

2018 WALK 3 Eastwick, Gilston and Hunsdon

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 March walk explores Green Belt countryside in East Hertfordshire District to the north of Harlow. The Harlow and Gilston garden town proposed for this area would eventually cover 2,700 acres (1,100 hectares) of Green Belt with up to 10,000 houses, engulfing the tiny villages of Eastwick and Gilston (combined population just over 400). Grade 2 and 3a agricultural land would be lost, despite national planning policy protection for this important agricultural asset.



Despite its proximity to Harlow this area is valued for its remoteness. In the original plan for Harlow New Town, its architect Sir Frederick Gibberd said that the River Stort formed the natural northern boundary to the town, with the Hertfordshire hills beyond providing a natural backdrop.

All of this rural setting would disappear.

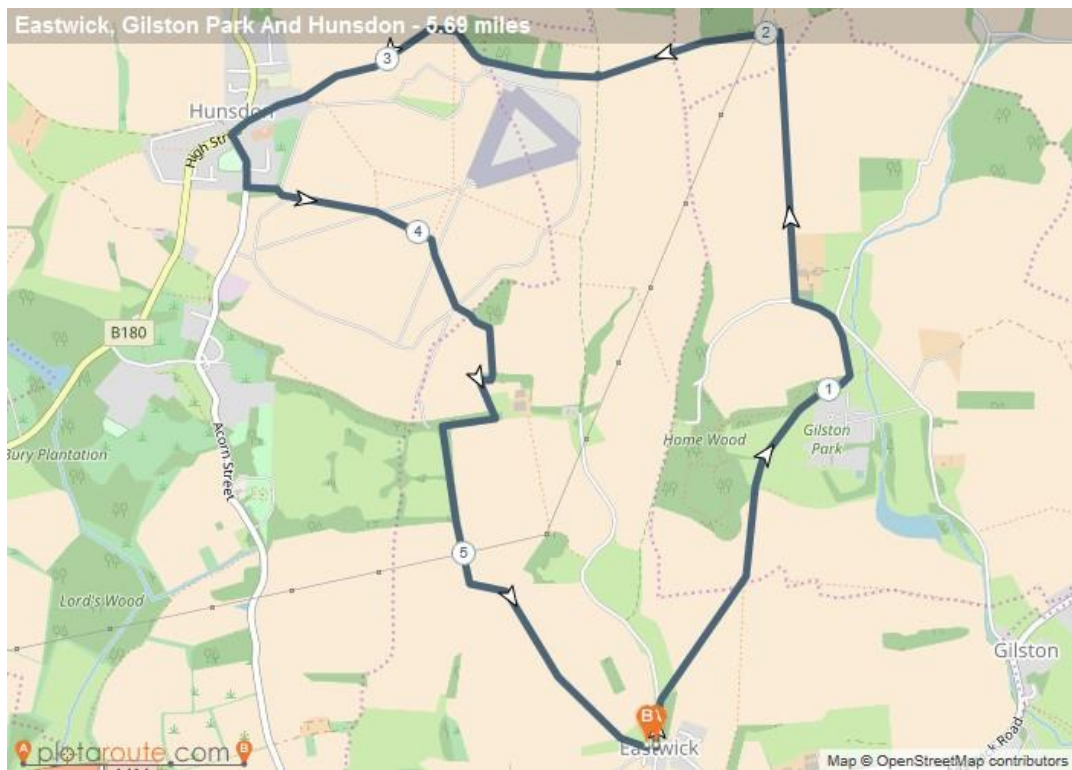
The walk of just over 5½ miles starts and finishes in Eastwick, just off the A414 road 7 miles east of Hertford. The route climbs onto the high land to the north of the Stort valley, taking in Gilston Park and the remote Gilston church, the World War Two airfield at Hunsdon and Hunsdon village, before returning to Eastwick. It mostly crosses agricultural land and the paths can be muddy after wet weather. There is one stile.

There is a shorter route of just over 3 miles which does not visit the airfield or Hunsdon village.

There are pubs at Eastwick and Hunsdon.

To reach Eastwick by road take the eastbound carriageway of the A414: the turning for Eastwick is not well signposted in advance but is in the 50 mph section. Go into the village and park on the roadside in the vicinity of the pub, taking care not to block driveways.

By train Eastwick is approximately 1 mile on foot from Harlow Town station.



Start by heading north up Eastwick Hall Lane from the War Memorial. In about 300 yards there is a public footpath signposted through a kissing gate to the right, next to a gate (see photo right). Follow the grass path, cross the footbridge and continue on the grass path, crossing an area of scrubby vegetation. Go through the kissing gate in the hedge to the right then turn left to walk diagonally across the field ahead, climbing steadily.



You might want to pause and look behind you - Harlow seems surprisingly close whereas ahead the countryside already feels remote. You might hear (and see) a skylark here. Follow the path as it levels out, then go through the gap in the thick hedge (see photo left).



Beyond the hedge Gilston Park (see photo right) will now be in view ahead. The house was built in the 1850s by a wealthy shipbroker, John Hodgson, after he acquired the Eastwick and Gilston Estate in 1837: the style is Tudor meets Scottish baronial. A remnant from the earlier Elizabethan house stands in the garden. The house is now apartments. Follow the path over the next field heading for the right hand corner of the wood. By now the traffic noise should no longer be audible. All of the land you have crossed since leaving the road at Eastwick is included in the proposed garden town area.

Cross the footbridge (see photo right) and bear slightly right to follow the path across the parkland with scattered veteran trees. Cross the next footbridge, then take the path running diagonally right across the field. Go through the gateway alongside a metal gate, then through the edge of a wood with the buildings of Gilston Park to the right.



Turn to the left when you reach the closed gates and keep on the path through the woodland until you reach the drive to Gilston Park. Turn left and follow the drive through the avenue of trees (see photo right) until you reach the road. Turn left here, and keep left on the lane leading to Gilston church.



St Mary's church (see photo right) dates from the 13th century, with an exceptionally well-preserved screen dating from this period. The building was altered in the 19th century, when it probably became more isolated than it had ever been, as older houses nearer the church were abandoned and pulled down, and the village population shifted to the south, around Pye Corner.



You might like to rest for a while in the church porch - on a sunny day this is a pleasant spot, with a view (see photo right) across open fields. That will all change though if the garden town goes ahead as all this land will be developed, and Gilston church will no longer be the peaceful place it has been for eight centuries.



To continue the walk, turn right out of the churchyard, then turn right again onto the track to the right of the churchyard signposted 'Public restricted byway 24 Acton's Farm 1¼' (see photo right). The route runs just about due north for three quarters of a mile. Both sides of the track will be developed under the garden town proposals. To the left (west) the limit of development will be the line of pylons.



If you prefer to follow the shorter route, do not take the byway heading north but instead go straight on beyond the churchyard, on a tarmacked road heading west. Further details are included at the end of the description of the main route.



To the right of the byway, there are views through gaps in the hedge of further land proposed for development as part of the garden town, stretching to the skyline in the distance (see photo left). As you continue a thatched cottage appears ahead (see photo right).



Just before you reach the pylon on the left close by a wood, where the byway turns left then right, turn left onto the public footpath running to the left of the woodland edge, keeping the pylon to your right. You are now heading west towards Hunsdon (see photo right). The wood is a typical coppice-with-standards wood, with hazel coppice beneath larger single-stemmed trees of oak and hornbeam.



As you pass the end of the wood keep straight ahead across the field, then cross over the bridleway (indicated by blue arrows on the waymarks) and bear very slightly right to head for the left-hand edge of the wood ahead (see photo right). You may see light planes parked on the airfield ahead. Keeping the edge of the wood on your right - you will see a pillbox in the wood - walk towards then behind the row of sheds and containers. Beyond the last of these follow the track around the edge of the wood.



The airfield is now a grass strip for light planes, but from 1941 until 1945 it was an RAF airfield from which numerous operations were carried out. There were up to 2,500 RAF and WAAF personnel stationed here as well as other military personnel operating ground to air defences and searchlights. A ring of pillboxes surrounded the airfield of which eight survive.



Beyond the end of the wood cross over the wide track and bear left at the waymark post, from where the path bends to the left and passes behind a large spoil heap. Join the grass path running alongside a clump of trees (see photo left), which then heads towards Hunsdon village past a row



of trees on its right (see photo right). Go through the kissing gate to the right of a metal field gate, then along the road with houses on either side to reach the centre of Hunsdon.



In the centre of the village there is an old village pump (see photo left) and attractive village houses (such as those in the photo right), as well as the village hall, the war memorial and a pub, The Crown.

When you are ready to resume your walk turn left opposite the village hall into Acorn Street, signposted to Hertford and Harlow.



Pass the village sign (see photo left), then a little further on turn left into Hempstalls Close just before the edge of the village. Follow the public footpath straight ahead and go through the kissing gate. Go very slightly right onto the path heading east across the airfield towards woods and



pylons in the distance (see photo right).

After about 400 metres cross the track and keep straight on along the line of the path. Just before another track turn right at the waymark post to head a little to the east of south, crossing the track and heading for another waymark post (see photo right).





When you reach the next track, by the waymark post, take the left-hand path towards the right-hand edge of a small copse (see photo left). Cross another track, go through the gap by the waymark post, then cross the narrow field to another post (see photo right).



Go around the right-hand side of the wood just beyond the post then round to the left and through a gap in the hedge with a ditch on the left. Turn right here to walk along the field edge with the hedge to your right (see photo right). At the far end of the field go through the end of a young plantation.



Just before you reach the fence ahead turn right and follow the path through the trees (see photo left). It soon turns to the left and goes south through the wood with a fence to the left and farm buildings beyond that.



Go over the stile at the far end of the wood and emerge onto a track. Turn right here and walk towards the wood ahead (see photo above right). Once again you can see Harlow to the south.



Go past the wood (a plantation of young trees) and turn left onto the footpath which runs along its right-hand edge (see photo right). A little way along look to the right to see a distant view of Hunsdon House and the spire of St Dunstan's church (see photo right).



A hunting park here created after 1066 became a royal property in the 15th century. Later a house was built here, where Henry VIII and his children were frequent visitors. Of the house which Henry altered and enlarged only about a quarter remains, much altered again. The church dates from the 14th century with many later additions and alterations, including a noted Jacobean screen and numerous monuments.

Keep straight on along the path through the wood then emerge into the field beyond. The path continues alongside the field with the hedge to the right, a little further on crossed by a line of pylons. At the next hedge go through the gap in the hedge by the waymark post (see photo right). Cross the field diagonally to the far corner.





Go through the gap in the hedge by the waymark post (see photo left). Beyond there is a bench on the left, with a wide view of farmland, all of which is included in the area for development in the Harlow Gilston garden town proposals. Part of this area is in the photo right.



Take the path heading straight across the field ahead (see photo left). You are now approaching Eastwick and the village will gradually come into view as you walk downhill (see photo right).



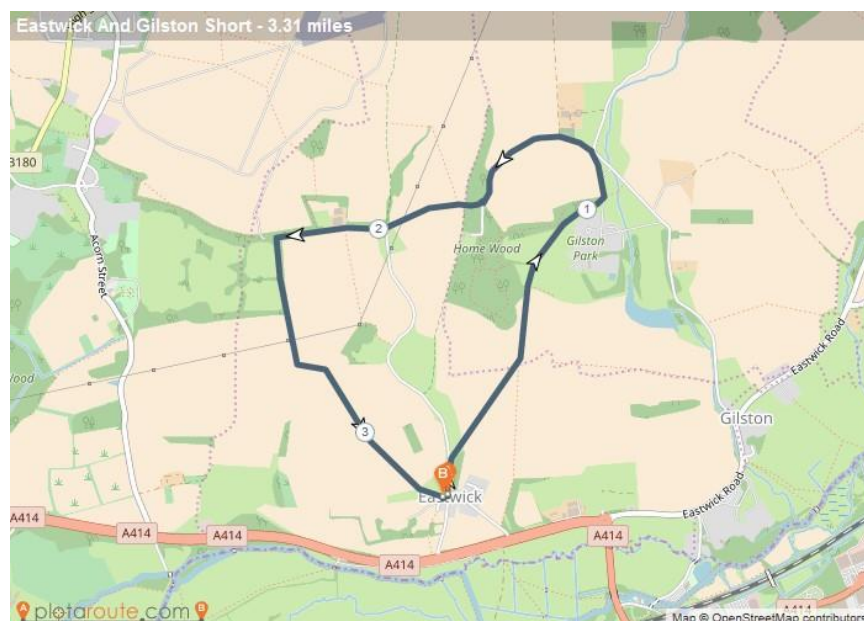
Near the bottom of the hill go through the kissing gate (see photo right), then cross the last field to reach the centre of Eastwick.



You might want to explore St Botolph's church in the village (see photo right). A church has stood on this ground above the floodplain of the river Stort since the 13th century, and there was possibly an earlier building too. The present structure retains a chancel arch from the 13th century but was largely rebuilt in the 19th century.



To follow the shorter route, use the map and route description below



Pass Gilston church then keep going straight along the tarmacked road past the houses to your left (see photo right). The road bends around to the left, then enters a wood. From the road there are views to the north and back past Gilston church to the east: much of this land is included in the proposed garden town development area (see photo below).



Continue along the road through the wood, bearing right onto the unsurfaced track, ignoring the sign claiming that there is no public right of way (see photo right).



At the far side of the wood go straight ahead with the hedge on your right. The track goes downhill and meets the upper end of Eastwick Hall Lane.



Go straight on following the signpost for Public footpath 8 to Acorn Street and Hunsdon 1¼, which passes houses and then farm buildings on the right (see photo left). Just past Eastwick Hall Farm your track rejoins the longer route (see photo right).



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 February 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.