

Your guide to attractions and cycling
in and around the historic town

Bridgwater

VISITOR GUIDE AND MAP

Leaflet produced by Bridgwater Town Council



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www.bridgwater-tc.gov.uk

in association with
Bridgwater Area Cycling Campaign



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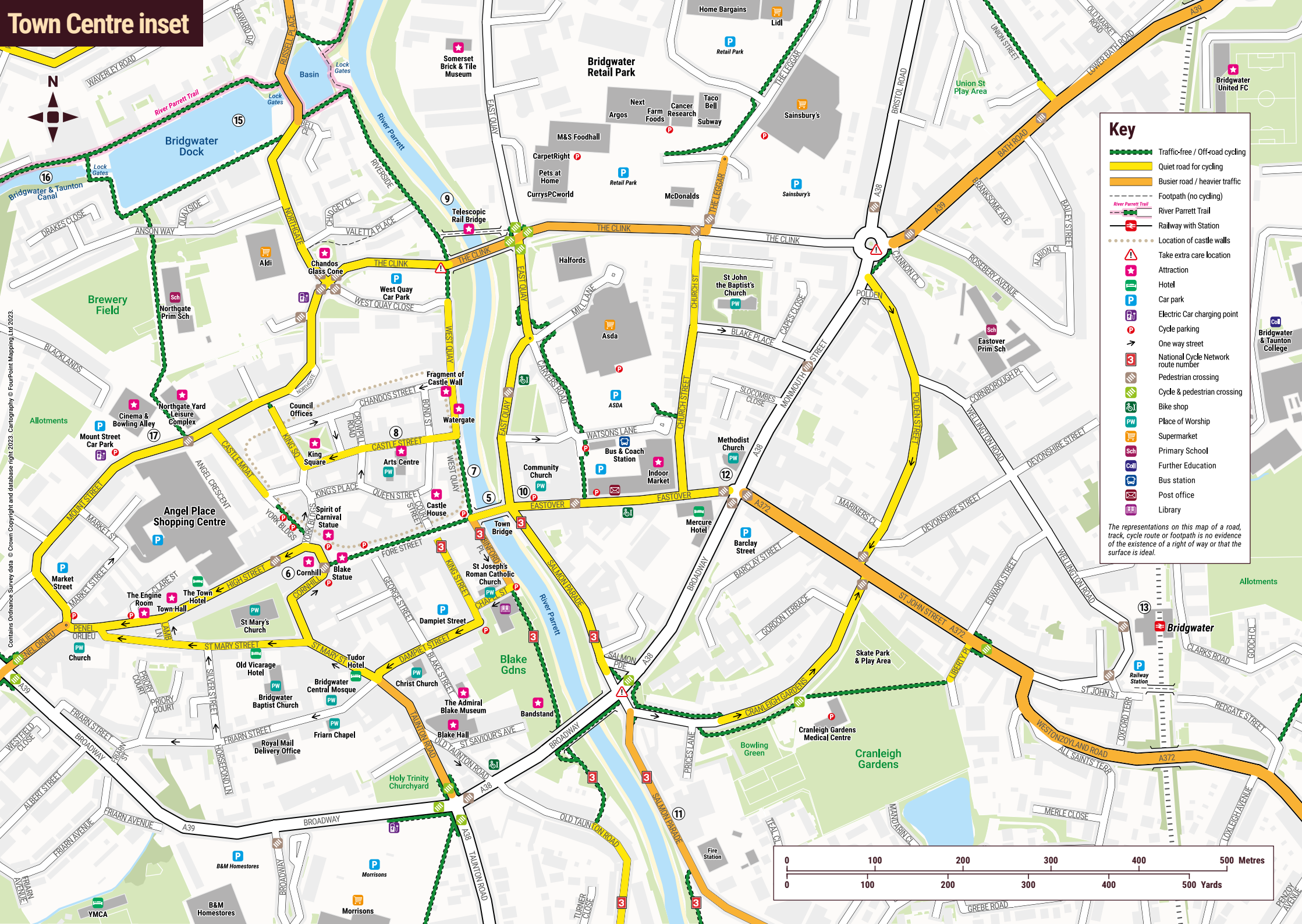
Bridgwater is one of Somerset's most cycle-friendly towns. This map, highlighting cycling, has been produced by **Bridgwater Town Council** working with the **Bridgwater Area Cycling Campaign**. Sustainable transport is the way to go, whether it is cycling, walking or public transport, and where better to start than Bridgwater. Situated on the M5 corridor and the main Bristol to Exeter rail link, the town is the ideal jumping-off point to the Somerset coast, the Quantock and Mendip Hills, and the levels and moors of Sedgemoor.



Bridgwater itself is a historic town, now with several new hotels. Bridgwater is proud to be the first town to petition Parliament against the evils of the Slave Trade (in 1785), the site of the last battle on English soil (Sedgemoor 1685), have the first Art Centre in the country (1946) and the biggest illuminated light show in the UK (Bridgwater Carnival dating back to 1605). Bridgwater is also a popular choice for film locations, with its perfect Georgian architecture. Despite being 10 miles from the sea, it has a hidden gem in the Bridgwater Docks, which link to the Bridgwater-Taunton canal plus a quayside adjoining the river Parrett. The river sees two tidal incursions a day as the river rises and falls by twenty metres brought in by 'the bore,' a fast-moving mini tidal wave.

In 1867, Edwin Roberts of Bridgwater was at the Paris International Exposition when he came across an invention, a Velocipede bicycle. Also known as a 'bone shaker' it had wooden wheels, iron tyres and a frame of wrought iron. Not only did Roberts purchase it on the spot, but he also rode it all the way back to Bridgwater! Roberts' bicycle can be seen today in the Blake Museum. Only three years later, in February 1870, the local press complained of 'Bicycle Mania'. They reported that "the number of these vehicles in the principal thoroughfares during the evenings is extraordinary as compared with other towns".

Town Centre inset



① Downend

Coming into town from the M5 junction 23 or along the A38 Bristol Road, the story of Bridgwater begins at *Downend*. A castle was built here in the 1100s by the *de Columbers*, who also tried to establish a port town. The remains of the motte and bailey castle, which are built over an older Viking-age fortification, can still be seen. However, in 1200, *William de Briwere*, a close friend of 'bad' King John, established his own (much, much bigger) castle and port town at Bridgwater, slightly upriver. That proved successful, and *Downend* withered away.



② Dunball

In 1844 a wharf was established here by the coal and cement manufacturers, and it is now the only part of the port still in operation.

③ Along the River Parrett

The A38 was built 1828-1830 by *John Bowen* on reclaimed land: the whole area was once part of a great bend in the river Parrett, straightened out in 1677. The Parrett has been managed by man over the centuries. It once had lots of separate wiggly courses running through the marshes, preserved in field names like '*Blind Yeo*' i.e., '*the dead-end bit of river*'. The land was tamed by a system of *Rhynes*, pronounced 'reens,' a local word for drainage ditches (*never refer to them as 'water-filled ditches' - the whole point is the water and rhyme is a great local word*).

④ Wylds Road

In the nineteenth century Bridgwater was a major exporter of building bricks and roof tiles, along with decorative roof finials, chimney pots and even garden pottery. The town was also an important innovator in cement construction, expressed by the unique and pioneering '*Concrete Castle*' show-home in Queen Street of 1851, which has been recently restored. As a result of the tides here, the slime of the riverbank about one mile either side of the town also has unique properties and was used to create the '*Bath Brick*'. This has nothing to do with Bath and was a type of scouring block for cleaning, polishing, and shining metal.

⑤ Town Bridge

The *Town Bridge* dates to 1884, replacing an earlier iron bridge of 1795, which in turn replaced a medieval stone bridge. The medieval bridge was an impressive structure, and there were houses crammed close to the four corners. The main road from the bridge leading to the *Cornhill* is Fore Street.

⑥ Cornhill

At the *Cornhill* you will see the statue of *General-at-Sea Robert Blake*, erected in 1901 in honour of the town's most important son. He was a Parliamentarian in the Civil Wars, holding Lyme Regis and later Taunton against impossible odds. He was then given charge of the navy, and defeated, in short order, the Royalist hold outs, the Dutch and then the Spanish. The *Cornhill* market house is hard to miss with its classical column and distinctive dome. Note the pineapple on the very top. This was built in 1834.

⑦ West Quay

This original foundation shore of Bridgwater stretches from '*the Lions*,' a fabulous early eighteenth-century building, along the town's medieval quay, past the site of the castle to the *Fountain Inn*, currently Bridgwater's oldest surviving pub and first mentioned in 1717. *West Quay* was rebuilt after the riverbank collapsed in 2012 and is now the '*rive gauche*' of Bridgwater with its cafés, restaurants, bars, and chip shop. Part of the *National Cycle Network*, you are never far from a group of cycles parked up outside a café during the summer.

⑧ Castle Street

Especially attractive is the Georgian splendour that is *Castle Street*, home of the country's first Art Centre. These 18th-century terraces would not be out of place in Bath or Boston and residents have recently re-lined them with a potted plant outside each door. At the top of *Castle Street* is *King Square* with quiet gardens round the '*Angel of Peace*,' a war memorial unlike any other.



⑨ River

The '*Telescopic*' bridge, just past the modern road bridge, was once able to retract into the east side of the river to allow ships to pass further upstream. Built in 1871 it is one of only two of its type ever made and carried a railway.

⑩ Eastover

The east side of the river is *Eastover*, and it is where you will find *St John's Church*, built in 1845 as a good example of Victorian '*Gothic Revival*' with its heavy buttresses and lofty scale. *Eastover* is Somerset's most multicultural area, and it is here that you can find Polish supermarkets, Portuguese cafés, Indian restaurants, and Turkish takeaways making Bridgwater the cosmopolitan hub it is today.



⑪ Salmon Parade

Once just '*Salmon Lane*' it gets its name from the salmon traps that once lined the riverbank. Here are the former buildings of the town's most beloved institution, the old *Infirmiry*, which moved to this site in 1820, having been founded in 1813.

⑫ East Gate

Monmouth Street is where the A38 and A39 run together and is named after the route the *Duke of Monmouth* took out of the town on his ill-fated march to the *Battle of Sedgemoor* at *Westonzoyland* in 1685. The *Cobblestones Pub* (a fine rock music venue) and the *Mercure Hotel* now stand on the site of the town's East Gate. The gate had to be demolished in the early nineteenth century after a carriage carrying an elephant got stuck underneath it. On the south side of this, under the hotel, was once the medieval *Hospital of St John*, straddling the two sides of the gate inside and outside the town - if someone arrived after the gate had closed for the night the hospital could still have taken them in. The hospital was something between a modern hospital for the infirm, a hostel for needy travellers and a school for the town's children. It had been founded in 1200 but was suppressed in the 1530s.

⑬ Train Station

The *Railway Station* was opened in 1841, as part of the Bristol and Exeter Railway and is one of the oldest surviving stations on the line.

⑭ Wembdon Road

The *Wembdon Road Cemetery* was laid out in 1851 and once had two chapels. These were sadly demolished, and the burial ground was neglected for a long time, but volunteers of the *Friends of the Wembdon Road Cemetery* have been slowly repairing it since 2010.

⑮ Bridgwater Docks

For centuries ships sailed upriver to the *Town Bridge* and offloaded at the quay but in 1841 the Docks were opened providing a safe anchorage where ships could be offloaded at leisure. Bridgwater's last surviving major industrial building, the *Oil and Cake Mill*, known as *Bowerings*, with its iconic harlequin chimney is the Docks' most notable feature. Nothing to do with desserts, cake in this sense is a form of pulp from grinding linseed and until recently the mill was an animal feed factory.

⑯ Bridgwater-Taunton Canal

The *Newtown Lock* connects the Docks at *Bowerings' Mill* and takes you along the splendid canal system all the way through the levels to Taunton. Along the way you can stop at the YMCA with its Canalside location and walk into the public space known as '*The Meads*,' a little bit of the *Somerset Levels* in the heart of the town.



⑰ Northgate Yard

A new leisure complex with a multi-plex cinema, bowling and restaurants is set amongst the newly landscaped *Brewery Field*. No guesses to what was once here. The older name for these fields was '*Blacklands*' and archaeologists have noted a strong correlation between this name and Roman remains, so there may be discoveries to be made here in years to come. On the site of *Starkey Knight* and *Fords* famous brewery, there is now a public park alongside the new cinema and bowling alley plus restaurants, known collectively as *Northgate Yard*. Near to this site stood the *Northgate Workhouse* (birthplace of '*Breaker Morant*') and remembered today by a set of information boards.



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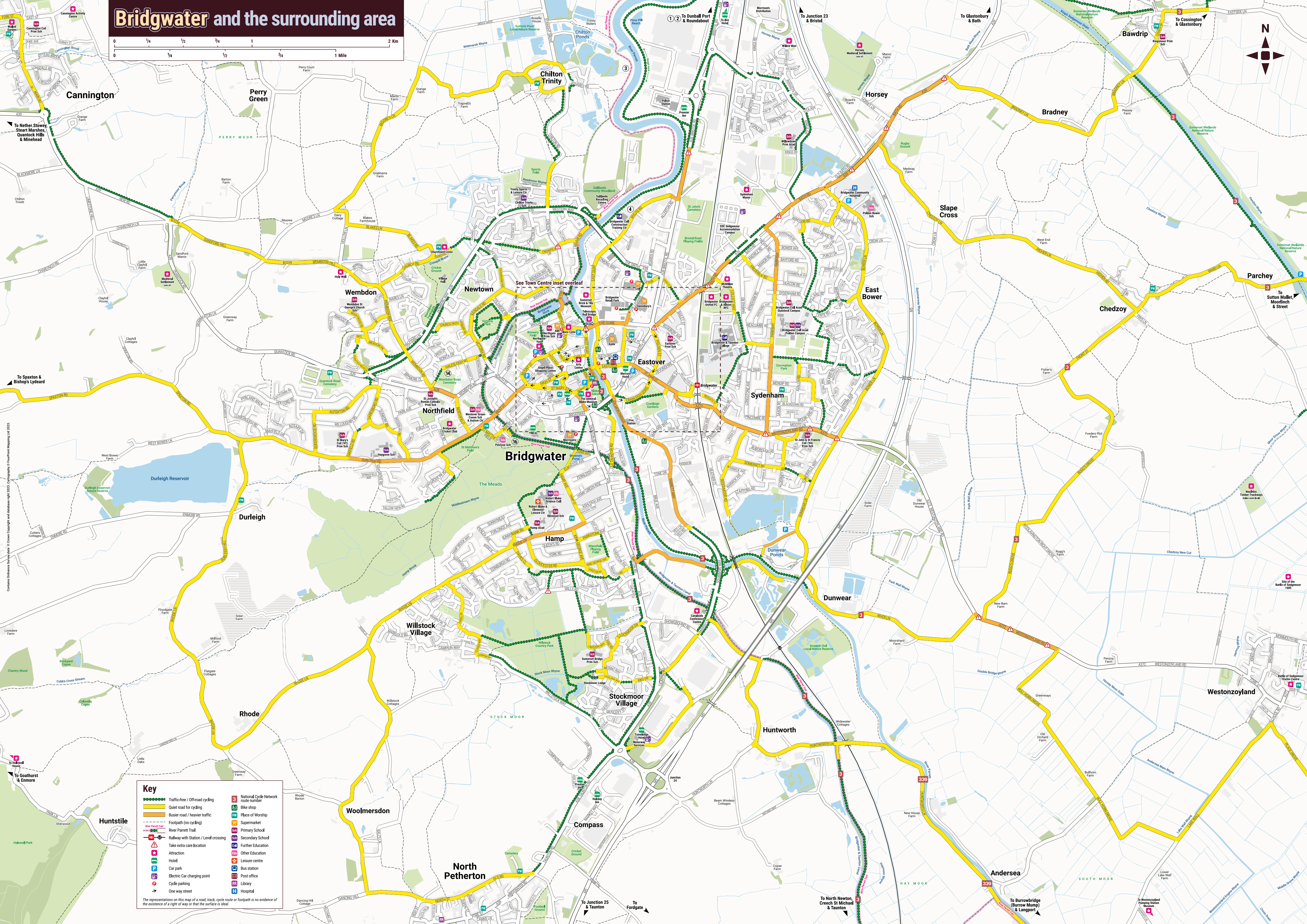
Wednesday to Friday 5pm-9pm

Saturday 12 noon- 2pm 5pm-9pm

Sunday 12 noon-3pm

Home of the Gremlins Carnival Club

Bridgwater and the surrounding area



Key

Traffic-free / Off-road cycling

Quiet road for cycling

Busier road / heavier traffic

Footpath (no cycling)

River Parrett Trail

Railway with Station / Level crossing

Take extra care location

Attraction

Car park

Electric Car charging point

Cycle parking

One way street

National Cycle Network route number

Bike shop

Place of Worship

Supermarket

Primary School

Secondary School

Further Education

Other Education

Leisure centre

Bus station

Post office

Library

Hospital

The representations on this map of a road, track, cycle route or footpath is no evidence of the existence of a right of way or that the surface is ideal.