



Have yourself a Greensand Country cycling adventure

Greensand Country Cycleways: **Vale Way**

Beginning in the car park at the church of St Laurence at Old Warden, this route is initially across the undulating countryside of the Greensand Ridge with a mix of plantation woodland, arable fields, and open parkland. The route then drops on to the flat terraces of the River Ouse before again climbing back up the scarp slope of the Ridge to the start point at Old Warden.

Key facts:

Route marker:

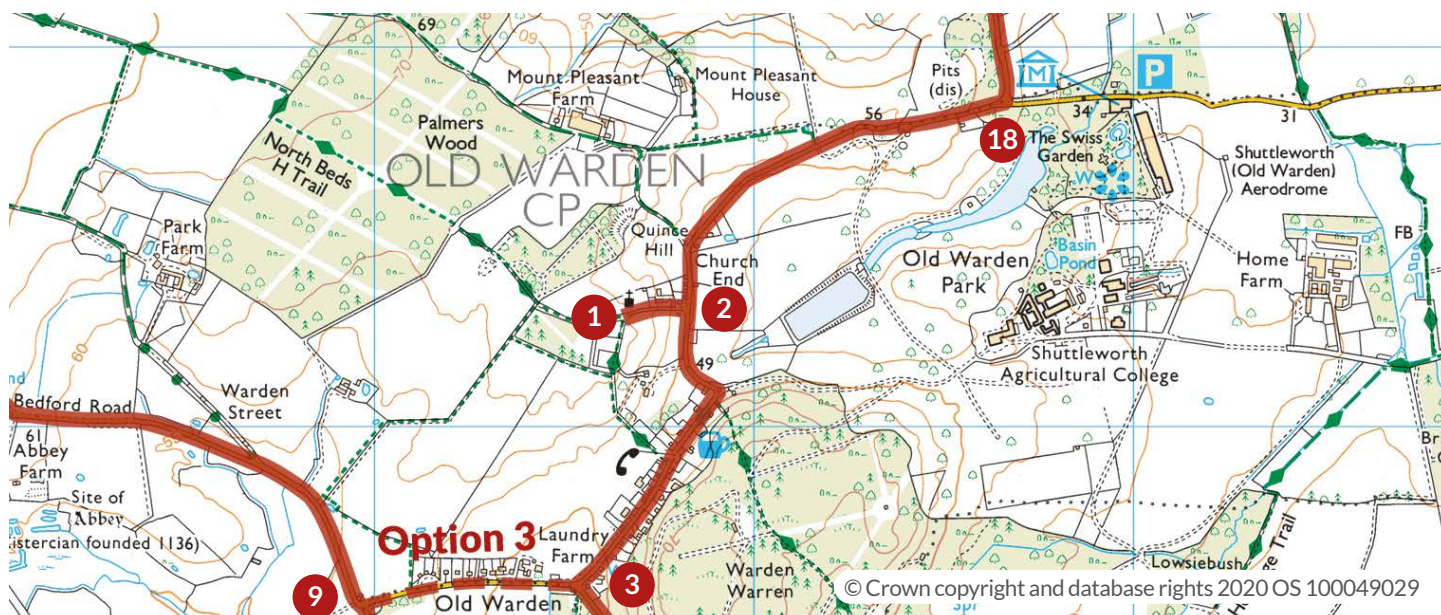


Length:	16 miles (25km)
Direction of travel:	Clockwise but route can be ridden in either direction.
Route type:	On road. Some options are off road.
Options:	Three. All off road
Links to other routes:	Greensand Cycleway, Forest Way, Abbey Way, Thatcher's Way
Terrain:	Undulating
Car park:	There is a car park available at St Leonard's Church. You can also park and start the ride from Cople church. 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: (Orange 1:25,000)	181, 182, 192, 193



Route map





- 1 Start from Old Warden (St Leonard's) church car park.

St Leonard's Church

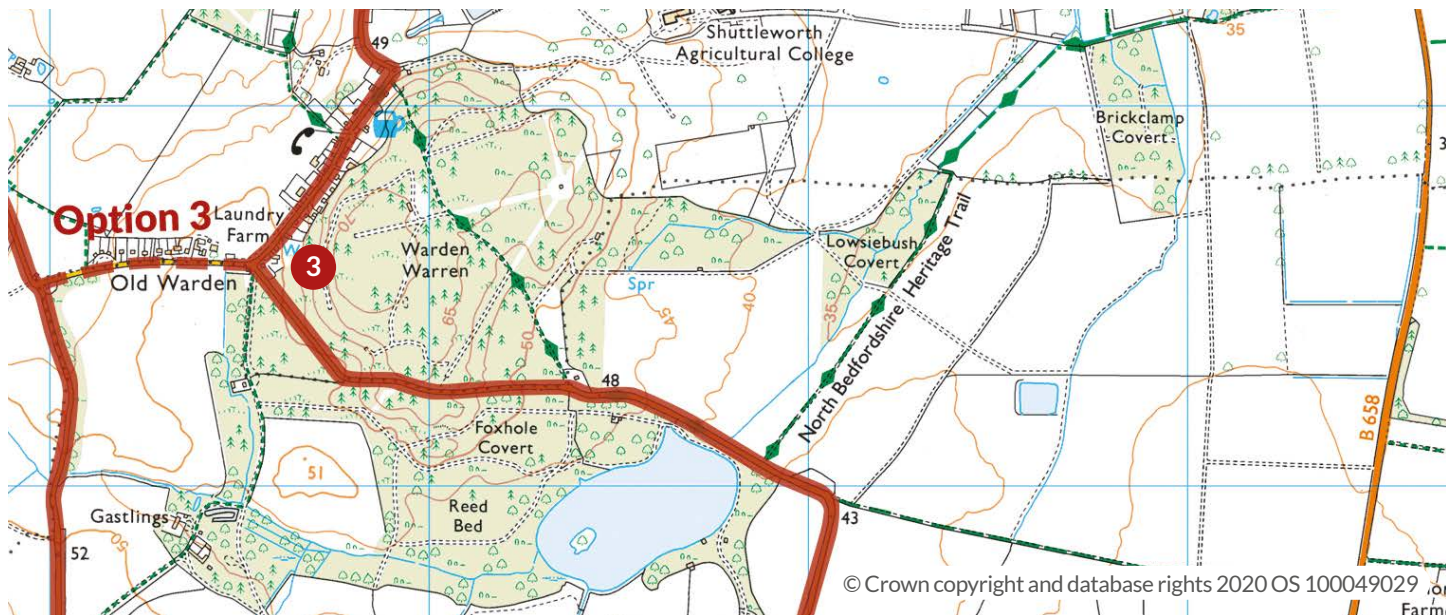
The church is worth a visit as one of the most historic churches in Bedfordshire. Built as the parish church connected to the Cistercian Abbey at Warden, construction was begun not long after the Domesday Book in the 12th c. A stained-glass window in the church thought to have come from the Abbey Church 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 right into Old Warden village, round the bend past the Shuttleworth College entrance and on past the Hare and Hounds PH. Watch out for the village well on your left.

Old Warden

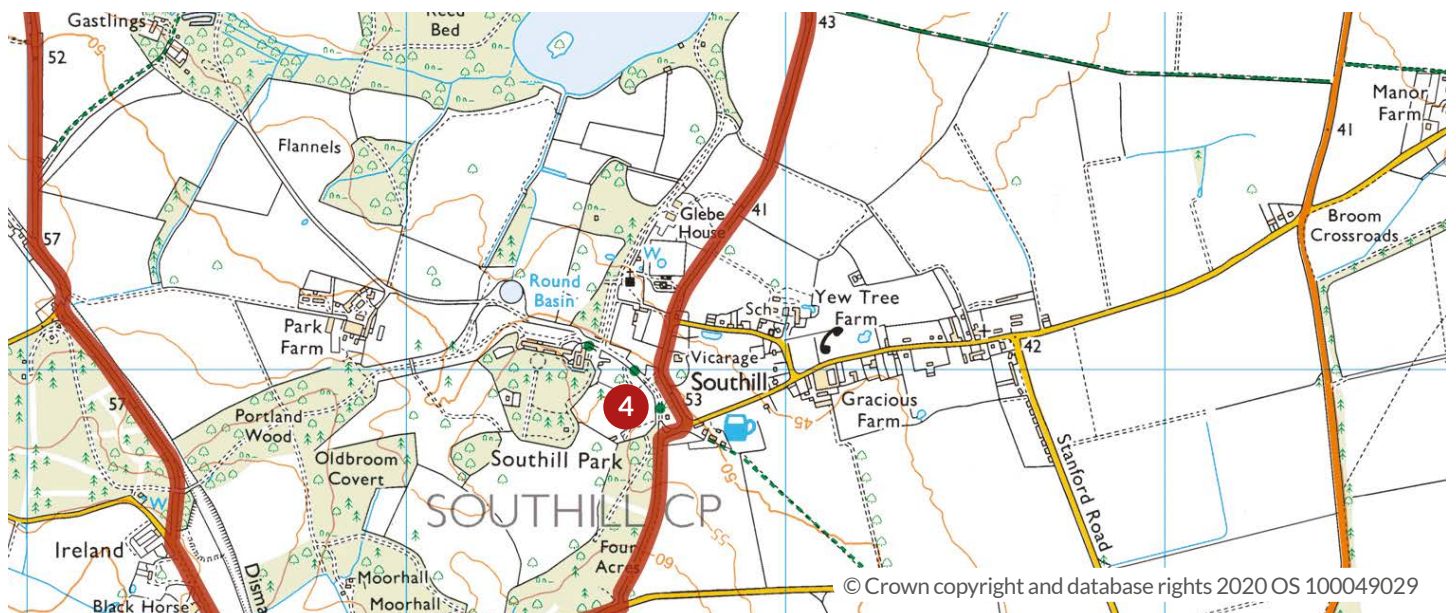
Old Warden was largely created by the Baron Ongley in the early 19th c. The idiosyncratic nature of the estate owner is best summed up with a quote of a visitor in 1854. 'The people all wore red handkerchiefs like the Swiss and it was his lordship's hobby to village look like a Swiss village'. With many picturesque 'Swiss' style thatched cottages this was considered a model estate village in the late 18th century.

- 3 Continue along the High Street until the left hand road (signposted to Southill) and turn left here. Follow the lane through woodlands and up a slight incline and past the attractive thatched cottage on the left. Follow through the bends, past the tree nursery, until you reach Southill village and carry straight ahead past All Saints church and the Old Vicarage until you reach the T-junction.



Southill estate

The Southill estate is one of the largest of these mixed parkland estates in this area which combines extensive arable agriculture, forestry and a game shooting as a commercial enterprise. Much of this land is sandy and well suited to plantation forestry. Previously this was a mediaeval rabbit warren.



- 4 Turn right at the T junction and carry on the next T-junction.



- 5** Turn right again and follow this straight road past woodlands (Moorhall Covert) on your right.



Bedford to Hitchin railway

Continuing south through the village of Southill, the road follows the estate boundary and crosses the dismantled railway before the village of Ireland. The route crosses and re-crosses this dismantled railway. The Bedford to Hitchin rail line, operated from 1857 to 1961 and 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.

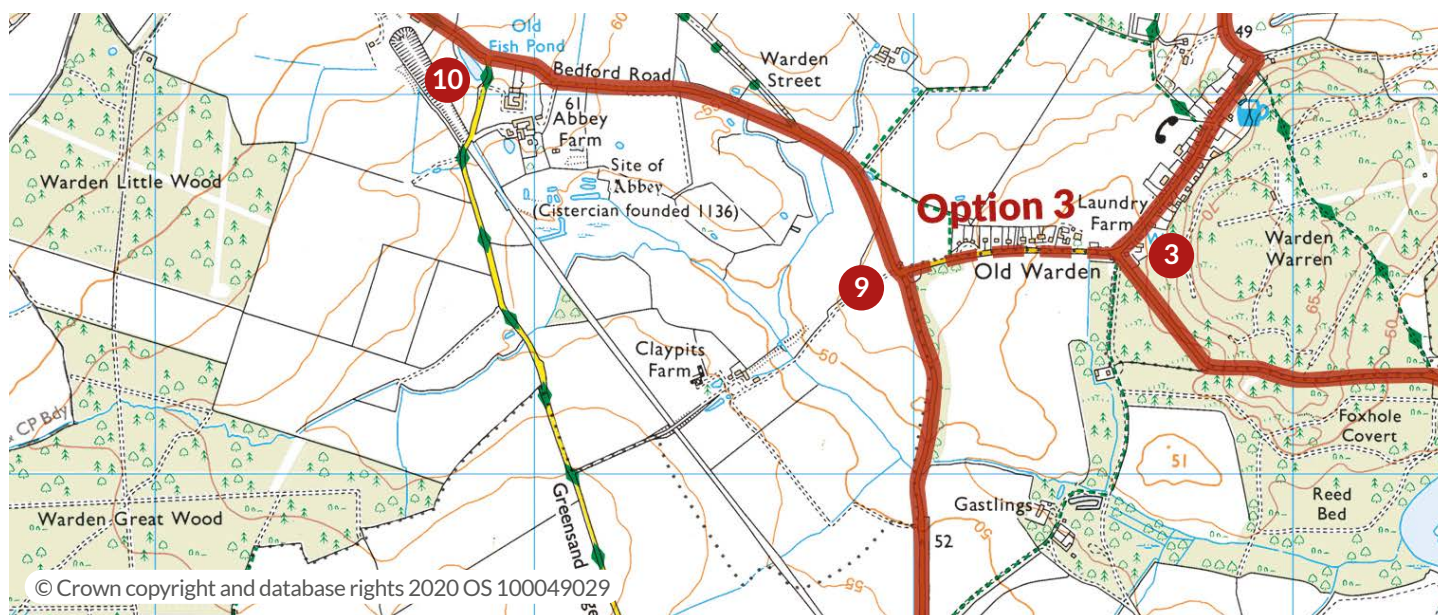
- 6** Just over the bridge, at the next junction, take the right hand road and cycle into the small hamlet of Ireland and past the Black Horse PH (on your left).
- 7** Take the next right-hand road down a hill through woodlands and to the T-junction at the bottom, opposite Yew Tree Lodge.



Rabbits

The Keepers Warren, on the left is another of the medieval rabbit enclosures, which were successfully established on sandy subsoils of this part of the Greensand Ridge.

- 8** Turn right here, under the old railway bridge and follow the bends past the old railway station cottages and past the entrance to Southill Sawmill (on the right). Continue along this road until you reach the edge of Old Warden village.



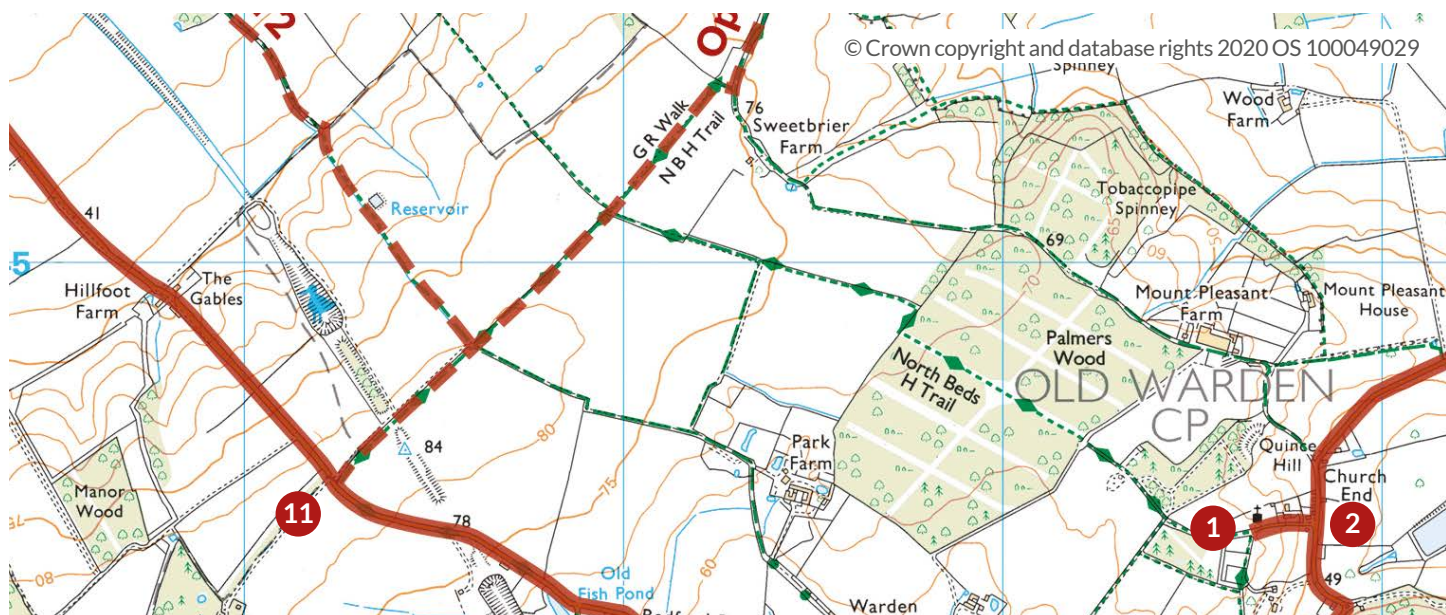
- 9 At this sharp right-hand bend turn left across the road and follow the country lane (Bedford Road). Option 3 takes Old Warden Road on the right back to the start at the church.



Warden Abbey

The ride passes the entrance to the modern vineyard on the site of the medieval Cistercian Warden Abbey. Historic records indicate that the Cistercian monks had several vineyards on this site. The route offers a view of the site of the former Warden Abbey complex now completely dismantled. 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 at Abbey Farm is a small reservoir which is thought to be a relic of the header tank which fed these fish ponds.

- 10 Follow the winding lane past Warden Abbey Farm and the remains of the Cistercian Abbey (founded in about 1136), on your left. Continue straight until you reach the edge of the Greensand Ridge escarpment with its fine views across north Bedfordshire and Cardington with its airship sheds which dominate the landscape.

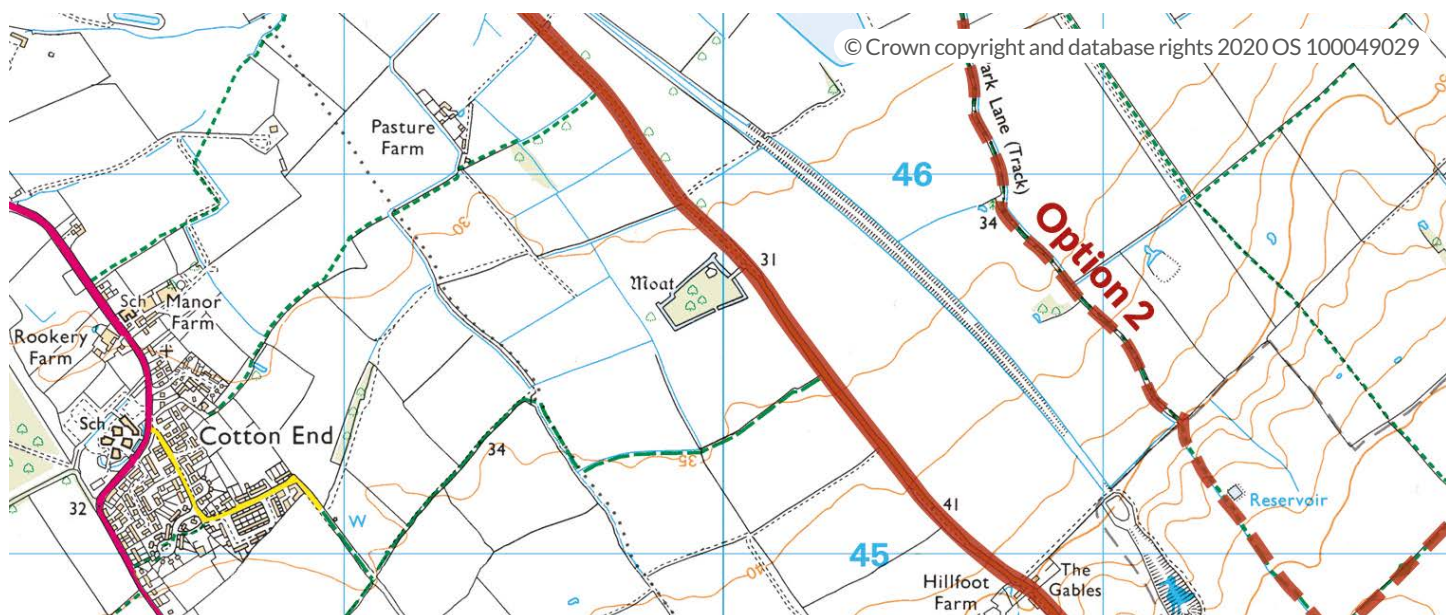


- 11** At the top of the hill option 1 takes the bridleway on the right. Drop down the sharp incline (now on Southill Road), past Hillfoot Farm and follow the road across the flat landscape towards Cardington. The road crosses the old Shefford – Bedford railway line twice and has bends and twists but eventually you will find yourself cycling past the rear of the huge airship sheds. Enter the village of Cardington, round a right-hand bend and past the Kings Arms PH on the left.



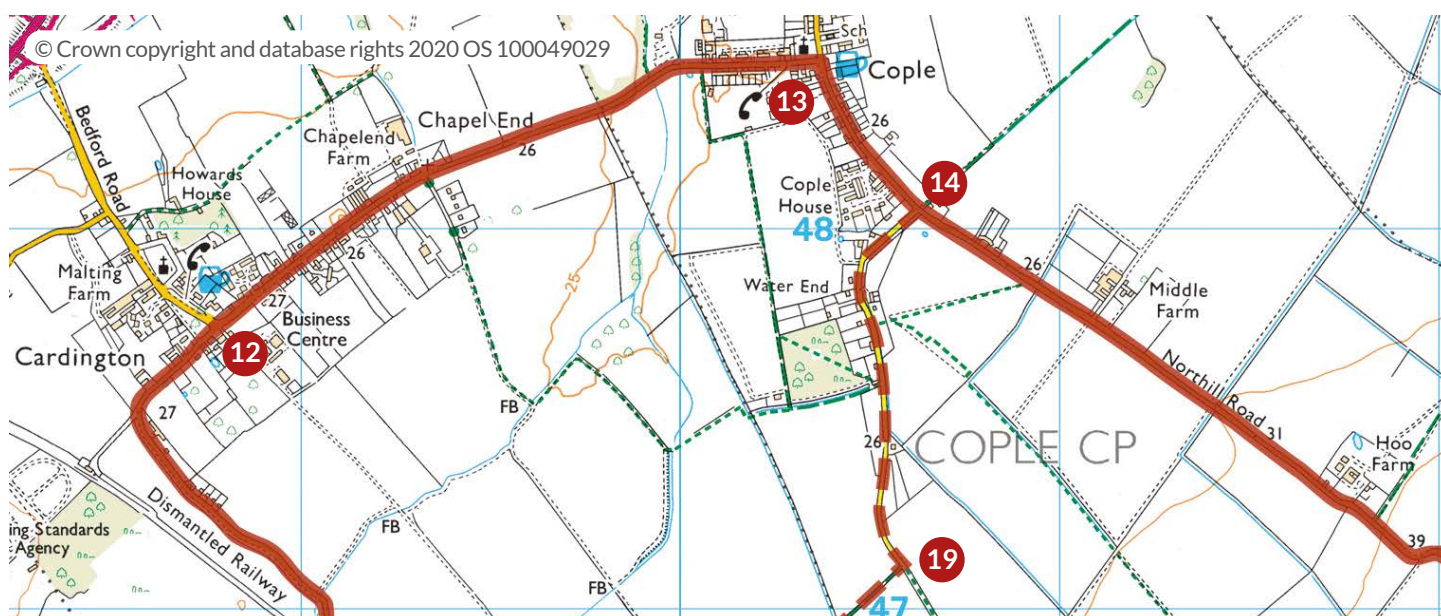
Cardington

The road now drops off the Greensand Ridge and opens up a new landscape across the extensive flat agricultural terraces of the River Great Ouse. On the left at Manor Farm is a medieval moated site one of the many in this part of southern England. Approaching the expanding village of Cardington, the remaining large aircraft hangers dominate the view. Beyond is the village of Shortstown, which housed the workforce building airships during a period from 1917 to 1930. The ill-fated R101 which crashed in France in 1930 with the loss of some fifty lives was completed here.





- 12** Carry straight ahead here (ignoring the road to the left) and cycle through the village, past the Farm Shop and leave the village. After a short stretch on the country lane you enter the village of Cople.

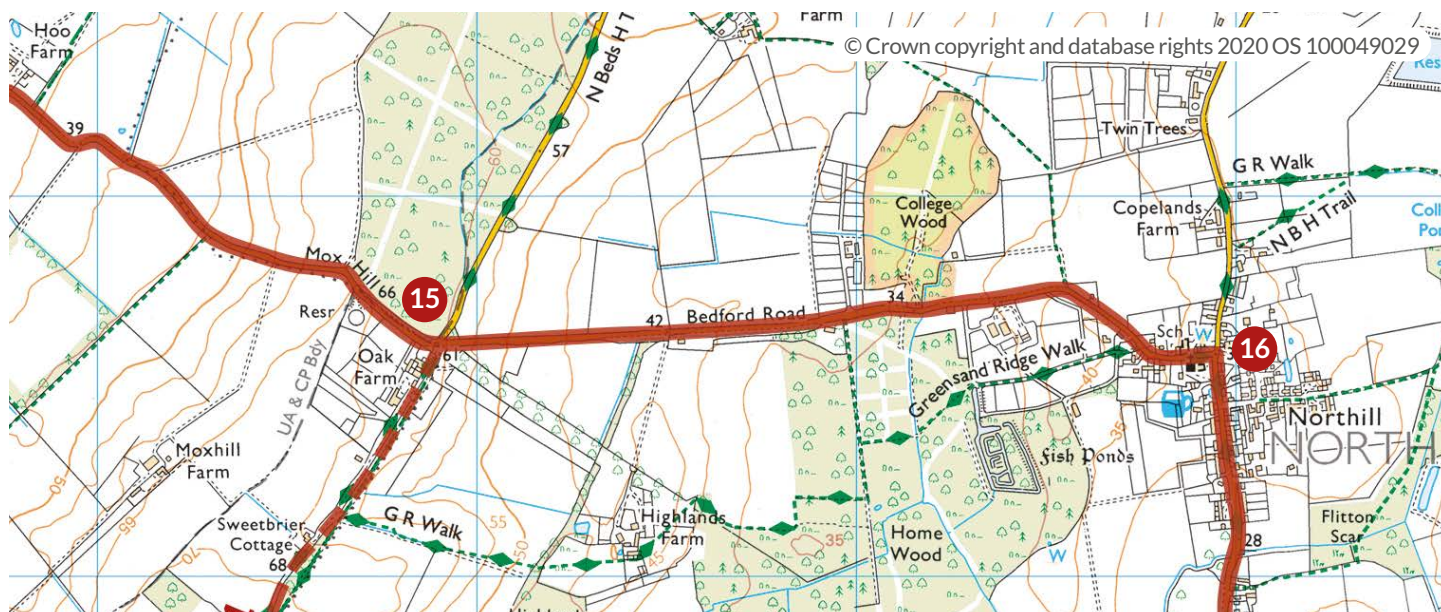


- 13** Continue past the Duke of Bedford cottages on your left and at the T-junction by All Saints Church and opposite the Five Bells PH, turn right onto Northhill Road (you can also park and start the ride from Cople church). Cycle through the remainder of the village and leave Cople.

Valleys & hills

The ride is now crossing the flat river terraces of the Ouse River to the north. This is a flat landscape with extensive extraction of sand and gravel the north of the villages of Cople and Willington. Large arable fields produce wheat, beans and oilseed rape are common. Soon the road climbs again, away from this flat landscape and approaches the scarp edge of the Greensand Ridge once more.

- 14** Shortcut 2 is on the right and follows Water End. The main route follows the road past Middle Farm then Hoo Farm on your left. After a few bends you start to climb steep Mox Hill up onto the Greensand Ridge.

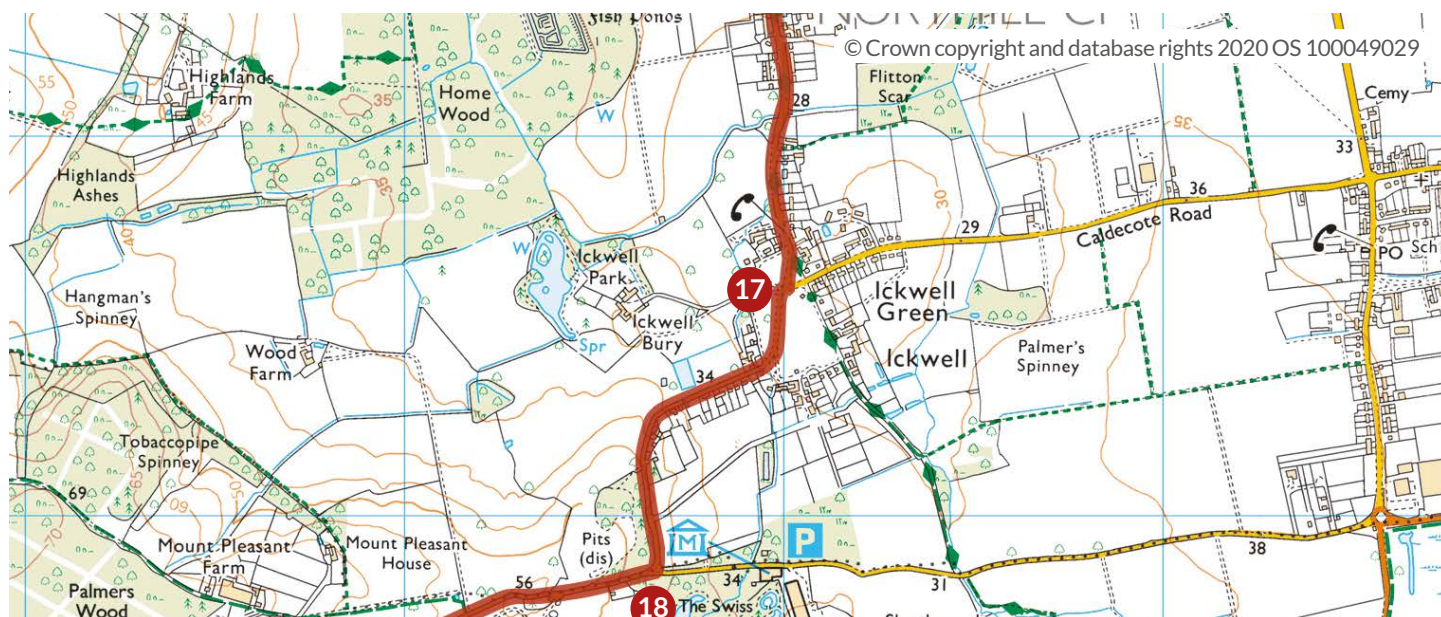


- 15** At the top of the hill you reach Sheerhatch Wood and the crossroads known as Deadman's Oak, opposite Oak Farm. Turn right for option 1 or continue straight through. Then onto the straight section of road (Bedford Road) and past several large attractive old houses. The road passes alongside Home Wood, containing a restored (medieval) fish farm and ponds, past the stud farm then enters the village of Northhill.

Fish

The Bedford Road approaching the village of Northhill is again typical of this extensive parkland wooded estate landscape. Medieval fishponds on the outskirts of the village are remnants of an economy of which valued both fish and rabbit as important parts of the diet.

- 16** At the T-junction next to St Mary's church turn right, past The Crown PH and the village pond and through the village. Next you enter the village of Ickwell Green, possibly one of the most attractive villages in Bedfordshire with its classic English landscape of cricket pitch, village green, large oak, maypole and pretty cottages.



- 17** Follow the road across the Green, past the maypole, and cricket pavilion, past the splendid Ickwell Bury (across the fields, on the right) then up the short hill and out of the village.

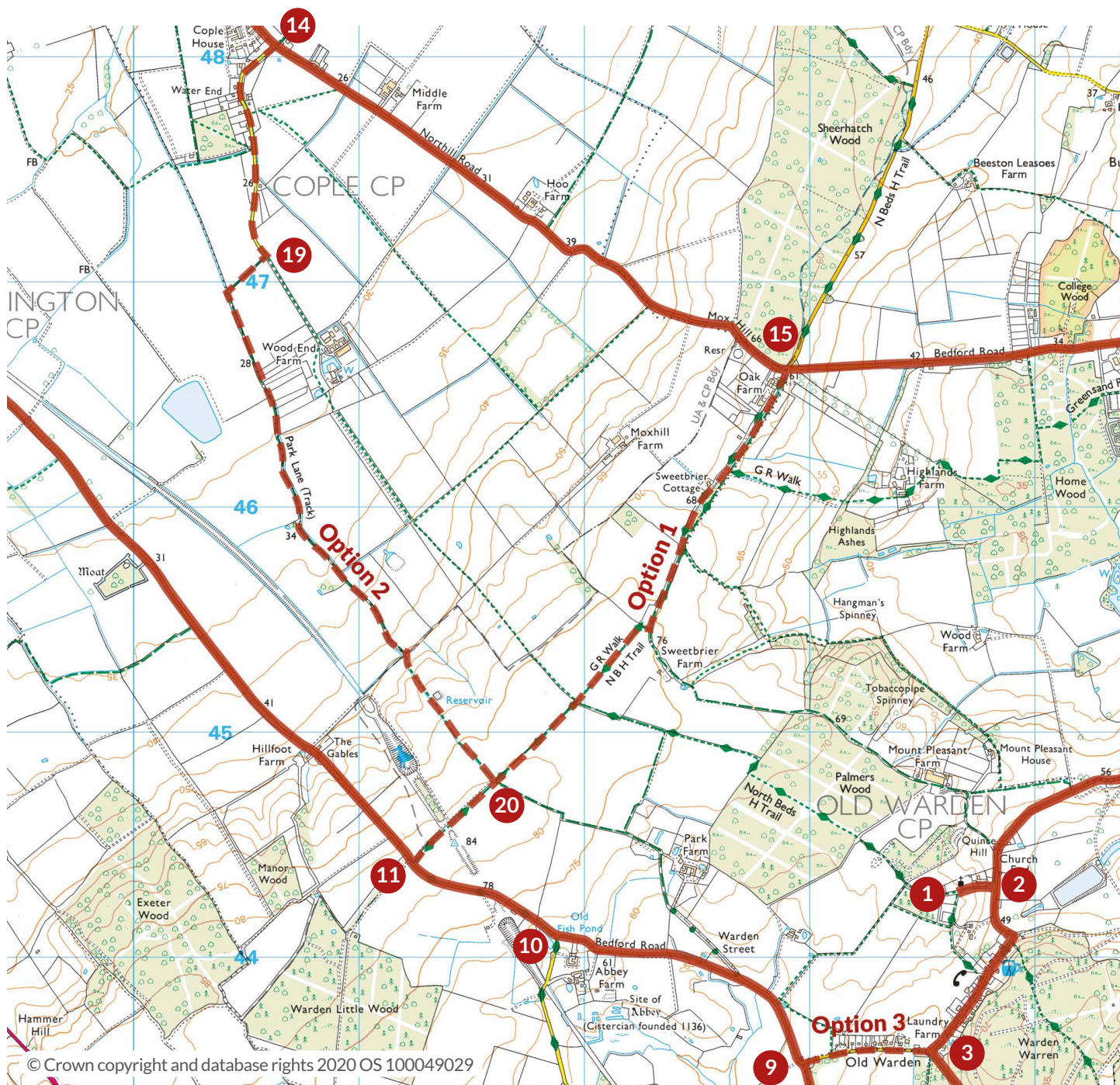
Cricket

The villages of Northill and Ickwell Green 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.

- 18** At the T-junction turn right and follow the road back to Old Warden then turn right by the cottage and back up the hill to St Leonard's church. Alternatively turn left at the T junction for the entrance to the Shuttleworth Collection and the Swiss Garden.

Shuttleworth

The ride now approaches Shuttleworth another large estate on the ridge. 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. This estate is 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.



Options

Option 1 (off road)

The shortcut runs from the top of the hill (11) along the bridleway towards Oak Farm (15). It can be very muddy at the north east end.

Option 2 (off road)

(14) Take Water End and follow until you get to the end where you turn right (19) onto the bridleway. Follow the bridleway until the T junction (20) with another bridleway which is option 1.

Option 3 (on road)

This follows Old Warden Road. At the Y (9) junction turn right for Old Warden and the starting point.

Refreshments

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



www.greensandcountry.com/experience

Remember when cycling

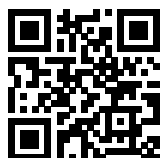
- If possible start your ride from your front door
- If you do drive to the start point then please park with consideration
- Please DO NOT cycle on footpaths.
- Always keep to the waymarked routes and do not enter private land.
- Always ride in single file when roads are narrow and never ride more than 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.