

THE Rochester TRAIL



Key

9.5km/6miles
Allow 2.5 - 3hrs

2km/1.2 miles



Contents

| | Page |
|---|-------|
| The Trail | 5 |
| 1 Rochester Castle | 7 |
| 2 Rochester Cathedral | 7 |
| 3 The Vines Garden | 8-9 |
| Route Accessibility Map | 10 |
| 4 King's School | 12 |
| 5 Watts Almshouses | 13 |
| 6 Watts Meadow | 14-15 |
| 7 Priestfields Recreation Ground | 16 |
| 8 Fort Borstal | 16 |
| 9 Borstal Recreation Ground | 16 |
| 10 Baty's Marsh | 17 |
| 11 Esplanade Gardens | 18 |
| 12 Churchfields | 18 |
| 13 The Short Brothers | 19 |
| 14 The Short Brothers | 19 |
| 15 St Margaret's Church | 20 |
| 16 Fort Clarence | 20 |



View from above Rochester High Street, looking South towards Borstal

The Trail

The Rochester Greenspaces Trail follows a route from the heart of Rochester, southwards through Rochester to Borstal.

Rochester has exceptionally rich heritage. In the centre, Rochester Cathedral and Castle are nationally important, with many other historic buildings and notable figures associated with the area. However, the layers of Rochester's heritage extend beyond the well-known centre.

There is a legacy of a defensive heritage, with forts located on hill tops overlooking the river. There is pioneering industry, including the Short Brothers seaplane factory. The River Medway was once a bustling location of cement works, saltings, quarries and boat building, forming part of the cultural heritage of Medway. This industry has long gone, but nature is making its home, for example at Baty's Marsh Local Nature Reserve, one of the few remaining salt marshes in the urban Medway estuary.

As well linking this heritage, the trail passes through the many greenspace sites of Rochester. These are the 'green heart' of Rochester and each has a different character. Four of these greenspaces have active Friends groups which are run by volunteers. Find out more by following this trail.

The main trail links the centre of Rochester to the southern part of Rochester and is 6 miles (9.5 km) long. You should allow 2.5 to 3 hours to follow the whole route. This route is marked by green waymarkers.

There is also a linking route, which is marked by blue waymarkers. This linking route is 1.2 miles (2 km) long.

Following the northern part of the green route and the blue route is 5 km/3miles. You should allow 1.5 hours

Following the southern part of the green route and the blue route is 8.5km/5.3 miles. You should allow 2 to 2.5 hours.



View from St Margaret's Church looking north west towards Strood

Accessibility

The southern area of Rochester is on higher ground than the centre of Rochester and the River Medway. This means that there are some hills on the route.

The route mainly follows surfaced paths. The path through Watts Meadow may get muddy in the winter (south of point 6). There are no steps on the route.

There are benches around the route, the map on the previous page shows where they are located.

Please see map on pages 10 and 11.

Parking

There is free parking at Priestfields Recreation Area. There is one disabled parking space.

There are 13 chargeable car parks in Rochester. The closest car parks to the route are:

Boley Hill – Short Stay up to 5 hours.

No disabled spaces. ME1 1SN

Union Street – long stay up to 18 hours.

No disabled spaces. ME1 1XS

There is also metered parking along **The Esplanade**.

Disabled parking spaces

The Kings Head car park is a Blue Badge holder only car park with six disabled spaces. Epaul Lane ME1 1SN.

The Cathedral short stay car park also has disabled spaces. Northgate ME1 1LX

Visit medway.gov.uk/Parking to find a full list of carparking facilities in Medway.



From the Castle to the Cathedral

- 1. Rochester Castle.** Strategically placed astride the London Road, guarding an important crossing of the River Medway, this imposing fortress has a complex history of destruction and rebuilding. Today it stands as a proud reminder of the history of Rochester, along with the cathedral and cobbled streets.
- 2. Rochester Cathedral** is England's second oldest, founded by Bishop Justus. The present building dates back to the work of the French monk Bishop Gundulf in 1083.

St John Fisher was Bishop of Rochester from 1504 to 1525. He wrote books of polemical theology, as well as devotional tracts, which influenced the religious debates even on the Continent. Many judged him as one of the greatest theologians of the time.



The Rochester Trail logo is inspired by the Rochester Catalpa tree, situated just in front of Rochester Cathedral. It is estimated to be 140-150 years old and could now be one of the oldest living Catalpa trees in the country.



Through to The Vines Garden

3. The Vines Gardens is a small park with a rich cultural history. With an impressive avenue of mature London Plane trees, bordering a central path known as the Broad Walk the park is a shady and tranquil spot in the centre of Rochester.

The Grade II listed gardens were used by monks in the medieval times to cultivate vines and there are interpretation panels within the park with further information about the park's origins. The park has a number of bat, bird and bee boxes, and the mature shrubberies and colourful herbaceous planting supports other wildlife.



Friends of The Vines



The Friends of The Vines is a community group dedicated to caring for and continuing the improvements in The Vines, a small Grade II listed park in the centre of Rochester. The group ensures that The Vines is a pleasant area to visit for both the local community and visitors to Rochester. The Friends Group works in partnership with Medway Council and Kent Wildlife Trust to support planting schemes, and also arranges regular events such as the Annual fundraising Cherry Picnic, Bug Days for children, and Bat events. The group has approximately 90 members, who participate in occasional planting days, and are welcomed to events in The Vines. The Friends of The Vines liaises closely with the local

primary school, St Margaret's at Troy Town, holding an annual bulb planting day and involving school children in events in the park. The junior school recently held its sports day in The Vines.

For information about the Friends of The Vines, email:

friendsofthevines@hotmail.co.uk

New members are always welcome.



Key

6.5km/4 miles

3km/1.9 miles

2km/1.2 miles

9.5km/6 miles
Allow 2.5 - 3hrs

5km/3 miles
Allow 1.5hrs

8.5km/5.3 miles
Allow 2 - 2.5hrs

Alternative route

Incline

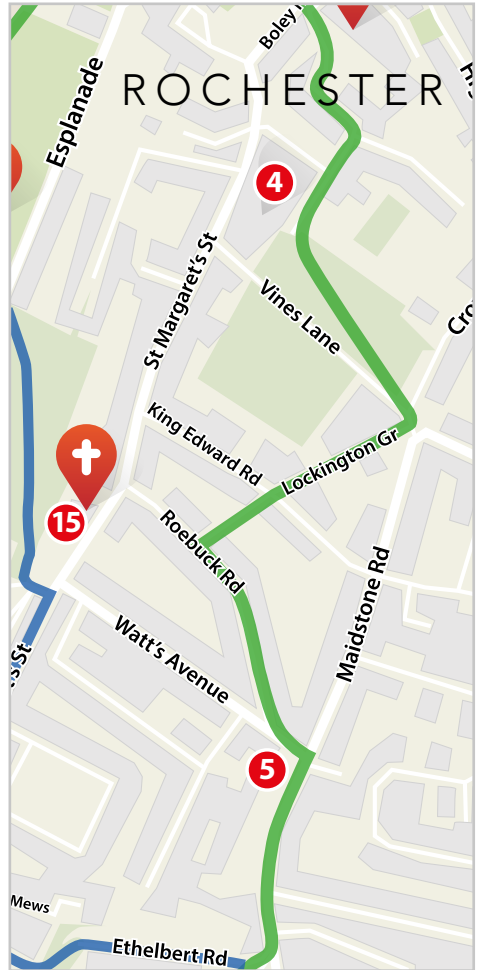
Seat



Kings School to the Alms Houses

4. King's School Rochester is the second oldest school in the world. The school is nestled in the Cathedral precinct of historic Rochester and in the shadow of Rochester castle. The name of 'King's School' dates from the Reformation, when, in 1542, King Henry VIII reconstituted the Cathedral Foundation after the dissolution of the Monastery, although there has been a school on the Cathedral site since 604 AD.
5. The Almshouses at Maidstone Road were built by the Richard Watts Charity in 1857. Richard Watts (1529–1579) was a successful businessman and Member of Parliament for Rochester in the 1570s. He supplied rations for the English Navy and supervised the construction of Upnor Castle. The Richard Watts Charity was set up in the will of Richard Watts in 1579. The Richard Watts Charity trustees purchased the site in Maidstone Road, Rochester for £1,412 on which to build new almshouses. The site was formally a hospital, a pest house (a place for people with infectious diseases) and a prison for prisoners of war.

From here you can continue on the Green route down the public footpath or turn on to the blue route down Ethelbert Road past Watts Meadow.



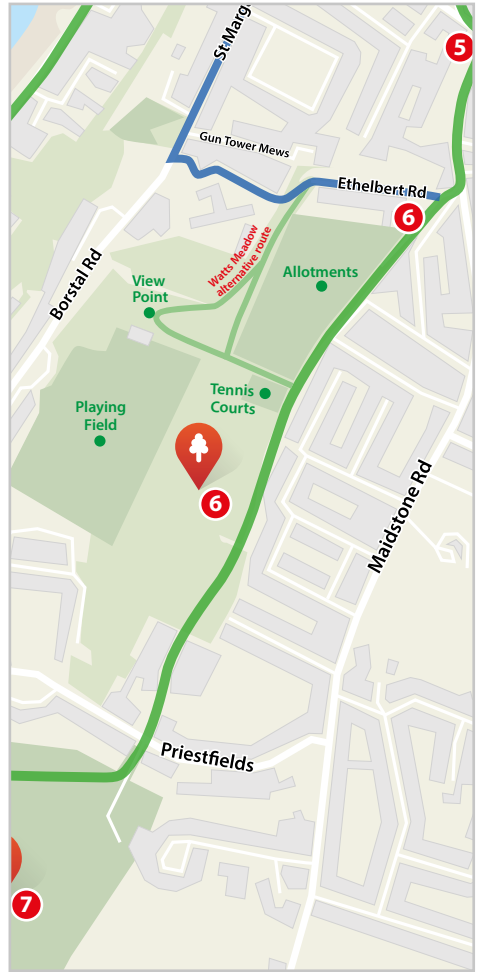
Alms Houses

Follow the trail to Watts Meadow

6. Watts Meadow was originally farmland. The woods grew when part of the site stopped being used as allotments - so none of the trees are more than 50 years old. It has always been popular with locals for walking, as it is one of the last remaining accessible wild spaces in Rochester.

Despite being close to some relatively busy roads, you can sit and hear birdsong, and the distant chiming of the clock on the Foord Almshouses. Flying overhead might be the chunky shape of a buzzard, or maybe even a red kite - increasingly seen flying over Medway. And in the evenings, listen for the resident tawny owls hooting.

The wide variety of flowers attract many butterflies and other insects. You can regularly see commas, red admirals, brimstone, speckled wood and both common and holly blue butterflies. Meadow browns, gatekeepers and ringlets can often be seen fluttering in the open grassy areas. And the jersey tiger moth is also a frequent visitor.



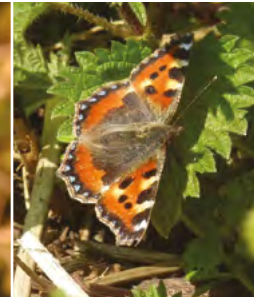
Brimstone Butterfly



Speckled Wood Butterfly



Comma Butterfly



Tortoiseshell Butterfly

Watts Meadow

A worthwhile detour

While this trail passes through the main registered footpath through Watts Meadow - Pat Wilson Way, it is worth a detour up the steep path by the tennis courts, as from the open space in the top part of the site, on a clear day you can see the naval memorial on the Great Lines, and the sloping roofs of the slips in Chatham.



Friends of Watts Meadow

The Friends of Watts Meadow work in support of Medway Council, who own the land. The aims of the Friends of Watts Meadow are to sustain the amenity of Watts Meadow for the benefit of the people of Rochester and to conserve its natural environment. Maintaining the balance between woodland and open space and between people and wildlife demands constant management - more volunteers are always most welcome.



Check out our website:
friendsofwattsmeadow.wordpress.com
or find us on Facebook.

Trees, plants and flowers

While the woods are a home for native British plants and trees, there are some exotic species - either planted deliberately a while ago, or escapees from local gardens. Look out for the catalpa tree - a smaller relative of the one which grows outside Rochester Cathedral. Also in the woods you will find oak, sycamore, ash, poplar, rowan, maple, larch, holly and many other types of tree. In the spring, look out for clumps of bluebells, primroses, cowslips, snowdrops and daffodils; later in the summer, large clumps of purple comfrey, buttercups, herb robert, white campion and poppies. Look closely to find clumps of purple cyclamen later in the year.

Food for free!

Watts Meadow is also great for foraging - bring a bag to pick blackberries in the autumn, plus hazelnuts, sloes and elderberries. You might also find walnuts, and there are many cherry trees, plus at least one apple tree.



Catalpa flowers



Cowslips



Sloe



*Photos above by
kind permission of
Julia Chandler
and Neil Stewart*

Priestfields to Borstal Recreation Ground

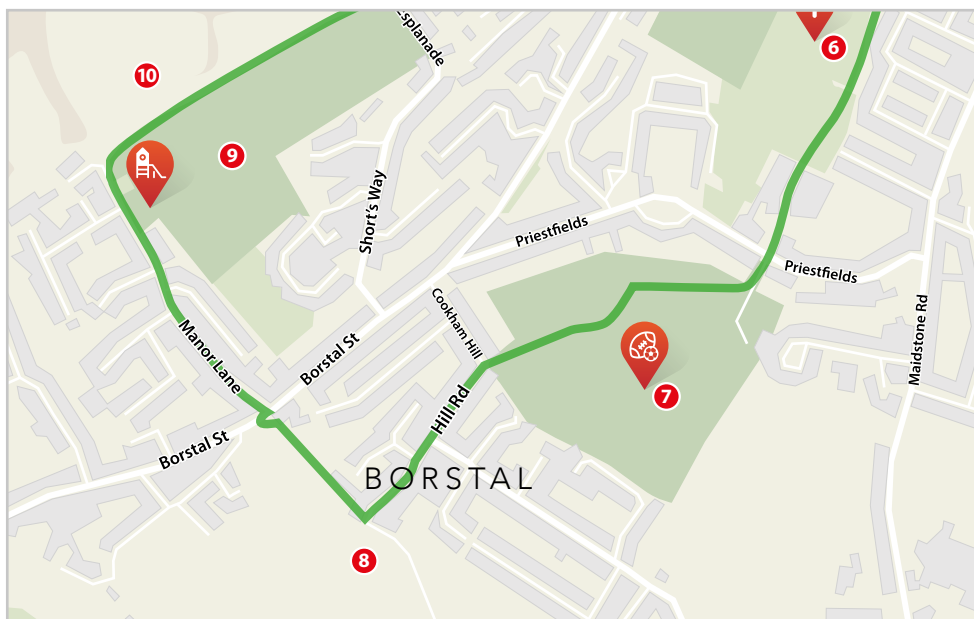
7. The land at Priestfields was once part of the Rochester Cathedral lands, where a college of secular priests lived who served Rochester Cathedral in the middle ages.

At the end of Hill Road, on the left is Fort Borstal, although it is not visible from the road. From this spot there is a commanding view over the River Medway below, making this an ideal location for a fort.

8. Fort Borstal was built as an after-thought from the 1859 Royal Commission on the Defence of the United Kingdom, by convict labour. Construction started in 1875 but was

suspended in 1885. The fort was completed around 1895. It was one of a series of four forts that ringed Chatham. Fort Borstal was designed to hold the high ground southwest of Rochester. It is of polygonal design and was not originally armed.

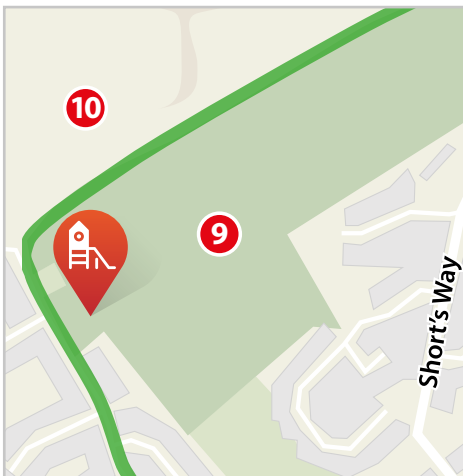
9. Borstal Recreation Ground is situated at the bottom of Manor Lane. There is a small children's play area with equipment for both younger and older children. There are also several picnic tables inside the park fence and outside the fence on the playing field too, this is a great stop for a picnic.



Baty's Marsh

10. Baty's Marsh is located between Borstal Recreation Ground and the River Medway. It is designated as a Local Nature Reserve due to its importance for wildlife. It is one of the few remaining salt marsh areas this far up the Medway estuary. This is a wonderful habitat for local wildlife; the variety of plants, butterflies and other insects here is brilliant. The unlaid path through the marsh is lined with brambles, buddleia and other shrubs giving plenty of shade and hidey-holes for dogs and children to explore.

There are several benches along the path that look out on to the River Medway for people to take time out and relax, sit and watch the boats move along the river. From here you can continue to follow the trail along the River Medway, to Esplanade Park.



Friends of Baty's Marsh

Welcome to Baty's Marsh and the Borstal Recreation Grounds. The area of the playing fields and associated tree and scrub boundaries measure approximately 16 Acres.

Friends of Borstal Open Spaces (BOSS) evolved out of several earlier groups, who had been protecting and looking after these open spaces and the marsh for many years. In 2006 we were joined by the late Bob Wade who set us up as the first friends group.

The land was bequeathed to the people of Borstal by Short Brothers (the flying boat builders on the Esplanade) to be kept as public open space for recreation.

Our activities include a clean-up of Baty's Marsh each spring (when the tide allows), and regular litter picks of the fields, footpath and surrounding undergrowth, as well as undergrowth clearing in the autumn. We have installed several viewing areas over the years which also need maintaining.

Volunteers always welcome (no previous experience required).

Esplanade Gardens and Churchfields Gardens

11. The Esplanade is surrounded by lots of things to see, including the castle and bridge, the River Medway and a wide variety of wildlife, plants and trees. Esplanade Gardens provide valuable public open space including a riverside walk. It is surrounded by lots of things to see, including the castle and bridge, the River Medway and a wide variety of wildlife, plants and trees.

The Gardens' shoreline was previously home to river-dependent commercial and industrial organisations such as barge builders and marine engineers. The Gardens' artistic interest lies in their position and open character, offering wide and varied scenic views over the river, up to the Castle, Cathedral and Satis House (associated with Charles Dickens) and south to St. Margaret's church.

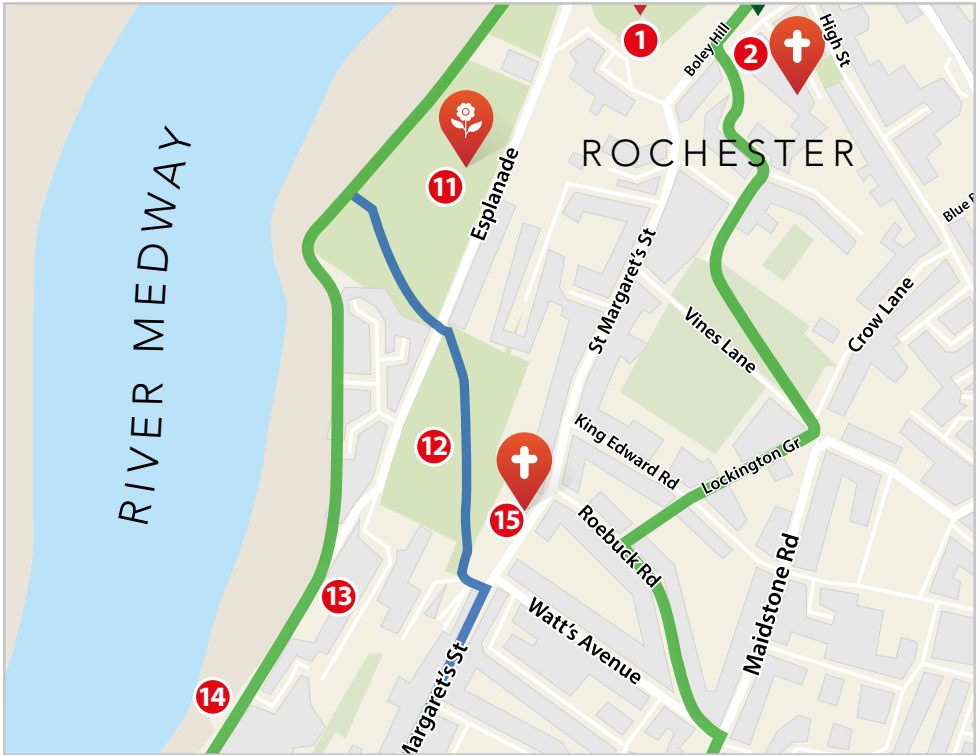
The Voluntary group, Friends of Rochester Churchfields & Esplanade (FoRCE) have created a beautiful Sensory Garden here. The gardens have been designed to celebrate the memory of Medway's own women's suffrage pioneer Vera Conway Gordon, who marched The Great Pilgrimage of 1913 and lived all her life here in the one of the houses overlooking the Esplanade. They have created the sensory garden in honour of her work.

12. Churchfields Gardens is a green space on a slope overlooking the river. Its situation on a hillside above the river offers one of the best panoramic and scenic views in Rochester, in particular for watching sunsets and sledging in the snow. In the past it has been known as Backfields, Willis Fields and Church Mead, and was once pasture land for cattle.

Churchfields was acquired through public philanthropy, being donated to the City of Rochester in 1906 by Councillor Charles Willis, later to become an Alderman, Mayor and Freeman of the City.

13. Short Brothers, famous for their 'Sunderland Flying Boat', started off as a seaplane manufacturer on the Isle of Sheppey, but later moved to Rochester in 1913 due to the need for larger facilities. Here they expanded considerably over a 3.4 hectare site, before the site was redeveloped for housing.

14. There are three jetties from the Short Brothers factory that are still visible along the foreshore. An early wooden jetty, a subsequent metal jetty and a later concrete jetty and apron that now houses the Rochester Rowing Club. These jetties were used to lower seaplanes into the water.



*The Short Brothers Jetty,
courtesy of John Stroud*

Friends of Rochester Churchfields and Esplanade (FoRCE)

FoRCE helps to protect, conserve and enhance the green spaces and river walks of Rochester Esplanade and Churchfields for the good of our community. We bring together volunteers who help improve the experience of all users of the park – our wildlife, plants and even we humans too. Anyone can come along to volunteer for our activities. Dates and more information can be found on our nearby noticeboard or website esplanadefriends.org.uk

No time to do the main route? Cut through via the blue link to Churchfields Gardens

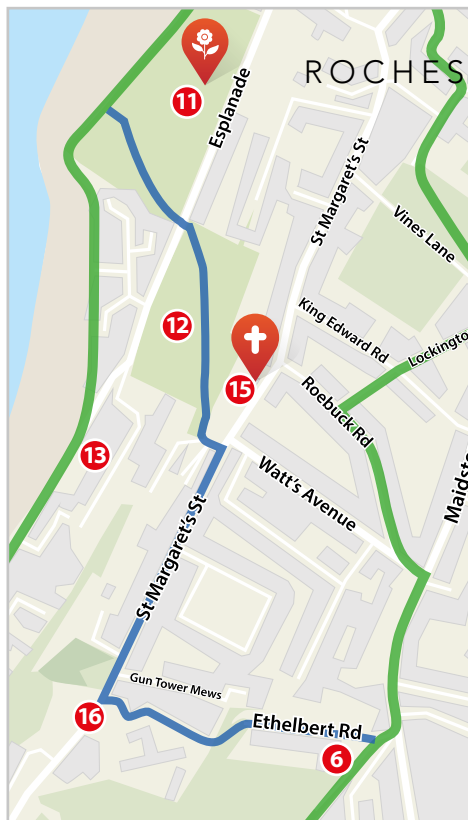


Follow the signs for the blue route through Esplanade Gardens and Churchfields Gardens, or from Ethelbert Road, near Watts Meadow. The Rochester Trail link route logo will have a blue circle and will appear on footpath signs and waymarkers along the route.

At this point you can follow the trail along the blue route through to Churchfields Gardens.

15. At the top of Churchfields you will see St Margaret's Church, Rochester. The first record of St Margaret's is in an 1108 charter of Bishop Gundulf. In 1540, during the Reformation, the church was surrendered into the King's hands and subsequently settled on the newly founded Dean and Chapter of Rochester. There are wonderful views looking over the Medway from here.

16. At this point you will see Fort Clarence, an imposing building constructed to stop invaders gaining access to the River Medway. Work on Fort Clarence started in about 1808 and was completed within four years.



St Margaret's Church