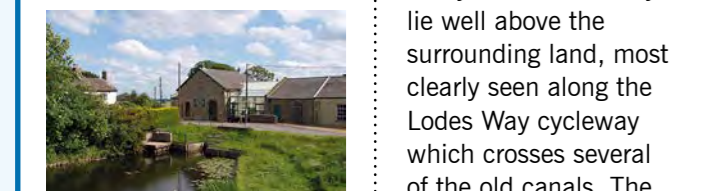


Around Ely

One of the country's smallest cities, Ely's importance arose from its position on higher ground, surrounded by the flat, agricultural land of the Cambridgeshire Fens. This landscape is shaped more than most by people. Before the huge



Prickwillow engine museum drainage projects of the seventeenth century, the 'Isle of Ely' was probably a true description, and the name lasted into recent times in its council and a parliamentary constituency. Some say that Ely's name comes from eel catching in its many surrounding waterways, an occupation that also continued into the twentieth century using punts and elongated wicker traps (see film of this at Ely Museum).

A landscape shaped by drainage

What little drainage there was in the middle ages fell into disrepair after the dissolution of the monasteries about 1540. So Francis, Earl of Bedford, led the 'Adventurers' (from which Adventurers' Fen near Wickens is named) to improve agricultural land by promoting new waterways, the key being a 34km dead straight canal to divert the Great Ouse. Now called the Old Bedford River, this was completed in the 1630s. Vermuyden's New Bedford River followed after 1650. These parallel Bedford rivers, north-west of Ely, now form a key part of the modern landscape. In winter the Ouse Washes, the half mile between the two channels, floods and freezes. This variously acts as a reservoir for excess water, a skating rink, and one of the most important wetland habitats in the country. Each year, around 9,000 Bewick's and whooper swans arrive.

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Weiney has a visitor centre open all year, right on National Cycle Route 11. Drainage has influenced the whole area. After water was removed, the spongy peat shrank, so many of the waterways lie well above the surrounding land, most clearly seen along the Lodes Way cycleway which crosses several of the old canals. The basin at Reach is the terminus of one such 'lode', evidence of trading activity since Roman times. Reach is also the site of an annual May fair and the end of Devil's Dyke, a 12km-long, Anglo-Saxon, chalk rampart, now a valuable grassland habitat. The need to constantly keep the water out means getting it up-hill, so another characteristic feature arrived: pumps. Once there were many wind pumps. An example can still be visited at the National Trust reserve at Wickens Fen. Later, tall, isolated buildings with chimneys dotted the land as over a hundred steam-powered beam engines replaced the windmills in the 19th century. Now electric pumps do the job, but you can visit two of the original engines: a museum at Prickwillow is an easy cycle ride east

Cycling

Why cycle?

- It's free.
- To save time – it's often the quickest way to get around town and parking is free and easy.
- It keeps you fit whilst you get from A to B – regular cyclists are as fit as a person 10 years younger and have a reduced risk of heart disease or stroke.
- To enjoy the open spaces and countryside.

Cycling Tips

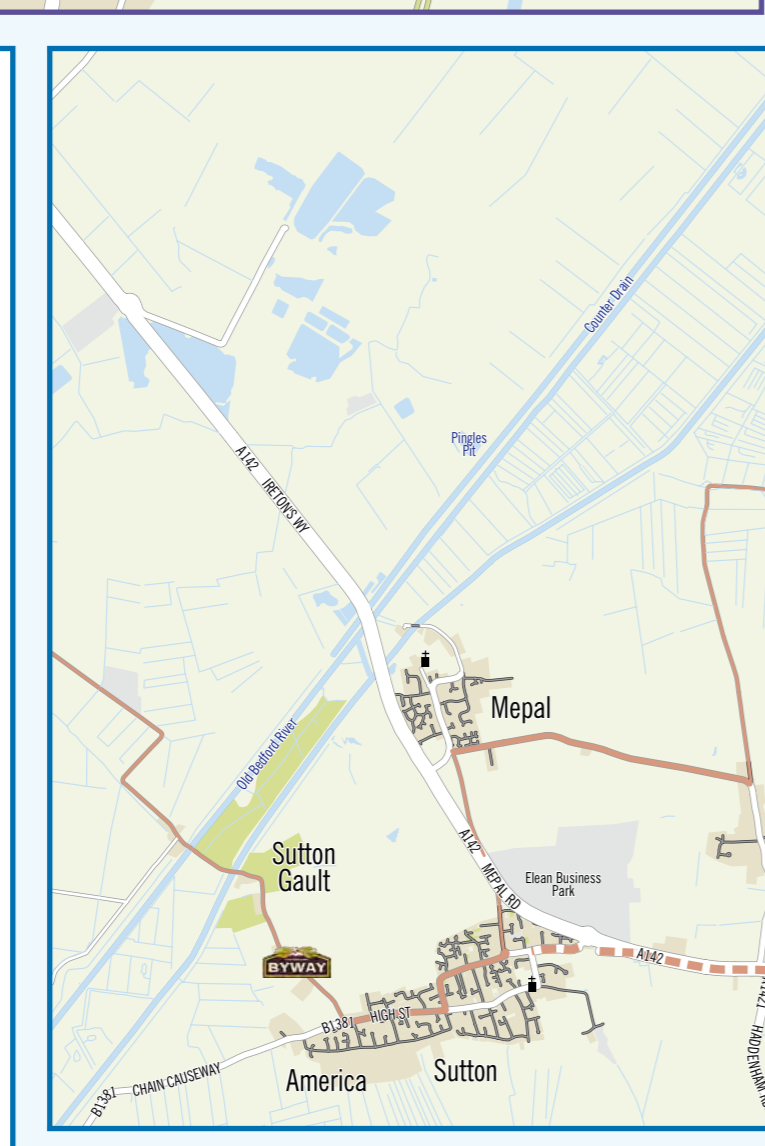
- Ride assertively – cycle well out from the kerb so that you are visible to motorists. This will discourage them from overtaking too closely.
- Watch out for car doors opening and make eye contact with drivers waiting to pull out.
- Don't overtake lorries or buses on the left at junctions as they have a blind spot and there could be fatal consequences.
- Master the backward look – practice looking back over your right shoulder so you can turn right or overtake without wobbling.
- Ensure your bike is roadworthy.

Do's and Don'ts

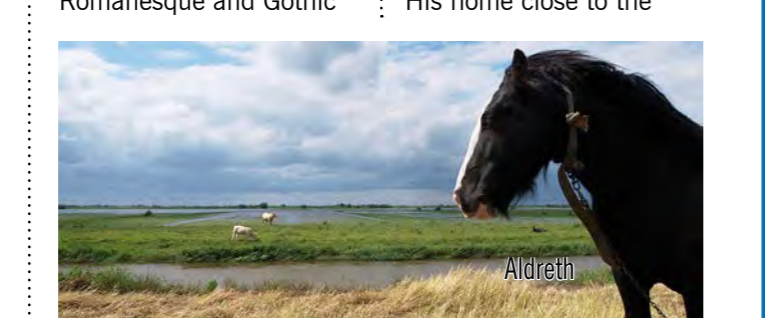
- Be considerate to pedestrians – they should be given priority on shared paths, so slow down and use your bell.
- Don't cycle on the pavement unless there are blue signs indicating that they are designated cycle routes.
- Use lights at night – reflective clothing is also a good idea.
- Only use one-way streets in the permitted direction and obey traffic signs in general.

Cycle Parking

- Cycle parking stands are available in and around the city centre.
- Sadly, cycle theft is common. Always lock your bike to a fixed

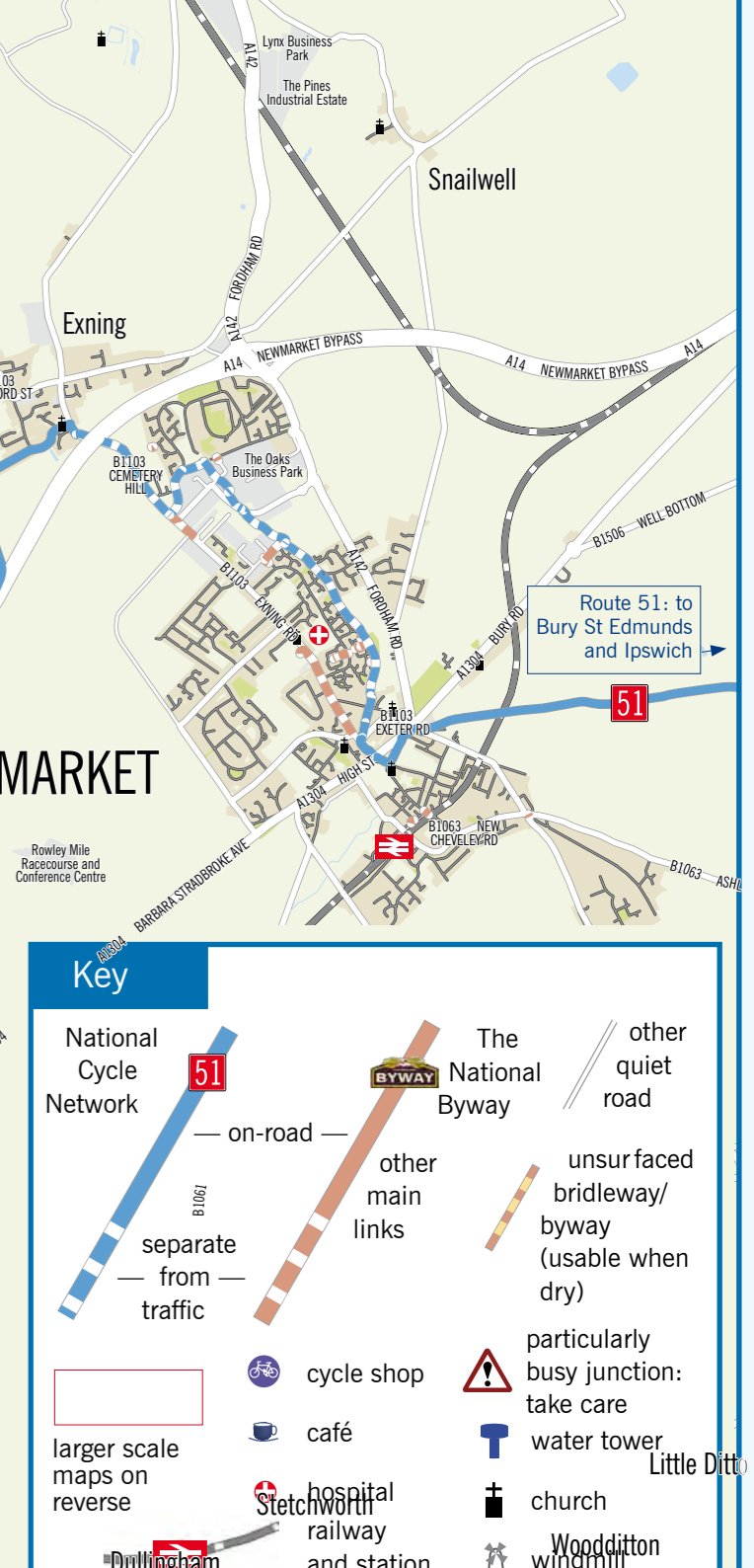
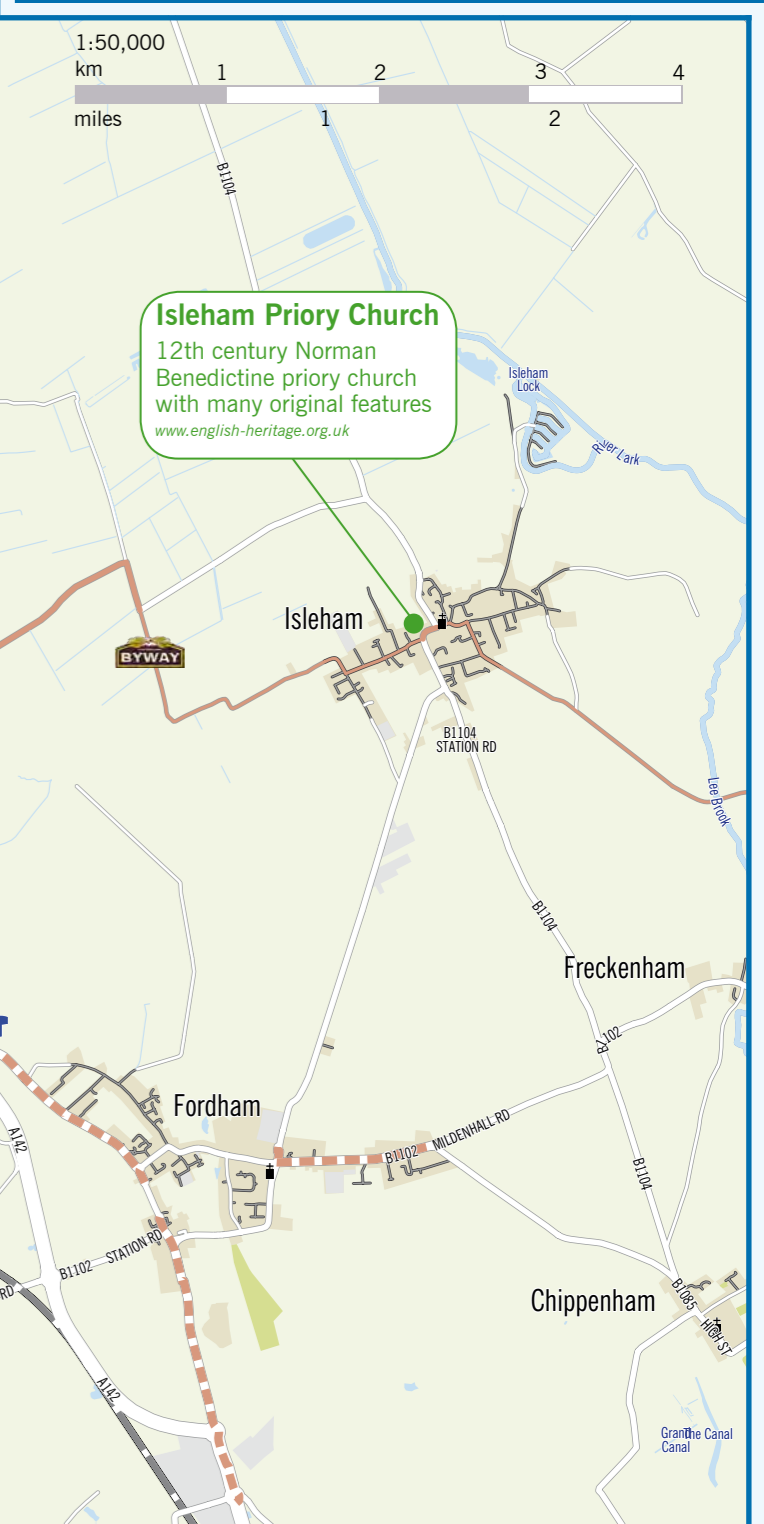
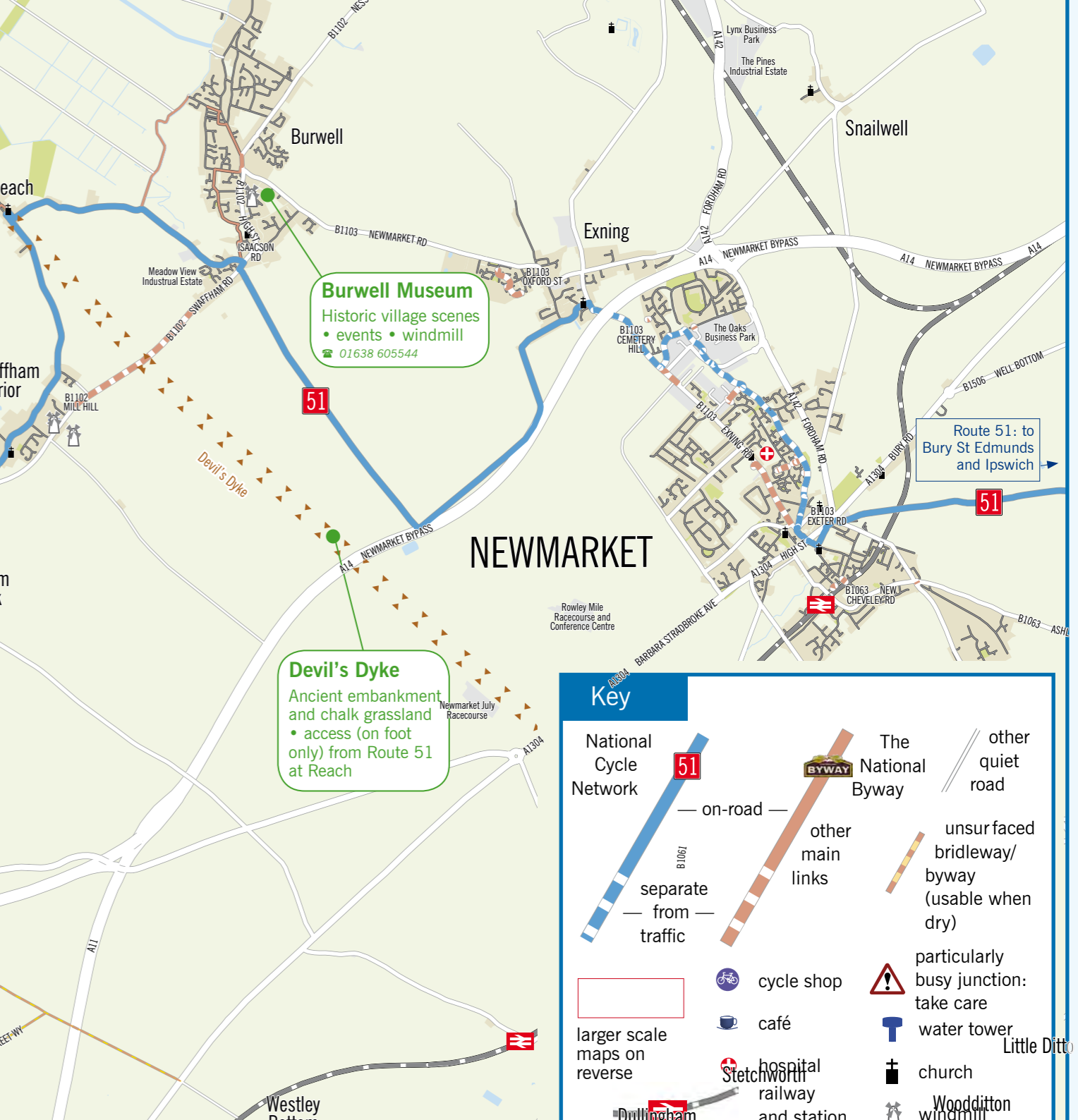
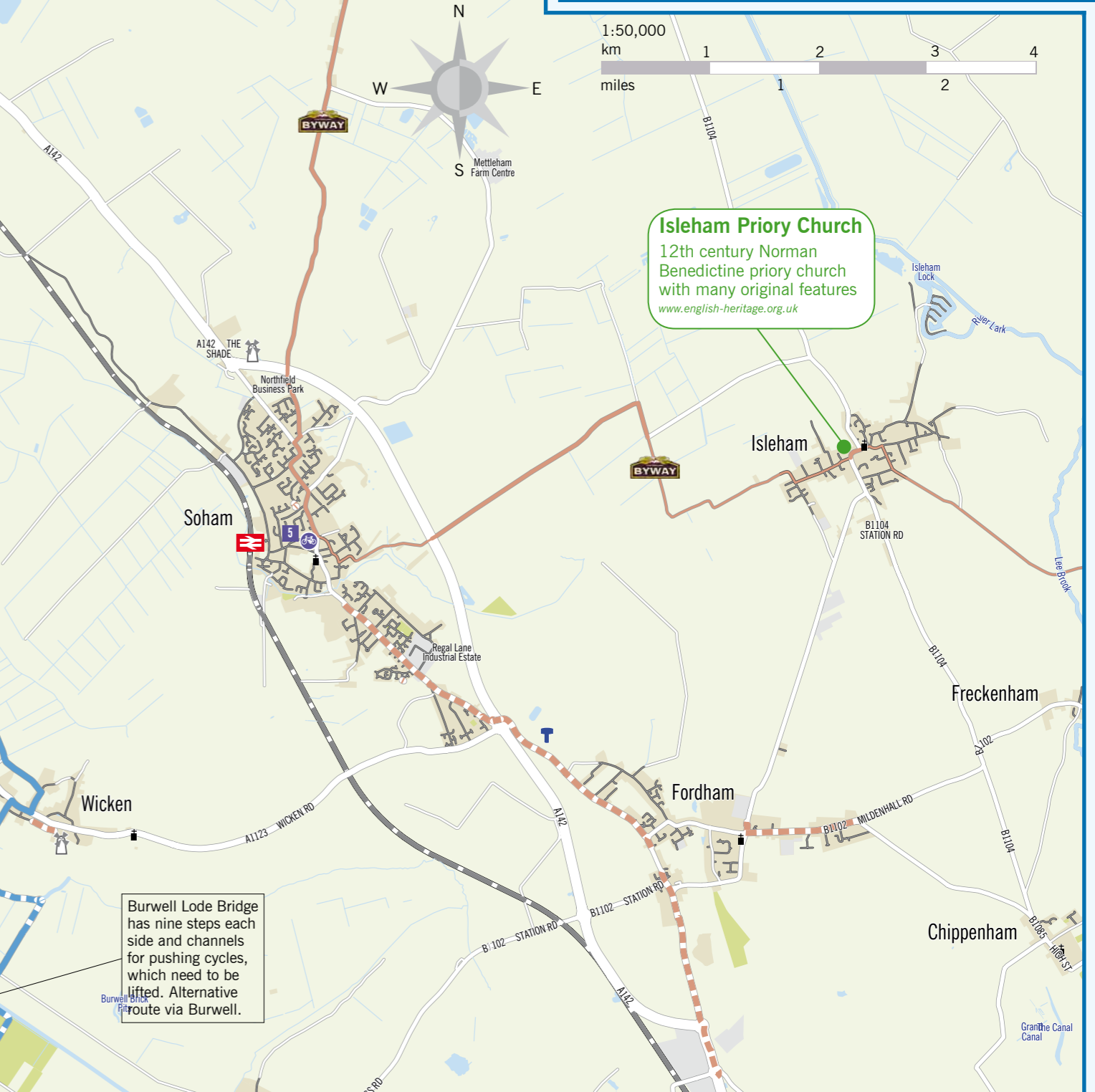
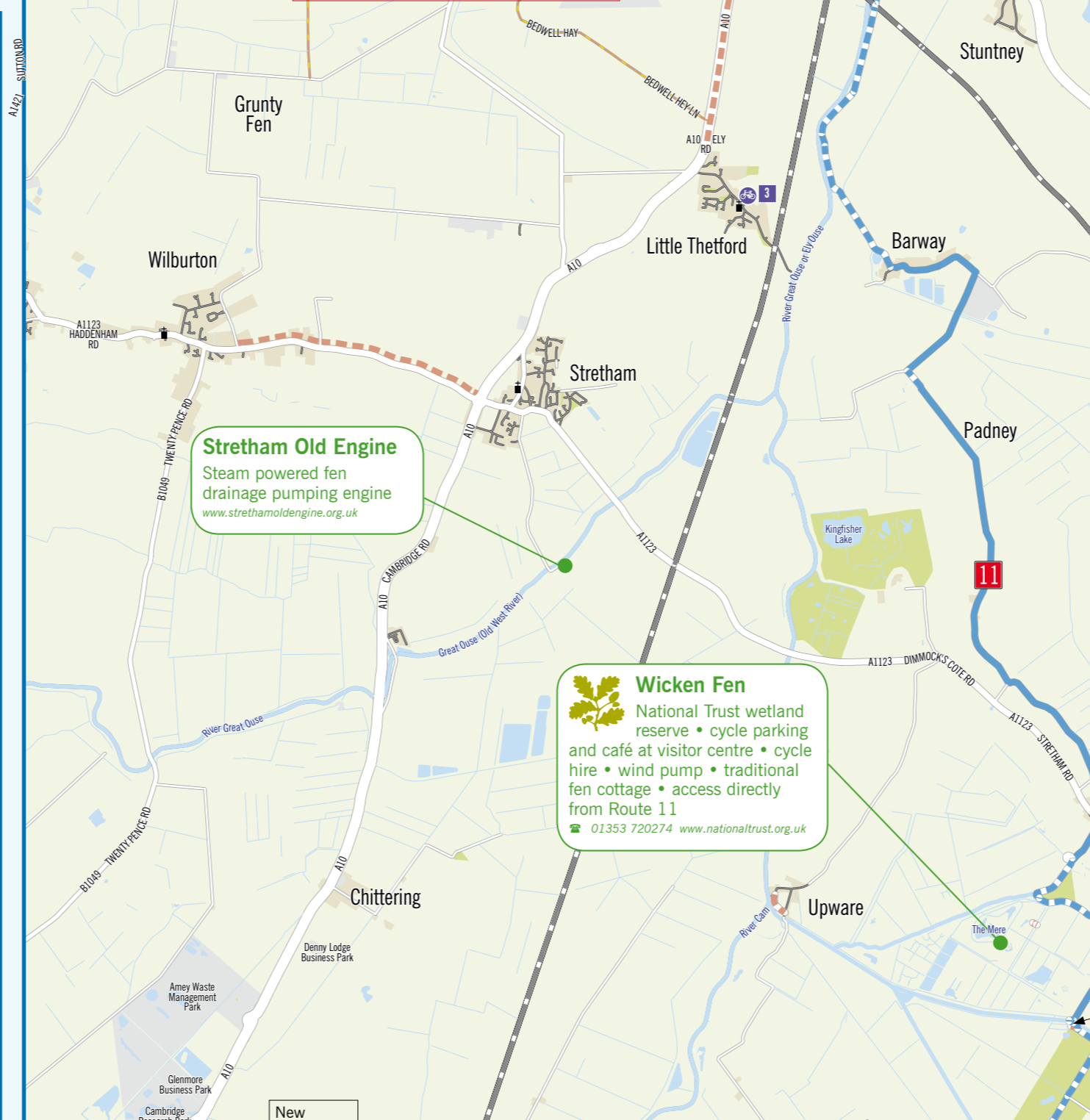
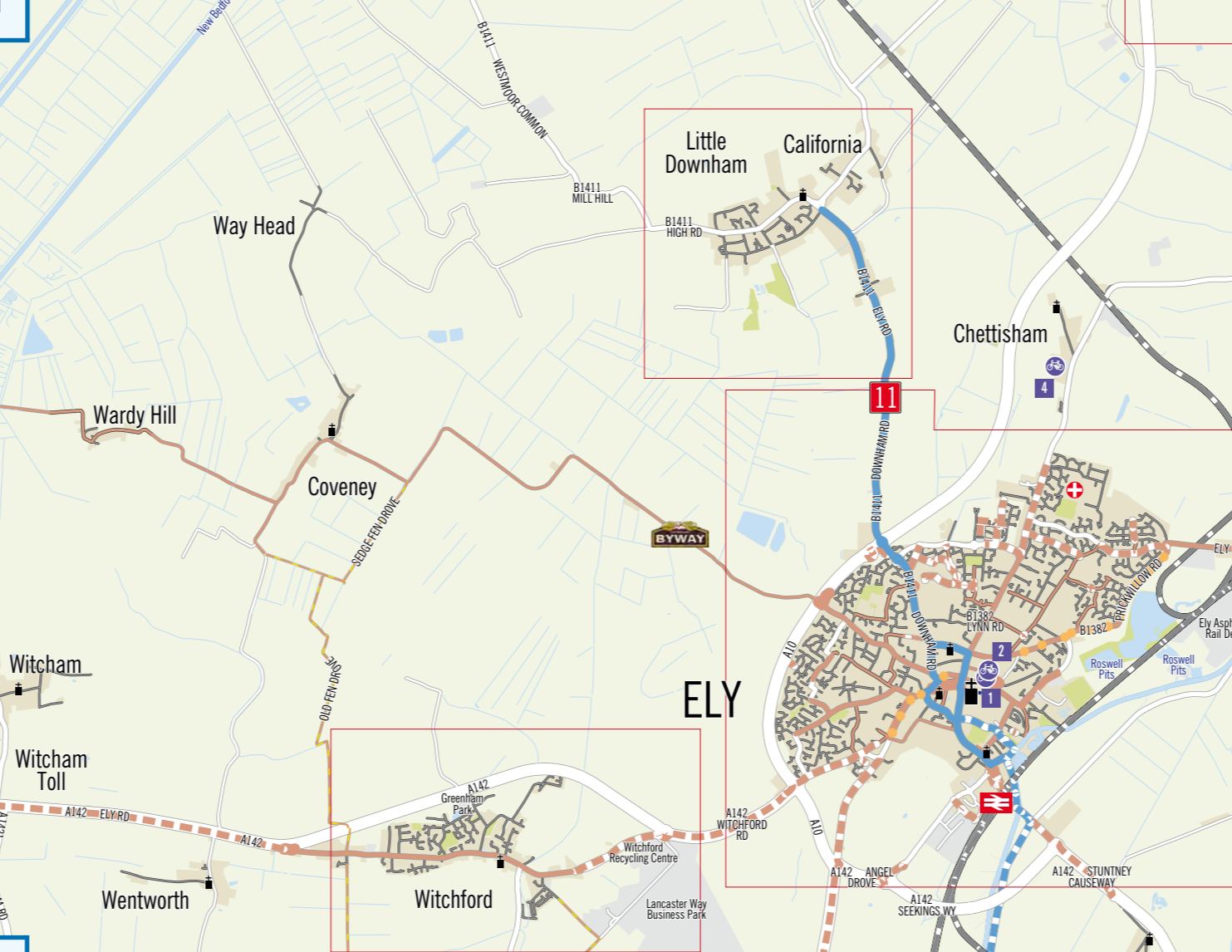
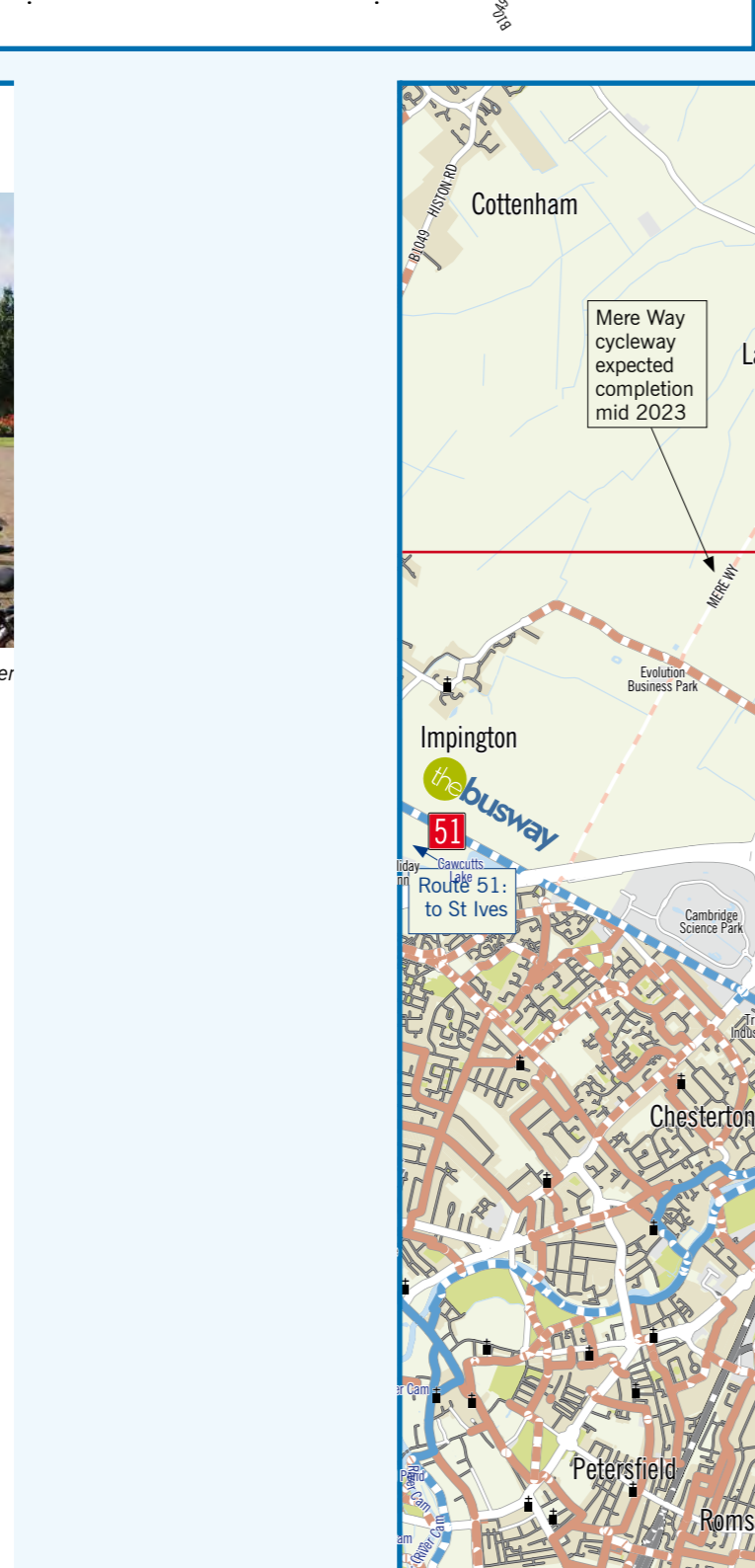


The Cathedral, the *Ship of the Fens*, is Ely's most prominent feature. In fact, the town grew up because of the cathedral. The present church, a wonderful example of Romanesque and Gothic architecture, dates from 1083. It is on the site of an earlier monastery, founded by St Etheldreda in 673, whose cult derives from the supposed preservation of her body, and a later Benedictine order. Ely Museum, just around the corner, is housed in the old Bishop's Gaol dating to the 13th century and features the prison cells among its exhibits. More generally it covers the area's natural history and pre-history through Roman and Saxon periods to modern times. Ely Tourist Information Centre: 01353 662042 www.visitely.org.uk



The New Bedford River and Ouse Washes near Pymoor

Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector during England's brief period as a republic, has many associations with the area. He lived with his family in Ely for ten years from 1636. His home close to the cathedral (his only surviving residence other than Hampton Court) now illustrates 17th century domestic life and Cromwell's connections to the Fens. It also houses the city's Tourist Information Centre. Ely Museum, just around the corner, is housed in the old Bishop's Gaol dating to the 13th century and features the prison cells among its exhibits. More generally it covers the area's natural history and pre-history through Roman and Saxon periods to modern times. Ely Tourist Information Centre: 01353 662042 www.visitely.org.uk



Key

- National Cycle Network 51
- on-road
- separate from traffic
- other main links
- other quiet road
- unsurfaced bridleway/byway (usable when dry)
- particular busy junction: take care
- water tower
- church
- Littleport
- Wicken
- Woolditch
- Woolditch
- Woolditch

larger scale maps on reverse

Stetchworth railway and station

