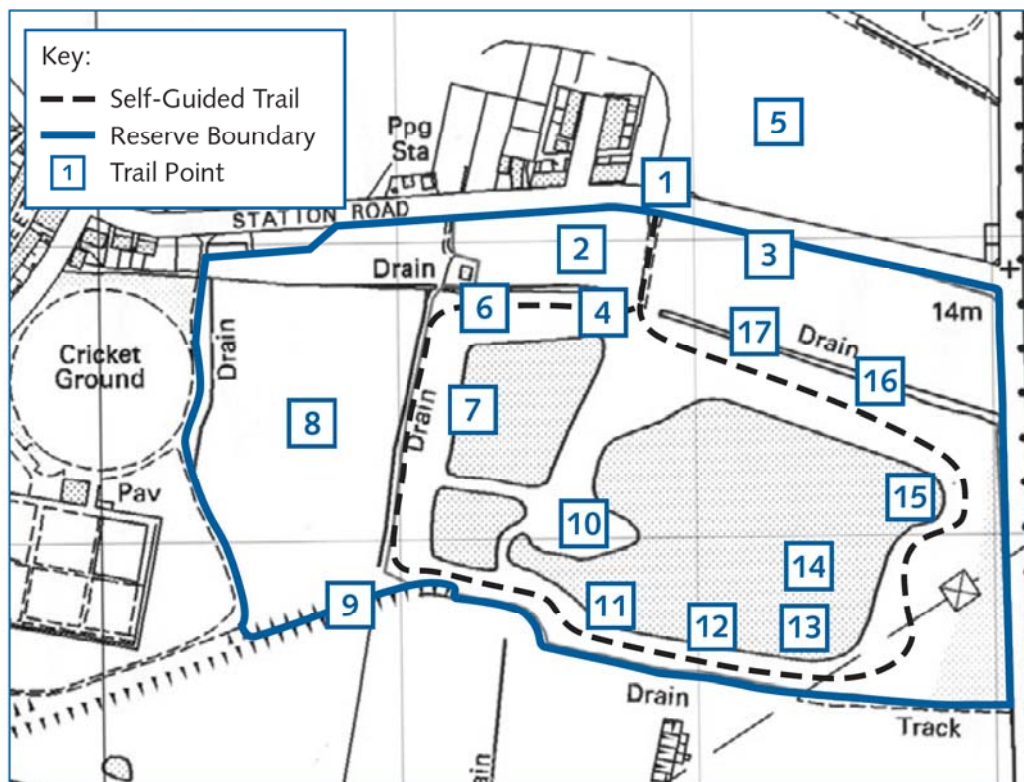


Letchmire Pastures Self-Guided Trail

Please refer to the map below:



To help you identify some of the wildflowers and butterflies please click on the links below:
[Wildflowers](#) [Butterflies](#)

Letchmire Pastures is a new nature reserve and much of it has retained its industrial character. The dark coal spoil gets warm in the sun and attracts insects at their most northerly point in Britain, so although it is not particularly attractive to the casual observer it is still valuable for wildlife. To make the most of a trip to Letchmire Pastures it is advisable to visit in the summer, especially late June to early July when there are many wildflowers, butterflies and dragonflies to admire.

This tour takes you around the outside edge of the reserve along the raised path.

1. Entrance

Enter the site from Station Road – nearly opposite the houses that make up Station Terrace. As you enter you come to an area created by The Groundwork Trust, as part of a project to improve the environment of Allerton Bywater.

2. Tree saplings

You will see new footpaths and young trees that were planted in winter 2002–3. The trees are a mixture of hawthorn, oak and birch; they are all native (come from Britain) and because of this they will be very good for wildlife in future years. For example, oak trees can support up to 423 different invertebrates like caterpillars, spiders and butterflies, as well as creatures like birds and squirrels.



Letchmire Pastures Self-Guided Trail

3. Hedge-laying

Groundwork also laid the hedges that go around the land in this area. This is an ancient technique that involves half-cutting the shrubs that make up a hedge (here it is mainly hawthorn) at the base of the trunk and then bending them over to thicken-up the bottom of the hedge. When this has been done to a line of hedge shrubs they are held in place by a sort of fence created by expendable branches of trees.

Hedge-laying is done in the winter while the trees are dormant (not growing) and in the spring the shrubs will sprout new growth where they have been cut, to create a lovely thick hedge. This technique was used in the past to keep stock (cows and sheep, etc) in fields and is beneficial to lots of wildlife that like to live in dense hedges, such as mice and wrens. If hedges aren't laid the shrubs tend to grow into trees, that aren't so thick, low to the ground.

4. Coal store

Pass straight along the path and through the vehicle barrier to enter the main body of the nature reserve.

The whole area in front of you used to be a coal store. If you look right you can see the coal spoil (the waste from the coal pit that was brought up with the coal – the fragments of coal in it make it look black) that has been left behind, forming a black wall that runs along this edge of the reserve. Sometimes it is possible to smell the sulphurous gases coming off this matter as it decomposes.

5. Allerton Silktone Colliery

The coal that was stored here came from the coal mine called Allerton Silktone Colliery over the other side of Station Road, where the Millennium village now stands. If you turn around and look across the road you can see this site from the vehicle barriers.

6. Solitary bees

Turn right as you come through the vehicle barriers and walk along the wall of coal spoil mentioned above. If you examine the spoil closely you will see small holes in the wall of spoil created by solitary bees (bees that live on their own – there are many species of these in Britain) as a nest site. In the spring and summer you can see them flying in and out of their burrows to collect nectar for their future offspring to feed on.

7. Pond

As you reach the corner of the reserve you will see an area of water to the left; often as you arrive at the site you may disturb a grey heron who regularly fishes on this pond.

8. Marsh land

Look over the hill and you will see another area of land that is a great place for wildlife. Don't go down there as it is marshy, but the top offers a good vantage point. In the summer, butterflies like meadow browns, common blues and large and small whites flit around collecting nectar, and birds like whitethroat and willow warblers (both have a lovely song) nest there.



Letchmire Pastures Self-Guided Trail

9. Two oak trees

Carry on walking along the top of the ridge. You will walk past two oak trees on your right – oaks are probably the most valuable trees in Britain for wildlife, as so many things like to live on them (from animals to lichen!).

10. Wildflower grassland

The grassland in the middle of the reserve is the one that has been transplanted from another site that was going to be developed for building. It contains a variety of wildflowers including yellow rattle (so called because the seeds rattle inside the seed pods when shaken), common centaury (a small and lovely pink flower), and bird's-foot trefoil – often known as 'eggs and bacon' because of its red and yellow flowers.

11. Grasshoppers

The grassland attracts both field and meadow grasshoppers in abundance; they are very easy to find along the edges in summer.

12. Damselflies and dragonflies

Continue around the reserve. In the summer it is possible to see dozens of damselflies and dragonflies hunting for prey and even mating. In fact dragonflies that you see buzzing around will only live for a couple of weeks in this adult form, until they have mated; they have spent most of their lives (2–3 years) living as nymphs in the water. Dragonflies at Letchmire Pastures include brown hawkers and emperors. Damselflies at Letchmire Pastures include ruddy darter and common darter.

13. Common reed

The plants to be seen growing around the wet areas are common reed. They are great for wildlife to hide in and dragonflies can often be seen sitting on them waiting for prey.

14. Wading birds breeding site

The large water body just here attracts a few birds who try and breed every year; unfortunately, they are rarely successful because of dogs, people and motorbikes intruding into the area, but it can be a good spot to see lapwings and little ringed plovers in the spring and summer (for a good view use binoculars). Little ringed plovers particularly like the bare ground. The knee-high fence around the area is designed to keep people out and give the birds a better chance of successful breeding in years to come.

15. Common spotted orchid

The grassland inside the fence at the final corner of the walk contains common spotted orchid, a lovely and uncommon flower, to have a look at.

16. Lichen

The land either side of the path as you walk back to the beginning has tiny lichen growing on it, in the form of little green 'plants' that are nick-named 'pixie cups' because of their wine glass shape. Lichen often grows on quite inhospitable surfaces like stone; it is a combination of algae and fungi that gives it its unique character.



Letchmire Pastures Self-Guided Trail

17. Water ditch

To the right as you walk back is a ditch containing water. Its steep sides are full of brambles that are very popular with birds and butterflies, who get their food from its fruit. The trees around here attract many birds, such as flocks of long-tailed tits.

