

# The Parks Trust Self-Guided Walks: Howe Park Wood & Tattenhoe Valley Park

Walk by Peter Burrett, Thursday 22nd August 2013

## Start point

Turn off Chaffron Way (H7), between Kingsmead and Westcroft roundabouts, into Portishead Drive, Tattenhoe.

After about 350 metres there is a left hand turn leading to a free car park in front of St Giles' Church.

## Walk overview

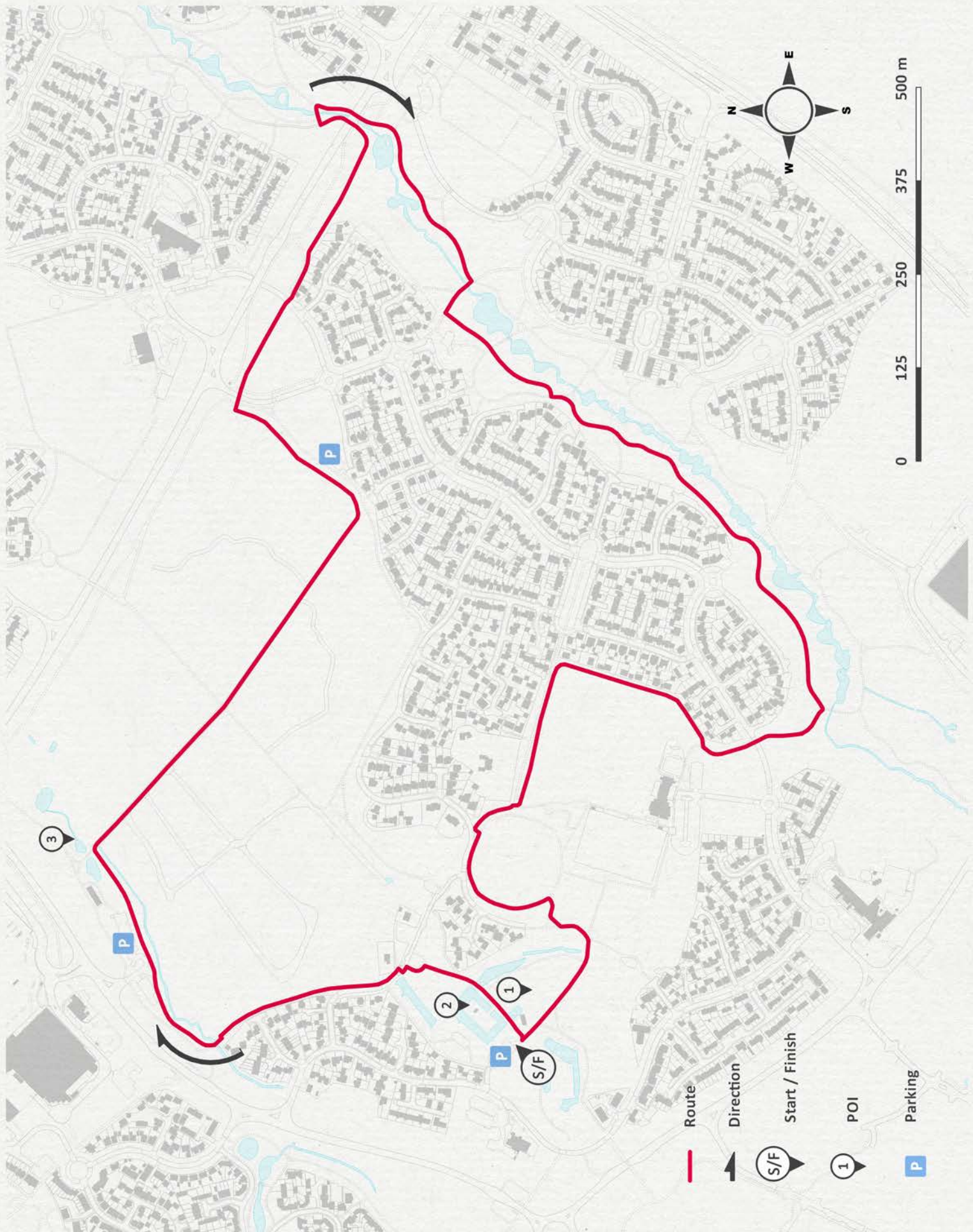
This is a circular walk, finishing at the same car park.

The walking is along footpaths, red ways and bridleways, but in wetter weather some of the route may suffer from muddy conditions or cross very soggy sections of bark path, so wheelchair users could find the going difficult at certain times.

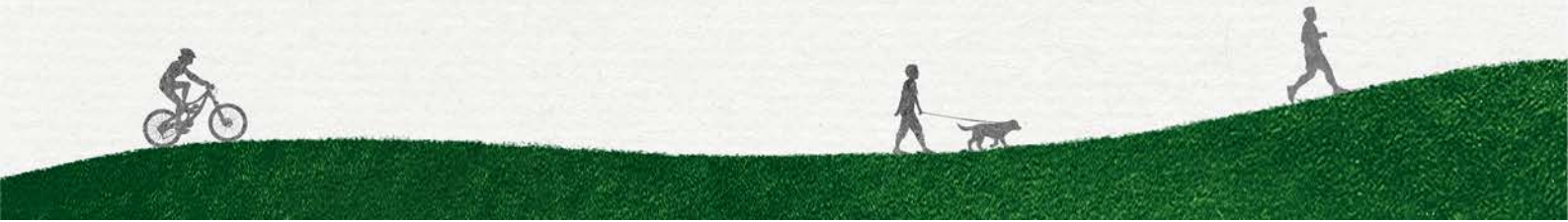
## Distances & times

Circular walk; Car park – St Giles' Church – Howe Park Wood – Tattenhoe Valley Park – car park = 2.7 miles, 90 minutes. There are no formal refreshment stops, but several benches / picnic tables along the route.





- Route
- Direction
- Start / Finish
- POI
- Parking



## The circular walk



Close to the car park there is an information board outlining the history of Tattenhoe. By sometime during the 16<sup>th</sup> century the village was deserted, apart from three farmsteads which still survive today. The reason for Tattenhoe's decline is unclear, but it was possibly due to the ravages of plague, or because local landowners replaced traditional strip field farming with more profitable sheep pasture.

Walk through a metal gate to the tiny St Giles' Church. There was a church on this site from around 1167, and the yews in its small churchyard date from this time. The current church dates from around 1538 and was constructed using stone from nearby Snelshall Priory after it was demolished on the orders of Henry VIII. There is nothing left of the priory, but St Giles' now has a weekly congregation of 30-40 souls, and hosts several hundred (mostly outside!) for its Christmas service.

Turn left from the car park onto a footpath, with church to your right. On your left you pass a partially hidden fishpond that is believed to have served Snelshall Priory and was choked with weed at time of visit. The footpath passes between apple trees and through another metal gate. Turn left and cross Hengitsbury Lane to join a bridleway. There is a red way in front of housing running parallel with this bridleway.

Go past a noticeboard on your right at one of the minor entrances to Howe Park Wood. Join a short stretch of red way that crosses an unnamed brook that is more easily heard than seen! Take next right turn, which is another bridleway, just before you reach an underpass beneath Chaffron Way (H7). *(Between this bridleway and Chaffron Way there is an alternative hard footpath, but instructions assume bridleway is followed).*



You are now skirting the north west of Howe Park Wood, probably the woodland mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086. Parts of it may be rare surviving fragments of the "wildwood" that covered the whole of lowland Britain after the last ice age, 6,000-11,000 years ago. The park is home to a wide variety of wildlife, including fox, badger, deer, bats, woodpeckers, sparrowhawks and tawny owls. There are 200 plant species, including old crab apples, a grand old oak and some hornbeams, some so rare that English Nature has designated it a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1992.



After a while you pass through the main Howe Park Wood car park, opposite the Westcroft District Shopping Centre, but at time of visit this car park was closed off for unspecified reasons. Beyond this to your left is a grassy area with picnic tables, and a series of small manmade ponds created to encourage dragonflies, amphibians and other wildlife.

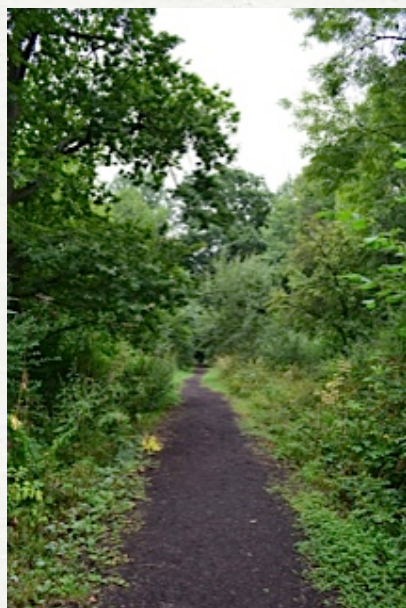
Where a wooden bridge crosses the ponds to the picnic area, turn right onto a bark path into Howe Park Wood itself. You are soon into the tranquility of this dense woodland. Cross over the first path crossroads, and proceed up a slight gradient. At the next path crossroads walk straight across a hard path where there are a number of picnic benches.

Carry on through the mixed woodland past footpaths on your right then left. Exit the wood where you can see Tattenhoe housing in front of you, and turn immediately left onto a green footpath. Pass through a stile next to a wooden gate. Before reaching Tattenhoe Street (V2) you come to a bridleway. Turn right on this, cross Langerstone Lane and proceed slightly downhill to cross Winfold Lane. Here a red way signed

"Bletchley" and "Far Bletchley" starts and runs parallel with the bridleway for a short stretch. Stick to the bridleway, which bends right, away from the red way.



Ignore two opportunities to turn right onto the wide grassy landscape that marks the start of Tattenhoe Valley Park, instead bearing left on the bridleway that soon runs adjacent to Loughton Brook under Tattenhoe Street (V2). Cross the brook over a wooden bridge on your right, then turn right at a bench to join the hard footpath on the opposite side of the brook.



*(Some of the signs and naming conventions for areas abutting Loughton Brook might lead to confusion! One sign refers to "Emerson Valley" (relating to that stretch of Loughton Brook passing through the neighbouring housing area of that name), another to "Loughton Valley Park" (the generic name for the whole of Loughton Brook's course). The stretch of the brook we are visiting today is specifically "Tattenhoe Valley Park".)*

Pass back under the road bridge and past a short series of manmade rapids on the brook, which is now on your right, and a Parks Trust noticeboard relating to the whole of the Loughton Valley Park. The footpath zig zags alongside the brook through an expansive grassy area. The brook itself widens into ponds at places.

At first opportunity, turn right onto a red way that immediately crosses Loughton Brook over a footbridge, then turn first left onto a bridleway. Loughton Brook and its occasional ponds are now on your left. Proceed towards the metal canopy covering a circular seat that you will see in the mid distance. At a crossways, leave the bridleway, turning left on a footpath towards and eventually past the seating canopy.

You will see the distant industrial and warehouse units of Snelshall ahead of you. Pass by a footbridge on the left across the brook. The path soon bends left towards a second bridge, but just before the bridge veers sharp right away from it. Stay on the footpath.

After a short distance, cross Holborn Crescent, continuing on the footpath opposite. You will soon see a children's play area adjoining a leisure centre. Just before this, take a bridleway on your right. This becomes a wide green corridor between two hedgerows. The local district park lies to your left beyond the hedge. The bridleway turns sharp left and shadows a red way across the north of the district park and past an entrance into it, as far as Hengitsbury Lane.

Turn left, taking a footpath that runs alongside Hengitsbury Lane for a short distance then turns left to follow Langney Green down the western side of the district park. Where Langney Green ends, join the footpath it becomes where a bench is situated.

Pass through a metal gate on your right into rough meadowland which contains the site of the vanished medieval village of Tattenhoe. Follow the path back to St Giles' Church and the car park.

