



Find out more about Oughtonhead Common



Key

- Restricted Byway
- Public footpath
- Fenceline

- Seat
- Kissing gate
- Large mobility kissing gate
- Interpretation panel
- Bin



- 1 Look out here for alder trees with their small cones, and the arching stems of pendulous sedge; both like wet conditions.
- 2 A working corn mill once stood at Westmill Farm. Creation of the deep, straight Mill Stream, which powered the mill, altered the course of the original river. North of the river is a wet area where willow, reed and rush were once grown and harvested.'
- 3 Opening to the west at this point is the ancient grazing common, where Hitchin "commoners" historically grazed their cattle since Medieval times. Of little use as agricultural land due to its wetness and winter flooding, this was one of the few uses the land could be put to. Grazing maintained a rich diversity of plant and bird life for which the site was renowned in times past. The cessation of grazing (c1914) led to scrub invasion and threatened the grassland habitat. In 1996, grazing with English longhorn cattle was re-introduced, thus restoring an ancient tradition and controlling further scrub invasion.
- 4 Across the river is Oughtonhead Nature Reserve (not open to the public) an area of wet woodland dominated by Alder and Silver Birch. The path continues to The Chalky, a popular picnic site. Beyond the site boundary, the path continues for a further 500m to take in the Springhead, the source of the River Oughton.
- 5 The path skirts around the two Grazing Compartments; English Longhorn cattle, an ancient breed, usually graze all year round.
- 6 The cattle pond historically provided water for grazing cattle, but toads and newts now breed here in the spring.
- 7 The towering beech trees in The Spinney were planted in 1842 by the Lucas family who lived at Old Westmill farmhouse.
- 8 This is the driest part of the site, the grassland here being very different from that nearer the river. However, springs are still active here, feeding a wet ditch system running through the middle of the meadow.



400 metres (approx)