

A Guide to Cycling to Placements



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Introduction

- This is quick guide to those people thinking of cycling to placements. It has some basic information about what you will need to cycle and then some individual sections, by hospital, on how to get there and what's available for you.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why cycle?

- Cycling is good for you and can be your gym session for the day.
- Cycling can be faster to get some to some of the closer placements thanks to Birmingham's fantastic traffic
- Even if it takes slightly longer, it's a lot nicer than sitting in traffic for 2 hours a day, and you're less liable to get stuck unexpectedly
- Cycling is cheap! Fuel is expensive and the travel allowance doesn't cover it

Is it safe?

- Probably the most important question if you think of cycling is 'is it safe?' Cycling certainly can be safe as long as you cycle safely, make sure motorists can see you and you are aware of the vehicles around you. Don't take my word for though – there's plenty of peer-reviewed literature^{1,2}.

But what about Birmingham drivers?

- Birmingham has a reputation for being very car dominated.
- However, there are good dedicated cycle routes and towpaths that can take you around traffic free.
- If you would like a map of routes available, Birmingham City Council will send you one for free: <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/cycling-map>

What bike should I use?

- Cycling around Birmingham will be easiest on a hybrid or road bike.
- If you are used to cycling mountain bikes, these other bikes are generally lighter, so quicker and easier to get up the occasional hill.
- Hybrids are particularly useful if cycling along the towpaths.

Where can I get a good lock?

- A good lock is worth investing in and they are not expensive.
- The best locks are rated on the 'Sold Secure rating' scale, which measures a lock on how long a thief would take to get through it.
- Currently, the highest rated - 'Gold' locks – are sold on campus by the police at a highly subsidised price of £15.
- The police are in the University Centre building on Wednesday between 12 – 3pm. They will also register your bike with a code free of charge, so they can ID the bike if it is stolen.
- Additionally, some hospitals have bike lockers for extra security

I have a bike! Bits are hanging off it, how do I fix this?

- If you have a bike in disrepair and need it to get fixed there are cycle facilities available on campus— go here for more details <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/collaboration/cycling/repairing/index.aspx>
- Alternatively there is a non-profit cycle shop on Pershore Road called the Birmingham Bike Foundry who will fix your bike and also runs courses.

What about punctures?

- Many people are put off cycling due to worrying about puncture or other maintenance issues. Repairing a puncture on the roadside is not fun, so carrying a spare inner tube with you and a small pump is ideal.
- Modern puncture proof tyres are a reliable way to avoid almost all punctures, and well worth the investment.
- If you don't know how to repair a puncture, look on YouTube, ask a friendly cyclist friend or there are courses at most bike stores.
- In general, all you need to take with you to cycle is: a puncture repair kit or spare inner tube + pump, and tyre levers.

What is cycling etiquette?

- Cyclists have a poor reputation, partially deserved, for flouting the rules of the road. This can lead to a lack of respect from drivers, which in turn makes all of our journeys more dangerous.
- Cycling through red lights is probably the complaint you hear most about, followed by using pavements and lack of lights at night.
- When cycling on cycle paths, cycle on the left as you would a road.
- All new bikes are sold with a bell by law. Ring the bell to let pedestrians know you're coming past. Avoid the urge to take it off, as they're very useful, particularly when behind a jogger with earphones in.

How can I make sure the journey is safe?

- Although not a legal requirement currently in the UK, a helmet is highly recommended, as is reflective clothing.
- To avoid being overtaken in a dangerous manner, it is recommended you cycle at least 1m out from the kerb, and use cycle paths where possible. During excessively narrow sections of road, it is recommended you cycle in the *middle* of your lane
- Lights are essential, even if you expect to be home from hospital before dark, there might always be a surprise teaching fellow session.
- Roundabouts: the highway code recommends that cyclists stay on the left hand side of a roundabout at all times. However, it may be appropriate to cycle in the correct lane to avoid being cut up unexpectedly. Less confident cyclists can dismount and take pavements around busy roundabouts

It's raining! Can I still cycle to placement?

- All hospitals have showering facilities for cyclists, so rain should not be a problem

- Unless it's exceptionally heavy rain, most regular backpacks will keep your stuff dry. If not, wrapping your stuff in a bag inside the backpack certainly will.
- Mudguards on your bike can help keep you dry
- Avoid the tow paths along the canals if it's raining, or has rained recently – these become exceptionally muddy!

What if it's cold?

- Cycling will keep you surprisingly warm, but wear gloves! Your hands will drop off otherwise.

What should I wear?

- Cycling to the QE you can probably wear your hospital clothes.
- For most other placements any sports clothes are fine. Consider wearing bright or reflective clothing.
- If you're going particularly far, fast or often, proper cycling shorts may be the most comfortable. Aldi and other shops nearby sell these at very competitive prices.

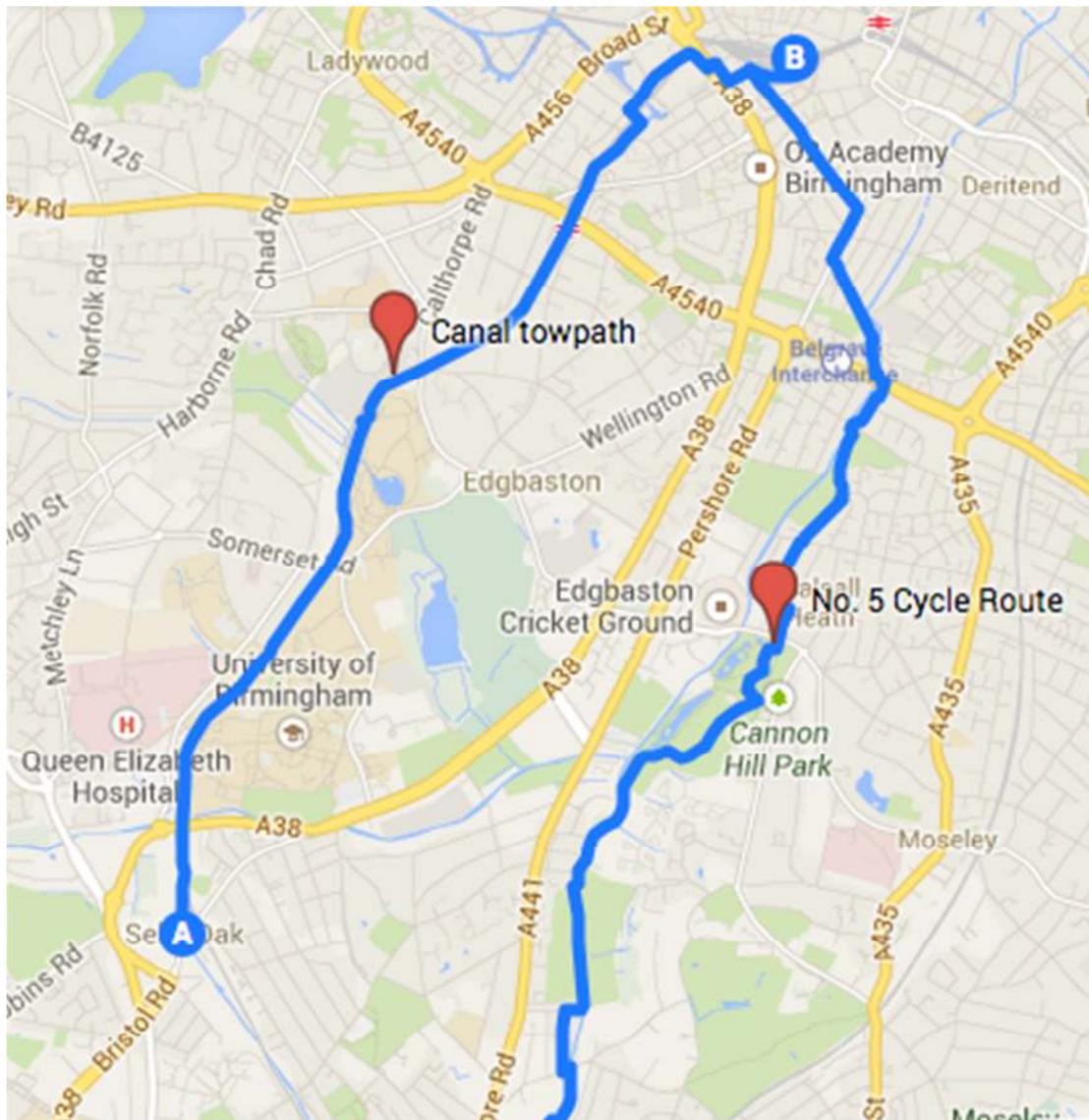
1 Rojas-Rueda D, de Nazelle A, Tainio M, et al., The health risks and benefits of cycling in urban environments compared with car use: health impact assessment study. *BMJ* 2011;4;(343)

2. Jeroen Johan de Hartog, Hanna Boogaard, Hans Nijland et al., Do the Health Benefits of Cycling Outweigh the Risks? *Environ Health Perspect* 2010;118(8):1109–1116.

Routes to Placements

Whittle Street (GUM clinic), Children's Hospital (~ 4 miles, 20 mins)

- Starting from Harborne or Selly Oak, the nicest way to cycle to city centre is along the canal towpath. There are entrances next to the med school, by University railway station and opposite Sainsbury's in Selly Oak.
- If you live near Raddlebarn Road you can instead cycling down to Pershore Road, and crossing onto the Number 5 cycle route. This is well marked, mostly off road, going through Cannon Hill Park and takes you into city centre around New Street Station.



Cycling to City Hospital (~ 3 miles, 20 mins depending on route)

City hospital is probably the easiest hospital to cycle to. There are good facilities available for cyclists, including a shed to leave your bike locked up in (ask the undergraduate centre for the code), showers in the teaching block and lockers next to them. They'll even preferentially give you the lockers next to the shower if you do cycle. Having said that, it's less than 3 miles from the med school to City and with a casual cycle you probably won't need a shower.

There are good routes to cycle to City:

From Harborne or Selly Oak:

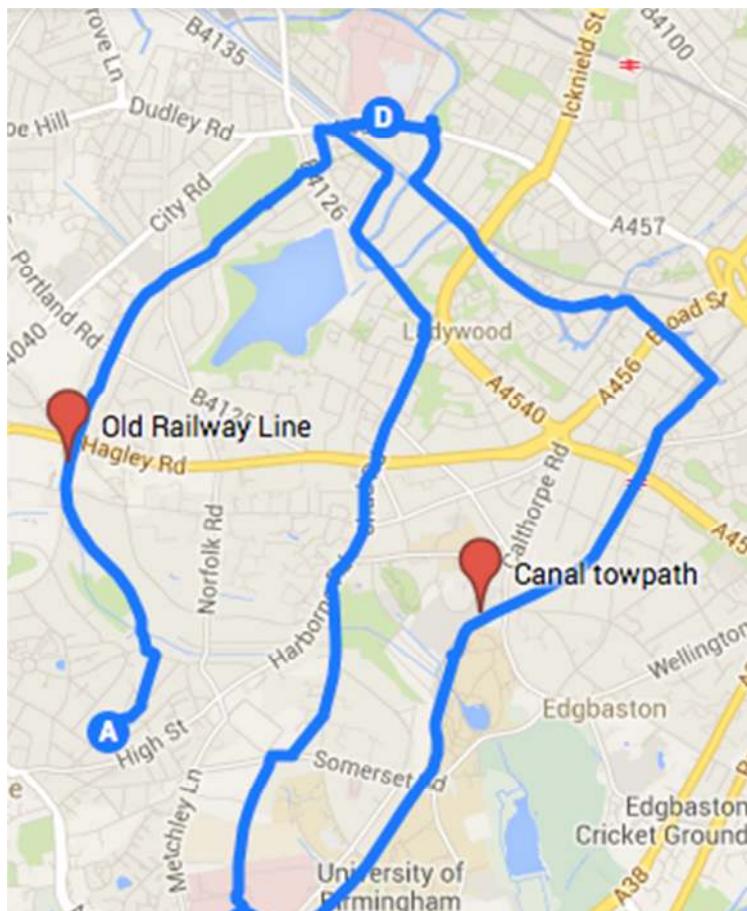
- The old railway line, which used to service Harborne, now makes for the perfect commute. This starts on Station Road in Harborne and runs almost the whole way there traffic free

From Selly Oak:

- Go along the canal, as shown, all the way to City.
- The undergraduate coordinator, Dr Carruthers, cycles along the towpath everyday and he will like you if you cycle.

By road:

- If you're on a road bike and want to brace it with the traffic then there's a fast straight road route from Harborne.



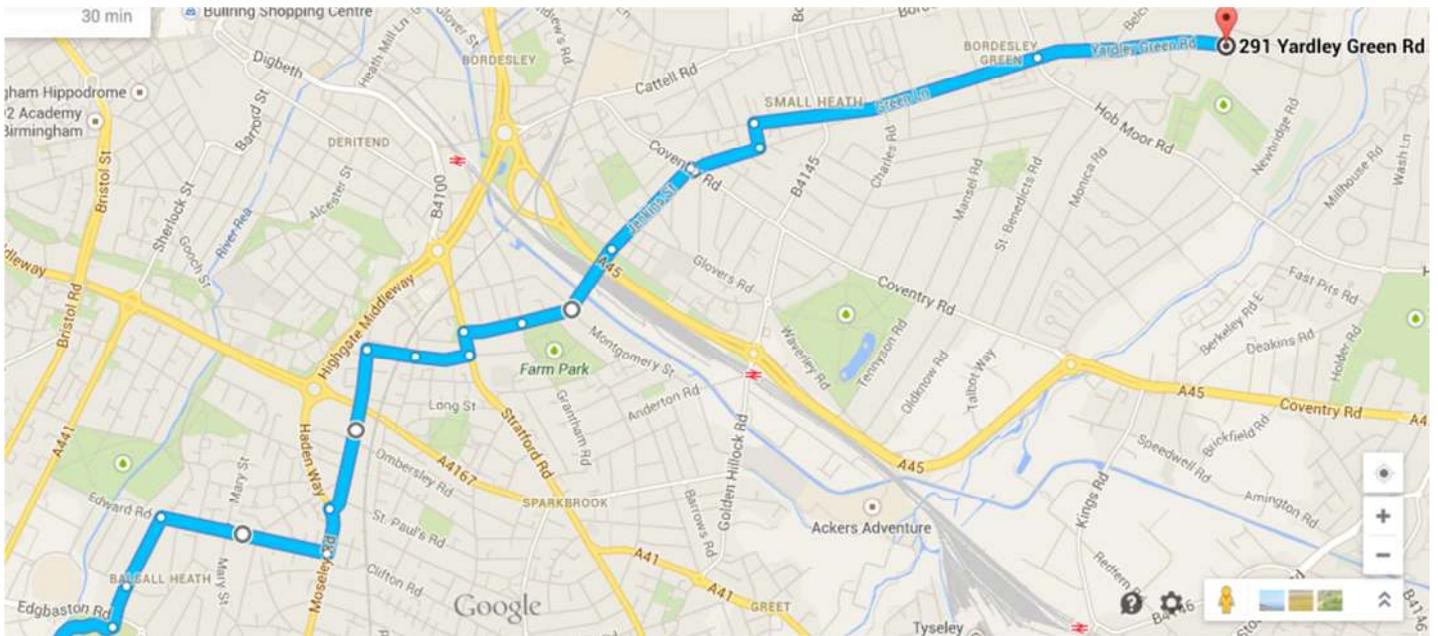
Cycling to Heartlands Hospital (~ 6 miles, 35 minutes)

A lot of staff and students cycle to Heartlands to avoid the gridlock of traffic that can mean you spend an hour in your car, when it's only a 30-minute cycle. There is a cycle lock-up right next to the undergraduate centre. You have to get a key once you have a trust badge from security near the front of the hospital (£10 deposit). Showers are available, although disappointingly restricted to before 7.45 am or after 8.30 am, in the on-site gym.

You certainly don't want to be cycling down Pershore Road or the big Middleway roads everyday, so stick to the less used roads, as can be found on the Birmingham City Council Map.

An example route:

- Use the No. 5 cycle route as if going into town.
- Pass through Canon Hill Park and continue along it until you reach Edward Rd.
- Break off from the route here, going onto Moseley Road and crossing Highgate road here. Go down Highgate Place, under a railway bridge and head toward Small Heath Bridge.
- From here stay straight on Jenkins St, Grange Rd before getting onto Green Lane and appearing at Heartlands.



Cycling to Sandwell (~ 7 miles, ~30-40 minutes)

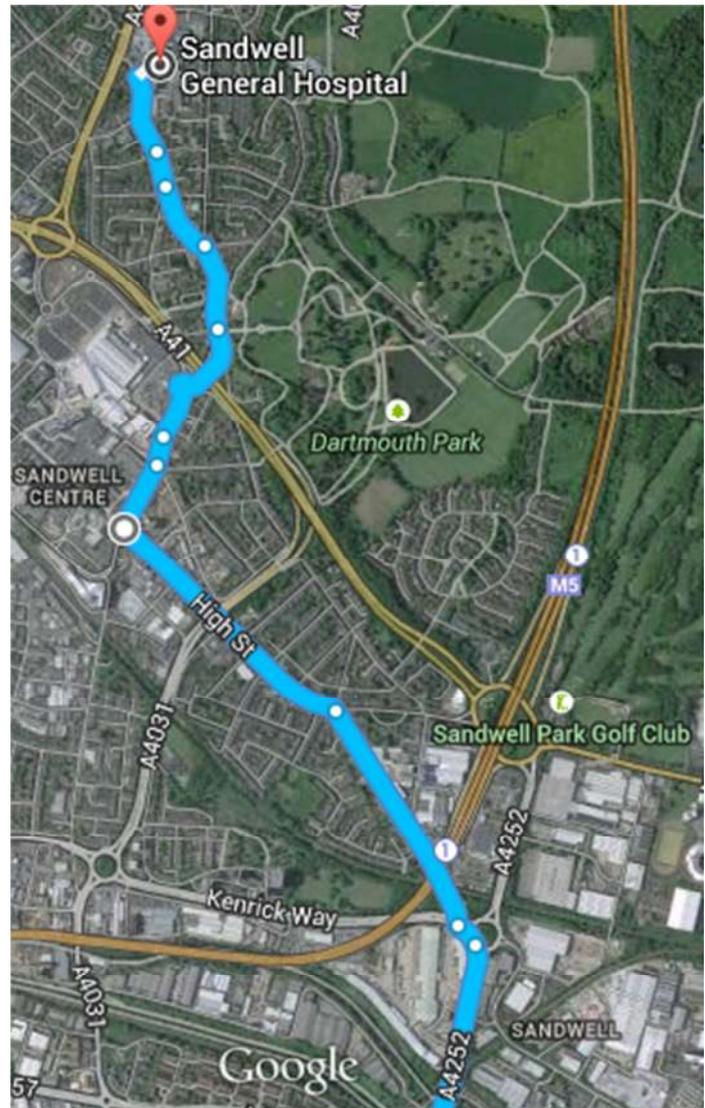
Cycling to Sandwell is along the main high streets of Bearwood and Smethwick before joining up with the northern section of the No 5 cycle route which allows you to cross the major A457 and M5. Although there is traffic along these roads, it's fairly slow paced. Cycling can help avoid the common gridlock on the way to Sandwell.

Route:

- Go north from Harborne toward Bearwood
- Pass through Bearwood, but turn left at the traffic lights after the main street, continuing down Bearwood Rd onto Smethwick High Street.
- At the end of the road and before the dual carriageway, take a left onto St Paul's Road. Along there you will see signs for a cycle path which crosses the main road at a pedestrian crossing and continues north on a separate track, avoiding the main roads.
- This takes you toward Sandwell, where you can cycle along the High Street before turning right toward Sandwell Hospital.

Facilities:

- Lock your bike up at the back of the hospital – going through the loading bay.
- Showers are on the 1st floor surgery block for guys and 2nd floor for girls.
- Inconveniently, there are no lockers there for us, so you have to use the undergraduate ones at present.



Cycling to Walsall Manor (~13 miles, 60 - 75 minutes)

- Instead of heading off down Sandwell High Street, stay on the Number 5 cycle Route and it takes you straight to Walsall, through a couple of nature reserves, all on well maintained paths good enough for road bikes.

Facilities:

- Walsall has excellent facilities. The bike shed is located next to A&E.
- Showers and lockers are available – call 7777 on the internal phones and contact facilities to get access (£10 deposit).

Cycling to Russell's Hall Hospital, Dudley (~11 miles, 40-60 minutes)

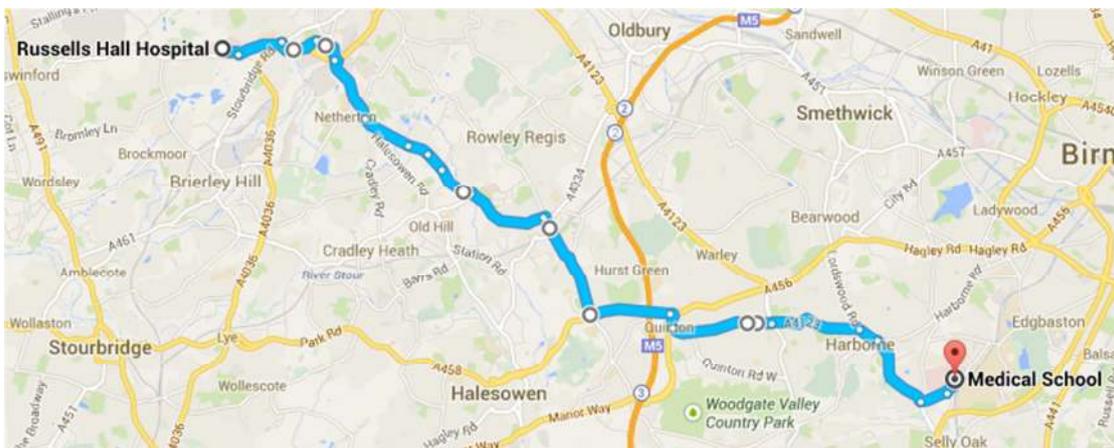
Russell's Hall sets the standard in terms of facilities available for cyclists, which is good because it's good but hilly cycle.

The route:

- The safest way to travel to Russell's Hall is avoiding the dual carriageways like the Wolverhampton Road.
- Take Court Oak road out of Harborne, but go straight over the roundabout along Ridgeacre road toward Quinton.
- Go along Halesowen Road over the M5 and turn right on a mini-roundabout on Long Lane heading toward Blackheath.
- Head out of Blackheath on Powke Lane. Staying on this road takes you to Netherton and to a big roundabout near Russell's Hall.
- If you go straight over this roundabout you can circumnavigate the dual carriageway down Clee Road and take the cycle path down to Russell's Hall.

The facilities:

- C block has a place to lock up bikes outside.
- Inside there are showers and towels available to use each day.
- The multiple showers available are opposite a large locker room, which you can ask for a locker for.



Cycling to Redditch (~13 miles, 60 minutes)

This is a great hospital to cycle to. Although it's 13 miles, once out beyond King's Norton you can get to the Queen Alexandra often without coming across a single car! There is a cycle route running all the way, including through Redditch, taking you straight to the front doors.

The route:

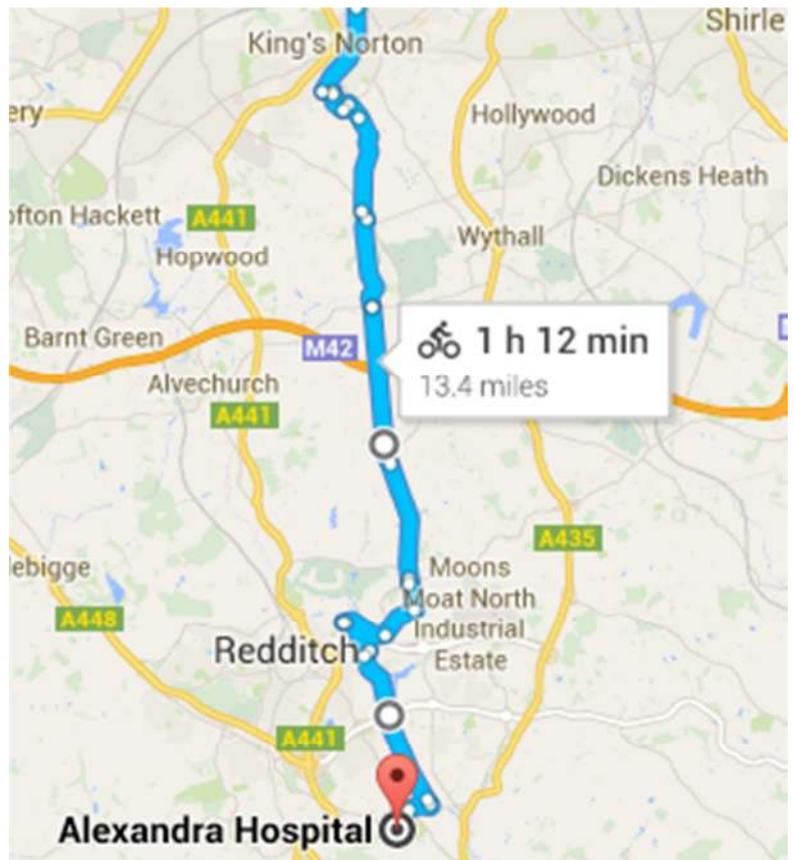
- Go out of King's Norton heading down Icknield Street.
- Continue along Icknield street on a straight road to Redditch.
- Along the way you pass farms and countryside and there are lots of signs to confirm you're headed the right way.

Once in Redditch

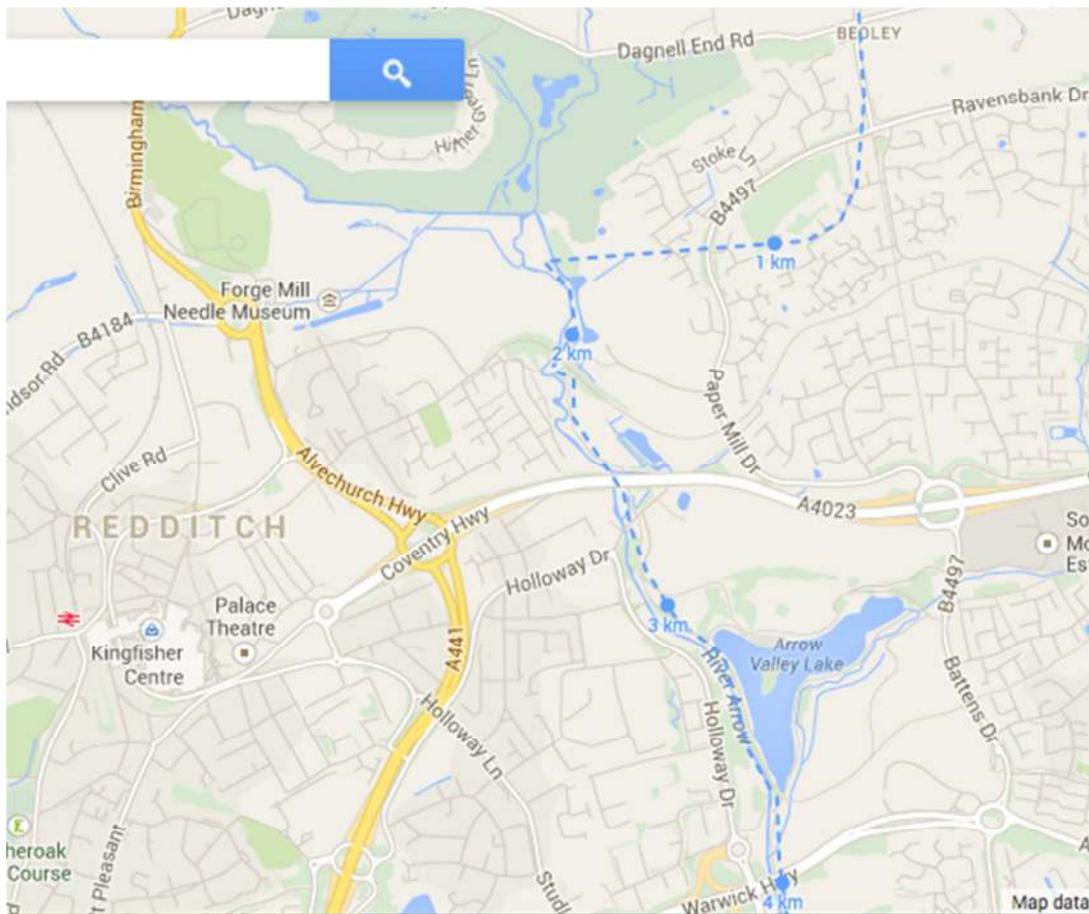
- Take the small turn off to the right after crossing the B4101 around Beoley. It is marked with a blue sign for cyclists saying "Redditch" (and also a bridleway).
- After going under a bridge, go right up into a housing estate, when you will be on Redstone Close. Stay on this road, heading right until you come across a cycle path.
- Follow this main cycle path, onto a bridge over a busy road, until you get to a small bridge over a river and turn left. Continue on, going under a big bridge, after which you veer left onto a new cycle path.
- Stay on this cycle path (actually part of the Number 5 cycle route again) with the River Arrow on your right for ~ 4 km. You will pass through most of Redditch, but not realise it.
- At the end of this path is the bridge you need to come up on. Go under the bridge and onto the cycle path, turning left as you come onto the bridge.
- This cycle path leads to the hospital. It's only another 1000 m, and all off road.

Facilities:

- Unfortunately Redditch lacks the facilities to encourage people to use this route.
- Cyclists must lock their bikes up outside the front of the hospital to stands that are not ideal.
- Showers are available in the theatre block, but can only be accessed before 8 am.
- Lockers are then only available in the undergraduate centre.



The cycle path through Redditch:



Better maps can be found at:

<http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/cms/cycling/cycling-maps.aspx>

Acknowledgements

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