

The Parks Trust Self-Guided Walks: North Loughton Valley Park

Walk revised by Peter Burrett, Tuesday 20th August 2013

Start point

The City Discovery Centre off Alston Drive in Bradwell Abbey. Alston Drive is accessed directly off the Stacey Bushes roundabout on the A422 Monks Way (H3), about 0.5 kilometres east of the Abbey Hill junction of the A5.

There is a free car park immediately off Alston Drive, but if there is space, drive on a short distance to a further free car park in front of the group of buildings that make up the Discovery Centre. Milton Keynes City Discovery Centre informs visitors about urban geography and new city planning, as well as the historical and natural heritage of Milton Keynes.

Walk overview

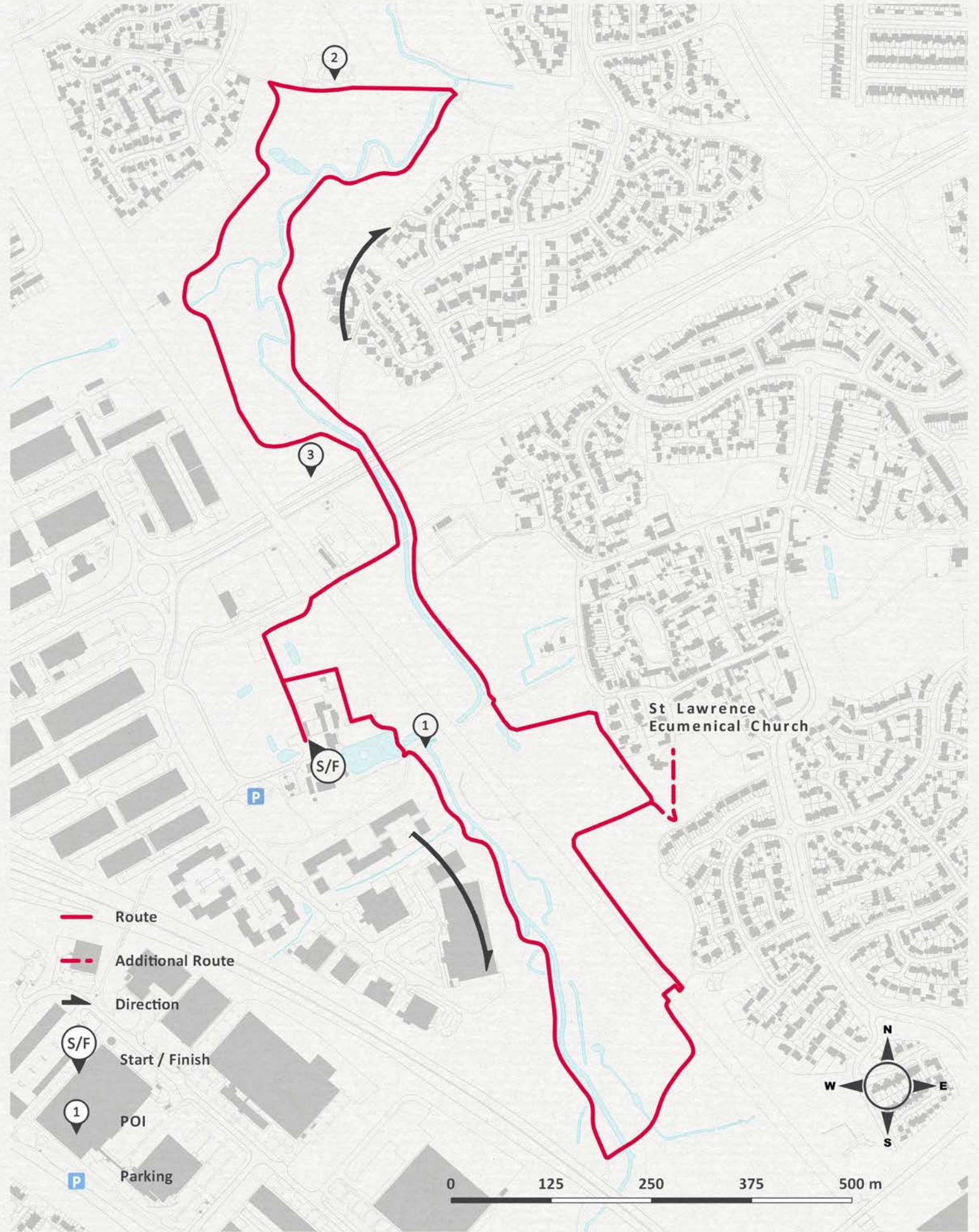
This is an elongated circular walk, finishing back at the Discovery Centre. The entire route is within The North Loughton Valley Park.

The walking is easy along footpaths and red ways, but because one section takes you over a stepped railway bridge it is not suitable for wheelchair users.

Distances & times

Circular walk; Discovery Centre – Bradwell Abbey Chapel - Loughton Brook – St Lawrence Church, Bradwell – Roman Villa – Concrete Cows – Discovery Centre = 2.5 miles, 90 minutes. There are no formal refreshment stops, but many benches / picnic tables along the route and opportunities for picnics at several grassy spaces.





The circular walk

Standing in the car park you will see grade two listed Bradwell Abbey Manor House to your left. The house was built in the early 1600s, but altered in later centuries. Walk down the short concrete pathway between the Manor House and a paddock until you see St Mary's Chapel, just beyond the Manor House on your right. This chapel is the last remaining part of Bradwell Abbey, which was established in 1154 but closed in 1524, twelve years before the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. At time of visit it was under scaffolding, so no photo was taken.

Turn right off the footpath, walk past the Chapel then pass behind both it and the Manor House, walking across foundations that are all that remains of the Abbey. When you reach the large pond that is stocked with carp and once served the religious community, take a bark footpath to the left.

Continue over a footbridge and through a gate, following the path directly opposite which runs alongside Loughton Brook, on your left. The path passes by a pedestrian tunnel under the main West Coast railway line. This was closed for repairs at time of visit, but should be ignored in any case.

Follow the brook for about 600 metres, past a short section of rocky stream bottom which produces a "mini rapids" effect when in full flow. Kingfishers are often seen on the brook, and damsel and dragonflies abound. Beyond the industrial units of the Bradwell Abbey trading estate (hidden from view behind a tree line) an area of grass opens out that would be ideal for a picnic in good weather.

At a footpath junction just before the A5 flyover, turn left onto a path signposted "Bradwell Village (unsuitable for wheelchairs)". An elaborate wooden bridge takes you over Loughton Brook. Follow the winding path towards the railway line. Just before the railway's security fence the path bends sharply left and delivers you to a stepped pedestrian bridge over the line.

Once you've crossed the bridge, ignore the footpath that you will see immediately in front of you, instead turning sharp left and following a green path, not marked on maps, running parallel with the railway line. Continue on this path, passing an area of woodland on your right containing a large number of mature horse chestnut trees.

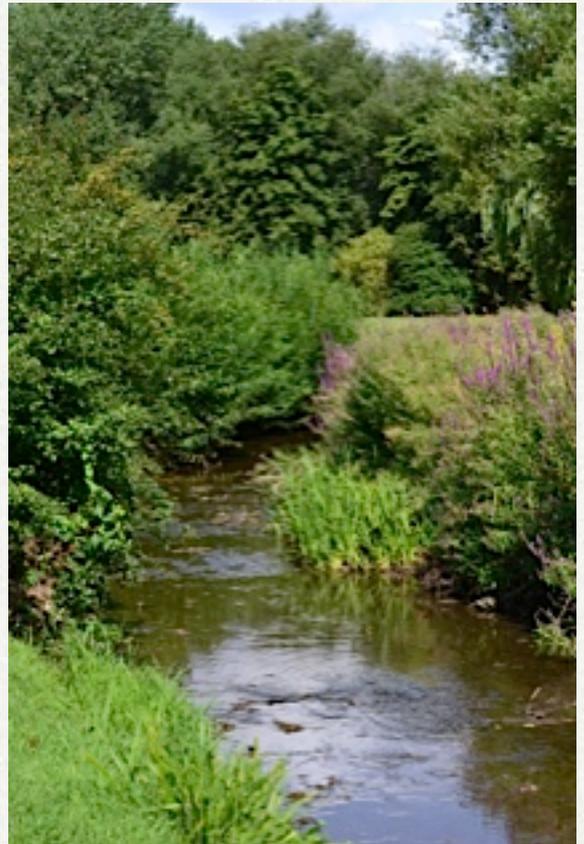
Take the first right hand turn onto another green path. The woodland is now on your right, allotments beyond a hedge on your left. At the next green pathway junction, turn left.

(If you wish, you can take a short deviation to your right to enter the churchyard of 13th century St Lawrence Ecumenical Church, Bradwell, before retracing your steps to continue the walk. The church tower houses two of the earliest bells in the country, dating from about 1300).

The allotments are now on your left, and you soon come to a green space called the Abbey Fields Wildlife Conservation Area. Cross this grassy area diagonally to its furthest corner, go through a short stretch of woodland, cross a red way and join the footpath directly opposite. Loughton Brook is on your left and a large sports field marked out for football and cricket matches on your right.

Beyond the sports field you pass some tennis courts and a bowls club. Here there is a bridge over the brook on your left signposted to "Bradwell Abbey and Discovery Centre", but ignore this and proceed under Monks Way (H3) into Bancroft. Once under the road bridge, ignore the red way to your right and stick to the path closest to Loughton Brook, sign posted "Bancroft Park", "Roman Villa" and "New Bradwell".

You will see the famous Milton Keynes concrete cows on the opposite side of the stream. The three cows and three calves were created in 1978 by Canadian artist Liz Leyh. The Bancroft cows are actually replicas, the originals now being in Central Milton Keynes shopping centre. Recent commentators have interpreted the cows as examples of conceptual art, with the artist poking fun at the preconceived notion of a new city.



Continue on your current path. There are several benches and picnic tables along the way. Ignore a bridge on the left over the brook. After about 600 metres leave the path and ascend steps on the right onto a red way that is initially carried by an elevated wooden walkway. Turn left onto the walkway. This leads you to the site of Bancroft's roman villa.

The first farmhouse here was constructed in the late first century, close to a previous Iron Age settlement. The house was extended over time and a formal garden laid out with ornamental fish pond. The villa was excavated during the 1970s and 1980s. Three information boards at the site give the history of Bancroft from prehistoric times to the Roman period.



Continue on the red way. Just before you reach housing, turn left onto a windy bridle way through woodland. Ignore other pathways to the right and left. The footpath eventually turns sharp left to follow the course of the West Coast railway line. When you reach a paddock, the concrete cows can again be seen in the distance. The grassy area surrounding the cows offers another opportunity to stop for a picnic.



Just beyond the cows, the bridle way shadows Loughton Brook under Monks Way (H3) back into Bradwell. After a short distance you arrive at the other end of the previously ignored footbridge over the brook close to the Bradwell playing fields. Turn right here onto a red way, which takes you under the railway line through tunnel number 171. Once through the tunnel, turn immediately left onto a bridle way. After a few metres, turn left through a gate, past the Manor House and back to the Discovery Centre car park.

