

Roxbourne Rough local nature reserve

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Roxbourne Rough is a 13-acre site alongside the Metropolitan Line west of Rayner's Lane station, which forms part of the Roxbourne Park open space. It is a series of species-rich grassy meadows with hedges, a pond at the lowest point on the site and a gravel path around the perimeter.



Grassy expanse

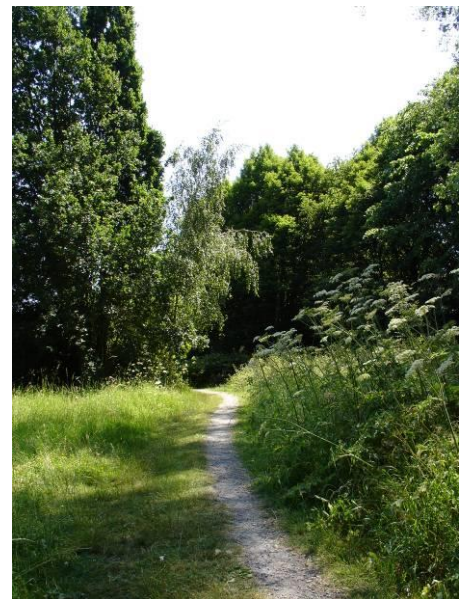


Wildflower meadow

Early in the 20th century the site was in agricultural use but more recently it was owned by British Gas, who used the land to store gas mains on railway sleepers. It had also been used by local people for dog-walking with a footpath across the site and the lack of disturbance and cultivation resulted in a grassland remnant, which was important for nature conservation and public amenity. In the early 1990s, British Gas put forward proposals for light industrial development on the site, opposition to which was led by Councillor Brian Clark. In 1992, agreement was reached between British Gas and Harrow Borough Council to a land swap which released other land for development and transferred ownership of Roxbourne Rough to the council.



Willows



Footpath

British Gas removed the railway sleepers and the council provided an entrance and a concrete road for access. Footpaths around the site were originally laid with wood chippings but these did not last as they were washed away in rainstorms. Gravel was then used on the paths, which follow the

contours, with 72 tons laid by volunteers by hand. An old air raid shelter was infilled with clay and covered with netting, soil and brambles to remove the risk to health and safety.

The lower ground lies on sand, loam and pebbles of the Reading Formation but the higher parts are on London Clay, from which water runs off rapidly. One of the main aims of site management is to divert and retain as much water as possible on the site through the use of ditches and a sump dug to slow the outflow, successfully reducing the flood risk from summer thunderstorms and helping to maintain the wet meadowland habitat.

The site has flower-rich grassland on London Clay so it is quite different from the well drained areas in Harrow Weald. Grass vetchling is one of the rarities found on the site, along with other vetches. In 2008, there were masses of ragwort but this year there has been very little. The eastern and western ends are closed off with hedges of hawthorn and blackthorn, respectively and internal hedges are dominated by hawthorn but with many other tree and bush species. The tallest trees are poplars and there are several species of willows around the pond. In 2009, the pond was full of frogs and spawn but this year there is very little and dog-walkers have reported people with nets taking tadpoles to feed their fish.

The site has been surveyed, in 1992 and 1997, by the London Ecology Unit, who considered it to be close to the quality required for designation as a Site of metropolitan importance for nature conservation. Their species list has since been augmented by the finding of wood anemone in 2014.