WELWYN GARDEN CITY
CIRCULAR WALK
20.20 km (12.5 miles)

Getting There
Spokes radiate from urban Welwyn Garden City out to the Centenary Circular Walk to enable residents and visitors to navigate from Town to Countryside, echoing Ebenezer Howard’s vision of ‘a marriage of town and country’.

Two spokes start from Howardsgate in the centre of town, accessible by train, bus and car. Two start from King George V playing fields, which has a free car park and good bus connections.

Frequent trains run from London and Cambridge to Welwyn Garden City. Bus 302 runs from the town centre to Stanborough Lakes.

Buses 301, 403, 724 all run from the town centre bus station to the QEII Hospital, which is the closest stop to King George V playing fields.

Buses do not always run on Sundays.

Car parks on the route are at Stanborough Lakes (chargeable) and Digswell Viaduct (free). Close to the route are King George V (free) and Campus West (chargeable).

The route crosses some fast main roads and two golf courses, so be aware and keep yourself safe.

If you notice any flytipping, please report it welhat.gov.uk/report-fly-tipping

The Walk
The circular walk around Welwyn Garden City combines existing footpaths into a single, well-marked trail with information about historical points of interest associated with the garden city to be seen along the way.

The walk is one of the signature projects created for the Centenary in 2020 which celebrate Ebenezer Howard’s vision of creating a ‘marriage of town and country’. Walking promotes individual health and wellbeing, enables people to get out and about to learn more about the town where they live or work, and enjoy the beautiful countryside around the town.

You can access the circular trail via the ‘Spokes’ which radiate from the town, with bus routes to and from the town centre.

There is also a one-mile accessible circular trail around The Commons and part of the Local Nature Reserve.

Follow the orange arrows either clockwise or anti-clockwise.

WGC Centenary 2020
Welwyn Garden City may be much younger than many towns and cities, but it has a remarkable history. There is real pride and much affection for Welwyn Garden City among its residents who recognise the town as a great place to live, to work, and to raise a family. On its 100th anniversary in 2020, it’s time to celebrate!

Welwyn Garden City: History and the Garden City Movement
The industrial revolution in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century had created not only new technology and smoke-belching factories, but also a momentous rise in urban populations. By the late nineteenth century, the great industrial towns had evolved into sunless slums characterised by extreme poverty. Reform was imperative and came in the shape of the Garden City Movement.

The Garden City Movement was a visionary alternative to the chaos and squalor of urban life. It was the brainchild of the pioneering Ebenezer Howard, who proposed a better civilisation through better housing, better union between town and country, and better community bonds. Thanks to his tireless energy and toil, Britain’s two Garden Cities were created, Letchworth Garden City (1903) and Welwyn Garden City (1920) as models of sustainable development.

In 1919, Howard purchased at auction a rolling green tract of Hertfordshire countryside and created Welwyn Garden City to a master plan. Louis de Soissons, as its architect and master planner, designed a place of beauty characterised by neo-Georgian buildings, elegant boulevards and generous open spaces. Our walk explores the surrounding villages and countryside which is largely unchanged from this time.
1. Stanborough Park/Lakes
This area has been a leisure destination for over 100 years, covering 126 acres of park and woodland featuring two lakes created in 1906. The River Lea runs the entire length of the park. Originally people would come to take tea and have picnics, and then there were organised football matches. Since 1970, the Lakes have offered water sports, boating, fishing and areas for children's activities. Nesting herons and egrets are regular visitors.

2. Stanborough Reedmarsh
Managed by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, this reedmarsh is home to three hectares of rich wildlife habitat. It is the third largest reedbed in Hertfordshire. A small detour off the walk takes you on a short loop of the area and returns you to the path.

3. Mill Green Museum and Mill
This Mill has stood in the Hatfield hamlet of Mill Green for eight centuries, grinding corn and wheat for the local community until 1911. Restoration work began in 1979 and was completed in 1986. You can now see a miller at work, grinding organic wheat into 100% wholemeal organic flour. The museum is situated in the original miller’s house and has three galleries with a changing programme of exhibitions. It also delivers a full programme of activities including bread making classes. There is an onsite café. For more information see www.millgreenmuseum.co.uk.

4. The Commons Local Nature Reserve
An ancient 13.2 hectare woodland nature reserve which includes a variety of habitats of oak woodland, flower rich meadows, wet fens, ditches and ponds. This woodland is maintained by volunteers on behalf of WHBC. A ten-year grant-funded programme of habitat work was agreed during 2014. Sometimes rare breed cattle are used on the reserve as a way of managing the land in a natural way to maintain flower-rich meadows.

5. Tewin Bury Nature Reserve
Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust manage a small but diverse wildlife reserve nestling here in the Mimram Valley where a two storey hide gives great views of the wildlife in the lagoon and surrounding reedbeds.

6. Tewin Bury Farm Hotel
An 18th century working farm with buildings, converted into a hotel and conference centre. This farm has been owned and worked by the Williams family since the Depression of 1929, when they drove their cattle down from their smallholding in Wales to the railway station and took them on the train to Paddington and on to Welwyn North. They opened a farm shop, followed by tea rooms and bed-and-breakfast accommodation in 1985, which has since been developed into a 4* hotel and restaurant.

7. Tewin Bury to Digswell concrete path
It is said that this path was constructed by Italian prisoners of war after 1916. Remains of the concrete construction can still be seen.

8. Digswell Viaduct
13 million locally manufactured bricks were used to build this magnificent structure that opened in 1859. The viaduct was designed by architect Sir William Cubitt. The bridge has 40 arches each spanning 40ft and 100ft high, and the viaduct still carries trains to London. It is said that Queen Victoria was too frightened to cross it on the day of opening and insisted on being taken down the valley and up the other side by horse-drawn carriage.

9. Digswell Church of St John
An early 12th century church adapted over the centuries, with its present refurbishment completed in 1962. The church contains a memorial plaque depicting St George dedicated to the 73 Australian soldiers, and the British nurse who nursed in the Parish during WW1. The Australian flag is also on permanent display. On the sanctuary floor of the old part of the church is a brass memorial to Sir John Periement, who was standard bearer to King Richard II.

10. Digswell House
There was originally a 15th century manor on this site. The grounds were landscaped by Capability Brown in 1771-1777. Between 1805 and 1807, the manor became a mansion built in the Neo-Classical style. During the first world war, it served as a hospital for the Australian Auxiliary Forces. It was used as a conference centre, boarding house and retreat. After 1959, was a venue for artists and sculptors, which became the Digswell Arts Trust. It is now a Grade II listed building converted into private apartments.

11. Sherrardspark Wood Local Nature Reserve
In the centre of this ancient woodland is the well-known Six Ways junction, which was an 18th Century carriage-way meeting point. The volunteer wood wardens, who maintain this SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) woodland, also offer many guided walks on the flora, fauna and geology of the woodland. (sherrardsparkwoodwardens.org.uk)

12. Brocket Hall
This classical mansion was built in 1776. Although there have been buildings on this site dating back to 1293. The golf courses are named Palmersston and Melbourne in honour of these resident prime ministers, and Queen Victoria visited regularly between 1836 and 1841. It is worth a short detour to stop and admire the hall from this vantage point.

13. Lemsford Mill
A 12th century working mill until 1913 when it became a private residence and later an engineering works, it is now the headquarters of Ramblers Walking Holidays. It is one of four mills on the River Lea that are mentioned in the Domesday Book. The village of Lemsford was established in 1858.

14. Lemsford Springs
A detour to the bottom of the village takes you to this beautiful nature reserve which is managed by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust and is an important habitat for wading birds as the natural spring-fed lagoons never freeze over. The reserve used to contain vast watercress beds, a vital source of vitamin C for the population of London during the Victorian era. The site’s history also dates back to the Domesday Book.

Refreshments and facilities

Please check opening hours

On the route:
• Stanborough Park café
• Tewin Bury Farm restaurant
• The Red Lion
• The Waggoners

A short diversion off the route:
• Mill Green Museum café
• Moors Walk shops
• The Hedgehog
• Knightsfield shops
• The Sun at Lemsford
• The Long and Short Arm, Lemsford
Accessing the walk via the Handside Spoke

This historic walking route from the town centre to Stanborough Lakes takes in Handside Lane, with many properties that are older than the town, including the 17C Barn Theatre. It is also the site of the Daily Mail Model Village where 41 houses were built to demonstrate different building styles using cheaper materials and methods after the First World War.

Note the QR codes on lamp posts which highlight (with your smartphone) the points of interest in this historic part of the original town and are part of the town centre heritage trail. Bus 302 from the town centre runs down this route to the lakes at Stanborough.

Walk from the shopping centre to the fountain and cross straight onto Russellcroft Rd. Turn left into Handside Lane and walk for a mile until you come to a T-junction. Cross over onto a footpath into Stanborough Park.

Take the right hand path to circumnavigate the obvious mound and stay alongside the A1M to cross a footbridge over the River Lea to join the circular walk.

Accessing the walk via the Sherrardspark Wood Spoke

This route takes you from the shopping centre to the fountain, and then right along Parkway to the Campus green space where you can admire the Ad Astra statue amid the plane trees. Cross the Campus at the pelican crossing, turn left towards the cinema and right through the car park. There is a path down onto the disused railway line that used to run trains from Hatfield to Luton and Dunstable until the mid-1960s. Walk the disused railway line for around three quarters of a mile, joining the circular route at the top of a zigzag slope.

The City of Trees project provides information on the wonderful trees in the town on www.wgccityoftrees.org.uk

Accessing the walk via the Beehive Spoke

This route starts from King George V playing fields, created “to promote and to assist in the establishment throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland of playing fields for the use and enjoyment of the people”. From the car park, cross Beehive Lane and walk along Moorlands to Sheepcote. These houses are in the Beehive conservation area and were designed by Louis de Soissons, some with the characteristic round windows seen in other parts of the Garden City. At the end of Sheepcote, cross the road, turn right then left down Queen’s Avenue.

As the road bends right, go through the metal kissing gate ahead and follow the path over the bridge through The Commons Local Nature Reserve, officially designated in 1998 and originally owned by the Commission for New Towns. This path joins with the circular walk in the nature reserve after the second bridge.

From King George V playing fields you can also link into the Centenary City of Trees route (www.wgccityoftrees.org.uk) illustrating the unusual urban trees in the town, and catch a 403 bus back to the town.

Accessing the walk via the Hatfield Hyde Spoke

Start from the King George V playing fields car park. Either walk left across the field to the kissing gate or follow the path through the park to the memorial gateway, with engraved heraldic plaques. Turn left along Homestead Lane and left again at the War Memorial onto Hollybush Lane, past St Mary Magdalene, the parish church of Hatfield Hyde. This was founded by Lord Salisbury in 1882 for the use of his tenants and workers, replacing the “Mud Chapel”.

At the end of Hollybush Lane, turn left, cross the road then go down a small path on the right just before a sign to Willow House. Follow the road forwards; go first left then right into Bennett Close, past tall pine trees and a pond on the right. At the end of the cul-de-sac is a path on the left which comes out onto Ascots Lane at the junction with Gypsy Lane. The clockwise circuit of the centenary walk goes through the Mill Green golf course; the anticlockwise circuit follows Gypsy Lane and turns left at the cricket green.
We have created a wide, flat, surfaced circular track extending for a mile and incorporating part of The Commons Local Nature Reserve.

The Garden City movement was the brainchild of Ebenezer Howard, as an alternative to the chaos and squalor of urban life in the early nineteenth century. His vision was to create a better civilisation through better housing, better community bonds and by creating "a marriage between town and country"

Sir Ebenezer Howard OBE
1850 - 1928

Founder of Welwyn Garden City
'A town designed for healthy living'