

Welcome to Priory Country Park, owned and managed by Bedford Borough Council.

Priory Country Park

Nestled within a bend in the River Great Ouse, the Park's 360 acres of lakes, meadows and woodland have something for everyone to enjoy. Whether you want to watch the wildlife or go for a bike ride, the park is a great place for a day out.

History

There has been human occupation of the area occupied by the park since the Bronze age. Evidence for this was discovered in an archaeological survey prior to mineral extraction.

An Augustinian Priory stood on the area now occupied by Aspects Leisure Complex and the Athletic Stadium, from the middle of the twelfth century until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539. The only visible remnants of this are the fishponds in the north-west corner of the park. There was a Roman Villa where Priory Lake now stands, between the island and the sailing clubhouse.

Since Roman times the area has been farmland, both arable and flood meadow, until the Second World War. The wall (Scheduled Ancient Monument) that runs alongside the marina is constructed from the stones of the Priory (and includes some Roman material) and was the boundary feature for a large house built by the Costwick family in the late sixteenth century.

In the 1960's and 70's most of the rest of the site was excavated for gravel resulting in the formation of the main Priory Lake and the Marina. The first part of the exhausted pits was in-filled with domestic refuse and covered with ash from the nearby Goldington power station (since demolished), and then capped with clay and covered with topsoil. The main car parks, Visitor Centre and a large proportion of the New Meadow lie on top of this former corporation tip.



Approx 6.5 km / 4 miles Time: 3.5 hours

Circular walks Priory Country Park Riverside Wildlife Trail

No.5

The Main Lake and the Finger Lake were created from the remaining ex-gravel pits. The lakes rapidly became important for wildlife and the area became a Country Park in 1986.

Refreshments

Ice Cream

The Ice cream van can be found outside the Visitor Centre on most weekends and throughout the school holidays.

Cloverdale Retreat Café

Located in the Visitor's Centre with outside tables providing a lakeside view. Please contact the café for more information.

Activities

The Park Rangers have a variety of pond dipping and bug hunting equipment which can be borrowed by educational groups for use in the park. They are also able to offer training in the use of this equipment. Please contact the Rangers for more information.

Walking

There are three way-marked walks around the park, or if you prefer you can just wander and make your own trail.

Blue: Priory Lake offers a bank side walk around the lake, on an all-weather path, giving an easy walk of 1 ½ miles.

Green: This is a more secluded walk around the Finger Lake conservation area, of approx. 1 mile.

This trail includes steps and can be muddy at times.

Red: This is a longer walk taking in most of the park, including parts of the river, which is about four miles.

Please see the separate trail leaflets available from the Visitor Centre.

Cycling

Cyclists are welcome in the park, and there is a variety of surfaces, from hard standing to grass, within the park.

ENV180_16 Riverside



Let's Go! Bedfordshire's
Promoted Routes & Sites

www.lets-go.org.uk

Other walks

Find out about more of Bedfordshire's walking and riding routes as well as nature reserves and country parks by visiting www.lets-go.org.uk

Priory Marina (British Waterways)

Boats and Moorings: 01234 351931

Canoe Slalom

Bookings: www.canoeslalom.co.uk/courses/cardington.htm

Priory Water Sport Association

E-mail: info@priorysc.org.uk
Web: www.priorysc.org.uk

Cloverdale Retreat Café

Tel: 01234 325462
E-mail: bedfordshire@wildlifebcn.org

The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire

Tel: 01234 364213
E-mail: prioryrangers@bedford.gov.uk
Web: www.bedford.gov.uk

Rangers

You can contact the Rangers by phone. Please leave a message and the Rangers will get back to you.
Tel: 01234 718012 (24hr answer phone)
E-mail: prioryrangers@bedford.gov.uk
Web: www.bedford.gov.uk

Park Address

Contact Information

Fishing

There are several different fishing waters within the park, including the River Great Ouse. There is a closed season from March 15th to June 15th inclusive. Season tickets are available (also valid at Harrold Odell Country Park). Please see the Priory Country Park page on the Bedford Borough Council website for details on how to purchase a season ticket. Fishing map boards around the park highlight where you can and cannot fish and the rules of the fishery.

Events

There is a range of events and guided walks held in the park. These are advertised on the park's notice boards and website. The Rangers will give guided walks to groups on request. Please contact the Rangers for more information.

Volunteering

Volunteering opportunities are available once a month on a Sunday, and once a week on a Monday. Please contact the Rangers for more information.

Car Parking

The Park has four car parks. The main car park is located on Barkers Lane, and is open from 5am to 9pm. There is a small parking area by the recycling point at the main entrance, and another small parking area at the top of the New Cut road. The other car parks are on Stannard Way (Priory Business Park), and by Riverside Pond (opposite Tesco on Riverside Drive). These car parks are open all the time. All the car parks are free of charge.



Public Transport

Stagecoach route no. 4 bus stops approx. 200m from the park at the western end of Riverfield Drive from Bedford town centre. The nearest railway station is Bedford, approx. 2 miles away.

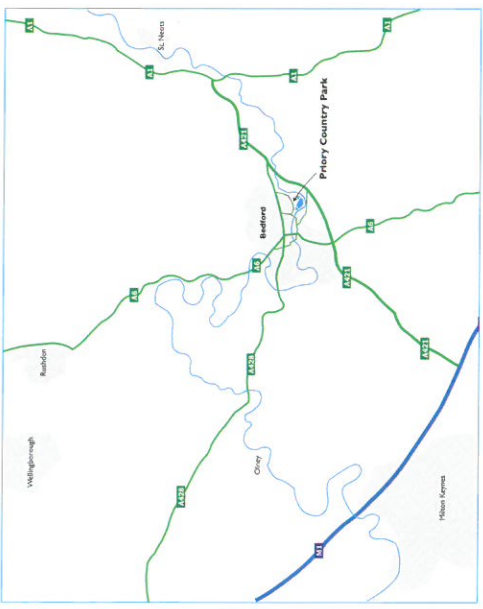
When to visit

The Park is open every day of the year. The main route around the Park is accessible in all weathers although other areas can get wet and muddy. The Park is busy at weekends, especially on Sundays, but is quieter during the week.

Access Information

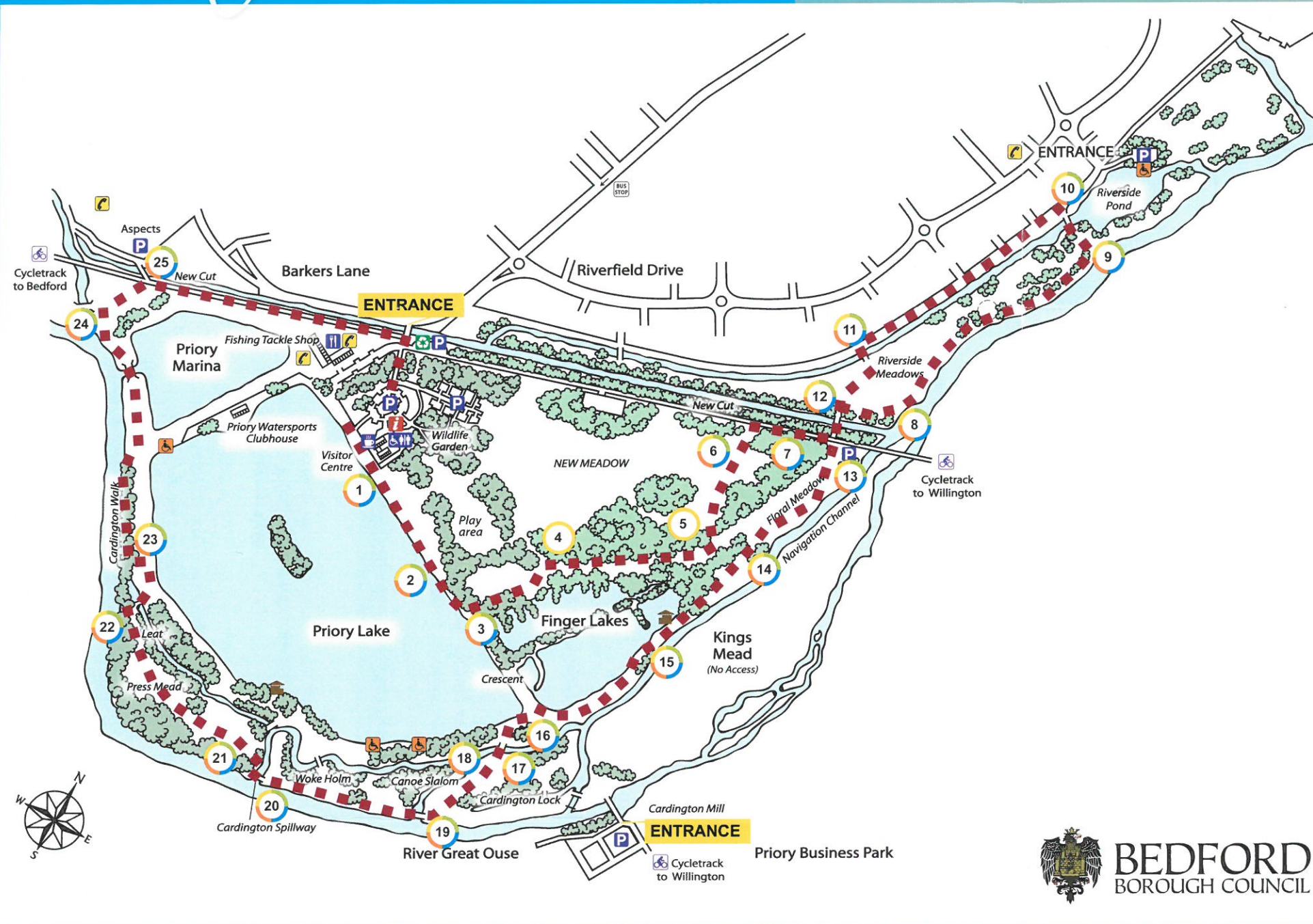
There are disabled parking spaces in the main car park, off Barkers Lane. The Visitor Centre and toilets are accessible by wheelchairs. The path around the lake is surfaced and suitable for wheelchairs and prams.

How to find Priory Country Park



Riverside Wildlife Trail

Approx 6.5 km / 4 miles Time: 3.5 hours



- 1 Bird life to look out for on the lake from the main path includes: Cormorants, Mallard ducks, Canada Geese and Mute Swans.
- 2 You may see Willow fencing in the water, this is bank revetment work. It is done to try and prevent the bank and the path from eroding away into the lake. Along either side of the main path you will see Willow trees growing. These trees are managed by rotational coppicing, each year a section is cut down, the new growth encourages insects and nestingbirds.
- 3 Follow the path through the Finger Lakes conservation area.
- 4 The Floral and New Meadow are left long to encourage biodiversity, they are a haven for butterflies, dragonflies and beetles. Areas of grass are kept short to create paths and provide space for activities such as kite flying.
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- 6 In the 1840s the New Cut was dug out to create an embankment for the railway. The cycle path now traces the route of the old line and is a part of route 51 connecting Milton Keynes to Sandy.
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- 8 On the far side of the riverbank gravel extraction has created the landscape. Other habitats such as reedbeds can be created after the gravel has been extracted.
- 9 Riverside Brook carries water down from the New Cut and feeds Riverside Pond.
- 10 Riverside Pond is a popular area with anglers fishing for Tench and Pike. It is an important breeding area for fish.
- 11 Along this stretch Willow trees and Dogwood fringe the path. These are managed by coppicing and the young growth offers some contrast in colour.
- 12 Go down the ramp and into the Floral Meadow. Keep an eye out for butterflies, dragonflies and birds such as Pheasant and Green Woodpecker.
- 13
- 14 A little way down the route a small path leads off to the left hand side to Kramer bird hide. From here quiet observation may reveal sightings of birds such as Heron, Coot, Moorhen, Mallard ducks and Grebe.
- 15 There is a lovely view over the Finger Lakes from this point. The banks on the right are popular with night fishermen fishing for Carp.
- 16 To the left is the canoe slalom, this is regularly used for national canoeing events.
- 17 Following the slalom up to its source, you will see the sluice gate which is used to control the amount of water flowing down it. If the river levels become very high, the gate can be opened to divert some of the water away.
- 18 The trail continues along the river bank before cutting through Press Mead and rejoining the river bank at Cardington Walk. Here there are a number of veteran Willow trees which support many insects and species of fungi.
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- 24 The trail then leads through a Scheduled Ancient Monument, called the Fish ponds, before joining the cycle path and leading back to the park entrance.
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Key

The walk
 Spring
 Summer
 Autumn
 Winter
 All Seasons

P Car Parks
 Restaurant
 Toilets
 Information

☎ Telephone
 Recycling Bank
 Bird hide
 Café