BRIDGE END GARDEN

Detailed information on accessibility

Location: Bridge End Garden is located on the west side of the valley of a seasonal stream, the Madgate Slade. To accommodate the rising ground, the Garden is terraced with steps and banks, but despite this it is possible to see most of the Garden if you are using a wheelchair or pushing a pushchair.

Coming from Caton's Lane Car Park. There are two Blue Badge parking bays in the car park. Follow the footpath past the children's playground to the large ornamental gates where you join the path from Castle Street (see below). The route from the car park has a shallow slope down but the return is a long slope back up to the car park, with four speed bumps. Level access to the children's playground is from the car park across the basketball court.

Coming from Castle Street: the two access routes from Castle Street to the Garden are down the east side of the valley. It is fine coming down but, going up, it is a long slope, so take a rest on the way back to admire the view back to the Garden and over Borough Meadow.

Coming down the path between The Bell House (55 Castle Street) and 57 Castle Street, go to the side gate of the ornamental gates joining the path from Caton's Lane Car Park. Carry on down towards the valley bottom. The path is steep in places with two speed bumps and at the bottom the path crosses over the Madgate Slade. Most of the year the stream is dry

but in winter, especially after heavy rain, the water is in full flow. Very occasionally it floods over the path, preventing access to the Garden, and you will have to retrace your steps and use the entrance by the Fry Gallery from Castle Street.

The first entrance to the Garden is just past the Madgate Slade and is the entrance to the Wilderness. Flights of steps and shingle isolate this area from the rest of the Garden, but there is a circular route that takes you through the Laburnum Arch and back to the entrance gate.

Access to the second entrance is through the gate to the Anglo-American Memorial. This has a locally steep section as you are now going up the west side of the valley. This entrance is close to the Visitor Centre and toilets and takes you into the rest of the Garden.

The Fry Gallery entrance off Castle Street: follow the signs to the Fry Gallery, which is by 21 Castle Street. Go past the Gallery and under the red-painted former gardener's cottage. You are now in the Garden and on the Castle Street Path. It is steep in parts and drops down to the junction with Bridge Street Path.

Coming from Bridge Street: if you want to avoid the steeper routes, use the Bridge Street entrance. When coming from the town centre, however, you will encounter another steep slope down Bridge Street to reach the Garden entrance. To avoid this, park in the Swan Meadow Car Park.

Coming from the Swan Meadow Car Park: there are a good number of Blue Badge parking bays in this car park. Follow the signs for the town centre but look out for a turning to the left, just after the small maze by the pedestrian exit to the car park. Take this level route, with the pond on your left, and continue along Freshwell Street until it meets Bridge Street. Turn left. The entrance to the Garden is on the other side of the road, just past the Eight Bells pub car park. Please do not park in the pub car park unless you are a customer. There is no fully accessible toilet at the pub.

For crossing the road, there are drop kerbs but not necessarily opposite each other and there is a short section of slope down to the entrance. Take care crossing the road as the traffic can be busy.

It is a longer route but, as an alternative, go to the exit end of the Swan Meadow Car Park and use the level pavement on the left side of the road, which has drop kerbs. Go past the Golf Club to the junction with Bridge Street. Turn right and use the drop kerbs to cross. Remember that the traffic can be busy. Enter the Garden via the Bridge Street entrance.

Welcome to the Garden: the charm of the Garden is that its layout has hardly changed from Victorian times. You are in a private garden that has become a public space but because of its historic character there are no ramps or handrails on flights of steps. Paths in the Garden are mostly level and are a well compacted hoggin type surface or beaten earth but both can be a bit sticky after heavy rain.

Access to the Dutch Garden: at the junction of the Castle Street Path and Bridge Street Path, there is a level spur off to the right to the corner of the Dutch Garden. You then meet a narrow stone path set in grass. The Garden is on chalk and is free-draining, so for most of the year it is possible to go on the grass to look at the Long Border to the east and the topiary and parterre to the west. Shingle is used on the parterre and a wheelchair or pushchair will get stuck.

You will have to retrace your route as flights of steps prevent further access. Follow the Bridge Street path past the Eagle Gates and through an archway. This is the start of a circular route around Jacob's Well, the Rose Garden and the Summerhouse Lawn.

The circular route anticlockwise: take the path to the right immediately past the archway. At the next archway the Rose Garden is to your left. You may be able to negotiate the small steps into the Rose Garden but an easier way to access the Rose Garden is from the Summerhouse Lawn. Go through the archway to the right, where there is a stone and grass path to the Dutch Garden. Take a look in at Poet's Corner and turn left on Pavilion Path. You will have an elevated view over the parterre and views towards St Mary's Church and the Pavilion.

Continue on the path and take the first surfaced path to the left as this takes you back to the circular path towards the Visitor Centre. Turn right and continue towards the second entrance from Castle Street which is on your right. If you want to visit the Wilderness, go out of the

Garden through the gate to the Anglo-American Memorial and to the Garden entrance just before the Madgate Slade.

Visiting the Wilderness: flights of steps and shingle isolate this area from the rest of the Garden but there is a level circular route that takes you through the Laburnum Arch, with a view through to the Dutch Garden, and back to the entrance gate. Remember that the path back up to the second entrance climbs up the valley side.

The toilets at the Visitor Centre: there are two large toilets. The one facing the Summerhouse Lawn is fully accessible with baby changing facilities. The toilets do not have universal locks. The Visitor Centre is fully accessible but, like the toilets, is only open when the Garden Team is at work or volunteers have opened the facilities at the weekend.

The Walled Garden: all the paths here are level but there is a locally steep section of path just past the Visitor Centre. To avoid this, take the path next to the yew hedge and turn right at the far end: it is still a rising slope but shallower. The centre path leads to the Dipping Pond, where seating and space for wheelchairs and pushchairs allows you to enjoy the sound of water from the fountain. The glasshouses are not always open, but when they are there is level access through them and out the other side.

The Hedge Maze: wheelchair and pushchair access to the area of the Maze is through a level gateway in the top right corner of the Walled Garden. There is a level circular path all the way around the outside of

the Maze. When the Maze was planted 40 years ago it was planted with wheelchair access in mind. In early 2026 the maze hedges were cut back substantially and it is now very open visually. Until the yew hedges regrow it will not feel like a maze but it will be very accessible. One section was not cut back so you might find the paths narrow in this area.

You will need to return to the entrance you came in by from the Walled Garden as the east exit from the Maze is via a flight of steps.

Getting back to the circular path: there are two exits from the Walled Garden at each end of the yew hedge that will take you back to the circular path. Turn left from the Visitor Centre and enjoy the views across the quintessentially English lawn and Summerhouse. There is a beaten earth path opposite the second exit from the Walled Garden that takes you to the Summerhouse Lawn. Continuing on the surfaced path to the left takes you past the Rose Garden and Jacob's Well, back to where you started.

And finally: Bridge End Garden is for everyone but its layout has hardly changed since Victorian times, which means it does not necessarily meet modern access standards. If you are less mobile, we hope this has helped you to enjoy most of the Garden. We hope to add photos to this note but if you have any comments or suggestions, please contact the Friends at: friends@bridgeendgarden.org.

January 2026

.