

# Friends of Norton Common

Established in 2006, the Friends of Norton Common help to look after the common by working in partnership with North Hertfordshire District Council and the Countryside Management Service. We are mainly local people who discuss, plan and carry out improvements at the common.

We have an active committee and hold an annual public open forum. We complete wildlife surveys and organise monthly work parties. All ages and experience levels welcome. Activities have included: path improvements, installing benches, cleaning out the brook, managing wildflower grassland and surveying butterflies and orchids.

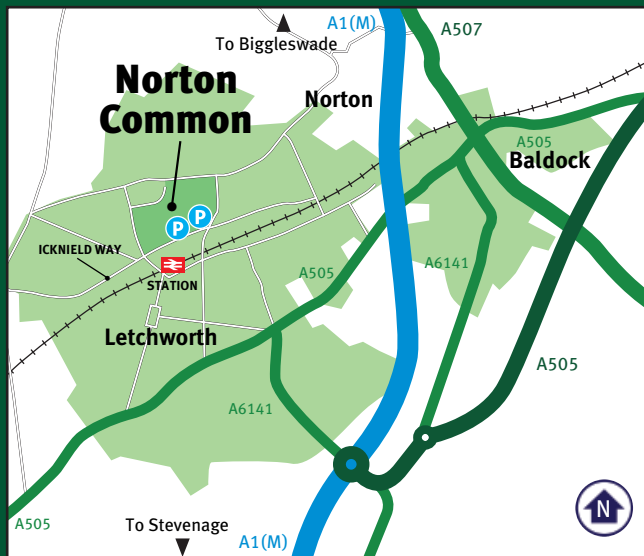
For further details visit [www.friendsofnortoncommon.info](http://www.friendsofnortoncommon.info) or contact [team@friendsofnortoncommon.info](mailto:team@friendsofnortoncommon.info)

## Facilities at Norton Common:

In addition to the Local Nature Reserve there are many other facilities:

Facilities	Opening times / cost
Car parks	Free, open 24hrs /day. Limit: 4 hours
1930s lido with café, 50m heated pool & children's pool	Open between last Bank Holiday in May and early September, see website for times. Charge for entry
Senior and junior tennis courts	Free, no pre-booking required
All-weather, multi-use games area (MUGA)	Free, no pre-booking required
Children's play areas	Free
Skate board park	Free
2 Bowling Greens and Bowls pavilion	Open to members April to Sept. Spectators welcome.

## How to get there



Produced by Fitzpatrick Woolmer Creative - 01634 711 771

**By Road:** Norton Common is located on Icknield Way, Letchworth. Parking is available next to the swimming pool and the bowls pavilion.

**By Public Transport:** The site is a short walk from Letchworth railway station. For travel details contact Intalink Traveline on 0300 123 4050 or [www.intalink.org.uk](http://www.intalink.org.uk)

Norton Common Local Nature Reserve is owned and managed by North Hertfordshire District Council. The Council seeks to balance the need for sustainable development with the protection of the environment. Contact us at:

**[www.north-herts.gov.uk](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk)**  
**Tel: 01462 474000**

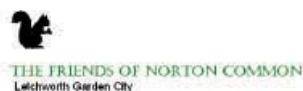
The Countryside Management Service (CMS) works with communities in Hertfordshire to help them care for and enjoy the environment. For more information contact us at:  
[www.hertsdirect.org/CMS](http://www.hertsdirect.org/CMS) Tel: 01992 588433

# Local Nature Reserve

Norton Common  
 LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY



Discover the countryside  
 in the heart of Letchworth



## Welcome to Norton Common

Norton Common is a Local Nature Reserve in the heart of Letchworth. Here you can explore woodland alive with birds, roam through grassland full of wild flowers, find mineral-rich springs feeding the Pix Brook and see traces of ancient farming.

Many paths cross the Common, some of them surfaced. The map will help you find your way around. We hope you enjoy your visit.

## What can you see?

Look out for **muntjac**, a small deer introduced to this country from China. You can sometimes hear their loud bark. They are usually seen in ones or twos, never in herds. You can tell the males from their short antlers.

Amongst the many grey squirrels you will notice some that are black. They are not a different species – they just have high levels of the black pigment ‘melanin’ in their fur. Although rare across Britain, **black squirrels** are increasingly common in this area and, like their grey relations, do considerable damage to the trees.



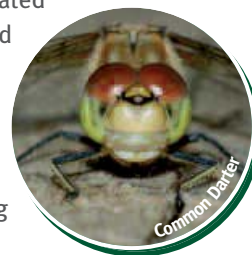
The **springs** feeding the Pix Brook are formed as water seeps over an impermeable layer of boulder clay. Look for the orangey-brown staining in the water, caused by natural iron and calcium salts dissolved as it filters through the ground.

The springs have created an area of marshy grassland, a rare and valuable habitat for plants and animals. In summer, look for the pink spikes of **southern marsh orchid**, the blue of **meadow cranesbill** and darting **dragonflies**. Smell the wild mint along the path.

**Cowslips** adorn the old meadow north of the swimming pool in spring. Later on, look for the yellow tufts of sweet-scented **lady's bedstraw**, the dainty blue **harebell** and **wild carrot** whose leaves really do smell of carrot.



Many insects and butterflies, including **orange tip** and **skippers**, thrive amongst the wild flowers.



The grassland is mown annually, preventing the spread of bushes and helping promote the wide range of species. One day soon we hope to see cattle return to do this job the traditional way.

The woodland is not old; much has grown up in the last 100 years. **Thorn** and **elder** bushes are slowly giving way to trees – ash, oak and the invasive sycamore have seeded themselves whilst several other species have been planted.

The woods provide many places for birds to roost, feed and nest. Residents include **tawny owl**, **woodpeckers**, **bullfinch** and **song thrush**.



In spring and summer the woods come alive with birdsong as our summer visitors reach us after their long migration. Listen for the **chiff chaff** and the alarm call of the **blackcap** which sounds like two marbles knocking together.

Coppicing along the woodland edges creates low bushes favoured by many birds and insects.



## History

Norton Common used to be arable and grazing land. You can see evidence of cultivation in the undulations seen on much of the site. Known as 'ridge and furrow', they were produced by ploughing strips of open fields in the same direction each year. This was the usual way of farming until the C18th, when the fields were divided and 'enclosed' with hedges.

After this, the commoners of Norton were granted rights to graze cattle on the Common and an amazing variety of wildlife thrived alongside. However, grazing declined and by the end of the C19th bushes covered many areas and some of the wildlife was lost.



In 1903 the Common was integrated into the design of the Garden City and paths were opened up through the scrub. The lido and other facilities were added from the 1930s. A surprising amount of wildlife can still be found on Norton Common and in 2006 it was designated as a Local Nature Reserve.

## Key

- |  |   |  |                       |
|--|---|--|-----------------------|
|  | Cycle path (part of National Cycle Network) |  | Car park              |
|  | Other surfaced paths                        |  | Disabled parking      |
|  | Unsurfaced paths (may be muddy at times)    |  | Interpretation panels |
|  |   |  | Benches               |
|  |   |  | Wheelchair access     |

