Introduction to the meadow area either side of Cuffley Brook, within the Western loop of the Old Course of the New River

Area—approximately 7.5 hectares (18.5 acres)

Northern edge— roughly follows the line of the OCNR (old course of the New River) from the Aqueduct to the main path through the ancient woodland.
Western edge— Flash Lane and the wooded western edge of the OCRN

Southern edge— the southern part of the OCRN and the bridleway from Beggars Hollow to Flash Lane.

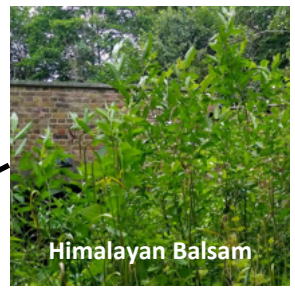
Eastern edge—the bund and path along the western edge of the golf course

This is part of the flood plain of Cuffley Brook. The soil is mostly a heavy clay, waterlogged in winter, cracked and dry in Summer. The larger cracks , of which there are many, now persist throughout the year.

Cuffley Brook is lined on both sides by large mature trees, mostly oak but with a variety of maples, alders and sycamores. There are also some large shrubby bushes.

The Brook has been colonised by Himalayan Balsam from the Aqueduct downstream. Some attempts have been made to repair the soft banks with willow.


Young oaks and grass


Himalayan Balsam


Ant hills Yellow ants


Established trees, brambles and grass

Winter Flooding that blocks foot-

Brambles

Bridleway— water-logged in winter

Footpaths

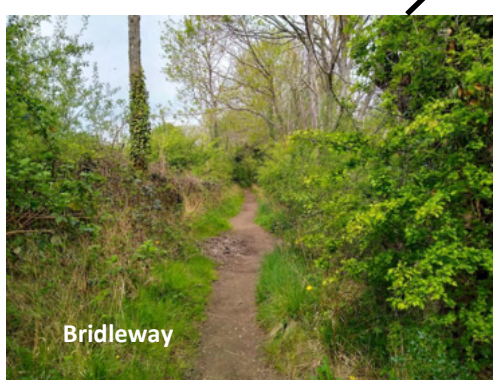
Overgrown footpaths

Mix of young trees and grasses


Established young oaks

Thick brambles


Brambles along Cuffley Brook


Bridleway


Encroaching brambles


Brambles and grass

Area A Issues in this zone of natural rewilding.

Along the Southern, Western and on parts of the Northern edge brambles are taking over much of the land. They need to be controlled.

In Winter the drainage (the Swales) are blocked and cannot drain the land efficiently. The walks through the area are impassable in the wetter months.

The open area is a mix of grassland and young oaks. We should be aiming at a balance of open grassy areas and wooded patches to support the widest possible degree of biodiversity. With appropriate advice we need to manage the number of new trees.

Area B

Over the last few years this smaller area has been rapidly covered by brambles and well established young trees. The brambles are outcompeting trees and grass.

It will soon be inaccessible by the public and lose the grassy areas that support a large number of insect species, including butterflies. The rabbit population seems to have disappeared recently.

Cuffley Brook—from the Aqueduct to the golf course

The bridge at Flash Lane with the Aqueduct behind it. Note the Himalayan Balsam, not yet grown to full height. This is the normal water level in the drier months.

There is a bat colony in the vicinity of the bridge and kingfishers have been observed along the course of the Brook.

Note the wooded nature of the banks and the soft soil which is subject to erosion in rainy periods. Water levels can rise very quickly.

In Spring the banks are covered by wild garlic with stitchwort and wood anemones as the year progresses.

Cuffley Brook runs along the southern edge of the ancient woodland and as can be seen there are fine examples of notable and venerable oaks along its course. Maples abound and there are hornbeams close by as well as many other species.

The view of Cuffley Brook looking West towards the Aqueduct from the footbridge on the main path to the Ancient Woodland.

This photo was taken on December 26th 2021 and shows the extent of the flooding in the area. Ahead in the distance is the footbridge over Cuffley Brook and half left is the footpath to the Aqueduct.

Additional thoughts and notes for a management plan

1. A raised path through the site would be useful to add access during the wetter months, impact of this on meadow should be considered but without drainage maintenance it would not last long.

2. Some of the scrubland does needs to be managed to stop the entire area turning into bramble and secondary woodland. This needs to be done over several stages with some scrub left for cover and habitat at various locations across the site. Essential where the site overlaps into the next 'type of habitat' or neighbouring land.

3. Open space and the mosaic habitat are needed for wildflowers and butterflies this will require removal of grass/hay at certain times of the year to stop the grass from dominating. (Grazing could be good if there was no conflict with park uses and occurred at the optimal times). Volunteers may be needed to rake up and cut grass if it cannot be grazed in certain areas.

4. Daubenton bats feed along the Cuffley Brook (not sure where roost though, it may be close to the Aqueduct).

5. It would be good to 'restore' parts of the old course to develop wetland areas.

6. Some species such as sycamore in this area may need to be thinned to allow other species to grow.

7. Ongoing monitoring of water quality. The Environment agency does this annually.

8. Water Voles were previously recorded here (RSPB notice board). Plans to restore banks and re-introduction if possible. The population of freshwater mussels has reduced severely in the last 5 years

9. Cuffley Brook was poisoned to eradicate an invasive species of fish a few years back (1913?). Has the promised restocking taken place?