

### WALI TAYLOR

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The Harborne walkway follows the route of the defunct LMS Harborne branch railway line. Starting at its western most point clearly visible is the remains of the central column of the bridge where the single track once crossed the Birmingham Main Line Canal, a series of steps takes you up to Northbrook Street. The railway originally went under the road and then into a culvert that at this point is filled in and grassed-over between 1960s housing. Following this takes you through the rather run-down Summerville Park until, slightly off the main path, you pass under a gated ex railway tunnel. This is rather a “wardrobe into Narnia” experience as you enter from Ladywood but exit into what does not feel like the city.

In all the walkway passes under four roads. The longest tunnel, under the Hagley Road, has been reinforced with corrugated iron sections at the one end due to embankment collapse. Just before the Woodbourne Road crossing there is a half-buried pile of the original railway sleepers and after you have gone under the road you have a choice of routes: either stick to the high path or go down the hill on the right for a brief walk along Chad Brook. The brook disappears under the gated and locked West Midland Bird Club Harborne Nature Reserve and the rough path follows the green steel boundary fence uphill to join the main path again high above the reserve and Harborne Allotments.

There is one more road to cross before the end of the walkway and this time it is by the only bridge on the route. From below it is obvious that the bridge has at some stage become unstable and repaired with wood and steel braces. Very shortly after crossing the bridge Harborne Walkway peters out in a smart modern housing estate, very much contrasting with the housing at the start.

Who uses the walkway? On the day I visited (Jan 1, 2023) I met families, organised walking groups (complete with maps) dog walkers, runners and cyclists although most users just walk a section to escape the city rather than the full two miles.