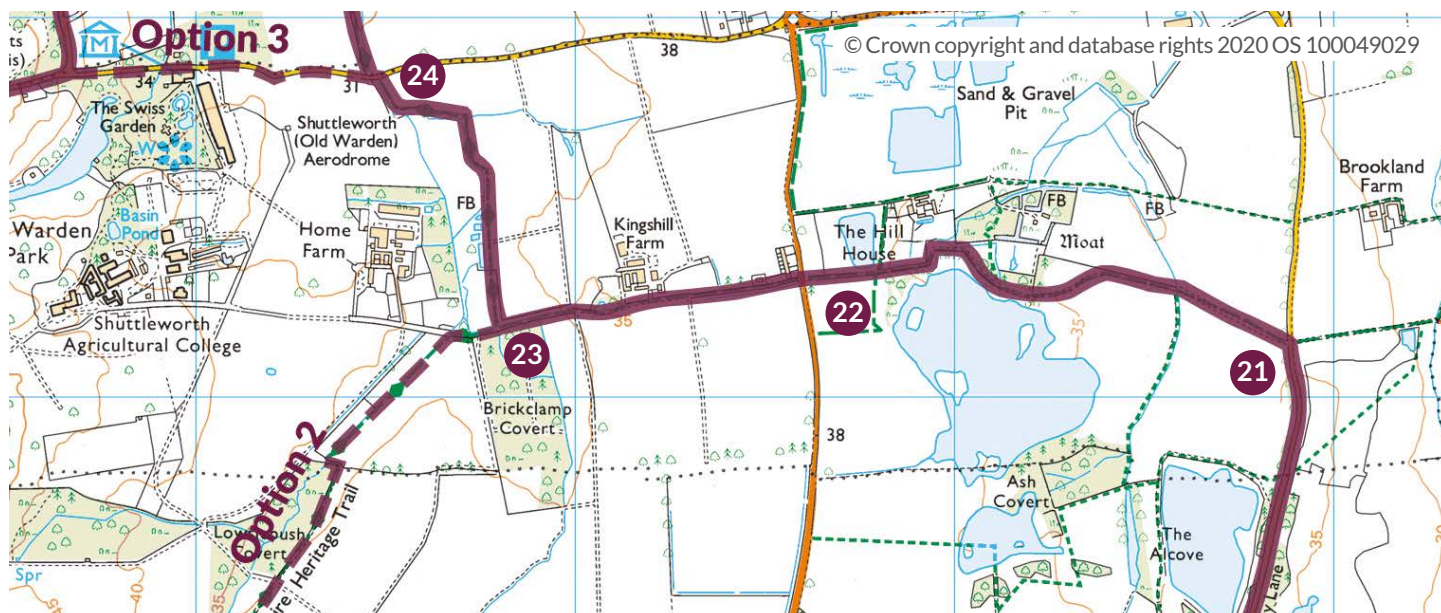
- 17** For Options 2 & 2a turn left at the T junction otherwise continue around the right hand bend and through the village.



- 18** At the Broom crossroads cross straight ahead (very carefully) over the B658 and along the Southill Road to Broom village.
- 19** In the village centre bear left around the small triangular village green and cycle along the High Street then bear right along High Road.
- 20** At the T junction turn left along Gypsy Lane.

River Ivel valley

This land surrounding Broom is on the Ivel River terraces and is very flexible for agriculture: in recent years has been used for the production of roses and commercial tree nurseries, in addition to the usual arable crops. The terraces are usually formed of sand and gravel of great value to the construction industry: working gravel pits are a prominent feature of the landscape all along the Ivel Valley to the confluence of the Ivel and Great Ouse rivers.



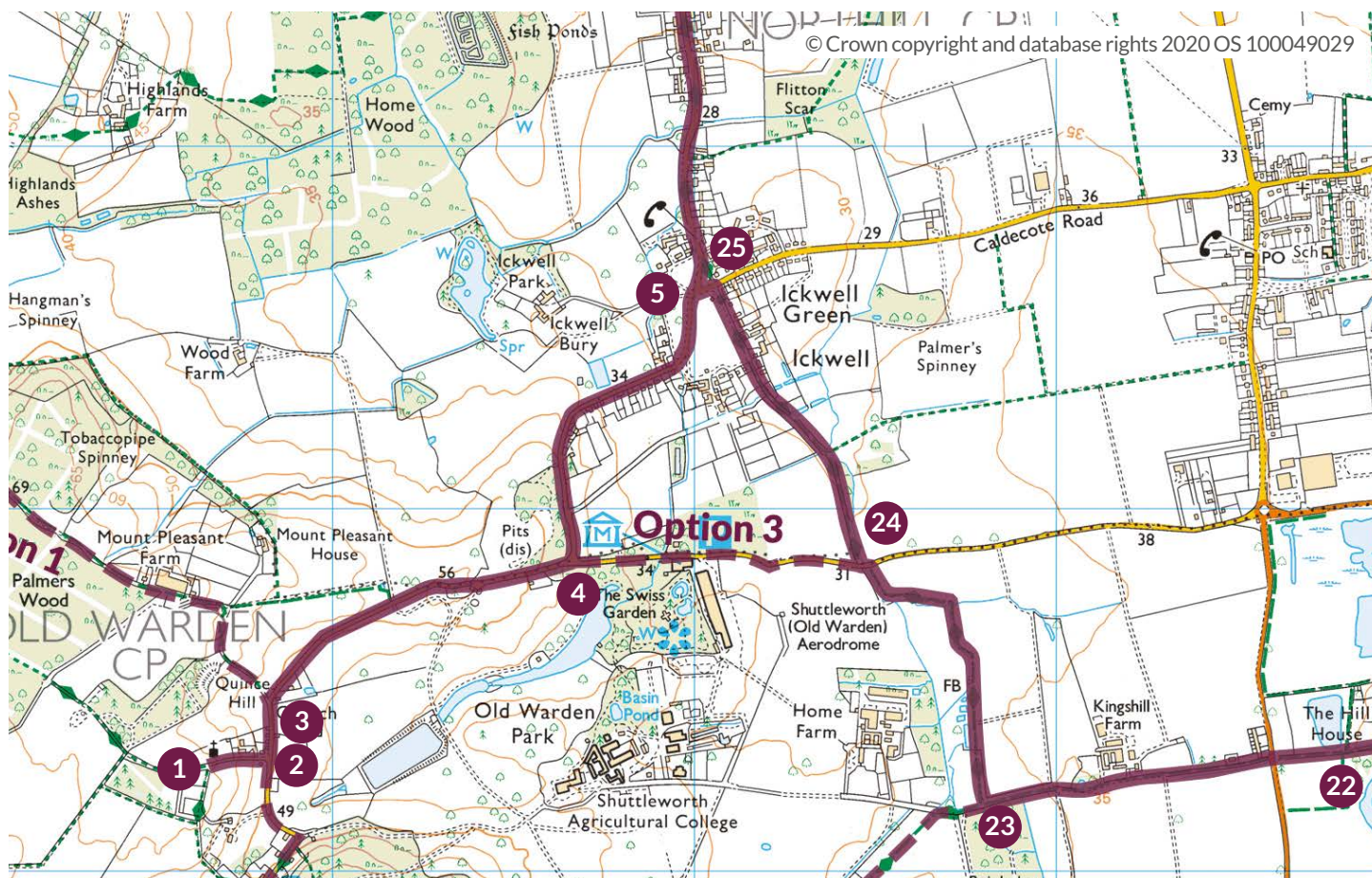
- 21** After a few minutes riding you will see a bridleway on the left. Turn along here, over the bridge and past the flooded sand quarries.
- 22** Stop at the B658 and very carefully cross straight ahead and down the bridleway past Kings Hill Cottages and Kings Hill Farm.

Old Warden

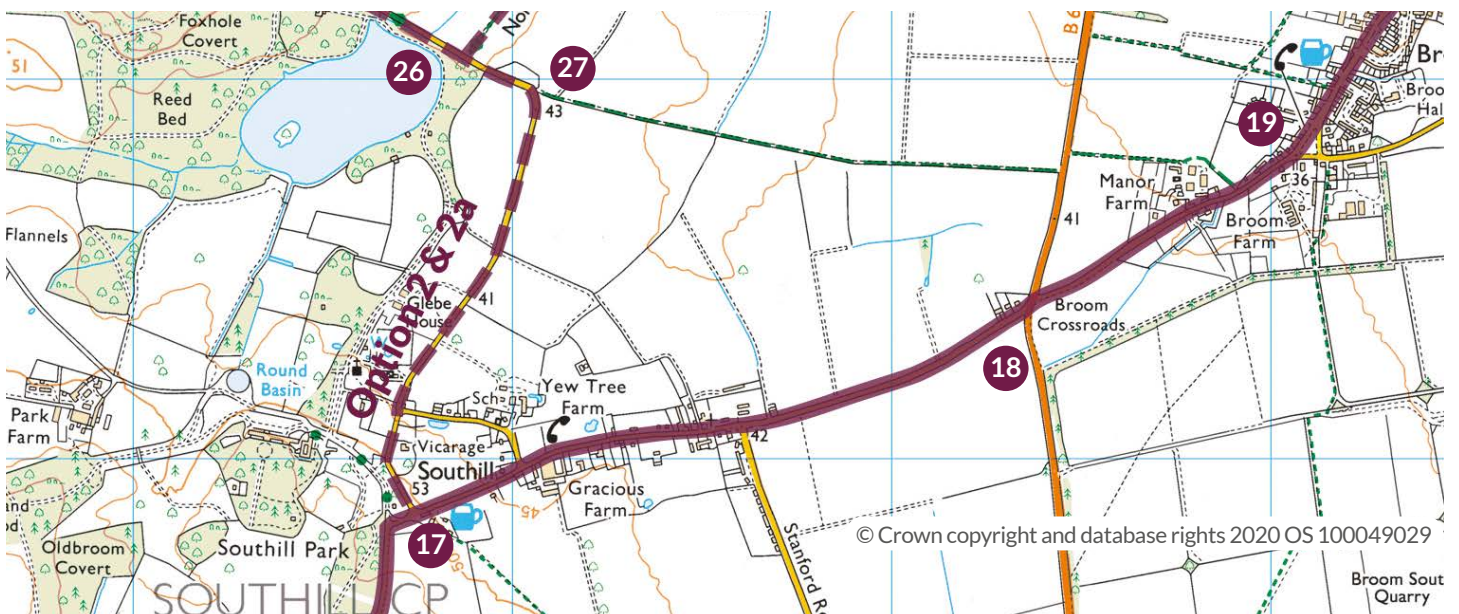
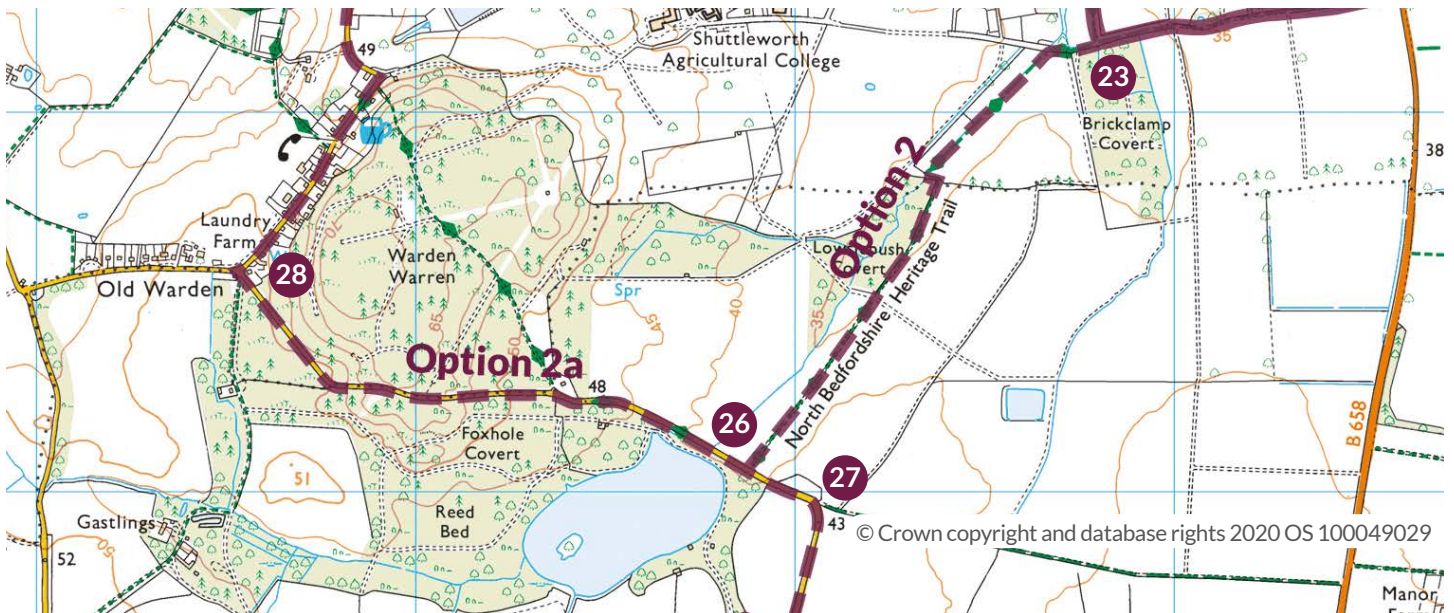
The route now climbs gently back up and onto the Greensand Ridge crossing landscapes which give a flavour of the rural economy of the Greensand Country crossing extensive plantation woodland which is also a valued pheasant shoot. Many woods are described as a 'coverts' proving cover for game birds. Finally, the route enters the village of Old Warden, largely created by the Baron Ongley in the early 19th c. The idiosyncratic nature of the estate owner is best summed up with a quote of a visitor in 1854. 'The people all wore red handkerchiefs like the Swiss and it was his lordship's hobby to make the village look like a Swiss village'.

- 23** Option 2 joins here. Just past the farm turn right, through the bridlegate, and along the bridleway across the grassy field. Go through another bridlegate and over the bridge and follow the stream.
- 24** At the road you can either turn left along the road and back to Old Warden church via option 3 or cross straight over the road and along the bridleway track of Sheep Walk to Ickwell Green.

- 25** At the end of the track keep going straight ahead, keeping the Green to your left. At the road turn left, then almost immediately turn left again and cycle back past the Green (on your left), follow the road as it bears right and head up the hill out of the village. Bear right at the fork on to the Old Warden road and into Old Warden, and turn right back to St Leonards church car park.



There are three options along this route:



Option 1

- ➊ From the start, at St Leonard's church, cycle down the short, steep hill to the metalled road.
- ➋ Turn left. Cycle approx 150m.
- ➌ Turn right along the bridleway, follow this track bearing left onto another bridleway and go through Mount Pleasant Farm. Stay on the track through Palmers Wood then across fields. Approx 180m past Sweet Briar Farm (on the left).
- ➍ Turn left onto the bridleway and then follow the Greensand Ridge Walk as described above.

Option 2

As you enter Southill village from the west

- 17** Turn left 80m after the right hand bend and follow the road past the Old Vicarage. Ignore the right hand bend and carry straight on past Southill Church (on the left) and the Tree Nursery (on the right).
- 27** Approx., 190m after the left hand bend.
- 26** Turn right onto the bridleway and ride along the field edge. Continue following the track (which becomes a bridleway) to the metalled track through the Shuttleworth Estate, which is the home of the Shuttleworth Collection and the Swiss Garden.
- 23** Turn right here then left onto the bridleway following the route description from waypoint 23 above. This cuts out the eastern section of the route.

Option 2a

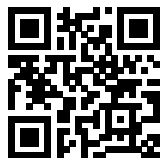
- 28** This option stays on the road out of Southill, through Warden Warren. then turn right at the T junction and back through Old Warden village to the church.

Option 3

- 24** At the end of the bridleway, instead of going across the road and down Sheep Walk to Ickwell Green turn left onto the road and cycle past the Old Warden Aerodrome and Swiss Garden (on the left) and back to Old Warden village and the church.

Refreshments

Details of refreshment outlets can be found on the Greensand Country website



www.greensandcountry.com/experience

Remember when cycling

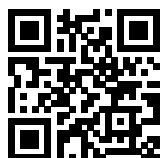
- If possible start your ride from your front door
- If you do drive to the start point then please park with consideration
- Please DO NOT cycle on footpaths.
- Always keep to the waymarked routes and do not enter private land.
- Always ride in single file when roads are narrow and never ride more than two abreast.
- Make sure you are visible to others.
- Always use lights after dark or in poor visibility.
- Plan your route according to the weather and daylight hours.
- Be aware of animals, other cyclists, pedestrians, horse riders and car drivers when cycling.
- Keep your speed down and give way to walkers and other path users.
- Be polite and considerate towards landowners and farmers.
- Keep away from farm machinery or farm/forestry operations.

More information



What 3 Words: Download this app to your smartphone to help you find locations and to tell others where you are. Each 3m square in the world has been assigned a unique 3 word address that will never change.

The route passes a number of churches. More information on them including services, facilities and what else they have to offer can be found online.



www.achurchnearyou.com



www.explorechurches.org

This website may also tell you what is special about the buildings and makes them worth visiting.

Churches are attractive and worthwhile stopping places steeped in community history. They usually have benches to rest on and a porch in which you can shelter from the elements.

Signage for promoted routes throughout Greensand Country has been part-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.