

The Valley Park Trail



*“Ancient, magnificent woodland weaves
its way across the landscape*

The housing nestles amongst them...” (Angela Breckenridge)

“I ploughed my way through the newly formed half-built roads to measure the houses and footpaths [...] that surrounded the woods and fields that now form part of our countryside playground.”

(Simon Hill, Valley Park surveyor, 1980s)

The Valley Park Trail provides an opportunity to explore the area – on foot, by bike or even from the comfort of your armchair.

The complete route is around four miles (6km) but can be split into smaller sections.

In late 2024, locals were invited to contribute personal written pieces about Valley Park locations. By following the trail, you can learn a little about the places that inspired their creativity. The trail will take you from one end of Valley Park to the other, from the oldest to the most modern parts and with glimpses of a time between. You will discover history and imagination and come to appreciate how strong the sense of place is for the people of Valley Park.

1. Chandler’s Ford Railway Station

The line between Romsey and Eastleigh opened in 1847 but Chandler’s Ford station closed to passengers in 1969. Following the development of Valley Park, calls to reopen began in 1999. A new station building was erected and the station was officially opened by local celebrity gardener Charlie Dimmock in 2003. To date, Chandler’s Ford is the only station in Hampshire to reopen to passengers.

2. Pilgrims Close

The first phase of housing was begun in 1984 east of School Lane, soon followed by areas near Pilgrims Close. A row of shops (including Misselbrook and Weston where Tesco now is), and a pub formed part of the development. The Cleveland Bay is still very much central to the community, hosting music festivals and seasonal fairs. St Francis Primary School and St Francis Church were both opened in 1991. The school was extended in 1995 as more and more families made Valley Park their home. The church runs many weekly activities for all ages. Community facilities were further enhanced in 1992 when the community centre opened.



Valley Park Community Centre, 1992

I remember the friend who drove me there along the half-finished Knightwood Road.

I remember the meeting room – fresh paint and fold out tables dappled with sunlight.

I remember the people discussing proposals – upbeat and positive with little disagreement.

I remember the place feeling like a community – one I’d love to be part of.

Lorraine Cooke

3. Knightwood Leisure Centre

The Leisure Centre was built in 2000. Places For People took over managing the centre from Valley Leisure in 2017. A thriving community café opened within the centre in 2014 and the site now comprises outdoor pitches, tennis courts, a BMX course and skatepark as well as a preschool, outdoor gym and children’s playground. Near the leisure centre, just off Blencowe Drive, is the oldest remaining building in Valley Park, Zionhill Farmhouse. It appears on maps from 1826 and is a private residence.

4. Zionshill Copse

Next to the Leisure Centre is Zionshill Copse, one of five ancient woodlands in Valley Park, dating back to at least 1600. Managed by Test Valley Borough Council, the woodlands are maintained to conserve habitats and species. Evidence of settlement as far back as the middle Bronze Age have been found here and an Iron Age Fort was discovered in 1999. For several years, an annual Woodfair was held in Zionshill Copse, showcasing traditional crafts and providing a fun day out. Step inside the copse and look for Chris Bain's wooden sculpture the 'Green Man' or Mr and Mrs Tree and son. Jeanette has been imagining their voices for nearly 60 years!



Mr. Mrs. Tree & Son

Mrs. Tree's branch is her long nose positioned over her husband's head. I hear her say,

"I am of long nose because I am filled with unfailing love/faithfulness for God and the earth."

She has a white knot for her eye, and a downward smile over her husband's head.

Mr. Tree looks outwards, not to the side like his wife. He has googly burls for eyes to show he is friendly, open and observant. His burl button nose blesses him with an adorable quality, with a faint trace of a walrus moustache in his trunk folds.

I hear this couple tell me to be reassured, that they are not sad and their downturned lips are to show empathy and their deep connection to all living things.

The son lives under Mr. Tree's mouth. His ivy hair cascades around his slender face. His eyes gaze down upon the earth. An aquiline nose, chevron moustache. Thin lips, melancholy smile.

I hear the son say, "I have compassion for you and like my parents a deep connection to all living things."

Together, I hear them say:

"Stop, be still."

"Take deep breaths."

"We speak as a gentle whisper."

"We envelop you with everlasting love."

"You are not alone."

"The seasons of life are not always easy but like us learn to see beauty, peace in every season."

"If we can withstand the test of time then so can you."

"So breathe in again and as you breathe out, receive our gifts without payment, as we fill the air with hope."

Jeanette Deadman

5. Badger Bench

In 2024 Valley Park was awarded a Green Flag award for its woodland and greenspaces for a 15th consecutive year. The woodlands are maintained by volunteers from Friends of the Park. The badger bench, carved by Chris Bain, recognises the hard work done by this group. Sit and admire the view, or listen out for birdsong, then follow the path north until you reach the balancing pond. Watch or count the ducks, then rejoin Skys Wood Road.



Travel Companions

*We rub the nose of the badger for good luck
(there's frost on his little carved face this December morning)
every time we embark on our woodland adventure.*

*It's an unspoken promise that
we'll be nothing but gentle to the creatures
that come waddling out in our path.*

*The only ones brave enough so far
have been the ducks
quacking along on their mandarin webbed feet.*

We'd like to follow them to their hideaway, but we must keep to the trail

GL

6. Brendoncare, Knightwood Mews

Building work started in autumn 2005 and the facility of 30 apartments and 7 bungalows was officially opened in February 2007 by Sophie, Countess of Wessex.

In spring, look out for some of the 24000 daffodils planted by local school children and local sporting stars. In summer, the Parish Council's multi-award winning floral displays look amazing along Knightwood Road and in autumn, remembrance poppies are attached to the lampposts.

7. Knightwood Primary School

The school started life with 83 pupils in temporary buildings in September 1998. The permanent building was officially opened in September 2000 by 25 former pupils who had never had the chance to use this award-winning architecturally elegant building. An extension was added in 2004 and the school now has space for up to 400 pupils.

Knightwood Primary
The roof
Arcs down the sky
Like a cupped ear, listening
To chattering children's voices
Below.
Lorraine Cooke



8. Clothier's Copse

Valley Park is built on land formerly owned by the Chamberlaynes of Cranbury Park. Houses were built on fields mostly used as pasture with some arable. Large areas of ancient woodland as well as smaller ones like Clothier's Copse off Katrine Crescent, remain around and between the built environment.

Sturdy woven base
My rugged veins growing tall
Reaching up and out
Jared



9. Baddesley Bridge

This forms the northern edge of Valley Park. From here you can see into the upper part of Flexford Nature Reserve with lovely walks along the banks of the Monks Brook and across the fields into North Millers Dale.

The Monks Brook is always a pleasure to measure the seasons with the flooded banks in winter to the trickle of water during high summer.

Simon Hill

10. Taw/Tweed Greenspace

Houses were built to the east of Knightwood Road between 1986-89, many named after UK rivers. The area was designed to incorporate walking/cycling paths and plenty of greenspaces and play areas including the Taw/Tweed recreation area. Play equipment was upgraded in 2024 and access points to the Monks Brook for dogs were improved.

Children soaring, swinging and climbing, reaching to try and get higher.
Adults talking, sitting and walking, rocking the babies to sleep.
Dogs chasing after leaves blowing and the river flowing next to it all.
Emily



11. Knightwood

The largest of the separate areas of ancient woodland within Valley Park. It was purchased by the Woodland Trust, along with Clothier's Copse, Titlark Copse and Small Profits in 1988. The preservation of the habitats found here is important as ancient woodland accounts for only 2.4% of the area of the UK.

The Magic is in the trees
Ancient, magnificent woodland weaves
its way across the landscape
The housing nestles amongst them
Heavy and fragrant in green
Dark and menacing stripped
Breathe in the green or walk in darkness
to listen to the invisible life around you
The magic is in the trees.
Angela Breckenridge

12. Rev Wilbert Awdry Bridge

Prior to 2017, the only way to cross the railway here was via an unguarded level crossing. Now a magnificent metal structure provides a safe way to cross the line. It is named for the author of the ever-popular Thomas the Tank Engine books who was born in nearby Ampfield where his father was vicar.



Railway line with local trains
Access across the Monks Brook stream
Impressive Structure
Link between Valley Park and Chandler's Ford
Walkways around Valley Park
Appreciate nature
Yellowing leaves in Autumn.

Birdsong in the trees
River trickling
Invigorating walks on cold winter days
Dogs dipping in and out of streams
Green paintwork
Exercise.

Anonymous

Getting there

By Car: Free parking is available at Chandler's Ford Railway Station, Valley Park Community Centre, Knightwood Leisure Centre and Glendowan Road car park.

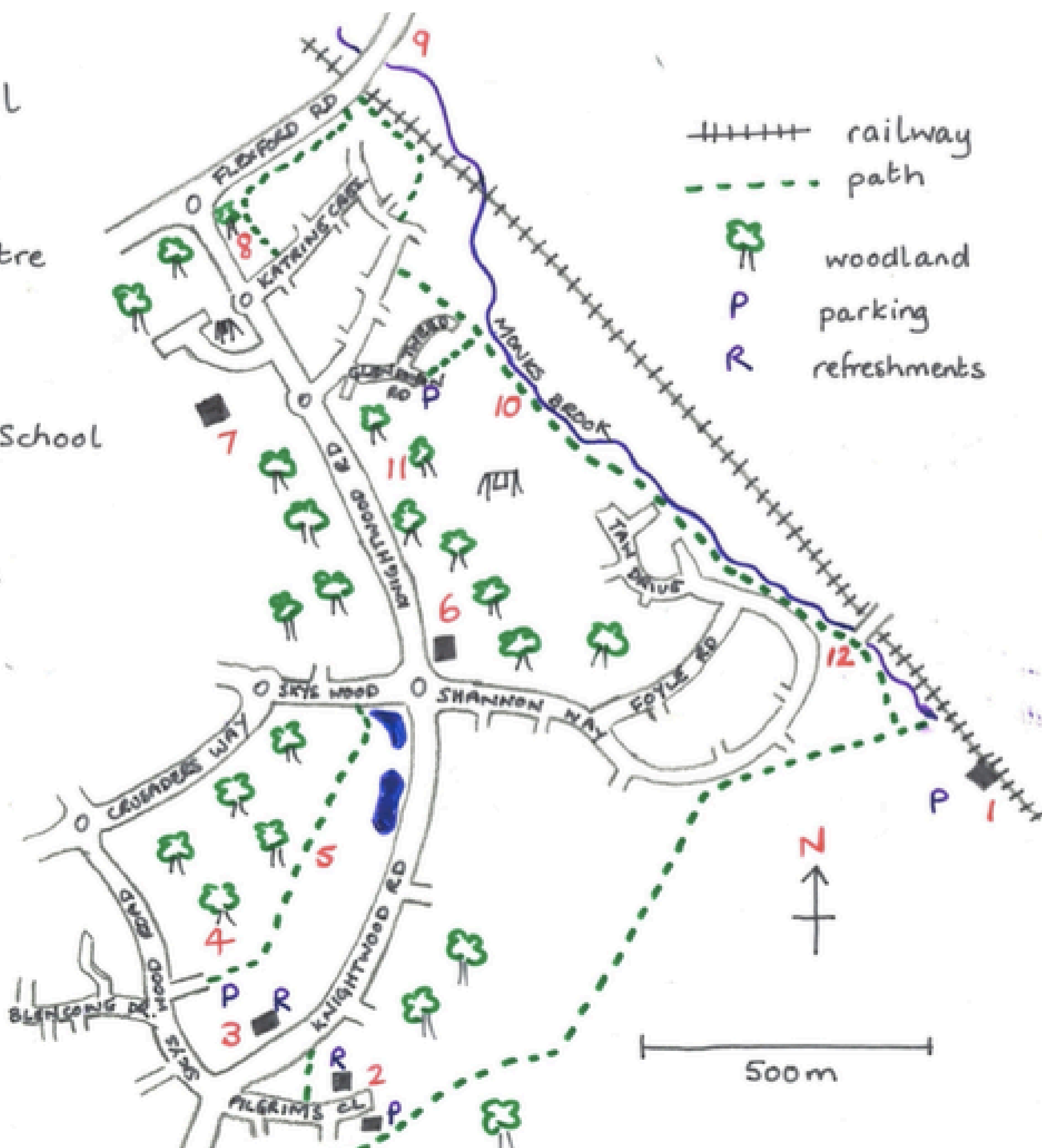
By Train: to Chandler's Ford from Romsey, Eastleigh or Southampton

By Bus: Bluestar 1 to Chandler's Ford station

Refreshments/toilets: The Cleveland Bay, Pilgrims Close or Knightwood Leisure Centre

The Valley Park Trail

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This leaflet was created by Lorraine Cooke, with the help of the Valley Park Community. Copies are available locally. A digital version can be found on the Valley Park Parish Council website valleyparkparish.org