

# The St Peter's Way

Surround yourself with wildlife and history



# The St Peter's Way is a 45 mile walk meandering through the countryside of Essex, from Chipping Ongar to the ancient chapel of St Peter-on-the-Wall at Bradwell on Sea.

The route will take you through some of the most spectacular countryside in Essex following field boundaries, through ancient woodland, over commons and hills down to the marshes on our estuaries and coastline. Along the way we hope you encounter much of the diverse and stunning wildlife that Essex has to offer.

Whilst most of the walk is fairly easy going and reasonably flat it does include stiles and kissing gates. We also strongly recommend that you wear stout, ankle supporting footwear, take suitable clothing for the conditions of the day and carry a little food and water.

The route is clearly signposted and waymarked in both directions. Using this booklet should make your experience more enjoyable.

We recommend that you use this leaflet in conjunction with the Ordnance Survey Explorer maps numbered 183, 175 and 176 which can be purchased from most good book shops or online at [www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk)

If you have any problems whilst walking on the St Peter's Way please let the Public Rights of Way team know by telephoning **08457 430430** or email [pro.w@essex.gov.uk](mailto:pro.w@essex.gov.uk)

The St Peter's Way was conceived by members of the Ramblers' Association (Fred Matthews and Harry Bitten) and has been adopted and this guide re-produced by Essex County Council. Use this leaflet to guide you along the route and visit points of interest we have highlighted along the way. For more information on places to visit in Essex please go to [www.visitessex.com](http://www.visitessex.com)

The St Peter's Way goes through many wonderful Essex villages with shops, public houses and public transport links. To find out more about public transport information contact the Essex Traffic Control Centre between 7am and 7pm on **0845 600 0110** or [www.essex.gov.uk/travel](http://www.essex.gov.uk/travel)

The average walker will take more than 15 hours to walk this 45 mile route without stopping! Therefore we suggest you attempt it in stages that suit your method of travel and the speed that you would wish to walk it.

Essex County Council support the Countryside Code, which helps members of the public respect, protect and enjoy the countryside.

## Follow the countryside code:

Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs

Leave gates and property as you find them

Protect plants and animals and take your litter home

Keep dogs under close control

Consider other people

For more information on the Countryside Code visit [www.naturalengland.co.uk](http://www.naturalengland.co.uk)



## Key

--- Footpath	--- Open access	ⓑ Bus stop
--- Bridleway	☒ ☒ Pylons	Ⓟ Parking
--- Byway	--- Track	+ Church
--- Road	Ⓟ Public house	

## Scale



## Chipping Ongar

Chipping Ongar used to have a motte and bailey castle; in fact it used to be known as Castle Ongar. There is little to see now but the remains of the earthworks that the keep was built on and some of the moat. The town developed as an important staging post, being a day's ride out of London for travellers heading north.

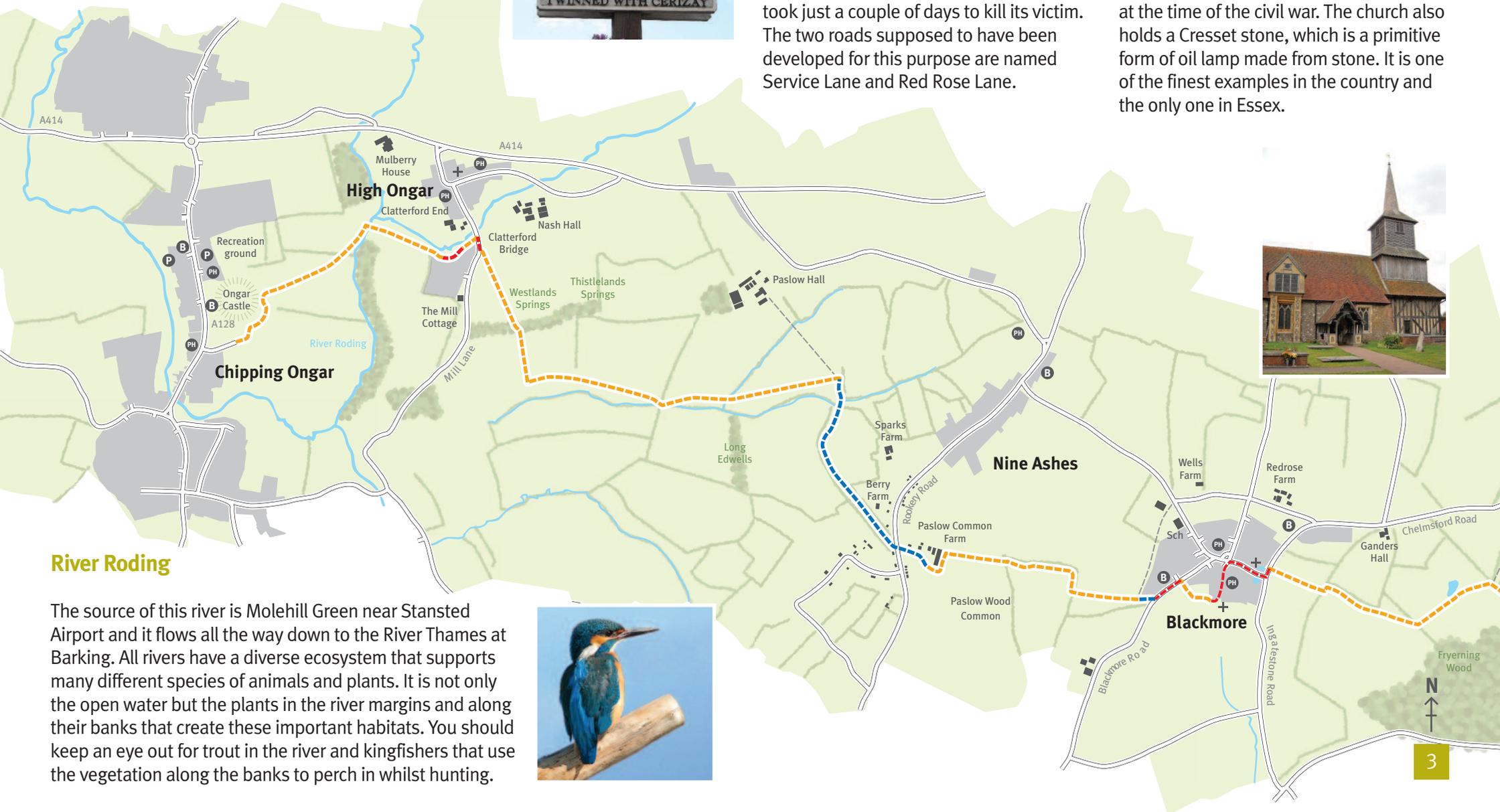


## Blackmore Village History

In 1349 the Black Death, also known as the Plague, hit Essex. Blackmore lost two thirds of its population to the disease. It is suggested that two roads which bypass the village were developed for travellers in order to avoid catching the disease that took just a couple of days to kill its victim. The two roads supposed to have been developed for this purpose are named Service Lane and Red Rose Lane.

## Church of St Lawrence, Blackmore

This fascinating church is well worth a good look. Parts of the church date to the 12th century when it was a priory. The roof of the nave has a number of carved faces and shields, some of which contain shot holes from the bullets of the Roundheads at the time of the civil war. The church also holds a Cresset stone, which is a primitive form of oil lamp made from stone. It is one of the finest examples in the country and the only one in Essex.



## River Roding

The source of this river is Molehill Green near Stansted Airport and it flows all the way down to the River Thames at Barking. All rivers have a diverse ecosystem that supports many different species of animals and plants. It is not only the open water but the plants in the river margins and along their banks that create these important habitats. You should keep an eye out for trout in the river and kingfishers that use the vegetation along the banks to perch in whilst hunting.

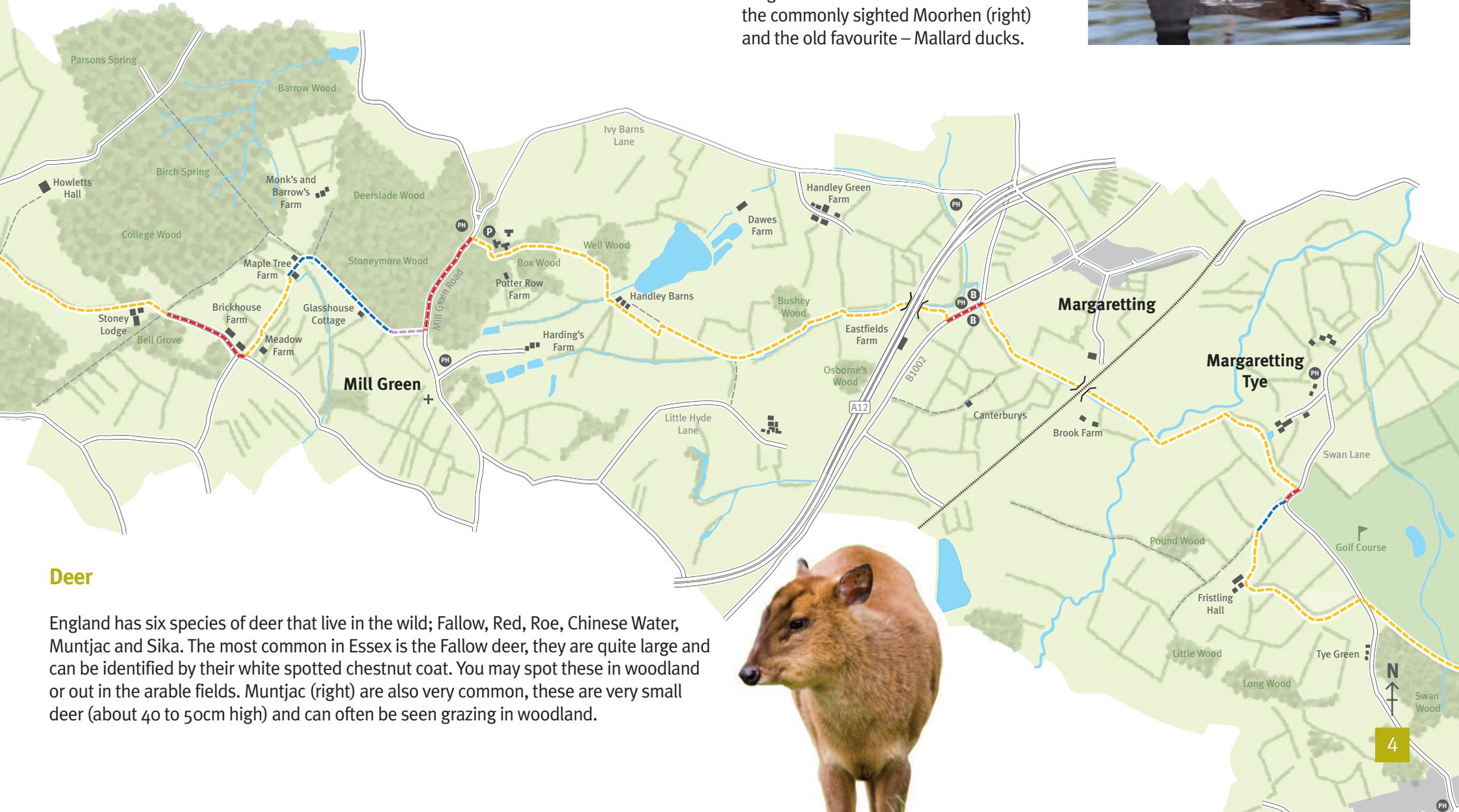


## Mill Green

In Mill Green, you can see Potter Row Farm; brick and pottery kilns have been found here. This area was a good place to make both pottery and bricks due to the clay, gravel and sand dug from the common. If you walk through the woodland you will see the pits and mounds created by this clay extraction industry. The woodland is one fragment of what was once the extensive Writtle Deer Park. Keep an eye out for the deer that graze in this area.

## Ponds

Village and farmland ponds can be a very important wildlife habitat as they are generally left undisturbed. You will pass several on this walk. These ponds can be home to the rare Great Crested Newt, to dragonflies and water beetles as well as the commonly sighted Moorhen (right) and the old favourite – Mallard ducks.



## Deer

England has six species of deer that live in the wild; Fallow, Red, Roe, Chinese Water, Muntjac and Sika. The most common in Essex is the Fallow deer, they are quite large and can be identified by their white spotted chestnut coat. You may spot these in woodland or out in the arable fields. Muntjac (right) are also very common, these are very small deer (about 40 to 50cm high) and can often be seen grazing in woodland.





## Stock Windmill

The windmill is the last of three mills that once operated in this village. When windmilling in Essex was at its peak, there were about 285 mills in the county. One hundred years later, only a handful were still at work and by 1950 the last working mill had stopped. The decline of windmills followed the arrival of the steam-driven roller mill and improvements in sea, rail and road transport. Grain could be brought from abroad to the huge dockside mills and the new roller-milled white flour could be distributed easily, even to remote country areas.



## Seamans Lane and Hanningfield Reservoir

The walk now takes you down an old road, Seamans Lane. This road was converted into a bridleway when the construction of the reservoir severed it. Work started in 1951 to build the reservoir in the Sandon Valley, covering the hamlet of Peasdown. There is a local myth that says the village is still intact under the water! Despite being man-made, the reservoir has become home to some amazing wildlife. There are plenty of fish for anglers as the reservoir is managed as a trout fishery, there are 250 acres of conservation woodland and it has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notable for its colonies of breeding ducks.

## Radar Mast

On the horizon you will be able to see this mast that is sited in Great Baddow. The mast was part of Britain's early warning defence network during World War Two. As part of the 'Home Chain' network it was originally built to detect German bombers approaching the River Thames and London from the northeast. After the war it was used for developing radar, radio and telecommunications technologies. The mast is a prominent landmark, visible for many miles. It serves as a strong reminder of the county's World War Two defenses, developments in radar and the legacy of the Marconi Company.

## Thrift Wood Nature Reserve

This woodland is a SSSI and managed as a nature reserve. The shrub layer includes Wild Service trees *Sorbus torminalis*, which are quite rare now in Essex. It also has both types of native Oak; Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea*. In the spring you will see a carpet of Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and Wood Anemone *Anemone nemerosa*. During the summer look out for the abundant Wood Ants *Formica rufa* that are often eaten by Green Woodpeckers *Picus viridis*.

## What's in those fields?



Wheat



Oilseed Rape



Barley



Alfalfa



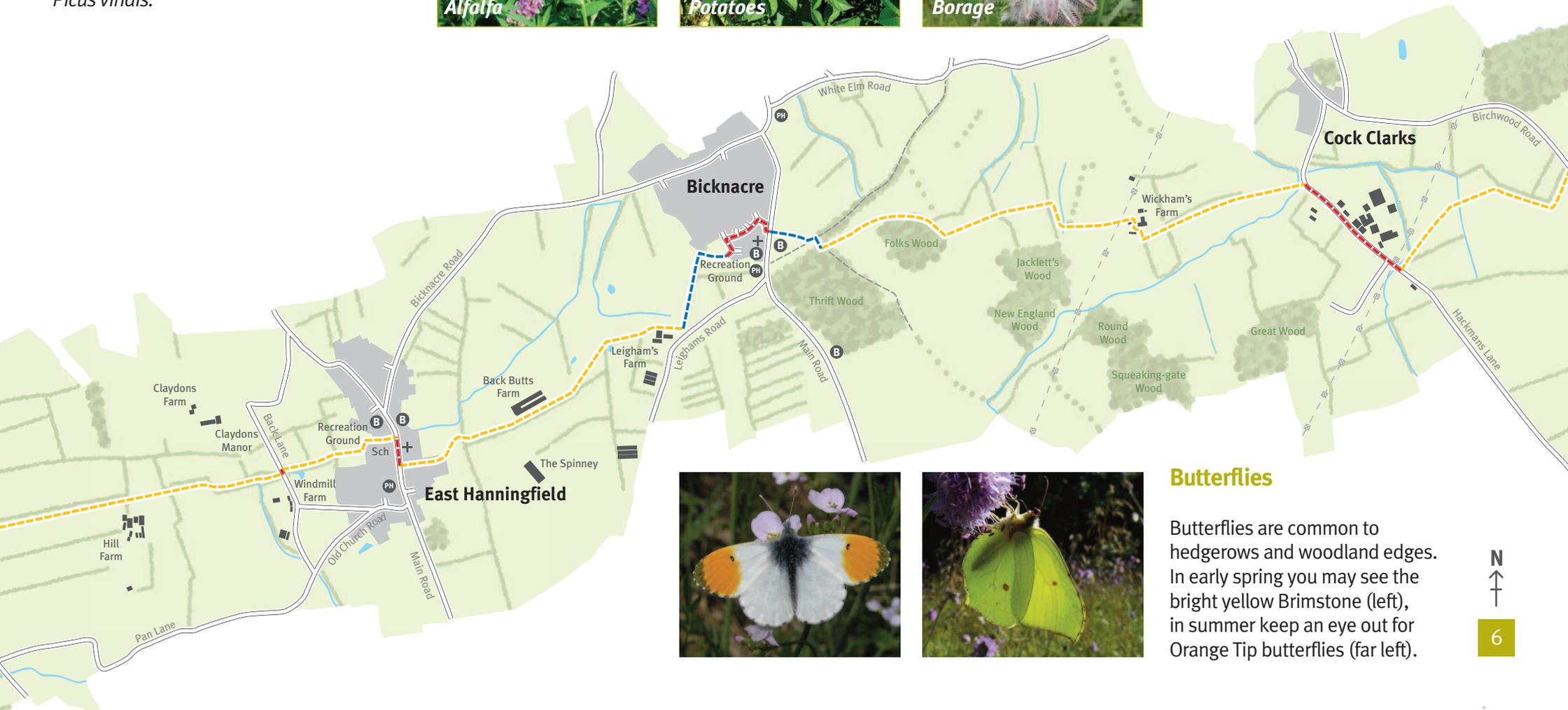
Potatoes



Borage

## Farmland management

Farmers are encouraged to manage wildlife as well as their crops. They leave large strips around their crops that they do not spray with pesticides or fertilise. This grassy strip provides food and shelter for many insects and birds.



## Butterflies

Butterflies are common to hedgerows and woodland edges. In early spring you may see the bright yellow Brimstone (left), in summer keep an eye out for Orange Tip butterflies (far left).



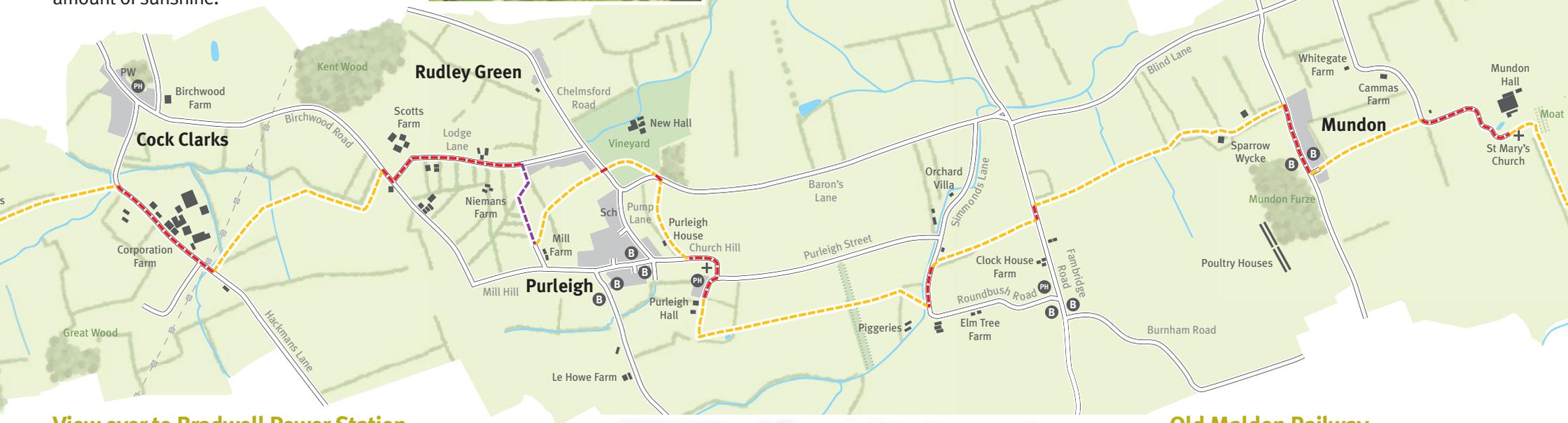
## Purleigh Vineyard

Established in 1969 by the Greenwood family, Purleigh Vineyard is one of the oldest wine producers in England. Grape vines are generally grown on south facing sheltered slopes. These locations are preferred to flatter ground for the drainage and for the plants to receive the most amount of sunshine.



## The Bell at Purleigh

This cosy public house has been entertaining people since the 14th century. It is set in Purleigh's small conservation area with the church and original village buildings on top of the hill overlooking the Blackwater estuary. The views along this section of the walk across the Blackwater valley are stunning.



## View over to Bradwell Power Station

See if you can spot the nuclear power station in the distance. The site was an early design, capable of 242MW (Mega Watts) of output with an infrastructure dating back to the 1950's. This nuclear power station generated electricity from 1962 until 2002 and it is now in a programme of decommissioning. The site was partly chosen for the unlimited source of cooling water from the Blackwater Estuary. It is currently estimated that clearance of the site will be completed by 2104. The power station has been a large employer out here in this very rural location for more than forty years. In 2009 the government identified the site for potential future nuclear power generation. The decommissioning will continue as a modern power station design would offer a much larger output.

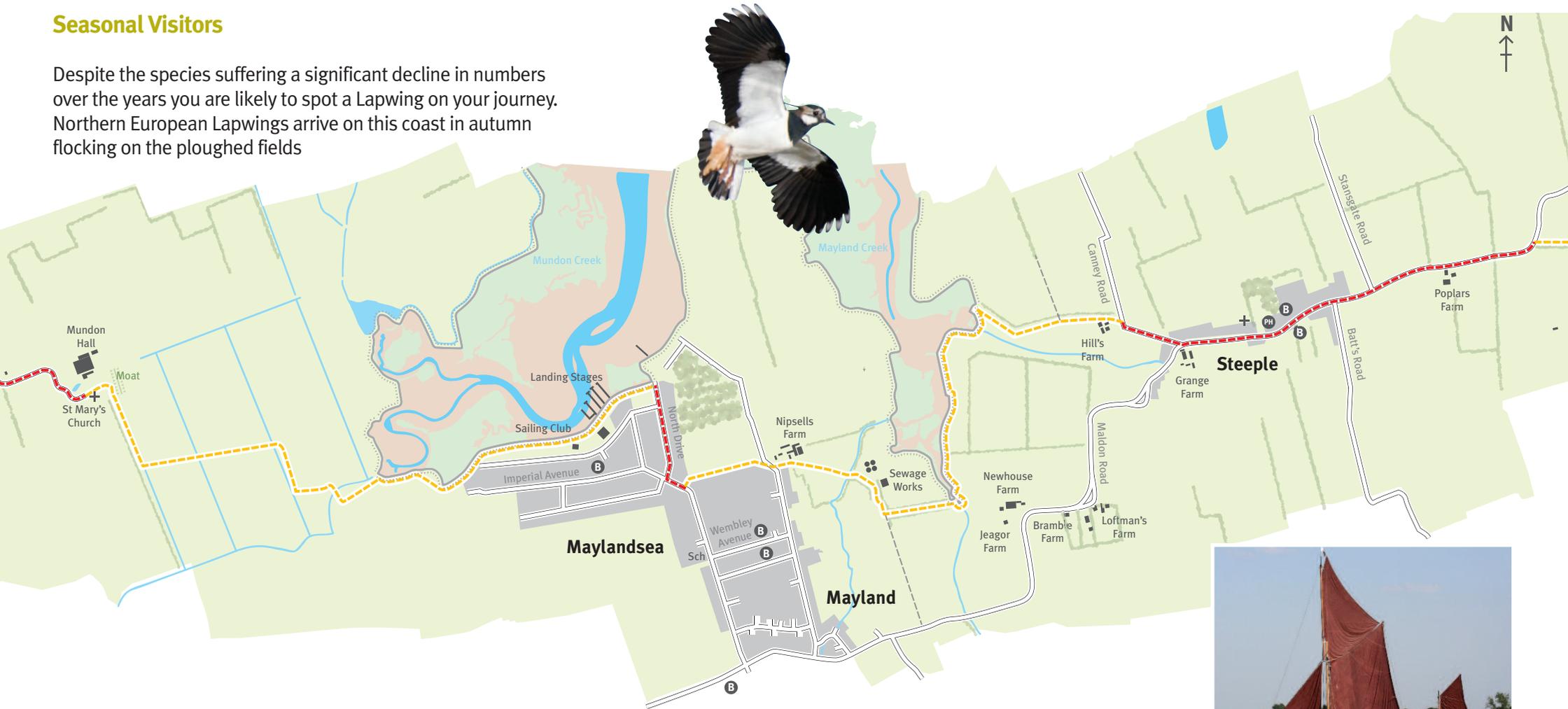


## Old Maldon Railway

You will pass over an old railway track that ran from Maldon to Woodham Ferrers. It first closed to the public and then to freight in 1953. Maldon had another train line that ran north to Witham. Although the lines are both long gone in Maldon you can still see the East Station building and the old goods shed near the River Chelmer. You can also see remnants of the tracks and the embankments dotted around the countryside, which is what you are passing over here.

## Seasonal Visitors

Despite the species suffering a significant decline in numbers over the years you are likely to spot a Lapwing on your journey. Northern European Lapwings arrive on this coast in autumn flocking on the ploughed fields



## Mundon Parish Church of St Mary

This is an extraordinary grade one listed monument delicately restored by the Friends of Friendless Churches with the help of English Heritage. Look out for the mural on the east wall which shows tassels and bunched curtains being drawn above the window in an attempt at a *trompe l'oeil* (trick of the eye).



## Maylandsea

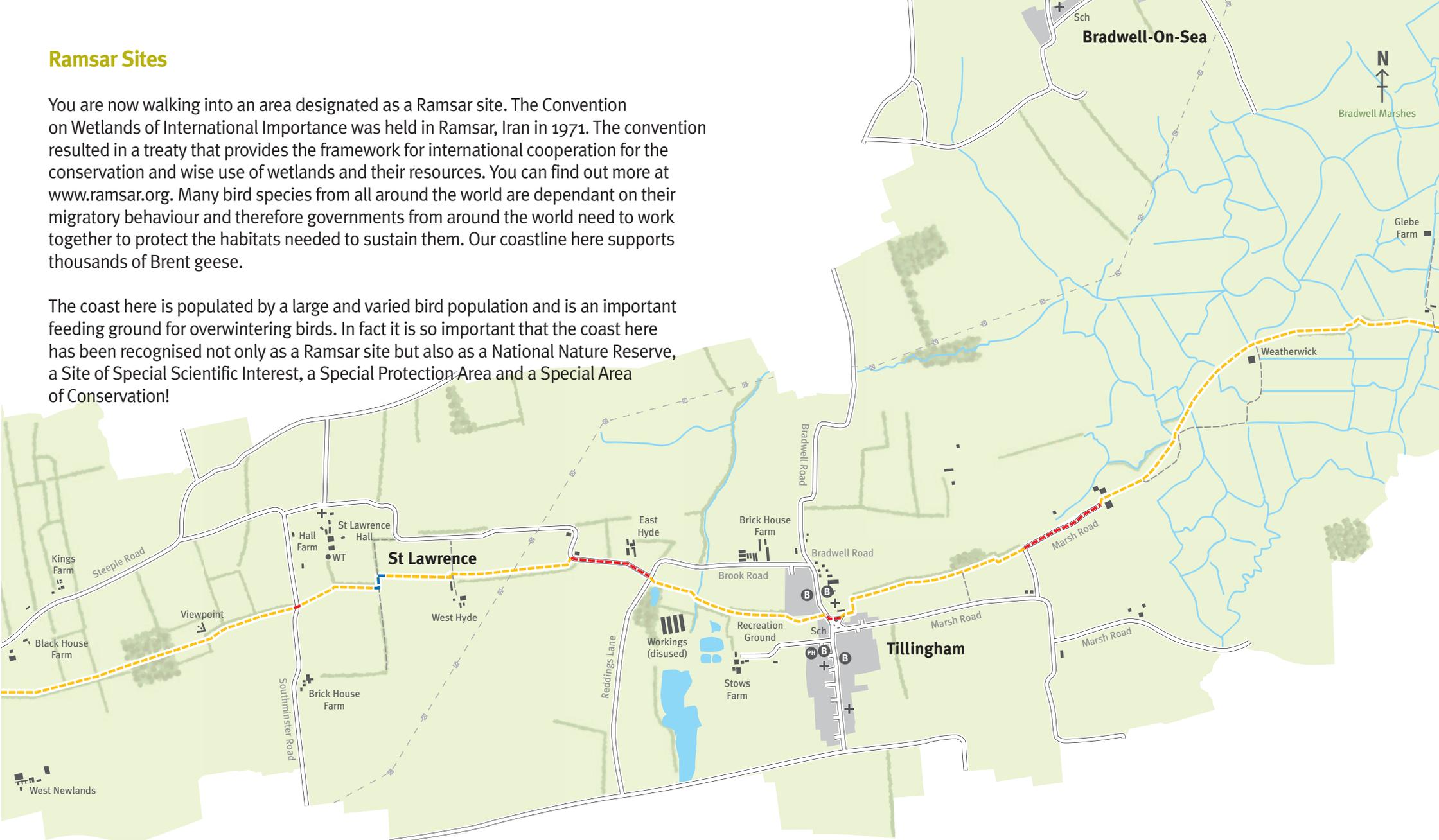
Classic sailing boats thrive on the Blackwater, look out for Smacks and Thames Barges moored at the Blackwater Marina. Smacks and Thames barges appear quite similar at first glance. Smacks were small fishing boats with red ochre sails. Thames barges were commercial sailing boats that moved cargo around the Thames, they also had red ochre sails but were much larger than a smack. Their flat bottoms were designed to enable the boats to operate in the shallow waters. They traded with the north of England and even across the sea to the European ports. The boats fell out of use with the development of road and rail transport. Sailing on the Blackwater remains popular today with many marinas and sailing clubs.



## Ramsar Sites

You are now walking into an area designated as a Ramsar site. The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance was held in Ramsar, Iran in 1971. The convention resulted in a treaty that provides the framework for international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. You can find out more at [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org). Many bird species from all around the world are dependant on their migratory behaviour and therefore governments from around the world need to work together to protect the habitats needed to sustain them. Our coastline here supports thousands of Brent geese.

The coast here is populated by a large and varied bird population and is an important feeding ground for overwintering birds. In fact it is so important that the coast here has been recognised not only as a Ramsar site but also as a National Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Protection Area and a Special Area of Conservation!



## Estuarine Saltmarshes

The coastal scenery of Essex is a mosaic of estuaries, twisting creeks, mudflats, large areas of saltmarsh, and shingle beaches. The creeks are relatively permanent and they are tidal which provides a fascinating habitat in which specialised species, called halophytes, can thrive. Halophytes are tolerant of high salinity conditions.

## Flood Management

The extent of the saltmarshes was reduced when men found ways to drain the land. These large areas of re-claimed land were put into agricultural use. You will walk along the large sea walls that protect this land from flooding. The remaining saltmarshes are delicate and need protection from the strength of the sea. Moored just off shore you can see some sunken Thames Lighters that are being used as wave breaks. Lighters are a type of flat-bottomed barge that were used in the River Thames to transfer goods from ship to shore when larger boats could not moor at the river edge.

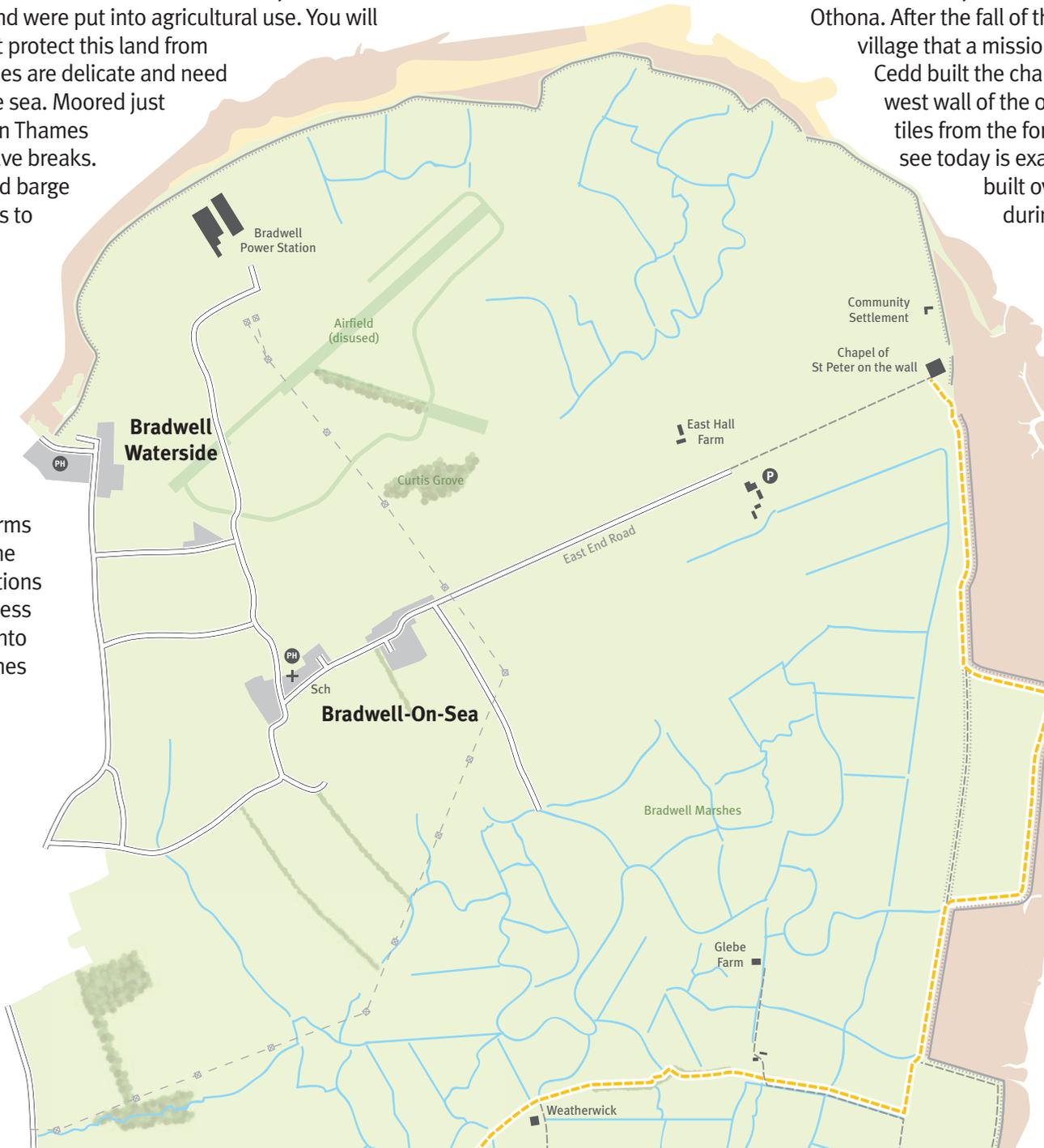
## Offshore Wind Farms

Those with really good eyesight will be able to see the faint outline of a wind farm beyond the Thames Lighters. Offshore windfarms are increasingly common due to the difficulties of finding suitable locations on land. These large turbines harness the power of the wind and turn it into electricity in our homes. The turbines you can see are at Gunfleet Sand, located off Clacton-on-Sea.



## The Chapel of St Peter on-the-Wall

In Roman times the area you are standing in was the defensive fort of Othona. After the fall of the Roman Empire the fort became a village that a missionary called Cedd came to in 653AD. Cedd built the chapel dedicated to St Peter across the west wall of the old Roman fort using the stones and tiles from the fort remains. Most of the building you see today is exactly the same as it was when it was built over a thousand years ago. However, during Elizabethan times the Chapel fell into disuse and was used as a barn probably housing animals, grain and carts! Look carefully at the walls to spot where the farmer removed some of the wall to get his carts in. Visitors are welcome to enter the chapel to find out more or just to sit for a while.



**This leaflet is issued by**

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