

Upminster Walk 7 : Pike Pond & Thames Chase Broadfields Centre

A circular walk across farmland and through woods, passing All Saints Church and Pike Pond. There are options for short and longer routes.

Most of the paths have adequate room to pass with social distancing but some sections are narrow with limited passing places. Be prepared to retrace steps to allow others to pass, or walk this route at a quiet time. The short route requires crossing a stile.

Note that some of the commonly used footpaths follow different routes to the paths marked on the Ordnance Survey Map.

Starting Points:

Park Drive – Short Route	: 3 miles
Park Drive – Long Route	: 3¾ miles

From Park Drive – Short Route

1. Pass through the gate at the end of the road and turn right onto a footpath at the edge of the field. Follow the path around the field, passing Spring Wood, part of Cranham Marsh Nature Reserve.

Managed by Essex Wildlife Trust, Cranham Marsh is typical of much of the land that once covered south Essex, before it was built on or converted to arable farming. The woods contain what are possibly the largest ash trees in Essex. With woods, grassland and reed-filled drainage ditches, it attracts a wide variety of wildlife. Woodpeckers, tawny owls and sedge warblers can be seen, sparrowhawks and kestrels nest in the woods and twenty three species of butterfly have been recorded.

2. On reaching a field boundary part way along the wood turn left staying by the right edge of the field. After 300 yards the corner of another field is reached and a wide path runs to the right. Turn right, following this path beside paddocks until it meets another path (from All Saints Church & The Chase) after 175 yards.
3. Continue straight on, crossing the path from The Chase and around the next field. Go through a gap at the far corner of the field, turn left and follow the path between crops on the next field. This and the next section of path is narrow with limited passing places. Be prepared to retrace steps to allow others to pass or to wait at a suitable place by the hedges.
4. On reaching the next field follow the path right around the edge of the field until reaching the opposite side by the Upminster to Grays railway line. Take the narrow path which climbs to Pike Lane where it crosses the railway on a bridge.

The single-track railway was constructed from 1892-93 and originally ran from Romford to Grays, before the District Line was electrified and extended to Upminster in 1932. Construction of Chafford Hundred station, serving new houses and Lakeside increased usage of the line, which is now run with through trains to London, not simply a branch from Upminster.

5. Turn left on Pike Lane, crossing the railway on the bridge. Take care on the road here.
6. 100 yards from the bridge turn right on the path into Thames Chase Forest Centre, then take the left fork when the path divides after 100 yards.

Part of the 38 square miles of Thames Chase, the former Broadfields Farm houses the Forest Centre and a landscape of meadows woods and ponds. A network of accessible paths allow the people of Upminster to enjoy this relatively recent asset to our area. Sadly access roads to the planned Lower Thames Crossing will destroy part of the forest and increase noise and air pollution for local residents and wildlife.

7. Continue on the path parallel with Pike Lane, ignoring branches to the right, then turn left when reaching a T junction with another path after ¼ mile. You are now close to the driveway to the Visitor Centre and will return to Pike Lane again after a short distance.
8. Cross Pike Lane and take the footpath running along the boundary between two fields. Turn right by trees at the end of the field, then after a short distance, left through a gap in the trees.
9. Follow the path around the edge of the field for 250 yards until it turns left under a railway bridge. Go under the bridge and stay on the path across the next field which soon reaches Pike Pond.

Known locally as Pike Pond but not named on most maps, this small pond was a popular fishing venue in the 1960s and 70s. It could be fished by day ticket, although these were rarely collected and wooden jetties were built to facilitate access. The pond then became a private water but was rarely fished. It remains private and with trees and reeds having grown up over the years, but is now probably too overgrown for fishing and has become a valuable wildlife habitat.

10. Pass to the right of the pond soon reaching a narrow path between hedges which runs to All Saints Church. To maintain social distancing it may be necessary to wait if anyone is coming the other way. The path ends at a stile
11. Follow the path through the churchyard, emerging onto The Chase. Turn right then immediately left, walking beside the old buildings of Cranham Farm (now private houses).
12. Follow the path and turn left along the edge of the field just before it reaches Argyle Gardens. The starting point at Park Drive is then reached after 325 yards.

From Park Drive – Short Route

Follow the short route from (1) to (7) then follow (13) to (15).

13. After emerging onto Pike Lane turn right across the driveway to the Forest Centre and pass through a gate to the left, joining a footpath that runs to the left of Cranham Golf Course and reaches St Mary's Lane after ⅓ mile.
14. Turn left onto St Mary's Lane, passing the Thatched House and Jobbers Rest, reaching Wantz Bridge after ½ mile.
15. Turn left up The Chase, then right on the footpath to Argyle Gardens just before the farm building. Follow the path and turn left along the edge of the field just before it reaches Argyle Gardens. The starting point at Park Drive is then reached after 325 yards.

