



Slow the flow installations

Natural Flood Management & Woodland Improvements at Etonbury Woods

Central Bedfordshire Council and Hertfordshire County Council are working together to carry out flood management and habitat improvement works at Etonbury Woods as part of the **ResilientTogether** programme.

The project forms part of a wider approach to **managing flood risk** across the Pix Brook catchment, using natural processes to slow the movement of water and reduce the impacts of heavy rainfall. At the same time, the works will improve the condition and resilience of the woodland in the long-term, supporting a healthier and more **diverse natural environment**.

This project is **fully funded by Defra** through a national innovation programme exploring new approaches to flood risk management.

Why Etonbury Woods

Etonbury Woods is well suited to this project due to its history, landscape and current condition.

In the past, this section of Pix Brook was straightened to provide drainage for agriculture. While effective at the time, this means water now flows more quickly through the channel, with less opportunity to spread out and be stored naturally. During heavy rainfall, this can increase the volume of water moving downstream towards Arlesey and Stotfold.

The area is still a **young developing woodland**, having been planted in 1998–99. This creates an opportunity to actively manage how it evolves, both in terms of habitat and how it functions within the wider catchment.

Some parts of the brook in the woods have **steep, narrow banks**, which means there is little space for water to spread out during heavy rain. At the same time, many **trees are being lost** due to ash dieback, and there are also **non-native conifer trees** that do not cope well with wet ground. Because of this, parts of the woodland would benefit from some careful management and improvement.

Site preparation
& surveys:
Late spring

Construction
works:
Summer

**Lasting up
to 12 weeks**
subject to
conditions

What you will see in the woods

The proposed works are designed to slow the movement of water through the woodland during heavy rainfall, allowing it to spread out and be temporarily stored within the local landscape.

Sampling and preparatory work

Initial surveys and site preparation will take place ahead of construction. This will include targeted vegetation clearance to enable construction activities and new planting, as well as preparation for riverbank reshaping and leaky barriers.

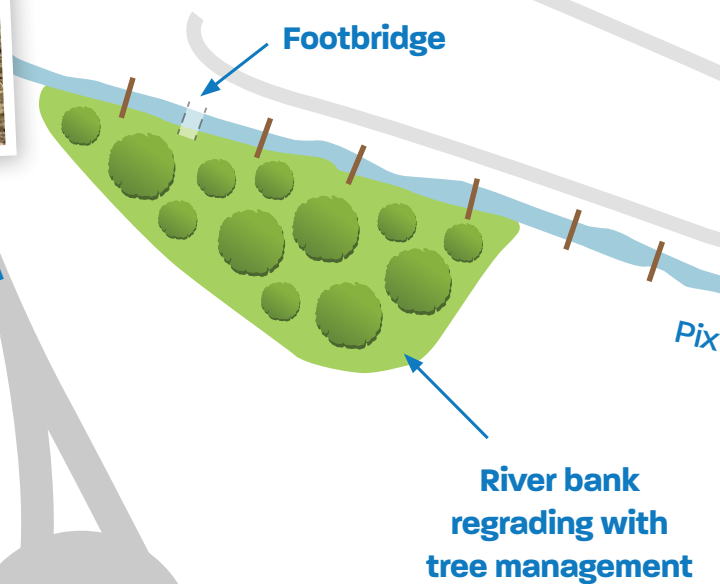
Riverbank improvements

Sections of the riverbank will be regraded from their current steep profile to create more gradual steps or slopes. This will allow water to spread out during high flows, slowing it down and increasing the woodland's capacity to temporarily store water. The softer banks will also help create a more natural river edge.

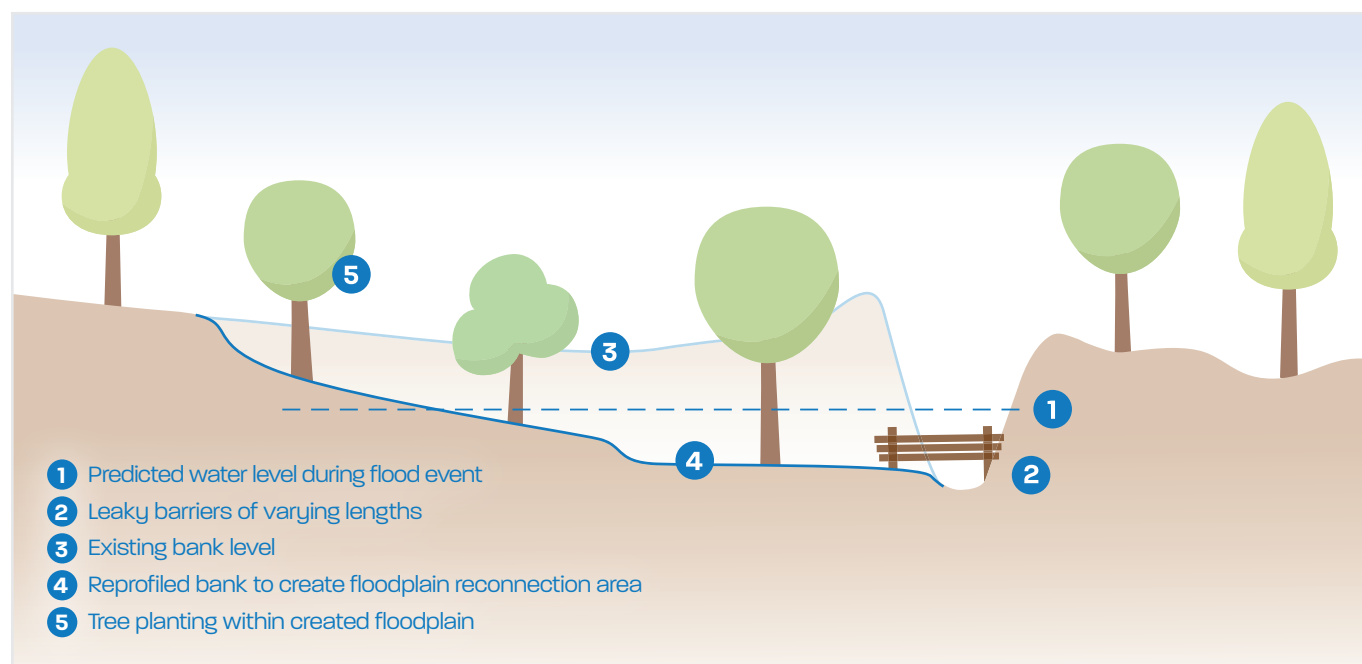


Footbridge

The footbridge near the A507, which has been closed for a number of years, will be removed. Changes to the riverbank will alter how water moves through the brook and would undermine the bridge's foundations if it remained in place. A replacement crossing is not proposed as part of this project. The existing structure will be removed and recycled for use elsewhere within the council's public rights of way network.



Pix Brook bank regrading: Artist's impression



This is an artist's impression of how the bank regrading and leaky barrier works are expected to look. Final designs are still being developed and some details may change.



Natural flood management features

Timber 'leaky barriers' will be installed within the brook. These structures allow the normal flow of water in the brook to pass through, but gently hold back water during heavier rainfall, helping to slow the flow downstream.

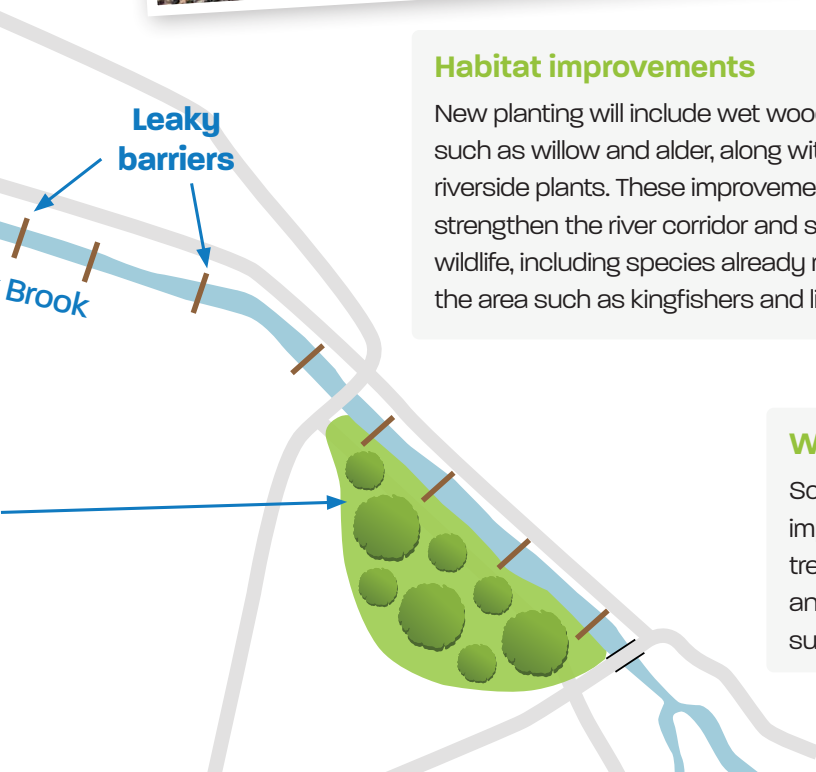
Habitat improvements

New planting will include wet woodland species such as willow and alder, along with native riverside plants. These improvements will help strengthen the river corridor and support local wildlife, including species already recorded in the area such as kingfishers and little egrets.



Woodland management

Some tree removal will be required to support the works and improve woodland condition. This will mainly involve ash trees affected by ash dieback, a small number of conifers, and selective thinning where trees are overcrowded or not suited to the wet woodland environment.



Ecology and environmental safeguards

All works will be delivered in line with environmental regulations and best practice, with appropriate safeguards in place throughout. This includes:

- **Ecological surveys ahead of construction**
- **Input and supervision from qualified ecologists where required**
- **Compliance with all necessary permits and permissions**

Special care will be taken to protect wildlife. Trees will be checked for nesting birds before any work takes place, and if active nests are found, those areas will be left undisturbed until nesting has finished. Habitats will be protected wherever possible during construction.

Works are planned for the summer months, when water levels are typically lower and flood risk is reduced. This allows works to be carried out more safely and helps minimise environmental impacts, while giving disturbed areas time to stabilise and re-vegetate before winter.

Access and recreation

Etonbury Woods will remain open to the public throughout the works.

- **Main paths will be kept accessible wherever possible**
- **Some routes may be diverted**
- **Work areas will be clearly signed**

Following the works:

- **Some paths may be adjusted to protect sensitive habitat areas**
- **Access around the woodland will be maintained**
- **We will minimise disruption wherever possible and keep visitors informed.**

Timeline

Site preparation & surveys
Late spring

Construction works:
12 weeks in summer

Subject to weather conditions and site constraints. Updates will be provided if timings change.

Find out more

We recognise that Etonbury Woods is important to local communities and users, and we are committed to keeping people informed.

If you have any questions or would like to find out more, email the team at ResilientTogether.Project@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk