

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.



1.5 km/1 mile Time: 1 hour

# Finger Lakes Wildlife Trail

## Priory Country Park

Country parks

No.6

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\_T6 Finger Lakes



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

[www.lets-go.org.uk](http://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](http://www.lets-go.org.uk)

#### Priory Marina (British Waterways)

Boats and Moorings: 01234 351931

#### Priory Marina Beefeater Restaurant

Table Bookings: 01234 352883

#### Priory Water Sport Association

E-mail: [info@priorysc.org.uk](mailto:info@priorysc.org.uk)

Web: [www.priorysc.org.uk](http://www.priorysc.org.uk)

#### The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire

E-mail: [bedfordshire@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:bedfordshire@wildlifebcn.org)

#### Cloverdale Retreat Café

Tel: 01234 325462

#### 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](mailto:prioryrangers@bedford.gov.uk)

Web: [www.bedford.gov.uk](http://www.bedford.gov.uk)

### Contact Information

#### Park Address

Priory Country Park, Visitor's Centre  
Barkers Lane, Bedford MK41 9DJ

### Fishing

There are several different fishing waters within the park, including the River Great Ouse. There is a closed season from March 1<sup>st</sup> to June 15<sup>th</sup> 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

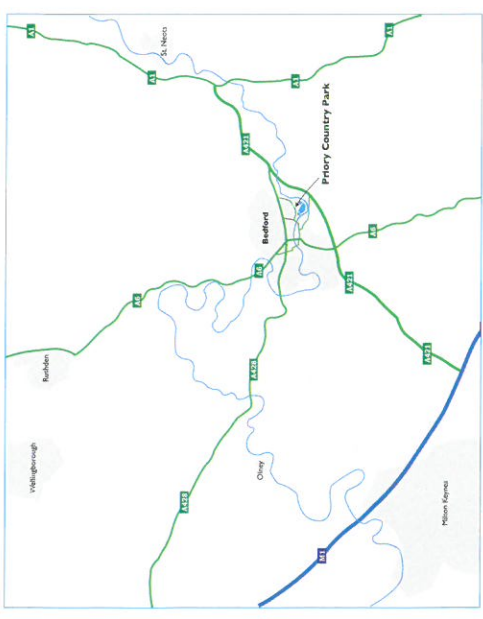
Stagecoach route no. 4 bus stops approx. 200m from the park at the western end of Riverfield Drive from Bedford town centre. The nearest railway station is Bedford, approx. 2 miles away.

### 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

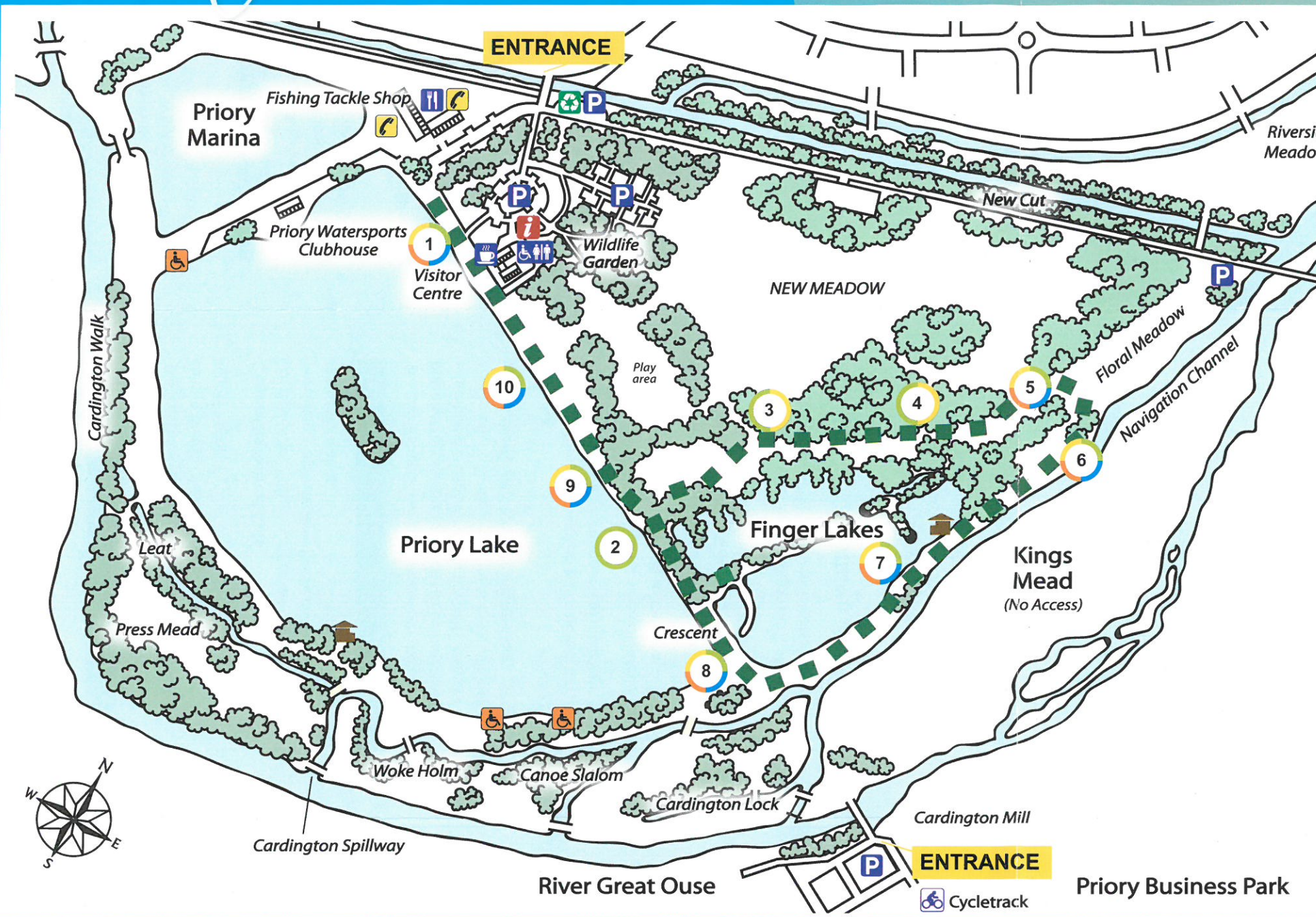
There are disabled parking spaces in the main car park, off Barkers Lane. The Visitor Centre and toilets are accessible by wheelchairs. The path around the lake is surfaced and suitable for wheelchairs and prams.



### How to find Priory Country Park

### Finger Lake Wildlife Trail

Approx 1.5 km / 1 miles Time: 1 hour



- 1 Bird Life to look out for on the lake from the main path includes: Herons, Mallard ducks, Canada geese and Mute Swans
- 2 In spring newts often use this area to lay their eggs. They are laid on the leaves of plants growing in the waters edge. Newts spend the rest of the year on land and often hibernate in long grass and under logs.
- 3 Look out along the hedgerow for male Orange Tip butterflies, they are fairly distinctive as their name suggests.
- 4 Look out for damselflies with dark bands on their wings, these are called Banded Demoiselles. Only the males have these markings on their wings. The females are an iridescent green colour.
- 5 Occasionally Muntjac deer are spotted in this area; the Duke of Bedford introduced them into the UK in about 1900. They have since escaped and spread.
- 6 The Kramer hide offers a great view of the birdlife found in the Finger Lakes area. Many birds nest in the reed beds and occasionally we get Otters in this part of the park too.
- 7 This area of the Finger Lakes is popular with fisherman, particularly those who are after Pike and Carp.
- 8 The Crescent is an area of reedbed, with Willow coppice on either side of the path. This habitat offers valuable nesting sites for birds including Moorhen and Coot.
- 9 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 nesting birds.
- 10 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.

**Key**

The walk	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter	All Seasons
Car Parks	Restaurant	Toilets	Information		
Telephone	Recycling Bank	Bird hide	Café		