

# The Ashford Green Corridor

## A Wonderful Place for Wildlife

## How is the Green Corridor managed?

# The Ashford Green Corridor

Nine out of ten people in the UK live in towns and cities, so green spaces in urban areas are very important as they provide a pleasant, relaxing environment for people as well as habitat for wildlife. Ashford is lucky to have a range of green spaces, including public parks and recreation grounds, which link together to create a green corridor through the town.



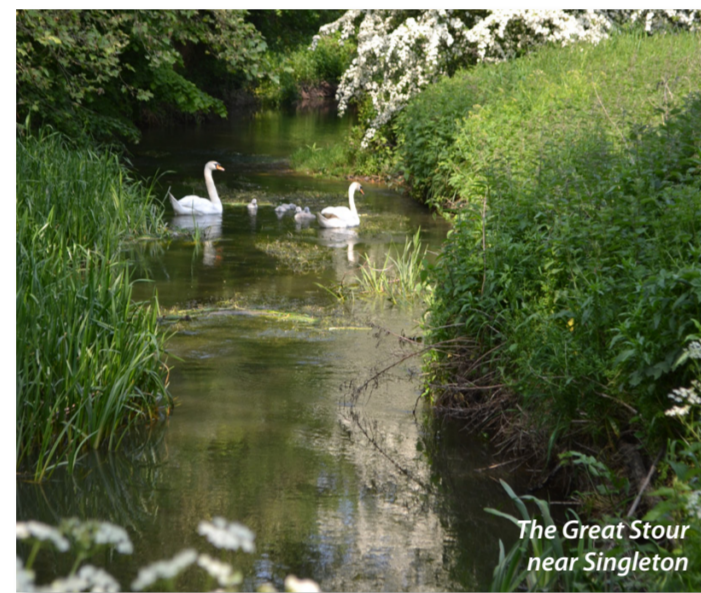
Watercress Fields

Since the middle of the 19th Century Ashford has expanded but land close to the East and Great Stour Rivers has not been built on due to the risk of flooding and because the Borough Council has protected it as green space. Some of these spaces also act as flood storage to help prevent flooding to homes and businesses. The resulting undeveloped 'fingers' of land reach right into the heart of Ashford collectively forming the Ashford Green Corridor. It connects areas, providing both people and wildlife with routes through the town and to the countryside beyond.

Ashford's rivers are surprisingly natural considering their urban surroundings. Kingfishers, grass snakes and the banded demoiselle damselfly can all be seen. Singleton Lake is a habitat for wetland birds and Buxford Meadow is wet grassland with an impressive range of plants, insects and other species. Water voles are present in the Green Corridor but they are secretive and generally hard to spot! It is because of these habitats so close to where people live that the Green Corridor has been designated as a Local Nature Reserve.

### WHAT IS A LOCAL NATURE RESERVE?

Local councils designate Local Nature Reserves. They are places of interest for their wildlife, offering opportunities for the enjoyment and study of nature through joining in with local events, education and practical management. Ashford Borough Council officially declared the Ashford Green Corridor a Local Nature Reserve in December 2002.



The Great Stour near Singleton

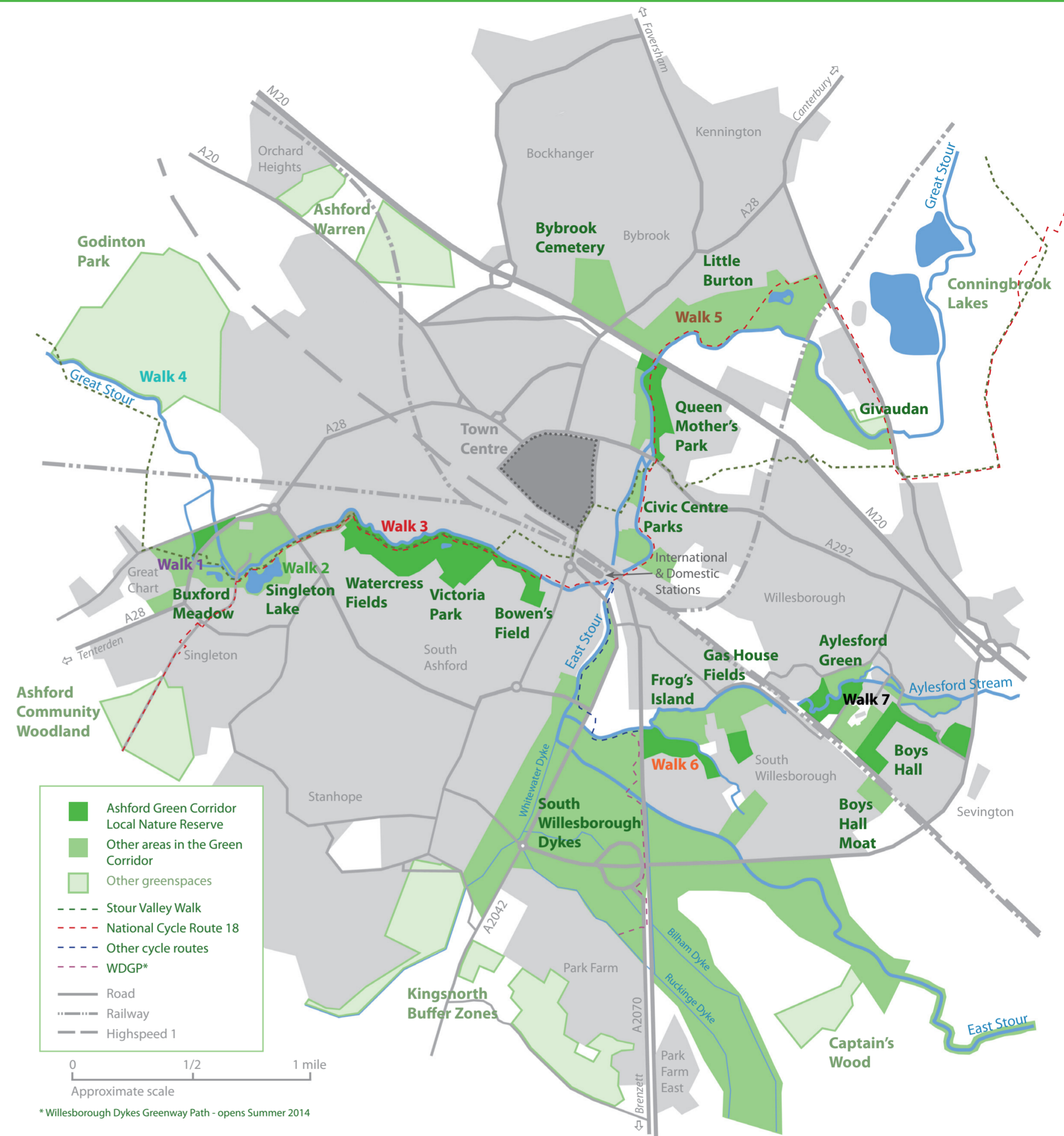
The rivers, riverbanks, trees, orchards, wetland, meadows, park areas, playing fields, ponds and hedges of the Green Corridor demand different kinds of management; management which balances wildlife conservation with maintaining good, safe access and space for people to enjoy.



Meadow at Frog's Island

For example, meadows have been created throughout the Green Corridor, in Watercress Fields, Queen Mothers Park, Little Burton, South Willesborough and Aylesford Green. The most recent addition is at Civic Centre South Park. Meadows are wild flower rich grasslands allowed to grow long then cut once in late summer removing the cuttings to sustain the meadows.

They are excellent habitats for wild flowers and animals such as butterflies, birds and small mammals. However, plenty of areas are still mown regularly to provide space for picnics, games and other activities. So if you see large areas of un-mown grass, this is not neglect, but the establishment of meadows!



\* Willesborough Dykes Greenway Path - opens Summer 2014

## History



Hunt gathering at Boys Hall c1900

From the manors of Buxford in the west to Boys Hall Moat in the east, the Green Corridor is rich in heritage.

Close to the town centre is Victoria Park with its commemorative trees and the Hubert Fountain. Pledges Mill, a former flour mill, stands at the confluence of the East and Great Stour rivers and the aptly named Watercress Fields points to Ashford's history as a market town dating back many centuries. Several areas were farmed until relatively recently and many living links still remain.

## Get involved

Community groups, schools and individuals all play a role in the future of the Ashford Green Corridor. The Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership has worked with a number of organisations on projects that introduce new wildlife habitats such as orchards, ponds, meadows and hedges. We also support local initiatives that benefit wildlife or improve an understanding and appreciation of green spaces through educational and fun activities. Perhaps your organisation might want to get involved?

### WOULD YOU LIKE TO VOLUNTEER?

We run weekly practical conservation tasks for volunteers every Wednesday in and around Ashford – come rain or shine. Work varies from season to season, from tree planting to hedge laying, meadow mowing and river work. We have a pick up point at the Stour Centre and supply all the tools. You can keep fit, learn some practical skills and enjoy the company of a great bunch of people.

Please contact our office by phone or email if you would like to find out more:

**kentishstour@kent.gov.uk**  
**0300 333 6490**  
**www.ashfordgreencorridor.org.uk**

**Useful contacts - access**  
**Ashford Access Group** - 01233 639609  
[www.ashfordaccessgroup.org.uk](http://www.ashfordaccessgroup.org.uk)  
**Ashford Gateway Plus** - 01233 331111  
[www.ashford.gov.uk/parks-and-open-spaces](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/parks-and-open-spaces)

**Useful contacts - cycling**  
**Sustrans** - [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)  
**Spokes** - [www.spokeseastkent.org.uk](http://www.spokeseastkent.org.uk)  
**Explore Kent** - [www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent](http://www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent)

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# Ashford



# GREEN corridor

Walk and cycle through Ashford's green spaces



## Recreation and Access

The Ashford Green Corridor is largely open to everyone to use where practical – see marked areas on the large map. The network of paths is popular for strolling, dog walking and for getting around town avoiding the busy roads. The majority of the paths are surfaced providing good access to a range of sites for wheelchairs and mobility vehicles, but please note that most are shared use cycle and footpaths (for more access information, see contacts on back page).

Many areas in the Green Corridor are places for recreation or simply for relaxation to get away from the stresses of urban living. There are open spaces for games, sports pitches and play areas at many sites. If you are an angler you can go fishing at Singleton Lake (licence required).

## Green Transport & Cycling

Do you use your car for journeys that could be made on foot or by bicycle? If traffic, exhaust fumes and busy streets put you off, why not walk or cycle through the Green Corridor.

A section of National Cycle Route 18, linking Canterbury to Royal Tunbridge Wells, runs through the town centre, along the Green Corridor from Kennington in the east to Buxford Meadow in the west. The Willesborough Dykes Greenway Path, multi-user route, will soon join Park Farm in the south to the Green Corridor. A number of other Ashford districts have smaller cycle routes that connect to the corridor. For example if you live in Kennington or Bockhanger you could walk or cycle into town through the delightful Queen Mother's Park, while residents of South Ashford can go through the wide open space of Watercress Fields and Victoria Park on their way to town.

The Ashford Green Corridor also acts as a gateway to and from the countryside and places much further away via Ashford's domestic and international railway station!

For further information on cycle routes see contacts on back page.



National Cycle Route 18 at Queen Mother's Park

Produced by Clarity Interpretation 01303 249501 [www.clarity-consultancy.co.uk](http://www.clarity-consultancy.co.uk)



## Walks 1, 2 & 3



**WALKS 1, 2 and 3** – Include part of the Stour Valley Walk and National Cycle Route 18. Distances are approximate.

**WALK 1 Buxford Meadow (0.5km / 0.3mi)**  
**WALK 2 Singleton Lake (1km / 0.7mi)**  
**WALK 3 Watercress Fields / Victoria Park (3 km / 2mi)**  
 Combined distance = 4.5km / 3mi

### A Buxford Meadow

This small area of wet grassland and woodland is an unexpected wildlife hot spot, home to 12 different dragonflies and damselflies and 59 moth species plus 100 different plants and a great variety of birds. At the centre of this natural haven is a pond brimming with aquatic insects, wetland plants and amphibians. The wet woodland is habitat now seldom found in the Stour Valley. A relatively new watercourse now cascades

### B Singleton Lake

The name Singleton is a corruption of the Old English *shingle tone*, meaning a farmstead with a shingled roof.

The lake may look natural but it is completely man made, constructed as a pleasant environment for residents of the nearby housing estate. Over time it has become a wildlife haven, with habitats for many animal and plants. The deep waters are ideal for diving birds such as great crested grebe, while the trees on the banks and islands have attracted that great singing star of the bird world, the nightingale. Kingfishers can be seen flying up and down the Great Stour River which runs alongside. The estate and lake take their name from a much older settlement – the manor of Singleton. The moated manor house is not far from the lake, near the Singleton Barn pub (an old tithe barn dating back to 1631). The house probably dates from the 16th century, but the moat is older and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

### C Watercress Fields

Now situated within an urban setting, the area takes its name from its history of watercress growing. This wild plant was grown commercially in clear chalk streams like the Great Stour to be transported to London markets in the 19th century. Maps of the time show a Watercress Farm was located nearby. At the western end there are still the remains of an old fording point from before the area was built up. However, the river here has kept much of its wild character. Take a closer look and you will see that it meanders naturally through the landscape and many wild plants grow on its banks. The river brings wildlife right into the heart of Ashford. In fact the Great Stour has better habitats here in town than in many rural areas where riverside vegetation has been lost in favour of agricultural crops. The recent addition of a traditional community orchard and meadow areas further encourages insects and other wildlife into this green space.

### D Victoria Park

In the late 1800s, Ashford was growing fast and more leisure facilities were needed. In 1898, 17 acres of agricultural land, probably grazed by sheep, were bought from local landowners the Jemmett brothers, to create Victoria Park. A look at old maps shows that the park's boundaries closely follow those of the original fields. The Hubert Fountain, originally made in France for the Second Great International Exhibition, London 1862, was installed in 1912.

## Walk 5



**WALK 5 Queen Mother's Park, Little Burton (2 km / 1.25mi one way, 4 km / 2.5 mi return)**

This route is not circular, but will take you from the centre of town out to its eastern edge. From there you can explore the splendid North Downs countryside via the Stour Valley Walk or National Cycle Route 18; both of which will take you to Wye, Canterbury and beyond. (Please see links at the end of the leaflet for more information)

### A Civic Centre North/South

(Circular walk 0.42 km / 0.26 mi)  
 Next to Ashford Borough Council offices, the site is surrounded by river corridor habitat, with the Great and East Stour on either side. You will see delightful wildlife inspired seats and picnic tables dotted throughout North Park, created by local artist Steve Portchmouth. Alongside the East Stour River you can see some polarded willows. These magnificent trees have probably survived from when this

area was open farmland. They have been cut in the traditional way, where the whole crown is cut to a height of about two metres. The crown grows back many thin stems which would have once provided a good supply of wood for locals. The South Park Meadow, created in 2014 will provide more valuable and beautiful wildlife habitat.

### B Pledges Mill

At the top of the site is Pledges Mill. The history of milling here goes back almost 1000 years - The Domesday Book records a mill on this very site in 1086. The existing building dates from 1864 and is one of two large mills once owned by Lawrence Pledge. Now a night club, the weir of the mill was recently altered by the Environment Agency to allow fish to travel upstream, returning the river back to a more natural state.

### C Queen Mothers Park

Once known as Henwood Nature Park, (a name deriving from the small settlement of Henwood that once stood nearby), the river and wildflower meadows of Queen Mothers Park continue to provide a valuable corridor for nature within the heart of urban Ashford. Early Ordinance Survey maps suggest that in the late 19th century this land was sheep pasture. The park's rural past is celebrated in one of a series of sculptures by local artists Mark Brockman and Mark Sidders.

### D Martyr's Field

The park also contains a darker history. An area known as Martyr's Field at the southern end of the park, was the site of a number of public executions of local people held in the early 16th century. For example in 1511 John Brown and 45 others were burned at the stake for their religious beliefs. These and the names of other people here executed are listed on a memorial stone and marked by The Martyr's Seat.

### E Little Burton

Via the M20 subway and Ashford Rugby Club you will arrive at Little Burton. This park is situated at the eastern end of the Ashford Green Corridor, where urban Ashford meets the countryside. Little Burton was one of the last areas that underwent the change from rural to urban. Once owned by the Earl of Thanet, the area was farmed as recently as 1992 when it was covered in orchards, pasture fields and livestock. Happily, a large part of the farm area was not developed but kept to form this park which includes a small man-made lake, maturing woodland, meadows, recreation space and the Great Stour River. All of which supports a range of wildlife including wildfowl, dragonflies, birds and butterflies. The Ward area is still called Little Burton Farm.

## Walk 4

**WALK 4 Godinton Park (9 km / 5.75 mi)** Distances are approximate

### A Buxford Meadow

See text above.

### B Great Chart

Great Chart is a very old settlement, first recorded in AD 762. Located at an important crossing point on the Stour, it was probably larger and more important than Ashford at this time. In the Anglo Saxon period this part of the Stour was navigable by boats and in 892 Danish marauders sailed into Great Chart, setting fire to buildings and plundering corn and other spoils.

The settlement survived this ordeal and was a large, thriving manor by the time of Domesday - 1086. The village church is built from ragstone and the area has a long association with the quarrying of this material.

### C Godinton Park

The Godinton Estate has medieval origins: The grounds started life as a deer park, and there is evidence of a Roman settlement on the site. The house you see now dates from the 14th century but, like most stately homes, has been restored and added to many times over the centuries.

The house can be seen from the public footpath, there are many ancient trees dotted through the parkland and the route skirts fields and coppice woodland and crosses the River Stour. Private drives lead to the house and gardens.

For 450 years, Godinton was in the ownership of one family – the Tokes. There are many memorials to them in Great Chart church, including a brass commemorating Nicholas Toke and his five wives; he died in 1680 while, it is said, travelling to London to visit a prospective sixth wife.

This route around the estate is made up of both public and permissive paths (by permission of the landowner) for walkers only, no bicycles. It is a working estate with livestock and farm machinery so dogs are to be kept on lead around livestock. Dogs are not allowed in the gardens. Please help this beautiful estate by picking up litter.

For opening times, entry fees and events [www.godintonhouse.co.uk](http://www.godintonhouse.co.uk)



Traditionally laid hedge

Magnificent veteran trees

Kingfishers can be seen flying along the river

Great Stour at Godinton

Godinton House across a snowy park

St Mary's Church, Great Chart

Barn owl boxes have been installed at Godinton to provide nesting places for these declining birds

## Walks 6 & 7

**WALK 6 South Willesborough (3.2km / 2mi)**

### A Frog Orchard

Once a farming area, a relatively new community orchard links this green space to its past. With meadow grass along one edge and between the fruit trees, it's a wonderful habitat for insects, particularly pollinators such as bees, and birds.

### B Frog's Island

As you walk through this green space, bordered by meadow planting and a wildlife friendly ditch, you will see patches of rough vegetation close to the path. These are scrapes (shallow wet areas) created as habitats for wetland lovers such as dragonflies. At one time the whole of this area would probably have been much like nearby South Willesborough Dykes, large open marshy fields with wildlife rich drainage ditches in between.

### C South Willesborough Dykes

A large area of open, marshy pastures beyond the railway line. The land is grazed by sheep and horses, as it probably has been for the last 100 years or so. The drainage dykes are excellent wildlife habitats containing some uncommon plant species including water violet, flowering rush and marsh woundwort.

### D East Stour River

The East Stour rises from chalk springs at the village of Postling then flows west. In the past it powered water mills at Evigate, Mersham and Swanton, before reaching South Willesborough.



South Willesborough Young Farmers' fields

**WALK 7 Aylesford Green (2.4km / 1.5mi)**

### G Boys Hall Moat

This 13th century moat is one of the most important heritage sites in the AGC and is a protected Scheduled Ancient Monument. It is the site of a house that was demolished prior to 1632, the moat being the most obvious historic feature, which is well preserved and holds water all year round. The surrounding area is also protected, and the long narrow pond and ditches and terraces visible to the west of the moat are the remains of a garden that was created next to the house.

### H Boys Hall

This 17th century manor house, with its characteristic gables and tall chimneys, was built by Thomas Boys and is now a venue for weddings and other special occasions. The house was built using material from the old 13th century manor house that once occupied Boys Hall Moat (see G).

### I Aylesford Green

Most Ashford residents will know that the River Great Stour flows through town, but running through the woodland and grassland of Aylesford Green is the Aylesford Stream. This lovely little waterway has many meanders and characteristic natural vegetation that supports a range of wildlife including damselflies, dragonflies and many birds. Green sandpiper and grey heron have been recorded here.

This part of the river is still good wildlife habitat despite being close to new housing. You may catch a glimpse of a grey wagtail or reed bunting. Water-loving plants include brooklime and yellow water lily.

### E Gas House Fields

This part of town is known as Gas House Fields, so called because there used to be a gas works here apparently built by the South Eastern Railway. The area is good for wildlife, particularly beside Aylesford Stream and in The Spinney; a section of scrubby woodland which is one of the habitat areas

Grass snakes live close to rivers and ponds

The East Stour and South Willesborough Dykes