

2018 WALK 5 **The Cole Green Way and Panshanger Park, including the proposed site of Birchall Garden Suburb to the east of Welwyn Garden City**

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.

Our May walk of just under 5¼ miles explores Green Belt countryside in East Hertfordshire and Welwyn Hatfield Districts, to the east of Welwyn Garden City. The proposed Birchall Garden Suburb on the eastern edge of Welwyn GC and spreading out towards Panshanger Lane and the A414 would eventually comprise 2,550 new homes in what is now Green Belt.



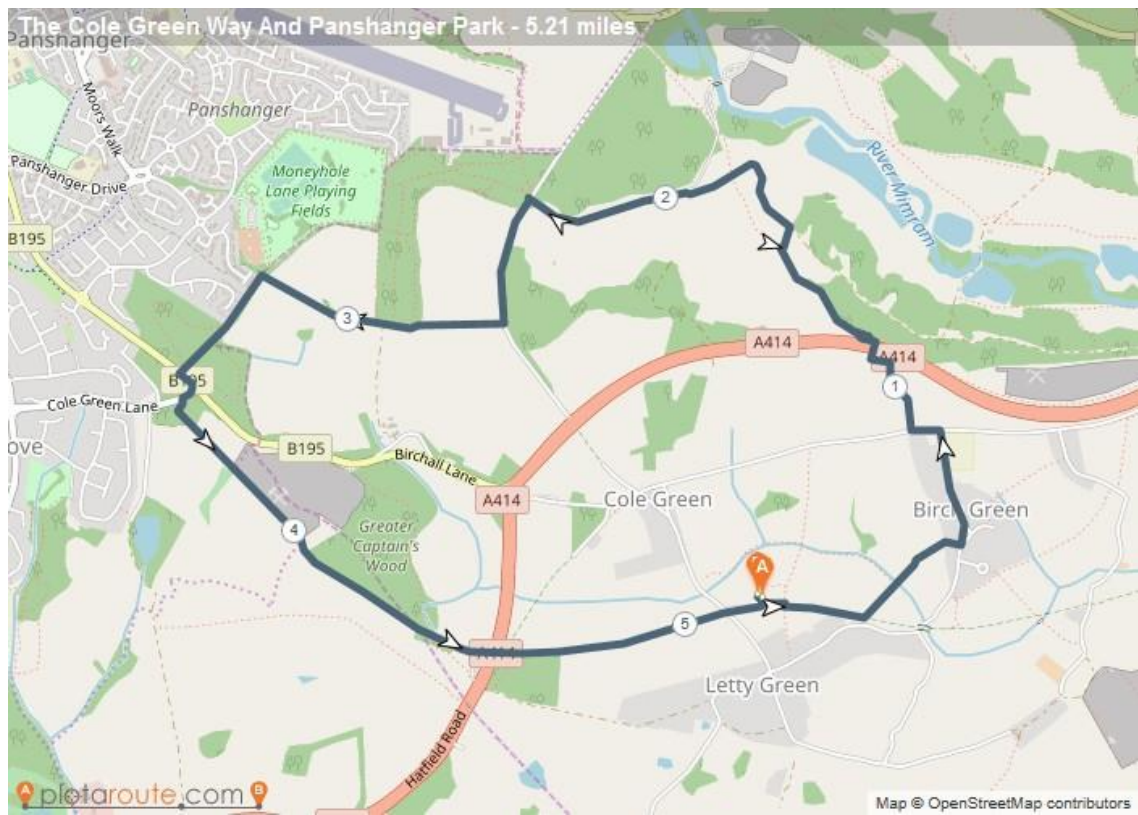
Agricultural land would be lost and precious urban-fringe countryside, so important for health and well-being, would disappear. Birchall Wood, where there are lovely bluebells, would have housing on on its eastern and western boundaries: inevitably greatly increased visitor pressure would overwhelm these flowers.

The walk also takes in part of the Cole Green Way which occupies the route of the former Hertford and Welwyn Junction railway, follows a short stretch of one of the Chain Walks devised by the East Herts Footpath Society in the 1980s, and visits Panshanger Park, recently reopened to the public after extensive gravel extraction.

The walk visits a small section of Panshanger Park: there is more of the park to explore if you wish. Beyond Panshanger Park the walk goes south along Panshanger Lane for approximately one third of a mile. The lane is relatively quiet and there is good visibility and a verge to step onto if traffic is passing. Please walk facing the oncoming traffic.

There is one stile.

Parking The walk starts and finishes at point A on the map, in the Cole Green Way car park between Cole Green and Letty Green, just south of the A414 between Welwyn Garden City and Hertford. The turning for the car park and picnic area is close to the Cowper Arms pub and adjacent to the former railway bridge.



From the Cole Green Way car park and picnic area turn left to go east along the former railway trackbed (see photos left and right).



The Hertford and Welwyn Junction railway operated a passenger service from 1858 until 1951. The railway continued as a goods line

and was used by trains bringing London's rubbish to nearby landfill sites until the 1960s. Today it is owned by the County Council and managed by its rural estates team, providing a popular walking, running and cycling route which is also a valuable wildlife corridor.



Continue along the former trackbed for just over 400 yards, then turn left to go through the stile (see photo left) which heads towards Birch Green in the distance, running down into a small valley, and keeping to the left of the hedge up the other side (see photo right).



When you reach Birch Green keep going between the houses then turn left to head approximately north along the main street in the village (see photo right), passing the school on the right and the war memorial on the left. Turn left at the T-junction. You are now on the route of one of the Chain Walks devised by the East Herts Footpath Society in the 1980s. The 15 linked circular walks through rural east Hertfordshire have sadly lost their waymarking, but are shown on Ordnance Survey maps.





After approximately 100 yards turn right onto public footpath 10 signposted 'Poplars Green ¼' (this should read '1¼') and take the path with a white weatherboarded cottage on the left (see photo left) and a pond to the right. Go through the kissing gate to the right of the gate marked 'Beechleigh'.



Almost immediately take the path to the left (see photo left) diagonally across the mown grass to the far corner. Go through the gap in the hedge and over the stile (see photo right), then turn right along the path running through dense vegetation. Turn left keeping the close boarded fence on your right.



Turn right to go over the footbridge crossing the A414. At the far side of the bridge turn left and continue along the path through more dense vegetation. When you reach the gate (see photo right) go straight over the track beyond and through the gap in the far fence. Keep ahead with the woodland on your right and restored gravel workings on your left.



You are now in the former Panshanger Estate, once part of an extensive network of estates along the Mimram owned by the Cowper family. At one time the family lived in a house at Cole Green (now disappeared), where Lancelot 'Capability' Brown advised on landscaping the park. Later they moved across the valley to a new house built at Panshanger in the first decade of the 19th century.

Like many estates, Panshanger declined in the 20th century. No male heirs survived (two sons were killed in the First World War and a third in a later car crash) and of the 4,000 acres sold from the estate in 1919 nearly half of the area was acquired for the new Welwyn Garden City. The rest of the estate was sold and the house subsequently demolished in the 1950s. In the early 1980s planning permission for gravel extraction was granted on condition that a 1000-acre country park with full public access would be the eventual legacy. Mineral extraction finished at the end of 2017 and full public access is now available in the Country Park (see friendsofpanshangerpark.co.uk for a map).



In about 400 yards turn right onto the path (see photo left) which runs into the woodland. You have now crossed into the Country Park area. When you reach the wide ride running through the woodland, turn left to follow the ride (see photo right) which eventually turns to the right.





Panshanger is famous for its veteran oak trees: there is one on your left as you walk along this ride (see photo left).



Go downhill to reach the edge of the woodland. You will now be looking over the valley of the river Mimram to rising land on the far

side of the river. In the base of the valley is a lake created alongside the river: this is the Broadwater (see photo above right). You could deviate from the route described at this point to explore more of the Country Park area: be sure to return to this viewpoint to resume the route described.

Humphry Repton (1752 - 1818) was engaged to create a new design for Cole Green and Panshanger parks together and by 1799 there were 60 labourers at work digging out the base of the new lake, the Broadwater, alongside the Mimram. The landscape designer is famous for his Red Books, which set out his ideas for a designed landscape, complete with folding pages opening out to reveal his vision. The one for Panshanger is in the care of the county's archives in Hertford. As well as creating the new lake Repton's plans included planting of thousands of trees. The end result was described as 'one of the finest parks in Hertfordshire' in its heyday.



To resume the walk, turn left at the waymark sign (see photo right) to follow the path running along the edge of the woodland and above the grassland of the valley floor. In a short distance you will come to a path running straight ahead between fences, marked 'Butterfield Way' (see photo right). Continue on this path.



Keep on the fenced footpath, crossing the track still being used (at the time this walk was devised) by large lorries (see photo left). The path takes you alongside and to the left of a road with grassland to the left and woodland with mature trees to the right (see photo right).





Eventually you reach a kissing gate at the exit from the park onto Panshanger Lane. Turn left here and walk along the lane for approximately one third of a mile until you reach a large clump of holly on the right-hand side of the road. Take the public footpath heading east from here towards Welwyn Garden City, with a hedge on the right (see photo right).



After a short distance the footpath runs along a green track between hedges (see photo left), then continues alongside arable fields (see photo right) before running through the southern end of Birchall Wood.



The area to the south of the footpath before reaching Birchall Wood (see photo left), and the land to either side beyond the wood, would be covered in houses under plans for the Birchall Garden Suburb, jointly proposed by East Hertfordshire and Welwyn Hatfield Councils. There would be new schools and roads, and to the south further areas of housing together with land for employment development. All of the area is within the Green Belt which is supposed to be protected under national planning policy.



Continue along the path through the edge of Birchall Wood, which is a sea of bluebells in spring, passing old hornbeam trees along the woodland boundary (see photo left). The path is clearly a popular route for those seeking some countryside for a quiet walk: walking in peaceful green areas is known to enhance health and well-being, and is especially valuable close to built-up areas.



Continue on the path between fields towards the edge of Welwyn Garden City (see photo left). Go through the gap in the trees ahead (see photo right), and turn left onto the green lane which runs along the eastern edge of Welwyn Garden City.





The lane is bordered in places by more old hornbeam trees (see photo left). There are also views out over one of the areas proposed for housing development (see photo right).



The last section of the lane runs through woodland to either side. Go through the pedestrian barrier at the end of the lane to reach the road (see photo left). Cross the road and turn left on the far pavement, walk alongside the road for a short distance then bear right into Cole Green Lane. Cross the



road and go through the entrance to the Cole Green Way (see photo above right).



Keep left at the junction of paths (see photo left) keeping on the Cole Green Way. Eventually the Way runs between former gravel workings restored to grassland on the right, and land still being restored to the left (see photo right).



The Way runs past another area of woodland to the left, with views out over the upper Lea Valley to the right. Then it goes downhill through a tunnel under the A414 (see photo left). Beyond, at the crossroads of paths, go straight on following the Cole Green Way signposted to Letty Green and Hertford (see photo right).



You are now back on the former track bed of the Hertford and Welwyn Junction railway (see photo left). This final half mile of the walk is quiet and sheltered, with views out over the surrounding countryside towards Letty Green (see photo right).



Shortly afterwards the route returns you to the Cole Green Way car park and picnic area.

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. Our website www.cpreherts.org.uk contains more information about our work and how you can donate and perhaps volunteer.

This route was last walked by CPRE in May 2018.

Note: all walkers do so at their own risk. Suitable footwear and clothing are recommended.

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.