



Have yourself a Greensand Country cycling adventure

Greensand Country Cycleways: **The Thatcher's Way**

This circular cycle ride uses quiet roads and a cycle way linking Bedford and Sandy. The route begins on the flat river terraces of the Great Ouse and then explores the attractive, undulating countryside to the south and east of Bedford including the picturesque estate villages of Old Warden, Southill, Cardington and Moggerhanger.

Key facts:

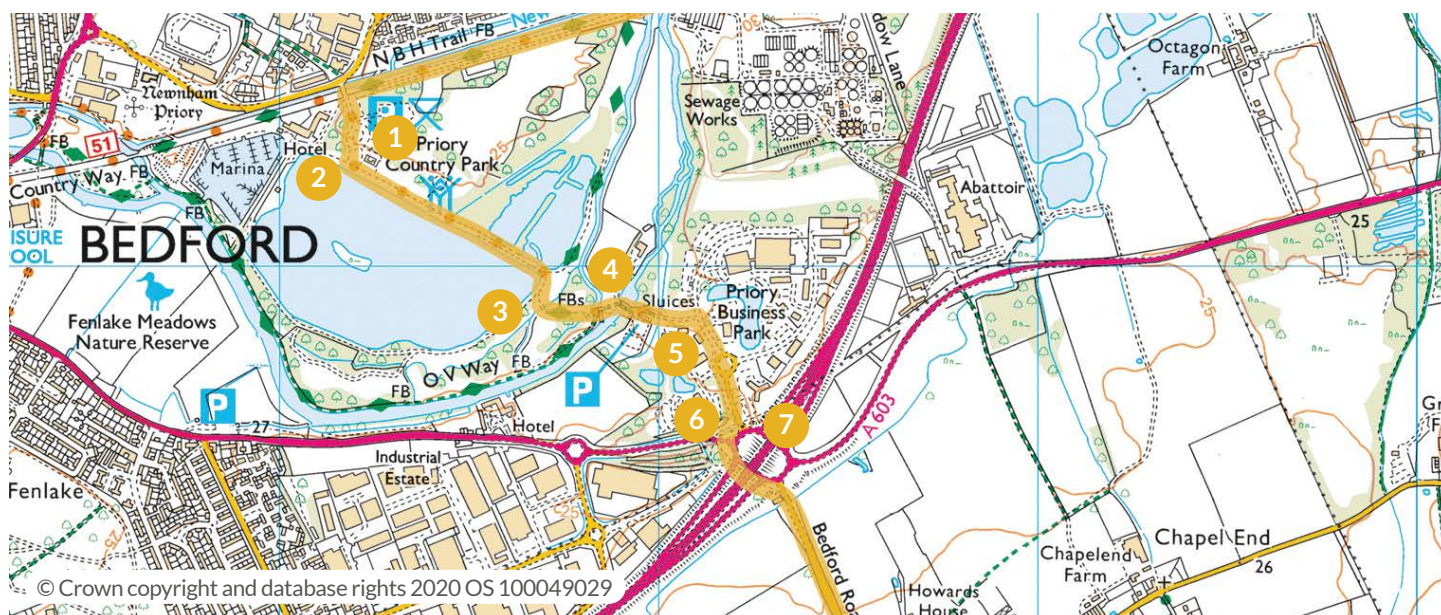
Route marker:



Length:	24 miles (38km)
Direction of travel:	Anti-clockwise but can be ridden in either direction
Route type:	On road and NCN
Options:	Two
Links to other routes:	Greensand Cycleway, Forest Way, Abbey Way, vale Way, NCR51
Terrain:	One steep hill going up if ridden anti-clockwise
Sites:	Willington Dovecote
Car park:	Priory Country Park, MK41 9DJ
OS Explorer maps: (Orange 1:25,000)	208

Route map





- 1 Start from the car park at Priory Country Park in Bedford. Cycle past the Visitor Centre and towards the lake.



A Priory and a Sand pit

This ride begins on the edge of Bedford in the popular Priory Park with the marina and lake reclaimed from former sand and gravel extraction works. The Park is named from the former monastic priory of Newham which was close to this site. This rich ecclesiastical settlement founded in 1154, was one of the richest of the Augustine houses, with jurisdiction over fourteen churches in the vicinity of Bedford. The priory lasted until the dissolution in the 1530s and an exterior boundary wall is still standing on the eastern edge of the site.

- 2 Turn left along the cycle path that runs along the lake.
- 3 Turn left over 'Marina Ford Bridge' and follow the path through the wooded area.
- 4 Then across 'Jetty Bridge'. On the other side, bear left then right across the 'Cardington Lock' and 'Sluice' bridges and leave the Park.

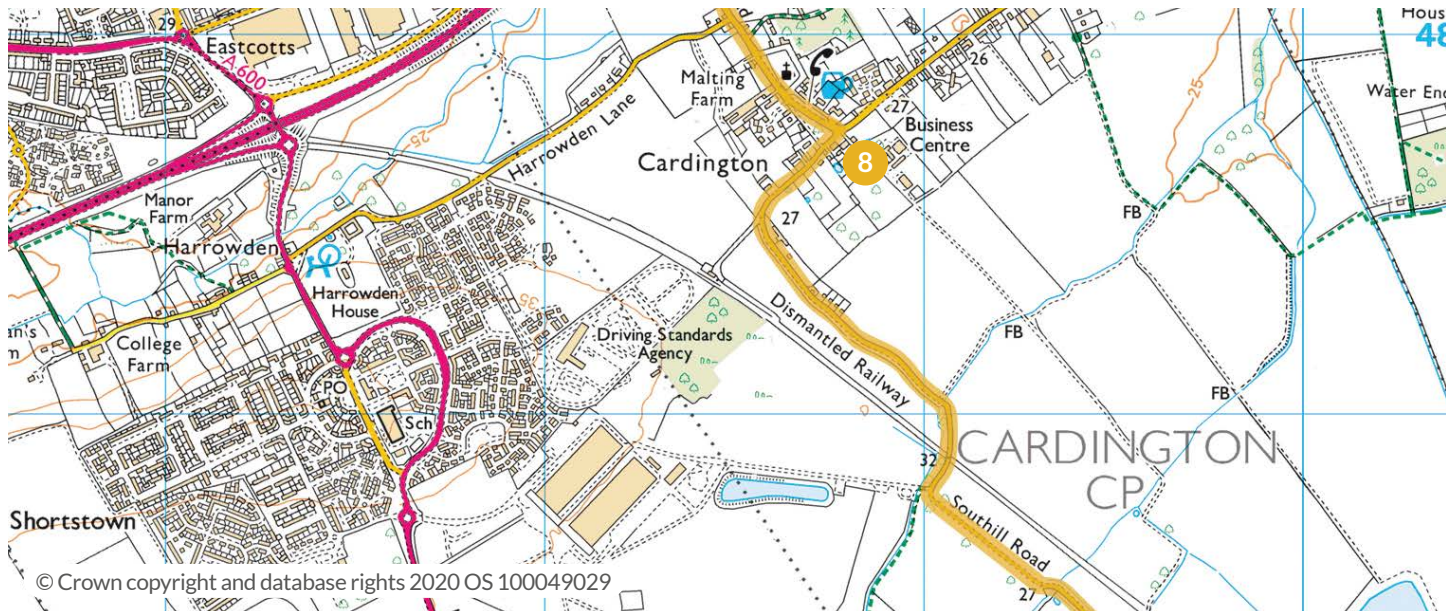


The Ouse Navigation

Crossing Cardington lock the ride leaves the river Great Ouse, at one of the 18 locks on this waterway which allows pleasure boats to penetrate into the heart of England from the North Sea. The navigation of this waterway had a long history from the 17th century onwards but the navigation fell into disrepair along many sections during the 20th century, and was revived and restored with the help of volunteers, reopening in 1978. The river is now navigable along a 75m (120k), from Bedford to Kings Lynn.

- 5 At the T-junction, turn right onto Stannard Way and past the first roundabout.

- 6 Then just before the second roundabout, bear right onto the cycle path, signposted 'Kempston and Cardington'.
- 7 Follow the path anti-clockwise around the large, busy roundabout, cross over the A603 (using the Pelican crossing) then bear left across the two slip roads of the A421. Then take the next right turning off the roundabout signposted 'Cardington'.

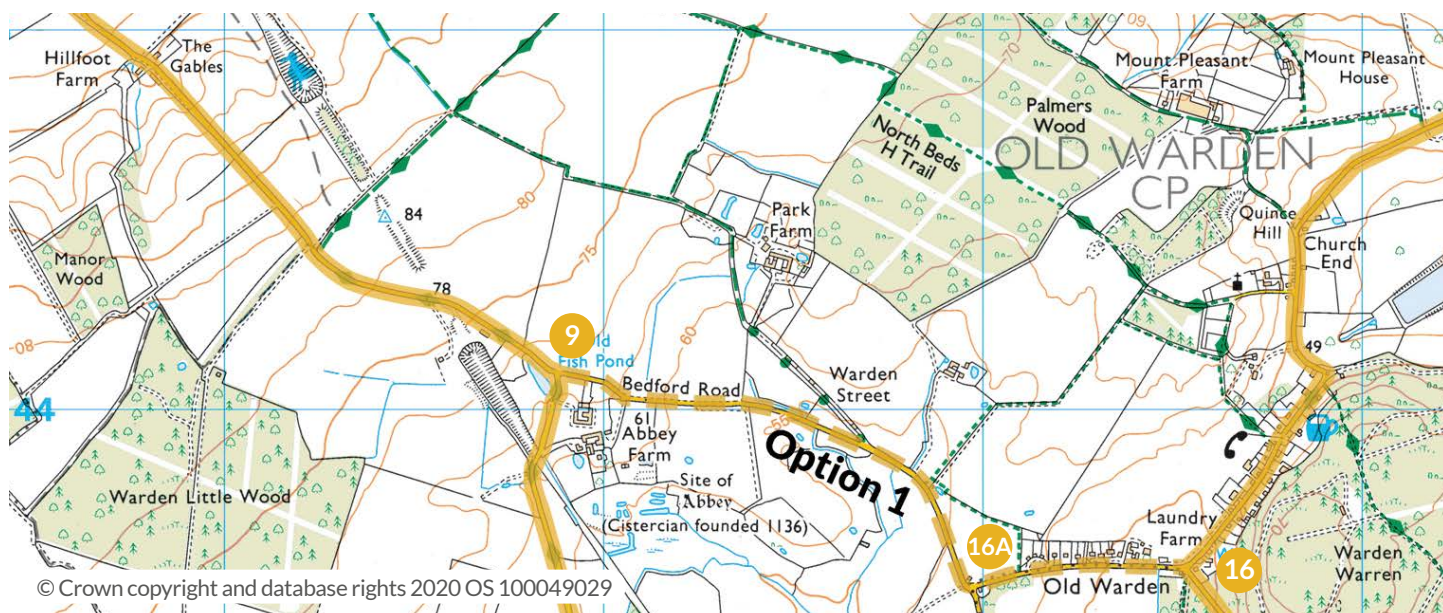
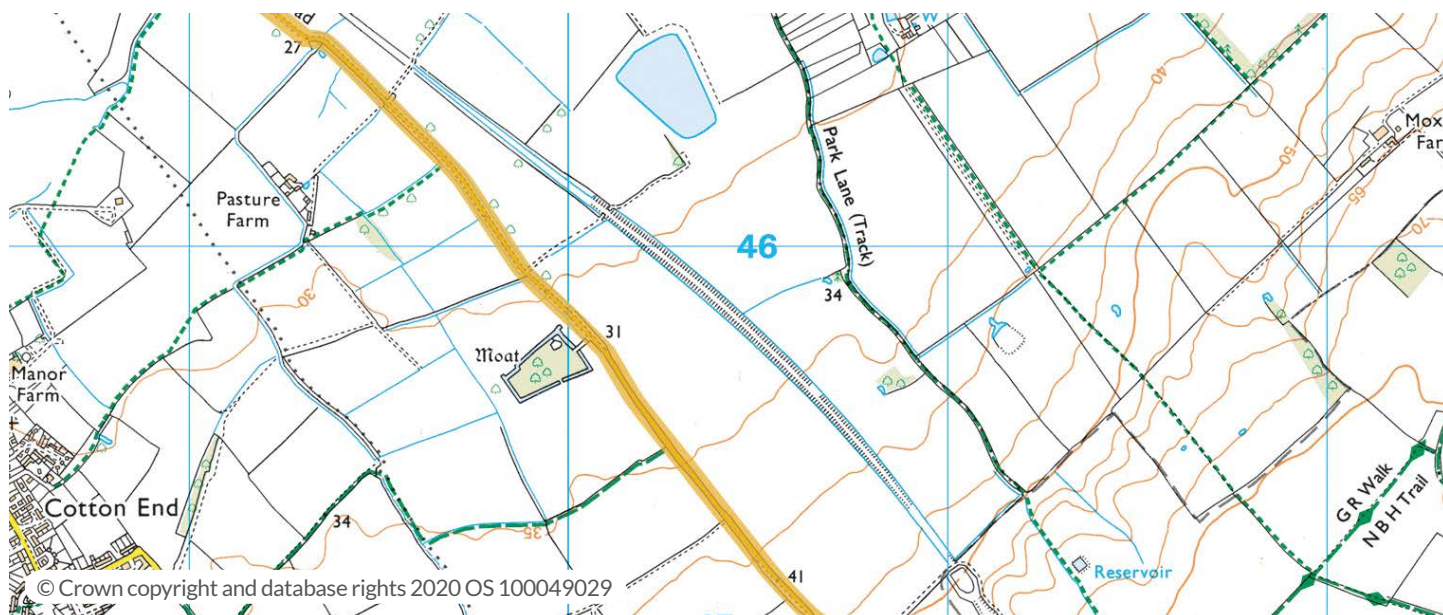


- 8 In the centre of Cardington turn right at the T-junction by the King's Arms PH and follow the road (Southill Road) out of the village going past the memorial clubhouse of the Bedfordshire Road Cycling Club and with the famous Airship Sheds to your right. Continue over a bridge over the old railway line. Continue ahead and up the steep hill onto the Greensand Ridge.



Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines

Leaving Cardington, the solid bulk of the airship hangers dominate the view on the right. At this point the route begins to leave the landscape of the River Ouse terraces and the steep scarp slope of the Greensand Ridge is directly in front. The flat land of the river terraces was ideal for airfields and the vast hangers close to the village of Shortstown on the right are one of the most recognisable in Bedfordshire. Built in the 1915 by Short Brothers, the sheds or hangers were the base for the booming enterprise of constructing airships before the crash of the R101 in 1930 and the decision to dismantle the R100 in shed #2. The hangers have been the site of many recent interesting enterprises and are now partly used as sound stages and for film production.

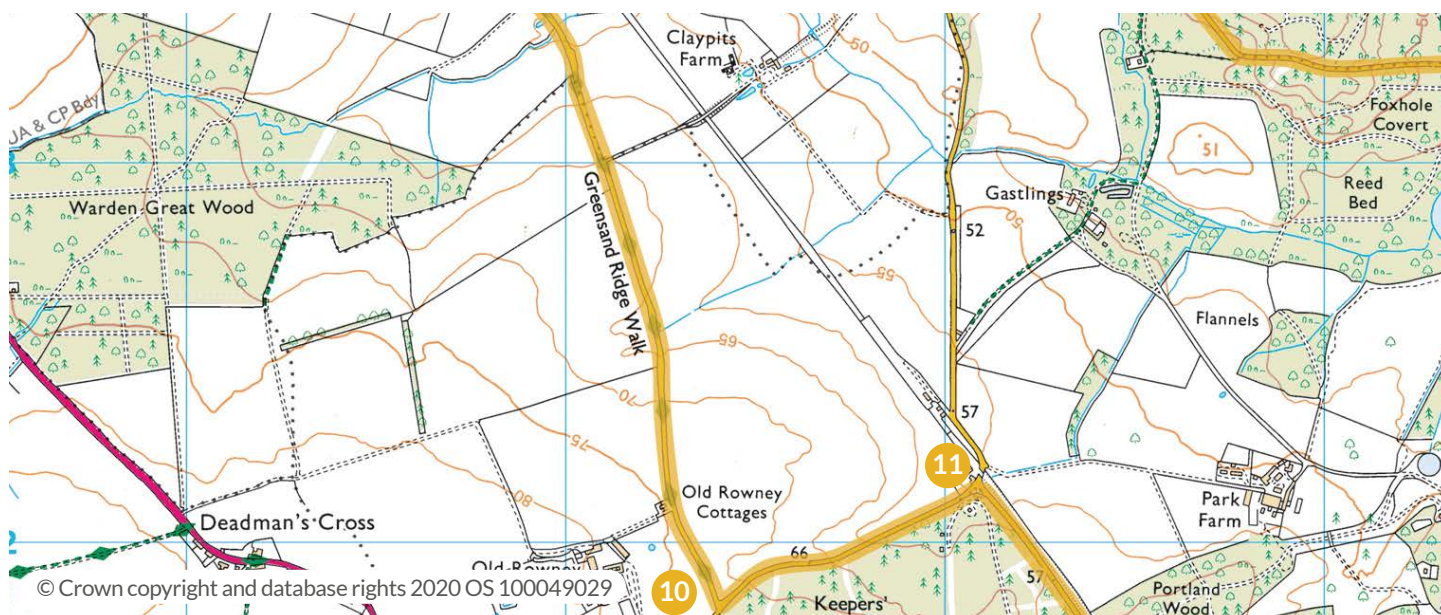


- 9 Just past the cottages (on the right) turn right down the small lane (signposted 'Haynes') (Option 1 joins here) and past the remains of the Cistercian Abbey founded in 1135.



A History Told in Fish Ponds

Reaching Abbey Farm at a road junction offers a view of the site of the former Warden Abbey. 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 founded in 1135, was a substantial complex of buildings and traces of the former fish ponds, are all that remain in the landscape. Fish especially carp were an important part of the medieval diet and monastic links to religious houses in Europe is likely to be the source of imports of this important food fish. 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, illustrating a sophisticated control of water supply.



- 10** At the end of the lane, turn left and cycle past Keepers Warren Wood, on your right.

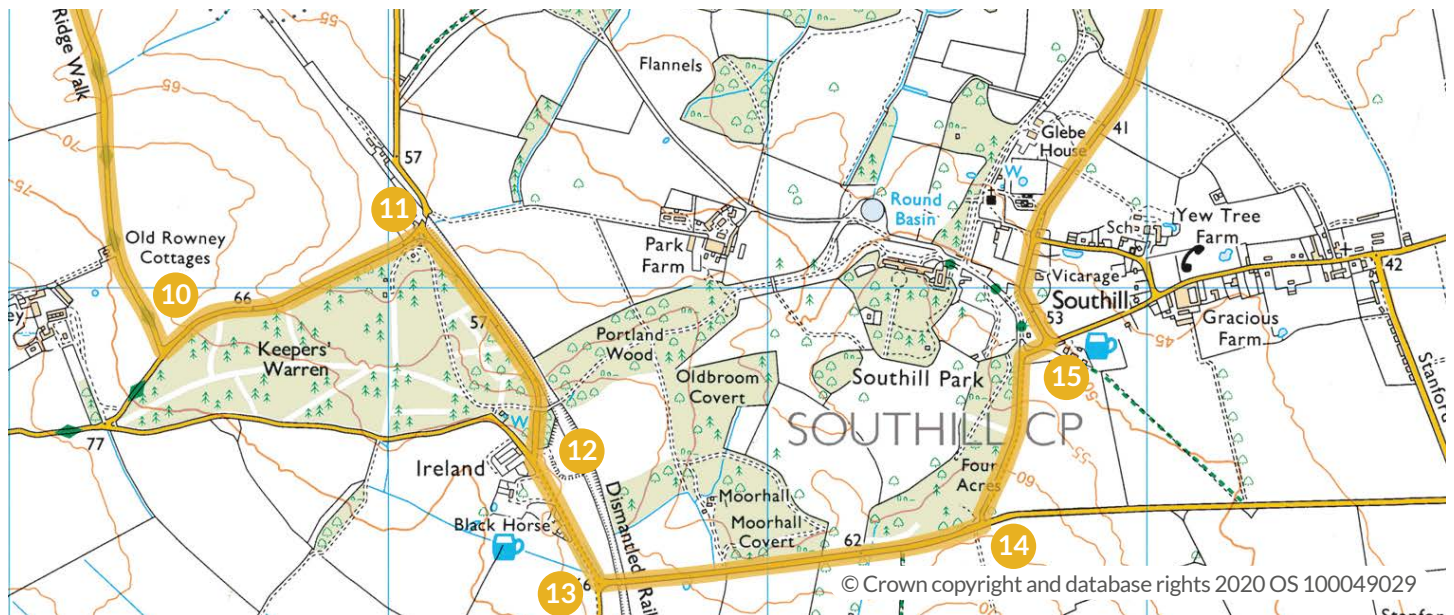
Rabbit Stew

The cycle runs now passes beside the Keepers Warren now approaches the village of Ireland. This part of the Greensand Ridge has sandy soils ideal for rabbits which were a valued commodity in the medieval economy. Rabbits are thought to have been introduced into Britain in the 12th century probably through monastic connections to Europe. It is notable that 'rabbit warrens' are not recorded in the Domesday Book in contrast to the careful documentation of woods valued for keeping pigs. Commercial rabbit warrens were valued and recorded in land documents from the 12th century to the Second World War.

- 11** Just before the old railway bridge turn right (signposted 'Ireland') and up the hill (can flood here in wet weather).

The Railway Age and Brussel Sprouts

Along this cycle route the ride crosses and re-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 provided access to markets for rural industries such as market gardens, the brewing industry and agricultural machinery. Access to market was the key to the expansion of agriculturally related industries which led to a boom in the cultivation of vegetables for the London and Midlands markets. The land along the Ivel and Flit rivers was especially favoured and Bedfordshire became renowned for fresh produce including the annual favourite of the Brussel sprout.



12 At the T-junction turn left and cycle past the Black Horse PH.

13 Then bear left, towards Southill.



"Capability" Brown and a Modern Estate

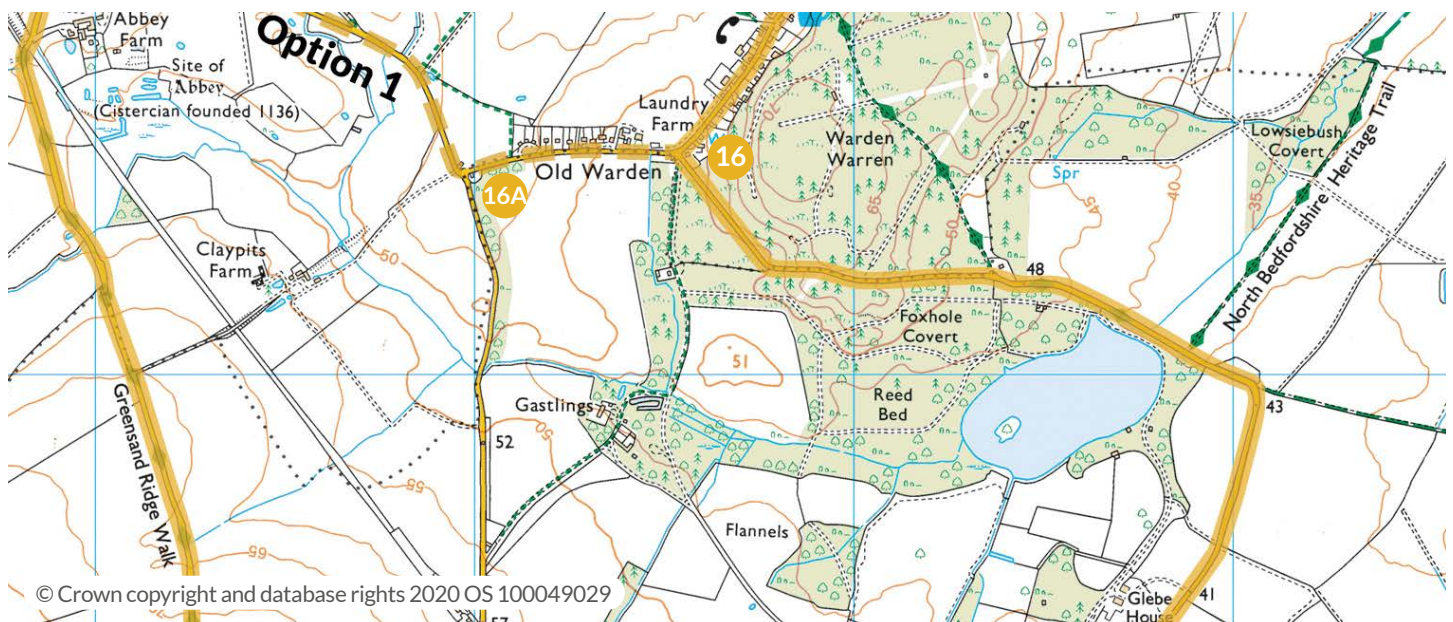
The route follows the boundary of the extensive Southill estate which is now a commercial farming, forestry, and game shooting enterprise. These parkland estates are now mixed agricultural enterprises which adapting to the ongoing and fast changes in markets, policy, the environment to make the best use of the land. At the heart of the estate is an extensive area of parkland which is one of the most interesting in the Greensand Country designed by another of the great English gardeners of the 18th century, 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.

14 Continue ahead until you see a road on the left, signposted 'Southill' and turn left into the village.

15 Turn left opposite the White Horse PH and follow the road, where the road bears sharply right, continue straight ahead and past the Tree Nursery. Continue ahead and past two attractive cottages on the right and down the hill through woodlands.

Switzerland in Bedfordshire

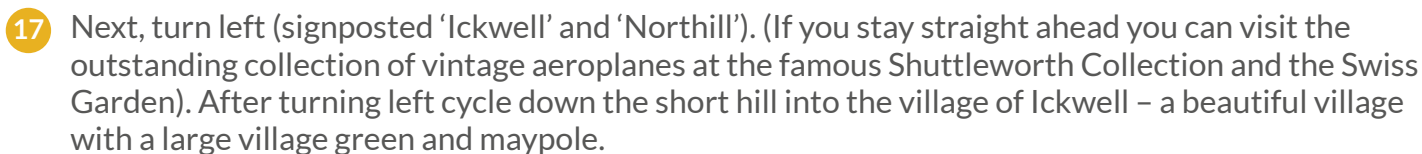
The ride now sweeps through one of the most interesting and historic parts of Bedfordshire, first passing along the main street of the village of Old Warden, with ornate and fanciful cottages. The character of this village is derived from the influence of the Lord Ongley, who allowed his enthusiasm for improvement of the estate and parkland to spill over into the village. The thatched cottages now are examples of what is termed, 'cottage orne' - a French description of a rustic decorated style popular in the late 18th and early 19th century. The village was seen as an embellishment to the estate and the villagers were encouraged to conform by greeting visitors wearing colourful clothing. Lord Onley went on to create a Swiss themed garden in the 1820s and this was further adorned by the Shuttleworth family in Victorian times. The garden is a tranquil spot which has added interest with a collection of listed buildings and resident peacocks.



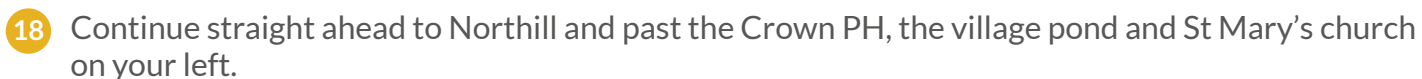
- 16** At the T-junction turn right onto Bedford Road and into the attractive 'Swiss' style village of Old Warden. Continue past the Hare and Hounds PH and the entrance to Old Warden Park (both on the right) and out of the village.

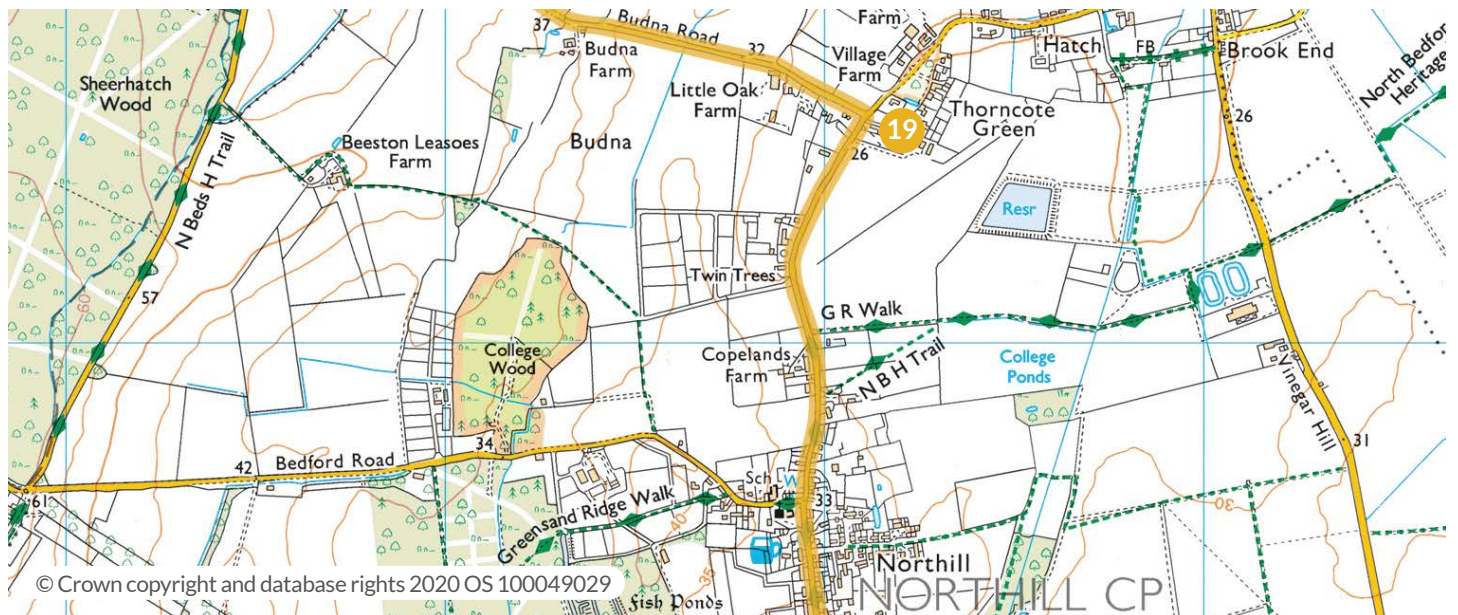
Vintage Machines and Modern Agriculture

The ride now 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 there is an accompanying collection of restored vehicles. 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.



Approaching the village of Northill the road drops off the Greensand Ridge and crosses the flat 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 buildings.



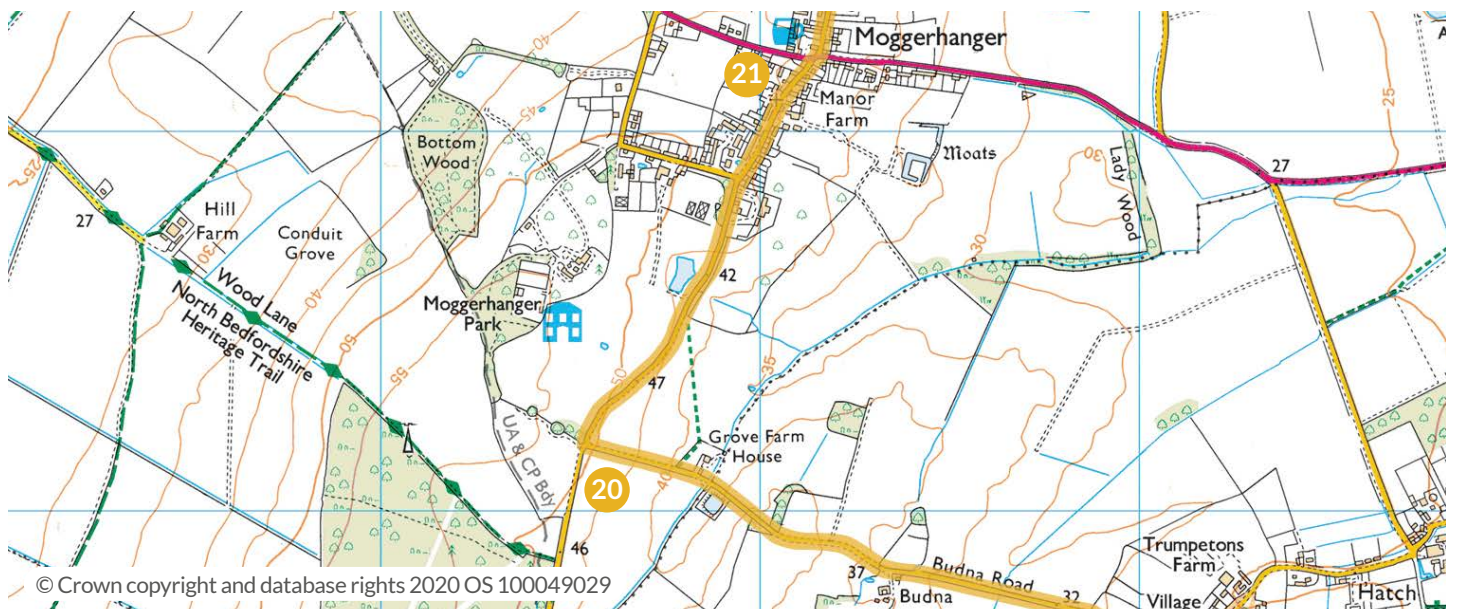


- 19** Continue straight ahead then turn left in the tiny hamlet of Thorncote Green (signposted 'Moggerhanger'). Follow the small lane.

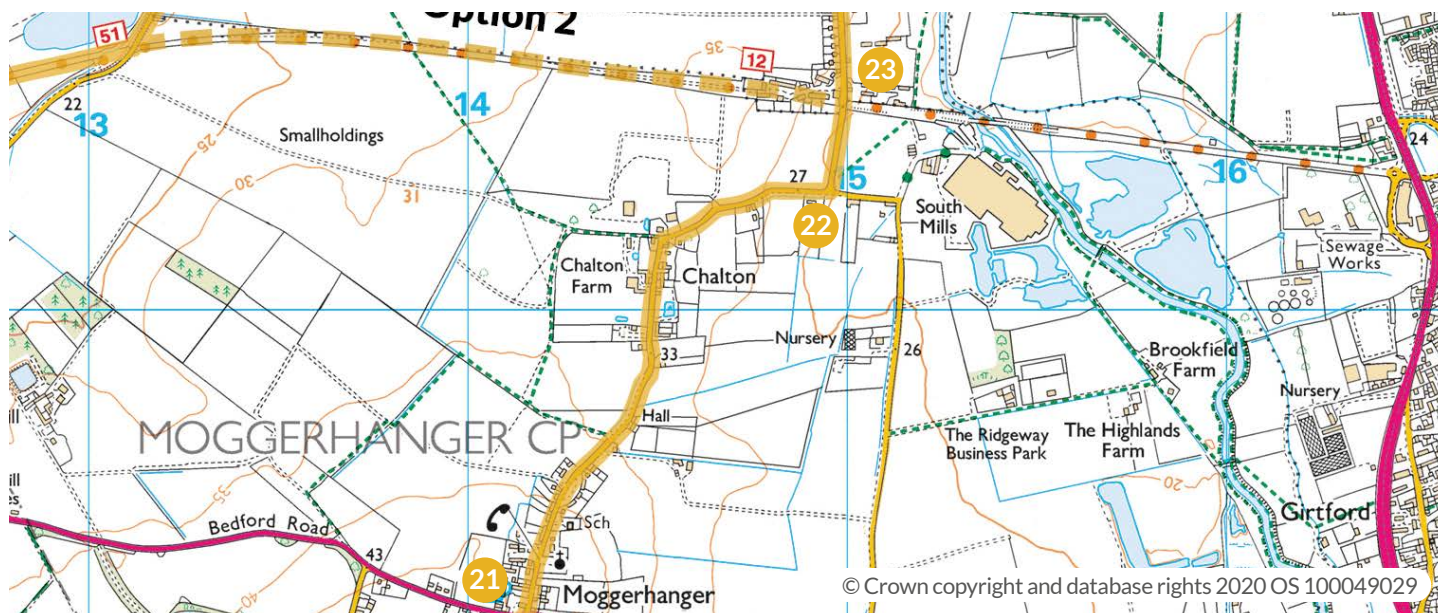


Repton and the Red Books

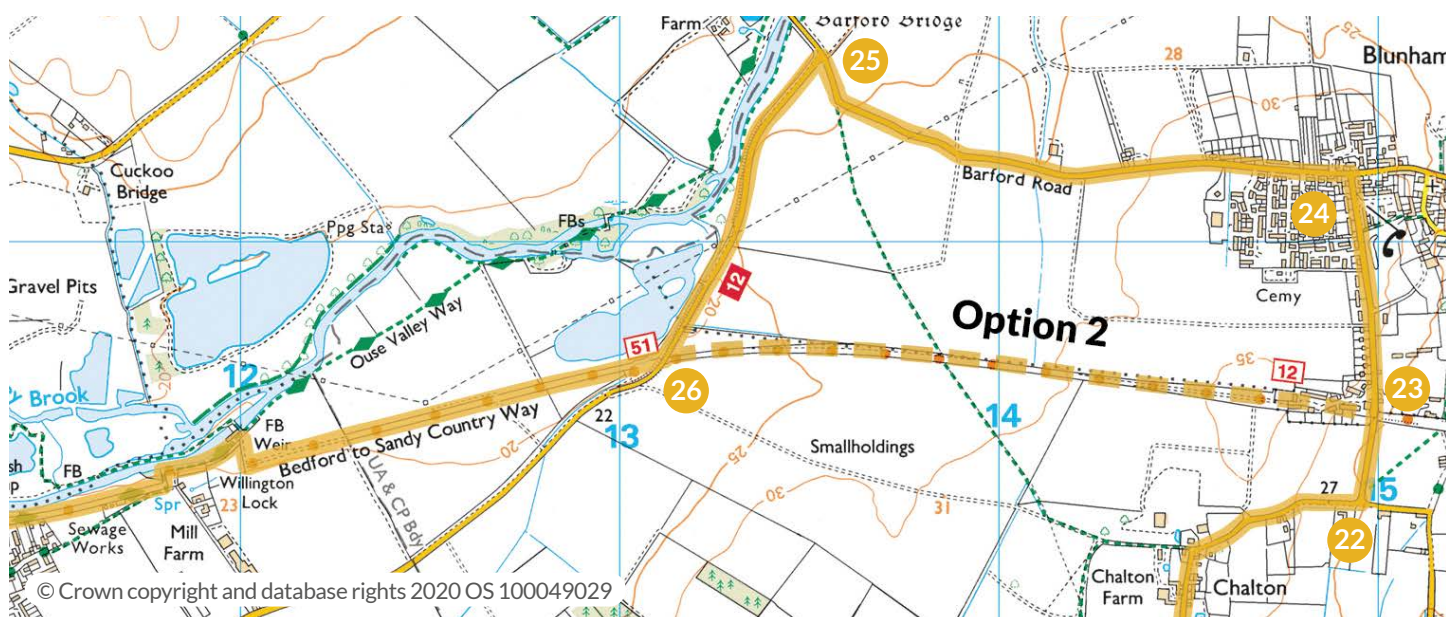
A gentle climb through the hamlet of Budna is rewarded with a view of the Moggerhanger estate another of these extensive Bedfordshire estate parkland properties. The house here is often open to the public and has an interesting history with modifications to the original house and a design of the land around by Humphrey Repton a leading English garden designer of the 18c. Designs by Repton and his landscape designs were based on art work presented to the client in a formal 'Red Book'. Repton was a considerable artist and his sales pitch was to market his work with a portfolio of small paintings complete 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'.



- 20** Turn right at the next junction (signposted 'Moggerhanger'). Just before entering Moggerhanger you will see the nationally important historic Moggerhanger Park with house designed by Sir John Soane, on your left.
- 21** Cycle into the village and stop at the crossroads. Carefully cross the busy A603 and go straight ahead through the rest of the village and past the church. Continue on and into the hamlet of Chalton.



- 22** Turn left (signposted 'Blunham').
- 23** Option 2 here



- 24** Continue into the village of Blunham and at the T-junction turn left (signposted 'Great Barford').

Barford Bridge

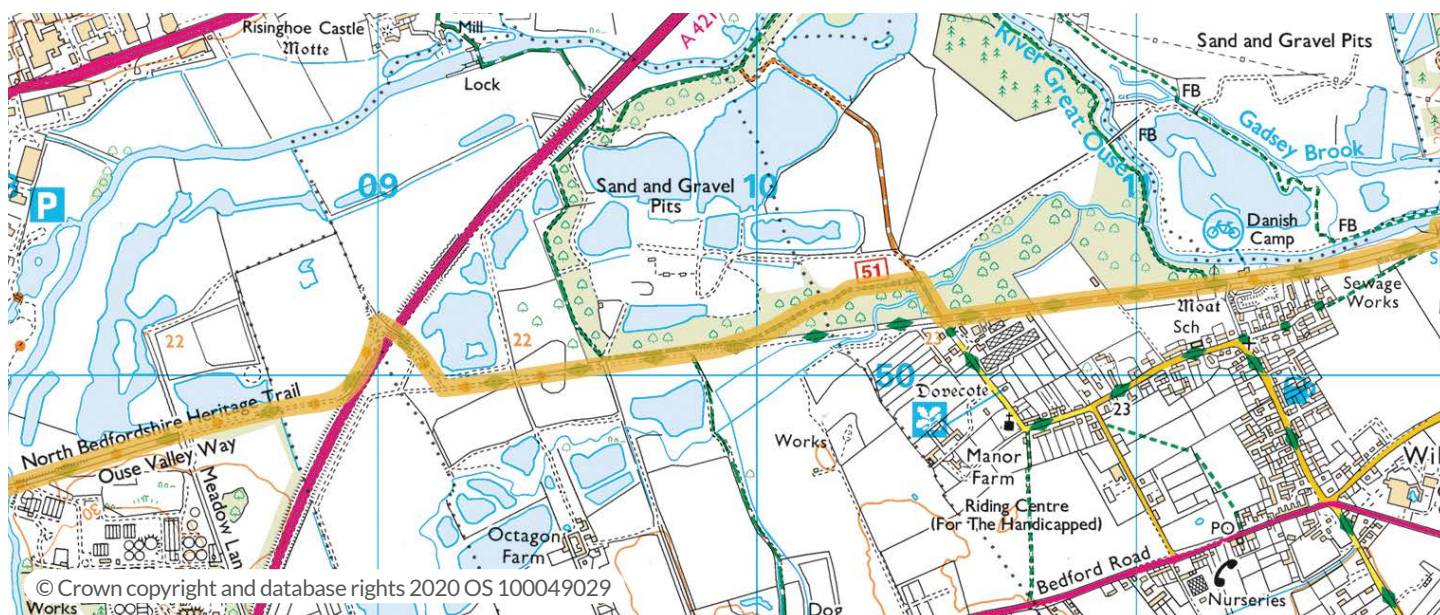
Close to the junction where the ride turns left to parallel the river, an historic bridge spans the Ouse. This is one of many historic bridges crossing the Great Ouse and this example, with 17 irregular arches, is a listed Grade I structure. Originally dating from the 14th century, the bridge was widened and strengthened in Victorian times. Flooding of the river has required a substantial causeway on the southern bank.

- 25** At the traffic lights turn left just before the bridge. Alternatively, go straight ahead over the bridge and into the village of Great Barford for shops and public houses.

Old routes-new uses

Leaving Chalton the ride re-joins the flat terraces of the Bedfordshire major rivers and takes advantage of the old Bedford to Sandy rail route, now a splendid cycle way (National Cycle Route 51) linking the Ouse and Ivel valleys. Cycling west towards Bedford there is an opportunity to explore a historic dovecot at Willington now managed by the National Trust. Built by John Gostwick this Tudor building was home to up to three thousand pigeons. Finally, the ride passes the Danish Camp before returning to the outskirts of Bedford. The name however is misleading as this was more likely a moated homestead dating from the 11th century. What we do know is that Danish raiders crossing the North Sea used the Great Ouse, to attack Bedford. By 875, Bedford was Danish town and remained so until retaken by the Saxon Kingdom of Mercia in 915. Finally, the route returns to Priory Park through extensive sand and gravel workings, which now offer potential for conservation projects.

- 26** After several hundred metres turn right off the road to join the Bedford – Sandy National Cycle Route (Route 51) and follow the route towards Willington past Willington Lock and Danish Camp. Continue to follow the path and turn right then left over the River Ouse. Be sure to visit the historic properties of Willington Dovecote and Stable – National Trust properties. Continue to follow the cycle path over the bridge on the A421 Bedford bypass and back into Priory Country Park.





Shortcuts/additions

Option 1 – Waypoints 9, 16A & 16

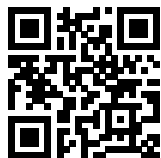
Instead of going down the lane (signposted 'Haynes') past the old Cistercian Abbey, continue straight on and then turn left at the T-junction and into the village of Old Warden. Here you rejoin the route as you cycle through the village.

Option 2 - Waypoints 23 & 26

Instead of going through Blunham village and just past the dip in the road turn left into Old Station Court and follow this road to the end where you join the Bedford – Sandy National Cycleway (National Cycle Route 51).

Refreshments

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



www.greensandcountry.com/experience

Remember when cycling

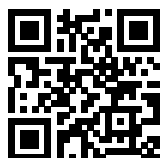
- If possible start your ride from your front door
- If you do drive to the start point then please park with consideration
- Please DO NOT cycle on footpaths.
- Always keep to the waymarked routes and do not enter private land.
- Always ride in single file when roads are narrow and never ride more than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

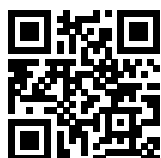


What 3 Words: Download this app to your smartphone to help you find locations and to tell others where you are. Each 3m square in the world has been assigned a unique 3 word address that will never change.

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.