


Upper Lea Valley Walk

An illustrated guide to take you from the source of the River Lea through Luton to the boundary where it meets with the longer Lea Valley Walk on its way to London.




Linear parks of the River Lea, Luton

Have you visited the many parks and green spaces along the River Lea?

With much of the route designated as a County Wildlife Site, you can escape life's hustle and bustle by:

- strolling by Wardown Park lake and visiting the museum
- resting in the Bide-a-While gardens and wandering around the community orchard
- spotting a kingfisher or water vole in the Limbury Riverside parks at Westmorland and Runfold
- discovering the River Lea's source and visiting the Neolithic Henge in Leagrave Park
- visiting the ancient pasture and wetland of Cowslip Meadow with its colourful plants, insects, birds and animals.

Tell us what you think about these parks and green spaces by visiting www.GreenSTAT.org.uk



Upper Lea Valley Walk



Welcome to the Upper Lea Valley Walk. Prepare to enjoy this easy self-guided stroll from the source of the River Lea following the course of the river into a beautiful green area of the town then through Luton town centre and continuing into the Bedfordshire countryside to the borough boundary at Lower Harpenden Road and beyond.

The walk will present you with a range of important habitats and recreational opportunities such as walking, cycling and areas for natural play, while providing fine views of the River Lea, Luton Hoo and the surrounding hillside.

The Upper Lea Valley Walk is the first section of the much longer Lea Valley Walk that connects London to the source of the River Lea in Legrave, Luton.

The logo for the walk is a white swan and locally the route is also known as the 'Swan Walk'. Along the way you will notice a series of white swans on signposts, waymarkers and on the footway marking the route of your journey.

Within Luton the majority of the Walk is shared with the National Cycle Network Route 6, (NCN6) and partly with the Icknield Way. As well as signing for NCN6 there are a series of stone half mile markers denoting local walking and cycling routes. The markers are part of a large-scale artwork titled Layering of Time denoting the layers of geology for the area. This artwork was commissioned by Sustrans and includes carvings of poems and quotes by local people of all ages.

Walking and cycling maps are available from both Luton Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Sustrans.

This guide provides information on a number of sites that you will come across during your journey.



Useful Information

Ordnance Survey Maps

The Luton section of the Upper Lea Valley Walk is marked on the following OS maps:

Explorer	Luton & Stevenage	Sheet 193
Landranger	Luton & Hertford	Sheet 166

Waymarking The symbol of this walk is a white swan. Along the walk you will find a combination of waymarker discs, standard signing and swans marked on footway paving indicating your route.

Start Points

By Train Luton is on the Bedford to Brighton train line and has three train stations, two of which are at either end of the walk. Legrave Station is at the northern end near to Legrave Park and the source of the River Lea and Luton Airport Parkway is at the southern end of the walk.

By Car Legrave Park has two car parks, one at Bramingham Road and one at Sundon Park Road. Parking is available at Luton Airport Parkway Train Station.

By Bus There are several bus services operating local routes within Luton that will take you to the town centre. The main bus operators within the town are Arriva Shires and Essex, Centrebus and Grant Palmer.

Distances The route is 9 miles/14km from Legrave Park, the source of the River Lea to East Hyde at the Bedfordshire/Hertfordshire boundary.

Terrain Within Luton the majority of the walk is flat and surfaced making it, in most part, accessible for those with limited mobility. The map indicates where alternative routes can be taken in order to stay on a surfaced path. Generally this follows the route of NCN6.

Please note that there is an incline at St Mary's roundabout where the route takes you through an underpass.

Footwear and Clothing Because of the terrain, there is no requirement for specialist footwear or clothing. However, there are some sections that will be slippery and/or muddy when wet making waterproof footwear advisable. It is recommended to check the weather as part of your preparations for undertaking the walk and to dress appropriately.

Refreshments The main area for refreshments is the town centre. However, there are some pubs at the southern end of the walk and there is a small café at Wardown Park Museum.

History of Upper Lea Valley

People have been living in the Upper Lea Valley since the Palaeolithic period about 500,000 years ago. The River Lea has formed a focus for occupation with Iron Age, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Mediaeval settlements along its banks.

Over the years Luton has been famed for many varying industries including brick making and aircraft manufacturing. In more recent times and more predominantly the town has been known for millinery and car manufacturing.

The legacy of these industries and their related trades can be seen throughout Luton in its architecture and open spaces as well as place and road names.

Wildlife, Flora and Fauna

Although Luton is a densely populated urban area there are a good proportion of parks and open spaces which play host to some interesting wildlife, flora and fauna.

When Luton was dominated by farming communities, orchards were commonplace. Due to the changing demands on the landscape, many of these have now disappeared but there is much interest in reintroducing orchards along the route.

Free roaming muntjac deer can be found in Luton. They will graze wherever there is a suitable habitat, even if that is a residential garden. Muntjac can be solitary and secretive but have been spotted at either end of the Walk, near the source of the River Lea in and around the grounds of the Luton Hoo estate, so you never know if you might see one on your way!

Rare and uncommon birds are regular visitors to the borough. These include kingfishers, red kite, siskin and great spotted woodpecker.



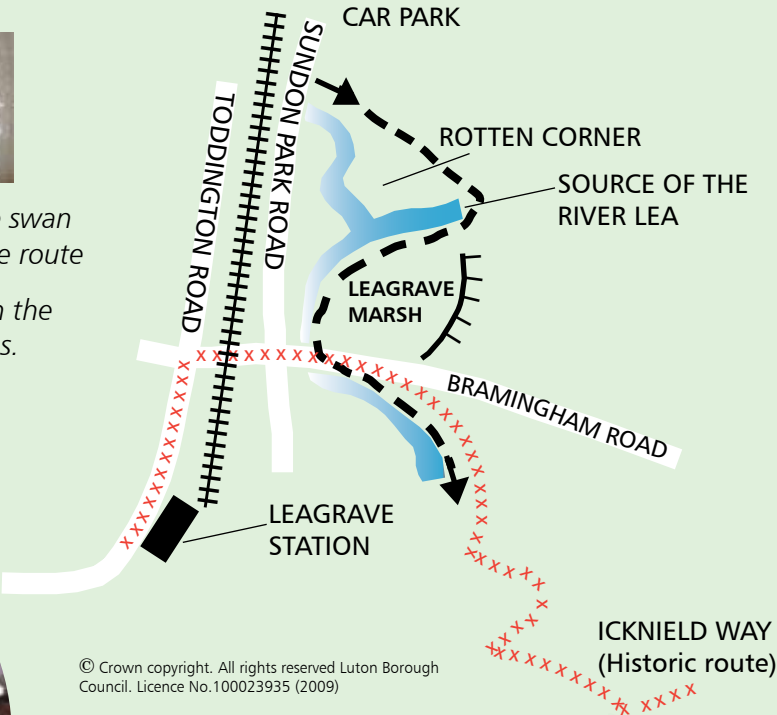
Leagrave Park

Leagrave Park is a local district park incorporating the areas of Leagrave Marsh, Waulud's Bank, Rotten Corner and the source of the River Lea at Leagrave Marsh.



Look out for the swan markers along the route

See the map in the centre pages.



Leagrave Marsh

Leagrave Marsh is the source of the River Lea and is at the start or end of the Upper Lea Valley Walk. This is a fragile wetland habitat with several rare plants including the Common Twayblade orchid and the Marsh Marigold, which is rare in Bedfordshire.





Rotten Corner

Within the wetland sits the woodland, Rotten Corner. This is a mixed wood where Alder and Willow predominate. The most significant plant in the area is the Bay Willow because it occurs in only one other site in Bedfordshire. This habitat plays host to a variety of animals. Seasonal visitors include the Kingfisher and the Siskin who will spend winter in the area. Rotten Corner is ideal for Siskins because its abundance of Alder trees from which the Siskin will feed.

Interesting birds that are resident all year round include Long-tailed Tit, Goldfinch and Great Spotted Woodpecker. In November 2008, a rare Red-breasted Flycatcher stayed for a week, delighting local birdwatchers. Other winged creatures include butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies. Also resident in the area is the Pipistrelle bat, although the most common bat in the country its numbers have been in decline.

In the water can be found the increasingly rare water vole, which also inhabits other areas along the Lea Valley. Due to factors such as intensified farming and predation by feral mink, the number of water voles is in decline.

Wauluds Bank Scheduled Ancient Monument

Wauluds Bank is a notable Neolithic Henge close to the source of the River Lea dating back 4,000 years. It is one of the most important archaeological sites in the Chilterns and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Over many years, various archaeological excavations have revealed human remains, pottery and flint arrowheads from different periods in time. These finds can be seen in Wardown Park Museum. Road names in the area reflect the significance of this site. The names include Henge Way, Flint Close, Arrow Close and of course, Wauluds Bank Drive.

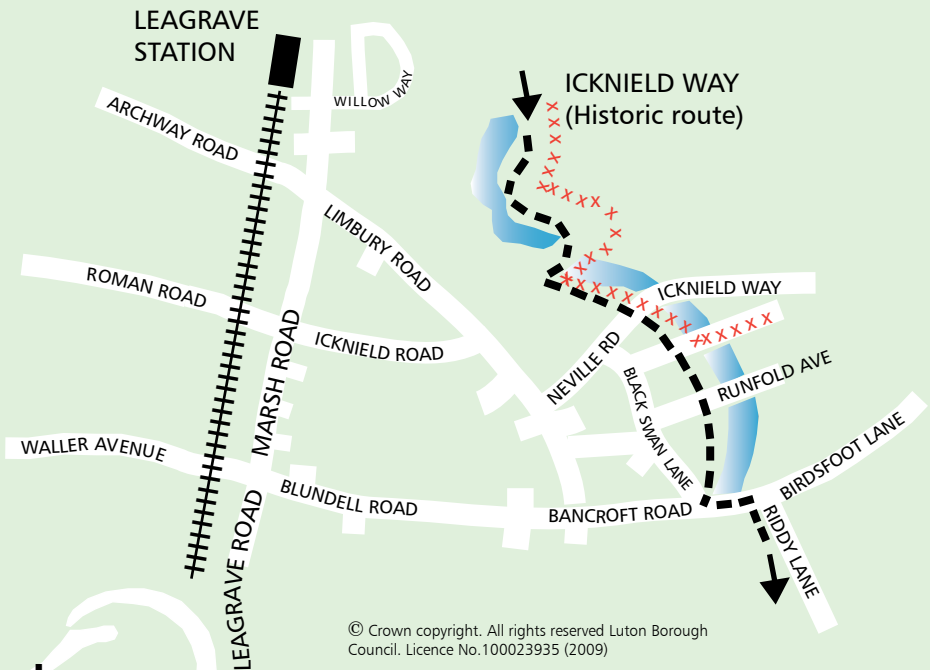


Willow Way

Prior to construction of homes on Willow Way, excavation was conducted by local archaeologist James Dyer. He discovered evidence dating from about 200 BC to 100 AD, including coins and possible timber piled dwellings. This probably represents a pre-Roman crossing point of the River Lea.

Intersection with the Icknield Way

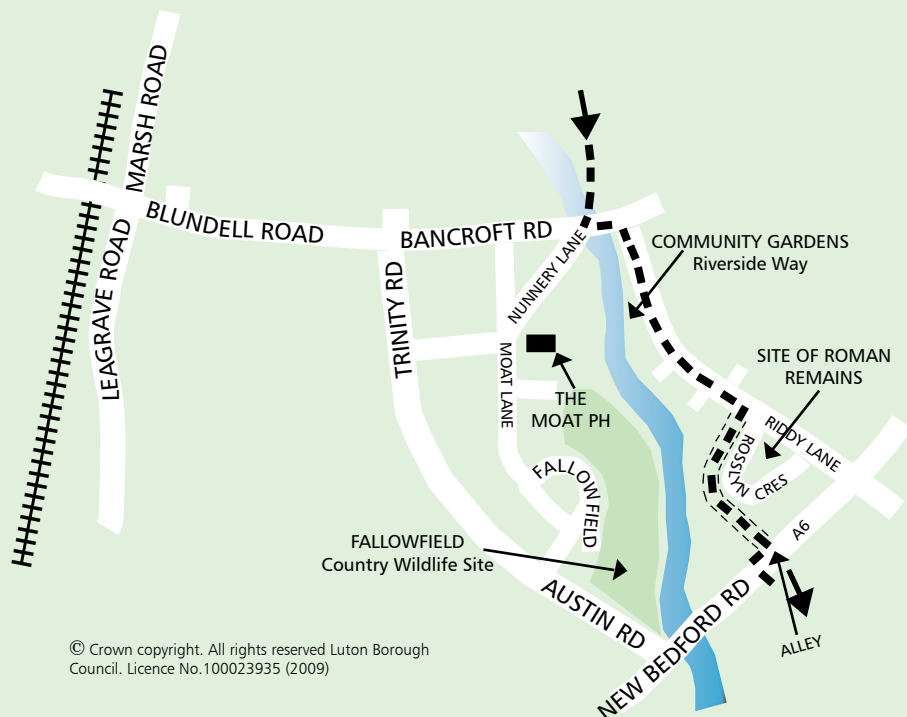
At this point of the walk you might notice some signing for the Icknield Way Path. The Icknield Way Path is the oldest road in Britain predating Roman occupation. Its 105 miles runs from Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire to Knetishall Heath in Norfolk. It passes through the Chilterns and meets with other well known routes, including the John Bunyan Trail and Watling Street.



© Crown copyright. All rights reserved Luton Borough Council. Licence No.100023935 (2009)

Limbury

Prior to the construction of the Runfold Avenue estate in 1953, rescue excavations were conducted on an extensive Roman settlement. Dating from around 200-400 AD it was built as the Romanised Icknield Way crossed the River Lea. Although no buildings were excavated, remains of a substantial Roman building are thought to exist in the vicinity.



The Moat House

If you are thinking about taking a detour for lunch or to view an historical building, a good option is the Moat House on Nunnery Lane. Built in the 14th century the main building is the oldest secular building in South Bedfordshire and it is still surrounded by its moat. Its current use is as a pub and restaurant.

Riddy Lane

Riddy Lane is home to one of the larger community gardens in Luton. This is the first community garden site along the route.

Fallowfield

The River Lea meanders through an area that was once Biscot Grange Farm, which no longer exists. This area is two ancient fields – Boggy Mead and River Close – which make up Fallowfield. Fallowfield is a County Wildlife Site bounded by urban development and community gardens. Even in this setting, rare creatures and plants can be found. Fallowfield has been noted for providing a habitat for nesting birds including Song Thrush, Blackcap and Whitethroat. Other visitors include the Heron, Kingfisher and Water Vole.





Rosslyn Crescent

When Rosslyn Crescent was constructed in the 1960s a small Late Roman cremation cemetery and early Roman building were observed and partially dug up by the Manshead Archaeological Society. The site dates from about 50 BC to 100 AD.



Bide-a-While

Bide-a-While is a small ornamental garden made up of well established trees, lawns and planting. Historically this site consisted of a number of allotment plots. In 1920 two of these plots were rented to George Farr, on which an orchard was planted, a greenhouse was erected, and a cellar was put in for mushroom growing. Shortly after, he acquired a further plot and developed the whole area into a landscaped garden. The name of Bide-a-While was adopted, having naturally developed simply because visitors wished to bide a while in the garden.





George Farr

© Crown copyright. All rights reserved Luton Borough Council. Licence No.100023935 (2009)



After crossing Stockingstone Road, the walk takes you along the back of the cricket and sports ground and into Wardown Park.



Community Orchard

Next to Bide-a-While is a community orchard containing traditional fruit trees. The orchard appears to have been in existence since 1920s - 1930s. It contains a wide variety of over 70 mature apple trees, together with some pear, plum and cherry trees. Over time the orchard became overgrown and a restoration project was instigated in order to improve this habitat, which is important for biodiversity.

The work has included clearing the scrub from around the trees and improving them through restoration pruning. In addition to the old trees, a number of young trees of traditional varieties were planted, including Laxton varieties from Bedford and Pam's Delight, an apple first grown here in Luton. Community orchard events are held at the site in recognition that this site is available for all.

After crossing the road the walk takes you along the back of the cricket and sports ground.



© Crown copyright. All rights reserved Luton Borough Council. Licence No. 100023935 (2009)

Wardown Park Museum

Originally a private house and gardens, the house within the park is now home to the Wardown Park Museum, where you can view displays, objects and old photographs about the history of Luton and its people. The museum houses many items of local interest, including millinery history, motor industry history and artefacts recovered from Wauluds Bank, a Neolithic Henge close to the source of the River Lea.

There is a small café at the museum.



Wardown Park

This 11 acre Edwardian park was opened to the public in 1906. It is worth taking time to stroll in this Grade II listed park among the mature trees, watching the wildlife in this peaceful oasis. Within the centre of the park, the river flows into the man-made Wardown Lake. The lake is straddled by the only cable suspension bridge in Luton.



Amenities in this mature park include a secure children's play area, bowling greens, tennis courts, a boating lake and mini-golf.

The Moor

The Moor was previously known as the Great Moor and covered the area from Dunstable Road to New Bedford Road. In the 1860s the Midland Railway line was built through the Great Moor cutting it in two.

The southern part of the Moor was developed by J.S. Crawley while the northern section remained as common land. In exchange for this loss of land he gave the town the large open spaces between Old Bedford Road and High Town which became People's Park and includes Popes Meadow and Bells Close. These parks and woodland are a pleasant diversion from your route. They are marked on the guide map in this booklet.

Galaxy Centre

The Galaxy Centre is a leisure and entertainment complex based in the town centre offering a wide range of facilities including an 11-screen cinema, games station, bowling centre, restaurants and bars.

St George's Square

Beyond the Galaxy Centre, you come to St George's Square. This space was created in the 1970s after several buildings were demolished. In 2006 the square was redeveloped with the intention of creating a space that can be used for public functions, the arts and other major events. In 2009, a water feature was unveiled which has proved to be very popular with local children offering a respite from the summer heat.

Luton Central Library and Theatre

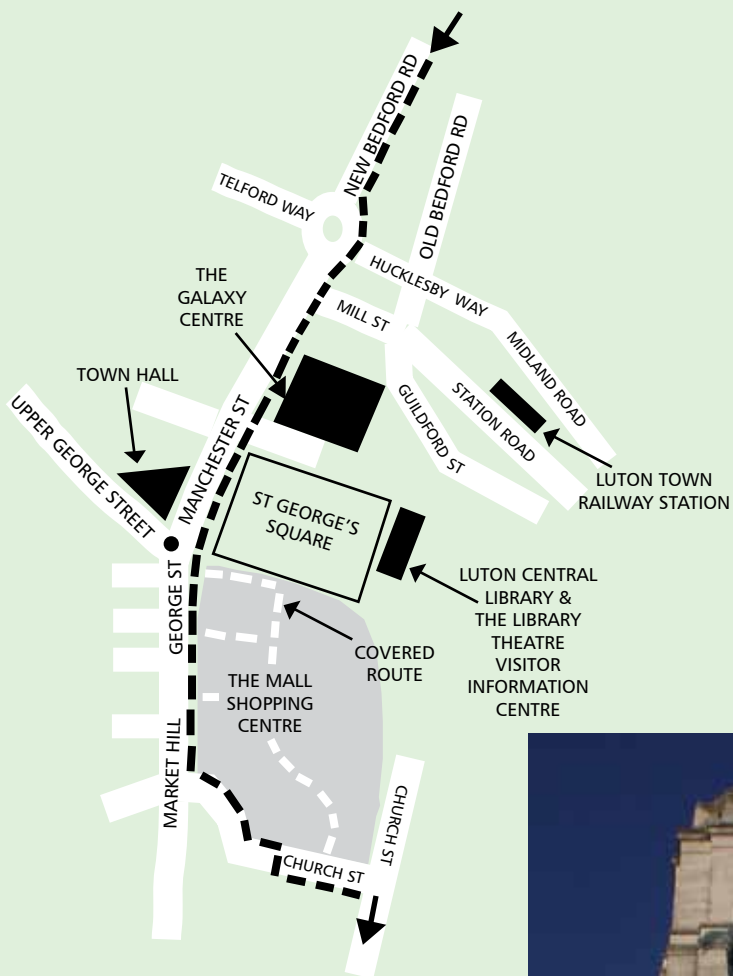
On the other side of the square is Luton Central Library and Theatre. The Visitor Information Centre shares this space and is a useful source of information for the other walks and attractions in and around Luton, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

Town Hall

The Town Hall was opened in 1936 by HRH Duke of Kent. The current building replaces the original Town Hall that was built in 1846 but destroyed by a fire in 1919 during the Peace Day Riots. The riots were the result of growing discontentment about the lack of recognition of the servicemen and women who fought in the First World War and returned only to find themselves unemployed and unsupported.

The Statue of Peace

In front of the Town Hall is the statue of Peace, designed by Sir Reginald Bloomfield, and erected in 1922, this lists the names of servicemen and women killed in the World Wars.



© Crown copyright. All rights reserved Luton Borough Council. Licence No.100023935 (2009)



The Mall

In the 1960s most of the old town centre buildings were demolished to make way for a new shopping concept. Originally named The Arndale Centre, when it opened in 1972, The Mall was the biggest covered shopping centre in Europe.

The Mall dominates this part of the town centre and offers 120 great shops including major stores such as Debenhams, Marks & Spencer, WH Smith, Next, Argos, Mothercare, Primark and many more high street names as well unique speciality shops and an indoor market. After all that shopping you can revive yourself in one of the many eateries on offer.

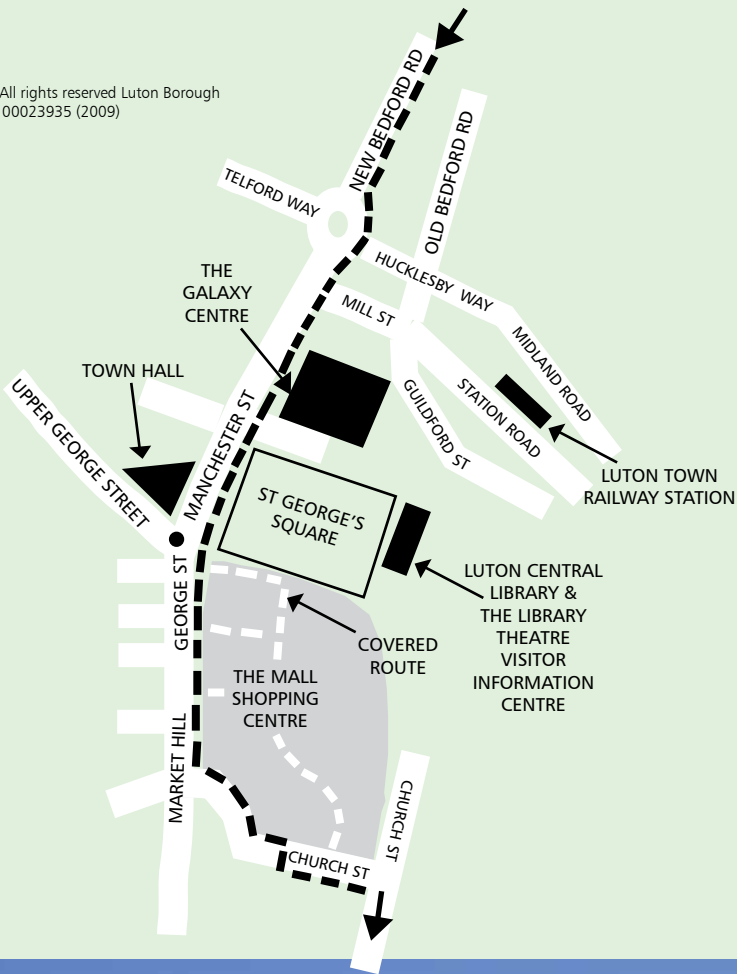
Within the town centre there are various pubs and restaurants offering a good selection of food.

George Street

Next you come to George Street, an unmistakable pedestrianised high street. Within this section there are various places to sit, including The Centenary Clock and the Park Square Maze. Although this section of the Walk is marked on the ground, it is worth taking a looking up above the shops to see a variety of architectural styles including 'art deco'. You can discover clues as to the previous use of the buildings. Look out for The Bell on the Northern side of the street, a former hostelry which has a much more sober incarnation.

One of the few older buildings to remain after the construction of The Mall is the Freemasons Lodge in Church Street, which is now a restaurant. This stands in an unimposing position as a reminder of what was previously there.





University of Bedfordshire

At the end of George Street is the University of Bedfordshire. Originally opening in 1908 as Luton Modern School, by 1938 it had changed to Luton Technical College and received university status in 1993. The institution is now known as the University of Bedfordshire and has a wide catchment area locally and overseas.

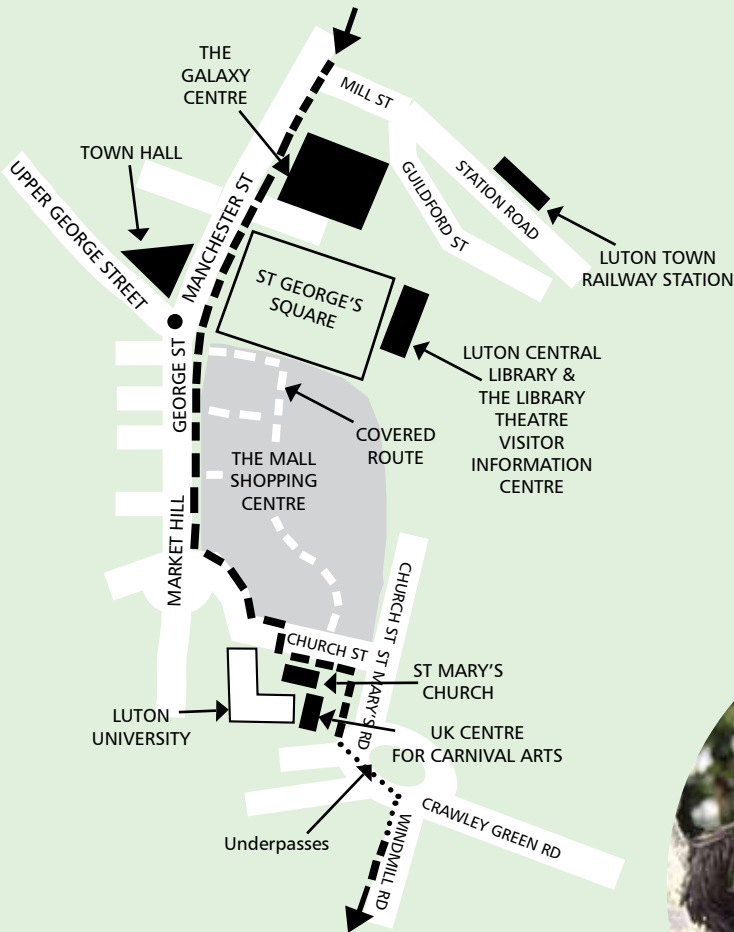


St Mary's Church

St Mary's Church is the largest church in Bedfordshire and one of the finest mediaeval churches in England. Everyone can be inspired by the beauty of the 850 year old building. People have been worshipping on the St Mary's site for over 1,000 years. In every generation the church has been extended and developed, retaining a place at the heart of its community. The current church dates mainly from the 14th and 15th centuries.

You may choose to walk through the church yard and take in the history of the site. Alternatively you can follow the Swans round the outside of the grounds.





UK Centre for Carnival Arts

Next to St. Mary's is the contrasting UK Centre for Carnival Arts providing a pioneering space for carnival artists. Opened in early 2009, the UK Centre for Carnival Arts creates a new architectural and cultural landmark in the heart of Luton. The state-of-the-art building is a national and international base for Carnival Arts with performance and rehearsal areas, teaching rooms, space for the construction of costumes and a community cafe.

Falkes de Breantes Castle

Falkes de Breantes castle stood in the 13th century and was one of two castles in Luton. This covered the area to the south of St Mary's Church to Lea Road. In 2009 the site was dug up and revealed its outer ditch as well as evidence of mediaeval occupation. There are no visible remains of the castle and the site is now part of University of Bedfordshire. However, Falkes de Breantes legacy does live on in his crest and his name. De Breantes held land in Surrey known as Falkes Hall later known as Vauxhall and his crest was a Griffin, which is the badge for Vauxhall cars.

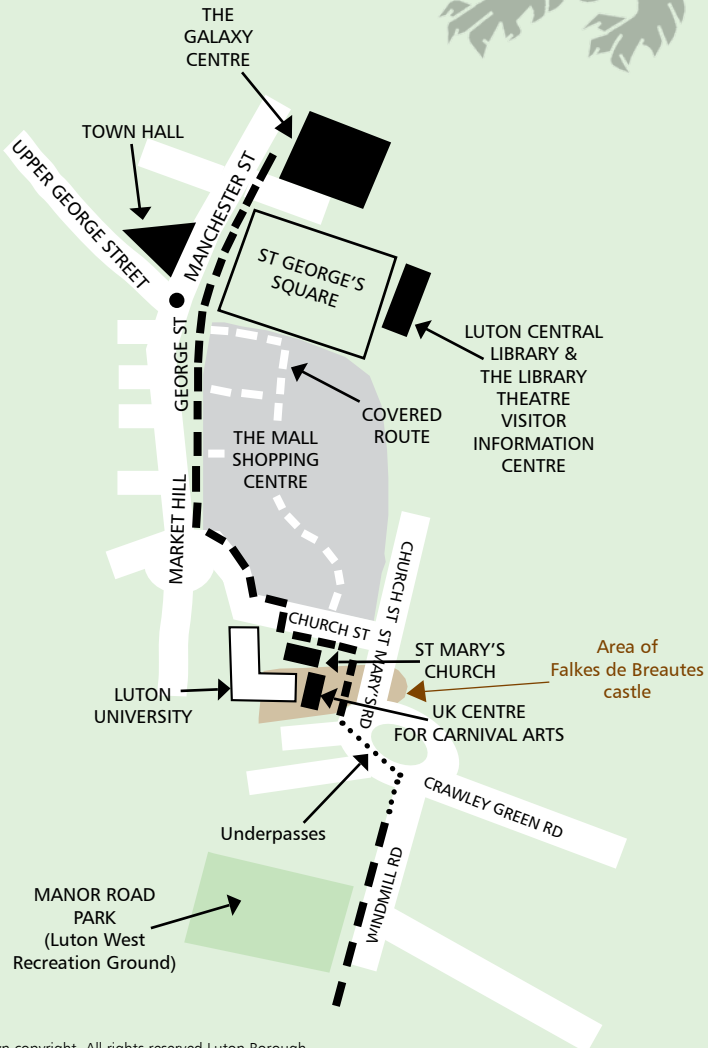
St Mary's Roundabout

The Walk continues along a busy vehicular route through St Mary's Roundabout. Access across the roundabout is via an underpass. This roundabout proves to be a calm oasis even with traffic all around. There is seating available and a view of the River Lea.

Manor Road Park

This is one of Luton's first recreation grounds and was previously known as Luton West Recreation Ground. It includes a skate and basketball area and children's play provision.





Vauxhall Recreation Club

The walk runs alongside the Vauxhall Recreation Club. This is a large indoor and outdoor sporting facility including the Luton and Vauxhall Tennis Club. This is also a venue for conferences.

Luton Hoo

At the end of Park Street is an original entrance to the Luton Hoo estate.

Please note; there is no public access to the grounds of the Luton Hoo estate through this gate.

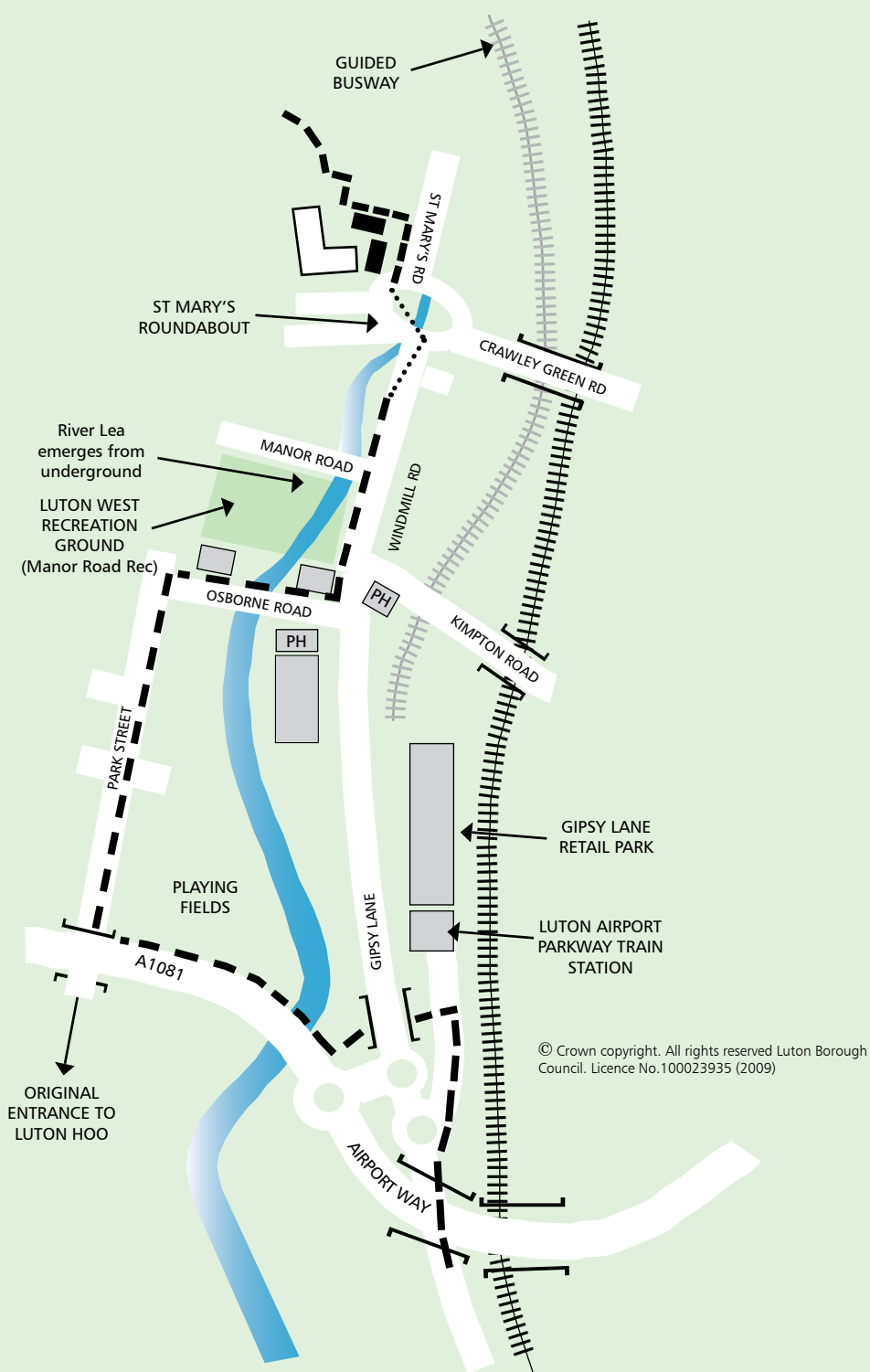
The current mansion house is largely a reconstruction of the original 17th century house following a fire in 1843. In the 18th century the grounds of the estate were remodelled by Capability Brown. This included widening the river Lea to form two lakes.

The mansion house has previously been used as a location for films including Four Weddings and a Funeral and Never Say Never Again. The mansion house and some of its outlying buildings is now a hotel with a spa and golf course set in more than 1,000 acres of parkland.

You can visit the adjoining grounds if you are visiting the hotel. You do not need to book in advance if you wish to visit the bar; however, this service is available depending on capacity. All other facilities at the hotel need to be booked in advance. The rest of the estate remains in private ownership and public access is limited to specified open days.

Luton Airport Parkway

Luton Airport Parkway Train Station is one of three train stations in Luton. Luton Airport Parkway provides easy access to London Luton Airport via the bendy bus service. This is a convenient end point for the Walk within Luton almost at the Borough boundary and with access to public transport back to Legrave, the start of the walk as described in this leaflet.





One small step. One giant leap.

Sustrans is the charity that's enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day.

Coordinated by Sustrans, the **National Cycle Network**, is a comprehensive network of safe and attractive walking and cycling routes throughout the UK. The Network extends to more than 13,000 miles, bringing these routes to within a mile of over 50% of the population.

To find routes near you visit www.sustrans.org.uk

If you think what Sustrans does sounds sensible, we urgently need people like you to help us do more. By giving from £5 a month you'll start to make a difference. Without this financial support, Sustrans and projects like the National Cycle Network would probably not exist. Please make your move and support Sustrans today.

Donate online **www.sustrans.org.uk**

By phone **0845 838 0651**


sustrans
JOIN THE MOVEMENT