

Rewilding the site:

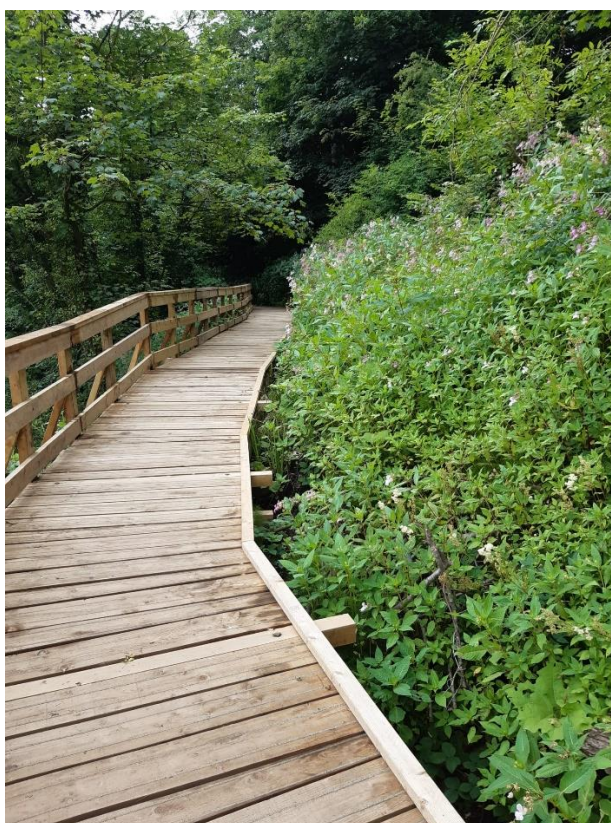
Rewilding only came into the language very recently but it seems a great description for what we have to do at the hydro site.

Rewilding is defined as a progressive approach to conservation. It is about letting nature take care of itself, enabling natural processes to shape land and sea, repair damaged ecosystems and restore degraded landscapes. Through **rewilding**, wildlife's natural rhythms create wilder, more biodiverse habitats.

So, that's our task. It'll take several years of course.

Lets look around the site to see what we have to do:

Into the site via the boardwalk:



The pretty looking pink foliage to the right is the dreaded Himalayan Balsam, in a perfect world we'd get rid of it all but the Dane Valley is full of the stuff!

This picture looks at the boardwalk as it skips over the piling holding the banks up!



The piling either looks very trendy, a rusty finish is all the rage currently with interior designers! Or an eye saw which needs some coppiced hazel or hawthorn hiding it and groundcover capable of growing in rocks!



The bare bank down to the river doesn't look prominent in this picture but if you stand on Havannah Bridge this bank is the main feature that shouts out to you. We have to plant this bank which is comprised of subsoils and rubble with low height and low maintenance foliage.

The worrisome area of the site is the ground where the temporary road was created. Its covered roughly and loosely in subsoils. It maybe at risk of moving in heavy rainfall until redistributed and stabilised by suitable planting:



The site has its own Flora and Fauna: flora means the plants naturally occurring in a particular area. Some examples of flora include- grasslands, forests, flowering and non-flowering plants and trees. Fauna: fauna means the animals naturally living in that area. Few examples of fauna include- birds, animals, fish, insects, etc.

We are not going to create formal gardens or forestry commission type woodland but there are a number of sensible things we can do.

We will have to nurture the site to return it to how it was before we started, but such plans are inhibited by the subsoils we have unearthed during the construction phase. They don't have any organic material in them because previously they were hidden below the surface. Construction has brought these soils to the surface.

For the first year our plans will be to let nature tell us what is possible, to let plants to grow in the surface soils if they can. Additionally, we plan to trial a variety of indigenous species, both plants and trees, to see how quickly they can establish themselves.

There is a 'Trees for Congleton' project, now into its second season, which is working to plant 30,000 trees in the town. A tree for every Congleton resident. The whole site will become part of this project and over the summer plans taking the challenging soils into account will be developed so that tree planting and seeding of the area can be undertaken by the project this coming Autumn. We are following Adam Linnet's, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, suggestion of the applying Cheshire specific seed mixes to the bare ground and investigating pre-grown ivy walls to cover the steel shutters.

In time, the bare earth will be returned to the random woodland we started with, but it'll take time. We will plant a mix of mostly tiny 'whips' that will take years to mature, with a few more mature trees to speed up the process.

An interesting matter is that of the endemic Himalayan Balsam, as the name suggests, Himalayan balsam is from the Himalayas and was introduced to the UK in 1839. It is now an invasive weed of riverbanks and ditches, where it prevents native species from growing. There is lots and lots of it on and around the site. It was there before we started. Do we try to remove it or do we accept it as part of the natural flora? For sure if we try to remove it, it will keep coming back, and back! If we leave Himalayan nature to take its course, we will have loads of it, so maybe we will have working parties each year to keep it to a minimum. What do you think?

And there is the dilemma, leave nature to take its course, or judiciously intervene? But who helps decide what to cull and what to leave? We are using the expertise of Cheshire Wildlife Trust and the Trees for Congleton team to inform our deliberations, we aren't the experts here!

We plan to hide the Power House in wooden cladding to let it blend more into the scenery and hide the steel shuttering in ivy and as the flora returns the fauna will follow.

Lots to do! And we're looking for help?