

# DISCOVER

## WEST STOW COUNTRY PARK VISITOR GUIDE & TRAILS



DISCOVER 125 ACRES OF UNSPOILT COUNTRYSIDE, WITH HEATHLAND AND WOODLAND WALKS, A SCULPTURE TRAIL AND AN ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND.

### OPENING TIMES

West Stow Country Park is open every day, including Christmas and Easter, with the car park available from:

Nov-Mar: 9am-5pm

April: 9am-7pm

May-Aug: 9am-8pm

Sept: 9am-7pm

Oct: 9am-6pm

### HOW TO FIND US

West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village & Country Park,  
Icklingham Road,  
West Stow,  
Suffolk IP28 6HG

West Stow Country Park is just 6 miles north-west of Bury St Edmunds, 15 minutes from the A11 and A14 and approximately an hour from Norwich, Cambridge and Ipswich.

### PARKING

There is ample car parking, and car parking charges apply during opening hours.

Car Park charges and 12 month annual pass available online at:  
[westsuffolk.gov.uk/parking](http://westsuffolk.gov.uk/parking)

### CONTACT US

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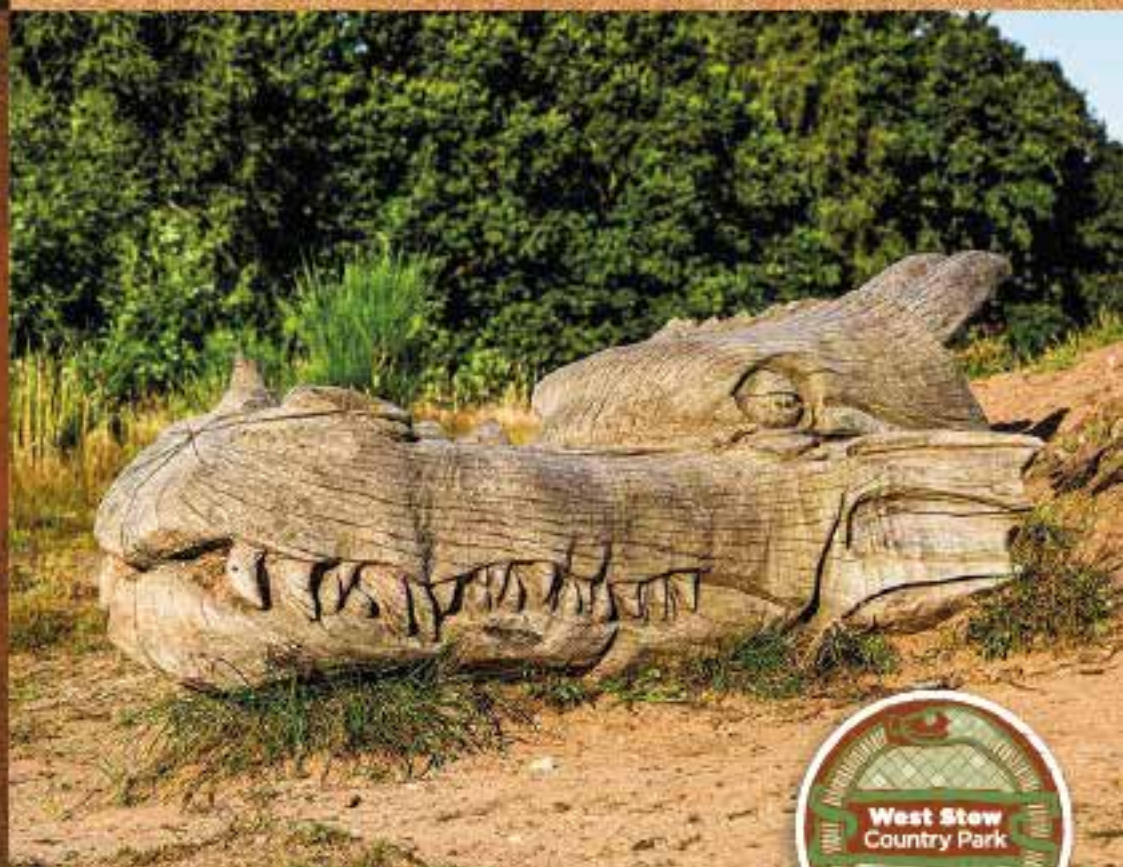
[www.whatsonwestsuffolk.co.uk/parks/west-stow](http://www.whatsonwestsuffolk.co.uk/parks/west-stow)



[www.facebook.com/WestStowCountryPark](http://www.facebook.com/WestStowCountryPark)



[www.instagram.com/weststowcountrypark](http://www.instagram.com/weststowcountrypark)



**West Suffolk**  
Council



[www.whatsonwestsuffolk.co.uk/parks/west-stow](http://www.whatsonwestsuffolk.co.uk/parks/west-stow)



## WELCOME TO WEST STOW COUNTRY PARK

The Park occupies approximately 125 acres of land along the Lark valley. The site has a large car park, children's play area and café, as well as the culturally important, reconstructed Anglo-Saxon Village.

Located near the southern edge of the Brecks, most of the site is open grassland or heathland with iconic Scots Pine belts. There are also patches of deciduous woodland, a river and a large lake. Various waymarked trails enable visitors to enjoy the interesting and varied habitats.

### A BRIEF HISTORY

Originally part of the Culford Estate, the site was purchased by the local council in 1886. In the first half of the twentieth century, the eastern half of the site was used as a sewage farm dealing with discharge from Bury St Edmunds. After it closed, sand and gravel was excavated and the resulting quarry was used as a municipal rubbish-tip. In 1979, mineral extraction began at the western end of the site which eventually resulted in the creation of a large gravel pit.

An early Anglo-Saxon cemetery was discovered in 1849, however major archaeological excavations did not begin until the 1950's. Remains of an Anglo-Saxon settlement were excavated and a reconstruction of the buildings commenced. West Stow Country Park was opened to the public in June 1979. The timber-clad Visitor Centre was opened in 1988 and eleven years later, the Anglo-Saxon Museum and café were opened.

### NATURAL KITCHEN CAFÉ

Run by an external company, the café is open daily except during the Christmas period. The café offers afternoon tea, daily lunch specials, freshly baked sausage rolls, freshly cut sandwiches, baguettes and homemade cakes and scones.

Opening times: 10am to 4pm all year, with hot food available until 3pm

### PATHS AND TRAILS

There are three waymarked walking trails which enable visitors to explore the Park. Brief details of the Red, Blue and Yellow Trails are listed opposite and more information about these and the Beowulf and Grendel Trail can be found overleaf in the Trails section.



### TRAIL SUMMARY

All the routes start at the front of the Visitor Centre and are waymarked with coloured arrows.

<b>Nature Trail</b>	0.93ml / 1.5km	Allow 30 - 40mins
<b>Pumphouse Route</b>	1.55ml / 2.5km	Allow 40 - 50mins
<b>Lake Walk</b>	1.86ml / 3.5km	Allow 50 - 60mins

#### NATURE TRAIL (RED ROUTE):

"Enter a world of woodland and nature"... with this 1.5km loop around the Breckland Heath.

#### PUMPHOUSE ROUTE (YELLOW ROUTE):

"Discover one of West Stow's former glories"... as you stroll through 2.5km of parkland and along the Lark.

#### LAKE WALK (PURPLE ROUTE):

"Venture around a landscaped lake"... created through sand and gravel extraction on the floodplain, as you wander through 3.5km of heath and wetland.

#### BEOWULF & GRENDDEL TRAIL:

"Embark on a journey through Anglo-Saxon folklore"... with this interactive trail of the Beowulf and Grendel story. Pop in the Visitor Centre for an activity pack today.

#### Other trails which pass through and from the Park:

- **Brecks Trail** – a walking/cycling/horse-riding route to Brandon Country Park via Thetford Forest.
- **Lark Valley Path** – a 13mile (20km) walk following the river valley between Bury St Edmunds and Mildenhall.
- **St Edmunds Way** – a long distance route which runs from Manningtree to Brandon.
- **Icknield Way** – a long distance path which passes along the eastern edge of the Park, then north through Thetford Forest.





# THE SANDS OF TIME

## INTO THE WILD:

The Country Park lies on the edge of Breckland, a unique region characterised by its semi-continental climate and poor soils. The landscape was once covered in woodland until Neolithic settlers arrived and cleared the trees using flint axes. They then attempted to cultivate the cleared areas but quickly discovered the sandy soils were soon exhausted. The term Breckland is derived from the older word 'breck' which was used to describe an unenclosed area of abandoned arable land.

### Did you know...?

*Frosts can occur in any month of the year in Breckland.*

The sandy, unstable soils not only made farming difficult but also resulted in serious erosion and frequent 'sandblows'. In the 19th century, the planting of Scots Pine shelterbelts helped reduce sandblows. We still have similar shelterbelt planting in the Country Park today.



The practice of sheep grazing also played a key role in shaping the landscape. Grazing controlled invasive scrub and coarse grasses allowing the distinctive Breckland plants and animals to thrive. The short grass and bare soil were ideal for the small, less competitive plants.

By the Middle Ages, Breckland had a thriving wool trade with production peaking in the 13th century. The local wool industry remained profitable until the arrival of the Industrial Revolution. Today, sheep still play an important role in maintaining heathland sites, including here at West Stow.

## UNEARTHING THE PAST:

This area has been visited by humans since prehistoric times. Homo-heidelbergensis, another species of human, regularly stopped here to make flint tools and use fire as hunter-gatherers some 400,000 years ago. Tens of thousands of flint tools dating from the Mesolithic (9,000BC – 4,000BC) and Neolithic (4,000BC – 2,500BC) eras have been found from the West Stow excavations alone.

### Did you know...?

*When local flint tools were made from a deep black flint, the flint could have been mined from Grimes Graves.*

During the Neolithic era, farming was introduced to the area and someone, probably of status, was buried in the centre of a ring ditch with a carved stone bead and surrounded by over forty cremation burials. Iron Age people continued farming the land and left evidence of round houses, whilst the Romans used the site for pottery kilns.



Then, in the early 5th century, a settlement was built on the banks of the River Lark by the people who became known as the Anglo-Saxons. The people of West Stow and their culture had roots in northern Europe and Scandinavia and possibly in the local Romano British population. Timber, straw and reeds were used to construct buildings around a central hall, possibly the focal point for an extended family. They were farmers, raising cattle, pigs, sheep and goats. They grew wheat, barley, rye and beans; crops that could be stored for use during the leaner months.



Rabbits have also been an important component in heathland ecology since they became established in the wild, superseding sheep as primary grazers. They keep grass short and their burrows and scrapes create areas of disturbed soil which is vital to the survival of many Breckland plants and animals.



**Did you know...?**

*Rabbit farming gave a big economic return on land which would otherwise have yielded very little and in Medieval times, Breckland had the largest number of warrens in the UK.*

About 86% of heathland was lost to development between 1934 and 1980, so Breckland heaths are now a fragile, threatened habitat. Many heaths have been designated as nature reserves or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) to offer them protection against development; West Stow Heath in the western half of the park is one such site. As well as legal protection, it is important that heathlands are appreciated by the public and managed sustainably so they can survive for future generations. Proper management is also vital for the survival of the special wildlife which inhabit this unique habitat.

**Did you know...?**

*Breckland is home to over 120 nationally rare and threatened plant species, many of which grow nowhere else in Britain.*

Characteristic Breckland species that occur at West Stow include birds such as the Woodlark and Nightjar. There are many different invertebrates including sand-burrowing wasps and bees and several nationally scarce plants that prefer sandy, free-draining soils, including the Maiden Pink, Sickie Medick and Mossy Stonecrop.



However, life was not just about surviving off the land. Their pottery shows trade existed across East Anglia. Some of the Anglo Saxons at West Stow wore gilded brooches, marking them out from their fellow villagers. Three swords associated with the settlement were found, with two in the cemetery, where a few of the dead were also buried with shields and spears to declare their warrior status.



**Did you know...?**

*The two swords that were found in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery and excavated in 1849, are now lost; only the one buried in the settlement can still be viewed.*

By the early 8th century, the settlement at West Stow was abandoned. We may never know why, but many early Anglo-Saxon sites suffered the same fate. Perhaps new ways of farming and emerging new elites, including the Church, meant they had to settle elsewhere. Evidence of Medieval ploughing survives but in the 14th century, the park was completely covered by a sandblow, up to a metre deep in places. The sand acted as a protective blanket, covering the evidence of times past for future discovery.

Whilst the cemetery was excavated in the mid-19th century, the settlement remained hidden until Basil Brown, of Sutton Hoo fame, discovered the Anglo-Saxon site in 1947. Excavations from 1957-1961 and then from 1965-1972 revealed the Anglo-Saxon settlement as well as the human activity that preceded it. The experimental reconstruction of the Anglo-Saxon Village followed and continues to this day.







## HEATHLAND AREA

West Stow Heath is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) occupying the western half of the park and is a surviving example of a Breckland heath. Breckland heaths are a rare and protected habitat and are home to many characteristic plants and animals, some unique to this region.

## THE PINE BELTS

Pine belts were originally planted as windbreaks in the early nineteenth century to help prevent sandblows. Additional belts in the Park were planted in the 20th century and represent an integral part of the Breckland landscape.

## THE LAKE

The lake is actually a gravel pit which was allowed to fill with water after mineral extraction ceased in the early 1980s. It is home to a variety of wildfowl and each Spring, thousands of toads migrate there to spawn. The lake is now run as a successful fishery.

## THE RIVER LARK

The Lark flows west along the southern boundary of the Park, eventually meeting up with the Great Ouse. It is thought to have been navigable since Roman times and barges carrying coal and wheat reached as far as Fornham up until the late 19th century. A unique brick 'crescent lock' which held up to eight barges still exists to the south of the lake. The river has suffered from poor water quality and habitat degradation in recent years but innovative restoration projects along the section through the Park have resulted in a more dynamic river system with greater biodiversity.








# WEST STOW COUNTRY PARK

Icklingham Road


Toilets  


Entrance 

TO B1106 - BURY ST EDMUNDS

Anglo-Saxon Village   

Visitor Centre & Café   

Car Park 

Play area 

Pumphouse

River Lark

St Edmunds Way

River Hide

Lackford Lakes

## NATURE TRAIL (RED ROUTE):

"Enter a world of woodland and nature"... with this 1.5km loop around the Breckland Heath.

### What can you see?

*Within a pine and oak tree belt, what will you discover among the Norway Spruce plantation and a small Birch woodland? There's more than Dragons in these woods!*

Picnic Areas  Car Park

Play Areas  Information

Toilets  Refreshments





## THE PUMPHOUSE

The Victorian pumphouse is the main surviving feature of West Stow Sewage Works which occupied the eastern half of the Park in the first half of the 20th century. Sewage was piped all the way from Bury St Edmunds and pumped into settling beds. Only the boilers remain inside the Grade II listed building.



## CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND

Our professionally designed playground in the main car park caters for all ages, from toddlers to teens. There are also two climbing rocks and a den-building area nearby.

## THE VISITOR CENTRE, PICNIC AREA & CAFE

The timber clad Visitor Centre was built in 1988 and houses the shop, reception area and an archaeology gallery. Picnic benches are available for use in front of the building among the conifers which provide welcome shade in the summer.

## THE ANGLO-SAXON VILLAGE

One of the main attractions of the site, the Anglo-Saxon Village, comprises of several reconstructed buildings on the site of an original settlement. Each house has been built using traditional materials and methods based on the evidence found there. They all differ in design to reflect what they may have resembled when they were occupied in Anglo-Saxon times.



## NATURE

Look out for Buzzards drifting overhead and listen for Nuthatches, Great-Spotted Woodpeckers and Goldcrests in the trees around the Visitor Centre. In winter, the bird feeders attract many species, including Bramblings and Siskins. On the heathland, there are Linnets and Green Woodpeckers and with a bit of luck, you could also see a Barn Owl or Roe-Deer. In Spring, look out for displaying Great-Crested Grebes and hundreds of toads in the lake.

In summer, the sounds of crickets fill the air and numerous butterflies and dragonflies are on the wing. The rare Maiden Pink still grows in a few areas of the park and heather is particularly spectacular in August. Autumn sees the first winter birds arriving to feed on the numerous berries. Fungi such as Fly Agaric and Shaggy Inkcap can be seen and listen out for the roaring of Red Deer Stags and Muntjac, barking.



	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
	Barn Owls Bramblings Great-Spotted Woodpeckers		Blackthorn Blossom Grey Herons Bullfinches Brimstones		Hobbies Four-Spotted Chasers Yellow Flags Comfrey	
		Heather Harebells Red Admirals		Jays Grey Squirrels Fly Agarics Acorns		Redwings Tawny Owls Muntjacs
JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	
Common Lizards Beewolf Wasps Roesel's Bush-Crickets		Blackberries Giant Puffballs Craneflies Common Darter		Roe Deer Kingfishers Green Woodpeckers		

## DOGS IN WEST STOW COUNTRY PARK

Dogs are welcome in the Park, but please comply with the advisory signs which state where and when your dog must be kept on a lead. Please also clear up after your dog. **Please note:** Only guide and assistance dogs are allowed into the Anglo-Saxon Village.



## CYCLING IN WEST STOW COUNTRY PARK

Visiting cyclists are welcome in the Park though there are currently no cycle routes on the site. We have cycle racks outside the Visitor Centre and a waymarked, cycling-friendly 14 mile (22.5km) linear trail (the 'Brecks Trail') between West Stow Country Park and Brandon Country Park.

Please note: The paths from the Car Park to the Visitor Centre are narrow so cyclists are asked to dismount in the Car Park and walk to the Centre/Café.

### PLEASE REMEMBER:

- No camping\*
- Guard against all risks of fire - no barbecues\*
- Keep dogs under control at all times
- Put your litter in the bins or take it home
- Protect and respect wildlife, plants and trees

\* Members of the fishing syndicate are permitted to stay overnight and use stoves on the lake



## BEYOND WEST STOW COUNTRY PARK:

You can visit ...

- Brandon Country Park
- Fullers Mill Gardens
- Lackford Lakes
- King's Forest
- Cavenham Heath



## TRAILS IN THE PARK

All the trails start at the front of the Visitor Centre and are waymarked with coloured arrows (see site map). The free-draining soil and predominantly level ground means they are accessible to wheelchair users; the only inclines of note occur along the two paths leading to and from the river on the Yellow Route.

### • Did you know?

*Scots Pines or 'Deal Rows' were planted in Breckland from the late seventeenth century to help prevent sandblows.*

## PUMPHOUSE ROUTE (YELLOW ROUTE):

"Discover one of West Stow's former glories" ... as you stroll through 2.5km of parkland and along the Lark.

### • What can you see?

*Discover the main survivor of the former sewage farm, a Victorian pumphouse, whilst you spot Trout, Moorhens and other aquatic life along the Lark.*

### • Did you know?

*The red brick Victorian pumping station was built to distribute 300,000 gallons of sewage which arrived every day through a gravity-fed pipeline from Bury St Edmunds.*

## LAKE WALK (PURPLE ROUTE):

"Venture around a landscaped lake" ... created through sand and gravel extraction on the floodplain, as you wander through 3.5km of heath and wetland.

### • What can you see?

*If you're lucky, you might spot a Kingfisher pop over from Lackford Lakes, but watch out also for Egyptian Geese and hundreds of toads as you encounter our majestic wetland.*

### • Did you know?

*The river Lark was once navigable as far as Bury St Edmunds. It was an important trade route and, in its heyday, numerous barges carried coal upriver from King's Lynn.*

## BEOWULF & GRENDIL TRAIL:

"Embark on a journey through Anglo-Saxon folklore" ... with this interactive trail of the Beowulf and Grendel story.

### • What can you see?

*At each storyboard lose yourself with part of the story and encounter a chapter frozen in time.*

### • Did you know?

*You can upgrade your experience with an Adventure Trail to discover the Trail and the Tale's runes and activity sheets, available from the Visitor Centre.*



## BRECKS TRAIL:

This route is a 14 mile (22.5km) linear trail between West Stow Country Park and Brandon Country Park, catering for walkers, cyclists and with sections suitable for horse-riding.

The Brecks Trail passes through open heathlands, forest and agricultural land. There are many points of interest along the route including Thetford Forest, the Elveden Monument and the King George V Monument. Trail leaflets are available for free in the Visitor Centre.