

The Ivel from Langford to Henlow, Bedfordshire

Start point and parking: Langford Village Hall, Mill Lane, Langford, Bedfordshire SG18 9UR. OS grid reference: TL 18385 41213. Length: 6 miles. Text by **Rebecca Dawson**.

This walk from Langford, along the River Ivel to Henlow, takes in some lovely river bank scenery, open farmland and views over various fishing lakes. There is always the possibility of catching a glimpse of a kingfisher, particularly as this stretch of the river is part of the Kingfisher Way. This walk includes an optional pub stop at the Engineers Arms, Henlow (for those who want a proper lunch, try The Crown or The Five Bells, also in the village). Toilets are available at Langford Garden Centre, where there is also a café. There are two pub options at the end of the walk (The Crown or The Wrestlers) in Langford, just up the road from the car park. Some parts of this walk can be wet in winter – especially the meadows. There are several kissing gates, but no stiles. Cattle and ponies often graze the meadows, especially in summer – take care, especially when cows have young calves at foot.

From Langford Village Hall car park, walk up to the T-junction on Mill Lane and turn left away from the main road. Continue until you reach the Mill Pond, in front of Langford Mill (now turned into flats). Cross the wooden bridge over the Ivel and turn left (south), through the kissing gates and onto the Kingfisher Way path that runs alongside the river. To your right is Henlow Common and Langford Meadow – a 50 acre nature reserve for public access and conservation. The meadows support several species of grassland, wildlife ditches, scrubland, native trees, bushes and a running stream, which make it an important refuge and development area for wildlife.



Continue along the riverside path, passing through several gates where paths intersect, continue straight on at all of them. Eventually the path terminates at High Street, just opposite Langford Garden centre. Pass through the kissing gate and turn left, crossing over and walking along the High Street towards the mini roundabout. At the mini roundabout (and what is sadly another closed pub – formerly The Boot) turn right onto Cambridge Road and then immediately right onto Common Road.

Continue along Common Road – eventually tarmac gives way to gravel and then to bridleway, go straight on at the bridleway barrier to walk alongside arable fields to your left. To your right, through the hedges and trees you will see Poppy Hill fishing lakes.

When the path becomes gravel once

more, continue straight on, past the turning for the fishing club.

For those who don't wish to go all the way in to Henlow, take the shortcut by turning right at the end of the chain link fence onto a new path with post and rail fencing that leads you through the woods, over the River Ivel (see if you can spot the wooden Kingfisher on the bridge) and onto Millennium Meadow. Then pick up the directions from Millennium Meadow (see * next page).

The main route continues along the gravel road to a T-junction, turn right, cross the river Ivel and follow the road up to another T-junction, opposite the school playing fields. Turn left along a wide dirt road to the junction with Henlow Grange (Champneys Resort) car parks and driveway. If you want to see the main Henlow Grange building – just walk a little further on and it's on your left – it's quite impressive.

Otherwise, turn right onto a tarmac single-track road with the hedge on your right towards Henlow village. Walk past the cricket field and carry straight on to the T-junction with Henlow High Street. Turn right here and continue up the High Street until you reach the Engineers Arms.

'The Engine' as it is affectionately known, is a free house, and regularly decorated with CAMRA awards – most



recently, Bedfordshire pub of the year 2014. The pub serves a wide array of real ale and real cider, amongst the usual fare. Bar snacks are available.

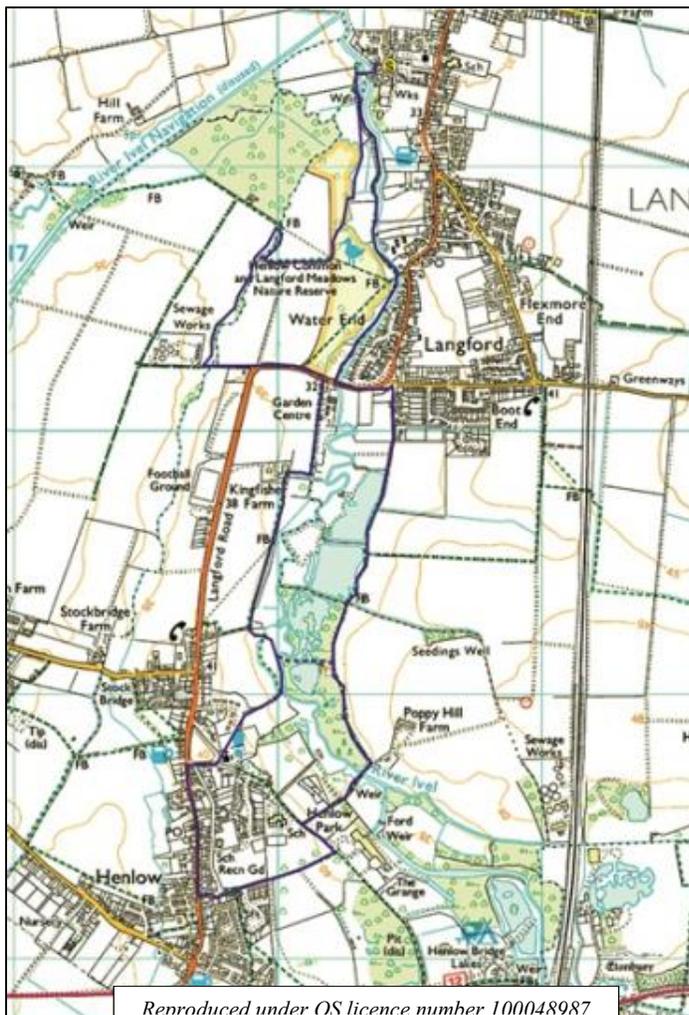
From The Engineers Arms, continue north up the High Street until you reach the Town Pump, complete with water trough planter, next to the village sign. The mosaic tiles of the pump building were redone for the recent Jubilee and are well worth a glance before passing on.

Turn right at the pump, onto Church Road and once you reach the church, enter the churchyard through the gate and turn left, skirting the church on a well-trodden path. The path leads you out onto the new extension field. Cross the field, heading towards the gates. Pass through the gates and follow the footpath around to the small car parking area. Turn right through the gate onto the top section of Millennium Meadow.

Follow the fence line to your left down towards the concrete bridge crossing the drainage ditch and onto Millennium Meadow proper. Here you can get a really good view of the River Ivel once more as it meanders along with steep banks. Look out for the wooden kingfisher on the bridge (see opposite)!

* Follow the river along Millennium Meadow until it turns sharply away to your right, here turn diagonally left and head towards the small wooden bridge on the other side of the meadow. Cross the bridge and follow the path diagonally to the gap in the hedge to your right. Pass through the hedge and turn right—following the field margin away from Henlow, back towards Langford.

Once you reach the stable yard, turn right, through the gap between the metal gates and the horses' fields, following the path along another field margin. Continue around the field until you cross the small wooden bridge over a ditch and meet Langford High Street once again (the garden centre is to your right). Turn left here, crossing the road and walking



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away from Langford on the pavement until you reach the sharp left hand corner. Take the single-track road in front of you, directly on the corner.

Continue along this track, pass over the stream and turn right through the gap in the hedge onto a path (not on OS map) through conservation grassland. Follow the well-worn path alongside the stream, passing arable fields to your left (further to your left is the disused River Ivel navigation channel). At the top of the field where it meets the hedge, turn right over a wooden bridge, crossing the stream once more. Turn right after the bridge and follow the field boundary until it meets a wooden gate adjoining Langford meadows. Go through the gate and turn left, following the field edge to another gate.

Go through the gate, then take the path which goes diagonally right, and leads up to a wooden bridge over a small drainage ditch. Walk along the ditch until you come to a small wooden bridge—cross the bridge and turn left, roughly following the stream. The path turns away to the right, away from the stream and towards the River Ivel. Follow the path, which eventually runs alongside the Kingfisher Way path on the other side of the fence, until you reach the end of the meadow, signalled by a hedge, and a gate to your right. Go through the gate and turn left. You are now back on the Kingfisher Way path. Continue north until you meet the gate by Langford Mill, go through the gate, cross the bridge and turn right down Mill Lane to the Village Hall car park. Alternatively continue straight down Mill Lane to the T-junction with Church Street, turn left and walk north up Church Street a short way to The Plough pub, where a good selection of beers, ciders and food is available!