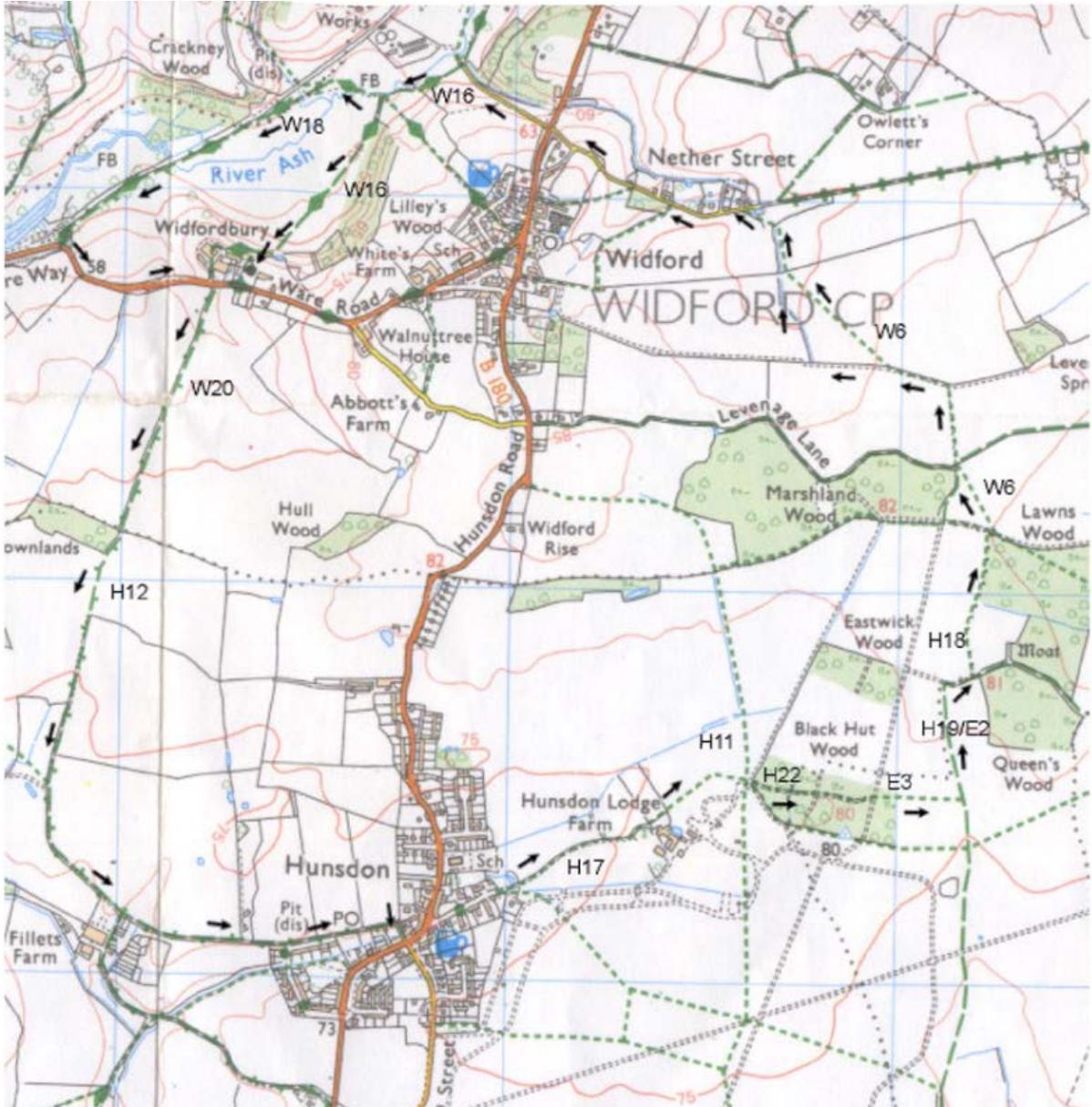


## North to Widford and the Ash Valley

The walk is just under 5 miles for Option (a) or just over 5 miles for Option (b) (8 km or 9.3 km) and at a normal walking pace should take you between 1 hour 45 min and 2 hours. The first half of the walk involves some walking across cultivated fields and may be heavy going during wet weather.



From the Village Hall turn left, cross the road by The Pump and proceed down Drury Lane. At the end of the lane continue ahead through the kissing gate, past the pond and along the farm track (Hunsdon FP 17), until reaching a copse on your right, site of the original Hunsdon Lodge Farmhouse with the remaining barns dating from the 16th Century on the site of what was thought to be a royal hunting lodge in the time of Henry VIII. The footpath continues ahead past the farm across a cultivated field. Cross Hunsdon FP 11 marked by a waymark junction post and go to the corner of Blackhut Wood. Enter the wood at the waymark post, (Hunsdon FP 22). A shallow ditch some 100 metres into the wood denotes the parish boundary where the path becomes Eastwick FP 3.

The parish boundary ditch has survived as a marker presumably since the original boundaries were established. It continues along the northern edge of the wood, again denoting the boundary when this was one expanse of trees known as Eastwick Wood. In spring Early Purple Orchids and Primroses are becoming a common sight. There is also a particularly large patch of wild bluebells on your right as you pass the second part of the wood. Many of the old wartime airfield structures including huts, slit trenches and a pillbox are also visible from the path in both parts.

At the end of the first part of the wood cross the concrete track and continue forward with the remainder of the wood on your right before crossing cultivated land to meet up with the northern section of what was Cockrobin Lane. Turn left at the junction. Although mainly an Eastwick path this part of what was Cockrobin Lane goes just inside the Hunsdon border so carries the number Hunsdon 19, instead of Eastwick FP 2 as does the rest of the old lane. The bridleway turns towards the right at the corner of Queens Wood, then look out for the waymark post directing you to the left (Hunsdon FP 18) which initially goes across cultivated land before following the edge of Lawns Wood on your right. Before turning on to Hunsdon FP 18 you may wish to continue a short distance along the bridleway for a glimpse of the large medieval moat on the left.

At the top corner of Lawns Wood you reach the Widford Parish Boundary. Go forward left across cultivated land (Widford FP 6) to the northeast corner of Marshland Wood, over a small bridge through the hedge and continue ahead northwards until you meet a farm track and hedge. Turn left here and proceed along the track until you reach a waymark post. Here you have two options, turn right across the cultivated field, continuing on the footpath which crosses a field and then bears right and then left through a small group of trees to Nether Street. Or in the winter when the going can be difficult, continue on the farm track, which is now a permissive route. This then turns right into another field. At the waymark post continue right on the permissive route as indicated on the post, and by a duplicate set of arrows on the map, and then bear left with a ditch to your right and continue around the perimeter of the field, where the permissive path then meets up with the Public Footpath, which joins from the right. Continue to Nether Street on the Public Footpath. Turn left along Nether Street and where the lane divides take the right fork to reach the B1004 Widford- Much Hadham road. Cross this and proceed down Pegs Lane opposite.

Towards the bottom of Pegs Lane you will see a post on your left with several finger signs attached. Take the left hand narrow bridleway between two wire fences (Widford BR 16) and follow this between two hedges, shortly coming to the view of the River Ash on your right. A short distance further on emerging from the hedged section you come to a junction of three paths, that to the left going back up the hill to the centre of Widford, the centre going as a bridleway to Widford Church and Widfordbury Farm with that on the right, through a kissing gate to the old Widford Station site. At the kissing gate this walk provides you with two options: -

#### **Option (a) (The difficult route - steep hill to be climbed)**

Take the centre path going towards the hill (Widford BR 16). Go through a small gate, closing it behind you, as this is still cattle country. In spite of being classified as a bridleway there is no clearly defined route through the meadow grass but keep the fence to your right and after the second oak tree where the fence turns to the right break away and head for the clearly seen steps between the church and the farmhouse at the top of the hill.

The route continues uphill on Widford FP 17 and through the churchyard. The climb up the hill is steep (so bear this in mind when making your earlier choice of options) and culminates in the set of steps cut out of the hill bringing you, via a kissing gate, out into Widford Churchyard. Pause for a moment at the top before going into the churchyard to take in the views along the valley.

Proceed through the churchyard to the road and turn right towards the entrance to the farm then left across the road to take the route back to Hunsdon by Widford RB 20. Follow this to the top of the hill and the small wood known as Townlands. This is the boundary with Hunsdon (Hunsdon RB 12) and it is then initially downhill. Ignore the right turn to Fillets Farm (BOAT H3) and continue straight to the rear of Hunsdon Village Hall and the starting point of the walk.

### **Option (b) (The easier route)**

Taking the right hand path at the junction of the three referred to earlier (Widford FP18). Pass through the kissing gate and follow the path with the bushes on your right. This brings you to a bridge over the River Ash with a kissing gate on the approach side. Cross the bridge and bear left following the path until it divides, that to the right leading to Little Blakesware. You take the left hand fork (still Widford FP 18) which brings you to a stile in the middle of the fencing. From here the path is classified as a RB. Initially there is little evidence of this as it is meadow land but a path through the grass is clearly defined by constant use and follows on the right the line of the old St. Margarets to Buntingford railway line opened in 1863 and closed to passenger traffic in 1964. Initially the track bed, on your right, is in a cutting in the trees but as the contours change it emerges onto an embankment. The River Ash meanders through the valley on your left and flows under a bridge, pass through with a five bar gate. From here a corresponding steel girder bridge carrying the old railway over the river is seen to the right at this point. Pass through the next five bar gate from here the walk passes beneath a row of mature Horse Chestnut trees and at this point one can at last see the possibility of it being a RB. The path terminates at a field gate by the old station site, now a coal and garden sundries yard. A reminder again, please make sure that you have left any gates that were closed in the same position after you have passed. Turn left from the gate and follow the footway by the road up as far as Widfordbury Farm and then turn right across the road to follow Widford RB 20 as in Option (a).



**View from Widford Church along the Ash Valley north of Widford**