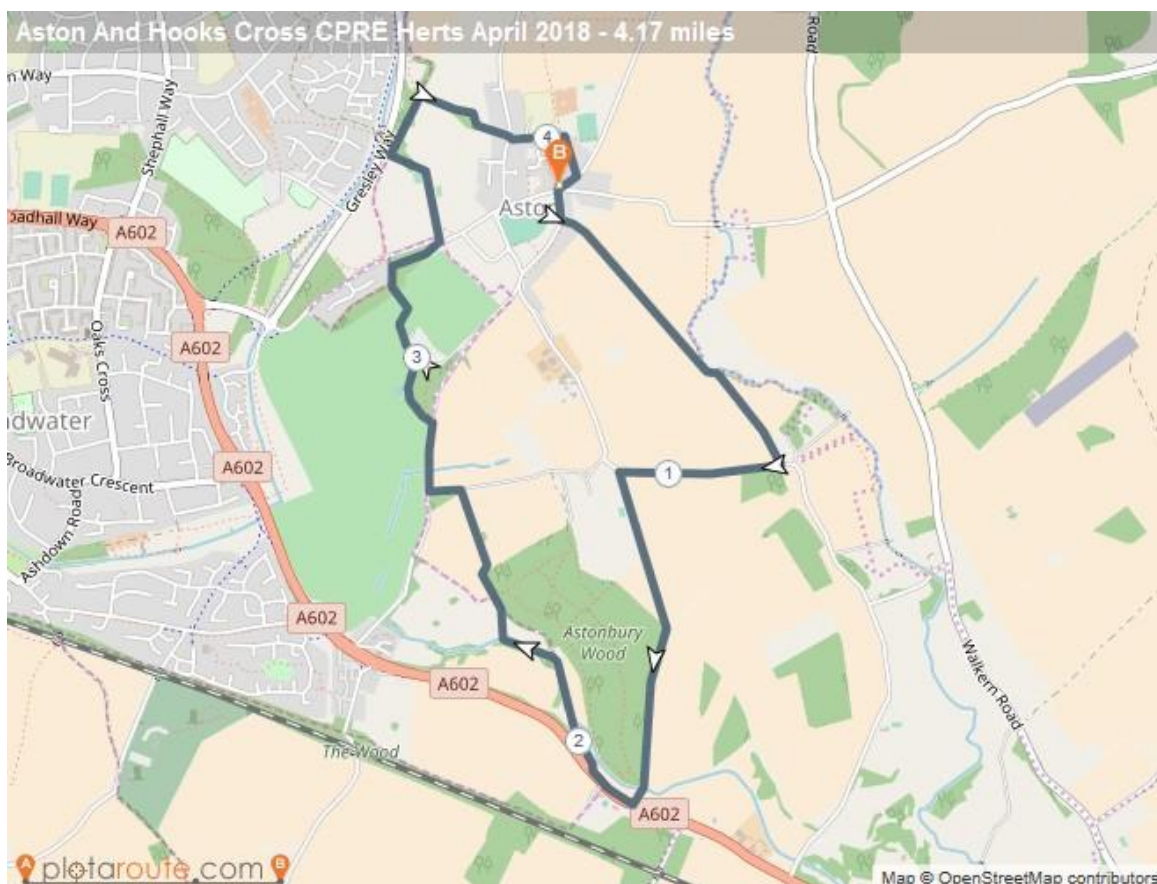


## 2018 WALK FOUR - ASTON and HOOKS CROSS

This 4.2 mile circular walk was devised by CPRE Herts' Trustee Eliza Hermann.

Throughout 2018, our walk each month will feature the corresponding site in our "Countryside Under Threat" calendar. Our aim is to highlight these sites and raise their profile in aid of local campaigns to prevent their inappropriate development.



The April site is situated in the Green Belt between Bragbury End and Hooks Cross to the southeast of Stevenage, where a new development of 550 homes is proposed. The walk starts and finishes in the village of Aston, and if timed for late April or early May should feature bluebells in Astonbury Woods. The walk utilises a portion of the 27 mile Stevenage Outer Orbital Path

(STOOP) designed some years ago by the North Herts Ramblers. There is one stile to climb over.

The walk starts and finishes in the village of Aston.

It is possible to park on many of the side streets in Aston Village. (It may also be possible to reach Aston on Bus routes 383 and 390, but these services are not frequent.)

At the centre of the village is the junction of Broadwater Lane and Stringers Lane, OS grid reference TL274227. This is the start of the walk.

Walk south on Stringers Lane, in the direction marked "Bragbury End 1/2".



After about 60 yards, there is a footpath off to the left, signposted "Public Footpath" and "Circular Walk". Take this path, heading through the metal stanchion and on into the field beyond. (Photo taken after passing through stanchion and looking back to Stringers Lane).





Continue on the path in a southeasterly direction across the field, through a broad gap in a row of trees and on ahead. Looking off to your left there is a nice view across the Beane valley to High Wood over near Benington.



Follow the path as it descends gently to the River Beane. The riverbed was completely dry on the occasion of CPRE's test walk in late March 2018.



At the Beane, the footpath joins the STOOP path, which continues for about 80 yards alongside the riverbed.

Stay on the STOOP path as it then turns right away from the riverbed and proceeds uphill across the field.



At the top of the hill follow the path keeping the fence on your left. You will shortly come to the corner of the field, and beyond it a narrow tarmac lane. Turn right (west) and continue along the field edge, with a hedge and the lane on your left. When you come to a distinctive tree alone in the field on your right, move onto the grassy verge along the lane as the hedge becomes thicker further along.



Continue west along the lane. Where the lane curves to the right, there is a signpost on the left for "Public Footpath 26 Hooks Cross" pointing south. Take this path.



Stay on this path as it continues straight ahead. You may catch glimpses of Aston Bury gardens and house on your right. Keep straight on to the end of the field at a signpost and an old wooden footbridge.

Turn right, staying on STOOP and Public Footpath 26 for Hooks Cross.

You will now have Astonbury Woods on your right. Keep the wood on your right and the pasture fence on your left.





You may encounter inquisitive horses coming up to the fence to make your acquaintance.

Continue on the path until coming to a gateway, with the Stevenage Brook just in front of you and the main entrance to Astonbury Woods on your right.

You now have a choice.



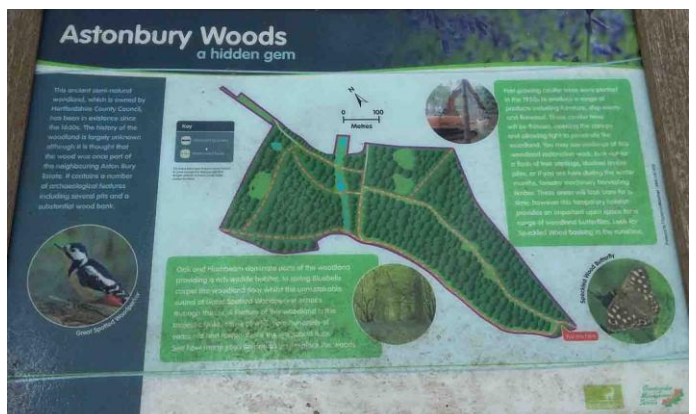
As shown on the map on the first page of this document, you can stay on the public footpath to the A602 pedestrian pavement where it turns right and proceeds along the pavement a short distance (never crossing the A602) before turning right again into some fields. This route is waymarked, but it is noisy for the short stretch alongside the A602. This is our CPRE Herts route and is described beginning on the next page.

As an alternative, you could turn right into Astonbury Woods and then take the left-hand path, keeping the Stevenage Brook and the edge of the wood immediately on your left. This land is owned by Herts County Council but is not public open space nor is there a public right of way.



If you choose to walk through the wood, you will re-join our CPRE Herts route at the westernmost corner of Astonbury Woods.

In any case, if the bluebells are in bloom, you may wish to pause to enjoy them in Astonbury Woods.



Proceed over the Stevenage Brook via the concrete bridge, and walk straight ahead. Climb over a stile to reach the pedestrian pavement adjacent to the A602. There is a signpost "Public Footpath 26 Aston 1 1/4" pointing back the way you've come.

Turn right here and walk west along the pedestrian pavement for about 200 yards.



Just past the bus stop, there is a wooden kissing gate on the right, with a signpost "Public Footpath 27 Aston 1 1/4". Take this path, keeping the fence-line on your right and the brook immediately on your left.



Stay on this path as it crosses the brook via a wooden footbridge, and continue on to the end of the field.

This is the northern portion of the Green Belt site proposed for housing development. (The southern portion is on the other side of the A602.)





Follow the path through a wooden kissing gate and on into some playing fields, with the brook still on the left and a mound on the right. Continue straight on.



Soon you will see a waymark pointing to the right (north) across the playing field. Take this path, heading for a wooden fence on the far side of the field. Pass through the gap in the fence and turn left, following the path alongside the wood and up the hill.

The path rounds the westernmost corner of Astonbury Woods, and then proceeds left across the field to meet the tarmac lane to Aston Bury Manor.



Turn left (west) and walk along this lane to the end, where it meets Aston Lane. Turn right and walk about 200 yards north on Aston Lane, taking care as there is some car traffic on this road.



Pass through a metal kissing gate on the left, signposted "Public Footpath 096" and STOOP Link.

Follow this path alongside the right-hand edge of the golf course fairway, until reaching the golf course car park.



At the car park, follow the waymarks pointing to the left, walking around the side of the club house.



Behind the club house at a maintenance area, take the path to the left at a signpost, still following the STOOP Link waymarks.

Follow the track into a small wood and turn right at the wooden fence. Proceed along the path, keeping the fence on your left. The path then turns right before reaching the road.





Follow the path as it leads straight on into a small wood. The path curves to the left a bit and then emerges at the road.



Watching out for any traffic, cross the road and proceed north along Dene Lane. Walk all the way to the end, past the tennis courts on the left. Pass through the bollards and straight ahead onto the footpath. Proceed down the hill, and turn right before the footbridge over the road.



Walk a short distance on this path and pass through a metal gateway as shown. Turn right again at this point, and proceed on this path back into Aston Village and the start of the walk.



We hope this walk has helped draw attention to the issue of urban expansion and encroachment into the Green Belt.

If you have enjoyed this walk, please consider supporting CPRE Hertfordshire in our efforts to protect and celebrate the Hertfordshire countryside for

everyone to enjoy. For more information on our work and how you can help, please visit our website at [www.cpreherts.org.uk](http://www.cpreherts.org.uk).

On our website you can also find ordering instructions for our remaining very limited quantity of 2018 "Hertfordshire Countryside Under Threat" calendars, which will provide the locations of our walks for the rest of the year.

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This route last walked by CPRE in late March 2018.

Note: all walkers do so at their own risk. Suitable footwear and clothing are recommended and a compass may be helpful.

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CPRE Hertfordshire is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered charity no. 1162419, address: 31a Church Street, Welwyn, AL6 9LW, tel 01438 717587. We are the county branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England.