Friends of Dibbinsdale
Supporting Brotherton Park & Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve
Email: friends@dibbinsdale.co.uk www.dibbinsdale.co.uk

# Letter from Dibbinsdale. Spring'13

**Dear Friend of Dibbinsdale**,
The Friends of Dibbinsdale committee has agreed on a number of projects for further improving your enjoyment and progress in Brotherton Park and Dibbinsdale Nature Reserve.
The projects listed below, for 2013/14, are areas where we, the Friends of Dibbinsdale, are planning to enhance the ongoing management of the reserve by the Wirral Borough Council Parks and Open Spaces Department.

1. Provision of an additional picnic table and upgrading an existing one to be suitable for wheelchair users
2. Practical training for the volunteers - to improve safety for all
3. Enhancing disabled access for Woodslee Pond - specific provision of disabled parking near the Rangers Office
4. Wetland improvements to Babbs Meadow - habitat preservation and protection
5. Visitor centre refurbishment - essential work is required to make the roof waterproof, followed by interior improvements
6. Reference books and practical study equipment for visitors and students
7. Summer BBQ and Winter Warmer social/ fun events
8. Educational/interest events - e.g. wild flower walk, Bug Hunts etc.

## Membership subscriptions

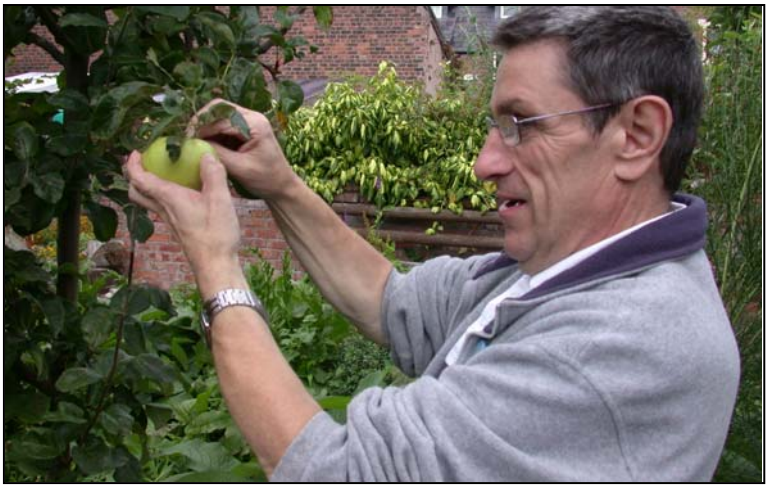
We are proposing to change our membership subscription arrangements. Rather than having a rigid annual Membership Subscription we believe the best way to provide on-going funding for Friends projects and activities is to invite members to annually contribute a suitable, affordable membership donation. This would replace the current £2 yearly subscription, which in the medium term is not sufficient to carry out the projects. If you wish to comment on this proposal please do so before the end of March as we would like to initiate the new system in April. Many Thanks.

David Rome, Membership Secretary


## Incredible Edibles

The walled garden looks to host a second year of a project that seeks to encourage everyone to grow fruit and vegetables as part of healthy living.

Come and see how it develops for yourself



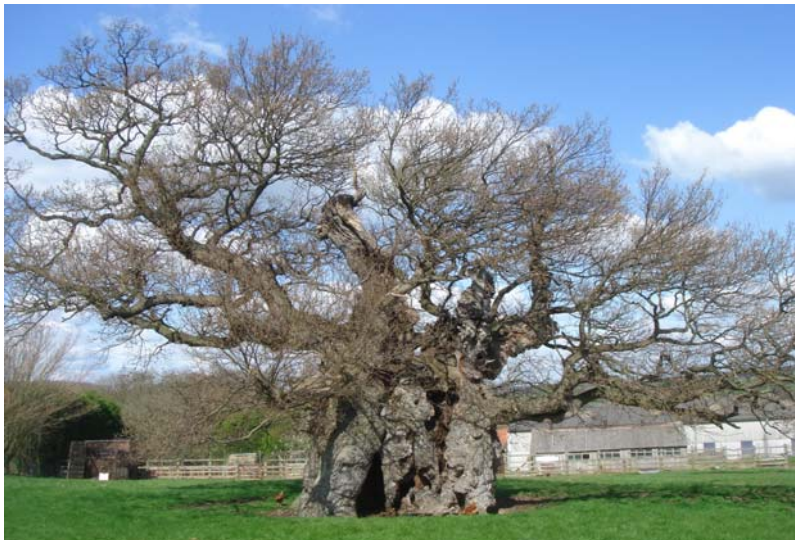
## Dibbinsdale's link with the Woodland Trust

Dibbinsdale nature reserve has two links with the Woodland Trust (a National Charitable Trust based in Grantham). One is through the Ancient Tree Hunt website which has been active for the past 5 years or so, and the second is through the Visit Woods website which encourages the general public to visit our many national and local woodlands. Both sites hold links to Dibbinsdale.

## Ancient Woodland

This Woodland Trust site, which acts as the UK reference for all our ancient trees, can be accessed as follows www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk. Unfortunately Dibbinsdale does not have any ancient trees though there are plenty of "Noble" classification re Oaks, Birch, Ash, Chestnut etc.

The simple criterion for classification and hence age is based on the diameter of the girth taken at 1.5m above the ground. For example for an Oak to be classed as ancient it must be within 7.5m to 12m diameter. The nearest to this on the Wirral is the oak at Eastham Country Park. This is reported to be 500 years old and has a girth of 5.5m which puts it into the category of a Veteran tree.



The oldest tree on the Wirral is a Yew which can be seen at St Mary's churchyard in Eastham. The tree is 1,600 years old. It is interesting to note that at the time this Yew was a sapling, the Roman Army was been forced out of Britain.

The most interesting tree in Dibbinsdale is, in my opinion, the Holm Oak which I have entered into the Ancient Tree website as being a very Notable Tree, with a fascinating interlacing structure to its trunk. The oak is an evergreen and has a Mediterranean origin.

I guess you might now be asking - well what does a truly Ancient Oak tree look like as might well be the case in Dibbinsdale in 800 years time? One of the best UK examples is the Bowthorpe Oak in Lincolnshire, which has a girth/circumference of 40 feet (12m) and is over 1,000 years old. There is sufficient space within the hollow trunk to hold a rugby team!

David Rome

**Pike in Woodslee Pond** George Bryant

Alan the Ranger asked the Environment Agency if they would assist in the removal of some pike from Woodslee Pond. On 24th October the Environment Agency came and removed 19 pike in exchange for some tench and perch. Most of the pike (esox lucius) weighed up to 7lbs in weight. When you consider females (hens) can grow to 50 lbs in British waters and males only to 12 lbs these were quite small. Females can lay up to 30,000 eggs between the months of March and May and when they are spawning - males at approximately 12 lbs - can make a tasty snack for the females!

Wirral Wildlife

## Ancient Woodland Walk

**Saturday 11th May 2013, 10am**
**Cost: FREE**
Enjoy a walk through Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve looking for Bluebells, Wood Anemones and other plants associated with our ancient woodlands, as well as discovering more about the local history of the area.
Meet at Bromborough Rake Station, Bromborough Rake SJ342819.
Come by train - or park considerately in the nearby housing (no parking at station).
Leader: Pete Miller
**All welcome no booking required.**
**Contact: 0151 648 4371**


Ash keys

## Ash die back and Dibbinsdale - a perspective

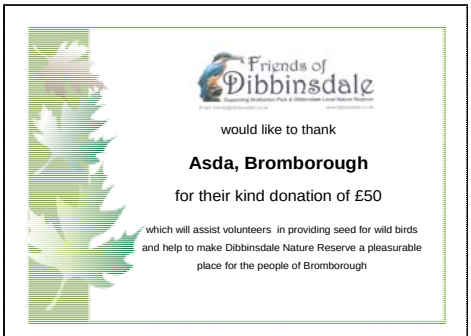
Should we be full of gloom and doom? Are we facing the loss of the ash tree in our wetland landscape? Is the ash tree going to follow the fate of the elm tree? Ash die back is not a sudden occurrence and has been in Europe for at least 20 years. Like the ripples of a pebble dropped in a pool it has been travelling here remorselessly. This is despite prevailing wind. Ash die back is only one of many tree diseases and tree pests that are savaging Britain- sudden oak death, larch die back, juniper die back, London planes are facing a disease spreading from the med as well as Asian longhorn beetle. On the positive side, (and there is little to be happy about) ancient woodland has taken 1000s of years to develop and its change is measured in hundreds of years

Scientists do not know what to do about it? Should we cut back and burn infected trees? This might be likened to the actions of King Canute. The stable door has been left open and cannot be closed. Could the infection have been avoided by government action? Unlikely. A 'globalisation' of plant sales does affect the spread of tree problems. There are no plant import regulations from the EU. No quarantine. In the Victorian past it was only plant seeds that were brought here. Modern consumer demand means that tree disease is spread as quickly as people diseases. Today the soil and the whole imported plant can harbour a wide range of unwanted undesirables. However, it can be argued that such free trade is 'unfit for purpose'
What is the future?
The answer is not straight forward. Trusting the development of natural tree immunity to save the species is unreliable. In Italy scientists have developed (bred) an elm tree that is Dutch Elm tree resistant. This is now available to plant back in out woodland. Could this be done for the ash tree? The elm tree hybrid work was begun in 1975. The ash die back comes from a fungus. Thoughts about the immunity of ash trees led scientists to think it comes from Asia. A vaccination bred from a fungus antidote found in Japan may be an answer.

What trees will replace the ash trees if they die out? Experience in Poland suggests it will be alders and birch trees.
What effect does Global warming have on all this. Trends in floral changes because of climate mirror that of fauna.
The arboretum at Westonbirt throws an interesting light on tree changes due to climate. They have an ancient lime tree that once grew in Britain when the climate was warmer. It didn't set seed when the climate became colder hundreds of years ago. It is now setting seed again. Its potential success is testimony to species diversity. In the same way, the coastal redwoods in America have survived over many millennia. Dibbinsdale needs to bear in mind the 'long game'. Trees have their own time. The diversity of its tree species is its ultimate strength. The ecology of the woodland will adapt to changes in tree species. They have done this over thousands of years since the last ice age and I'm sure they will continue to do this into the next millennium. Sadly I may not see the return of the elm and ash into Dibbinsdale in my life time. But my grand children will.

## News in Brief

Over the winter months, the Dibbinsdale volunteers and Friends group have been busy with a number of management projects in the reserve. These have included both habitat maintenance and visitor management issues. We have now completed the hand rail and fence at the steps by Otters Tunnel which complements' the hazel coppice work and sycamore removal in this area. Light coming into the woods will allow new growth from seeds that have lain dormant for many years. This work has opened up a new view over the wet woodland area from the bench at the mid way point of the steps. We have now completed the Woodslee Pond project with the resent installation of the disabled car park near the visitor centre. In the next month or so we hope to have an opening day with all who helped invited.
Moving forward into 2013, there will be plenty more to do at Dibbinsdale and I am hoping to arrange joint task days with groups from other parks.
On a personal note, I would like to thank all the groups and individuals that help out and contribute to the development of the reserve in so many ways. Without this help the park would not be the vibrant welcoming place that it is.
Alan Smail. Ranger, Brotherton Park & Dibbinsdale LNR.




*Looking after our water environment and reducing pollution is something that the Environment Agency along with Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Wirral Ranger Service and other volunteers have been involved over many years. How we can address poor water quality at home is explained by Tim Gannicliffe who used to work for Natural England.*

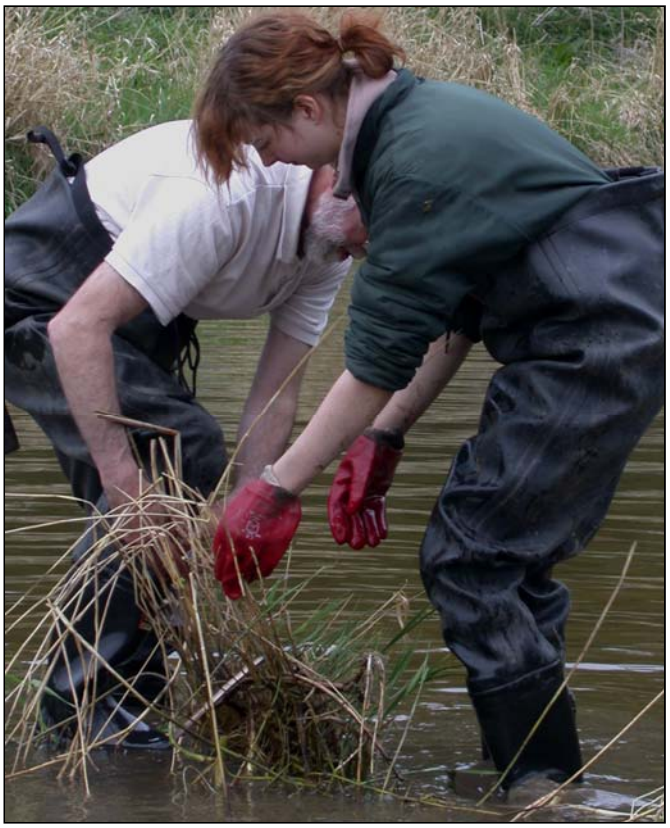
## Improving water quality in the Dibbin.

The main problems are excessive amounts of phosphate and ammonia, and low dissolved oxygen concentrations. The two sources of phosphate are run-off of fertilisers from fields or erosion of soil particle bound phosphate and poor storage of animal excreta. However the major source of phosphate is from laundry cleaning products i.e. washing powder, detergent and human or animal sewage. Poorly maintained septic tanks are also a source. It should be noted septic tanks are not particularly efficient at removing phosphate. Phosphate is considered a growth limiting nutrient which in excess can lead to nutrient enrichment (eutrophication) of a river resulting in overgrowth of algae.

In houses there are normally two forms of drainage - surface water and foul water.

- Surface water drains, or 'storm drains' carry rainwater from road surfaces and rooftops into local rivers and streams and flows into the river untreated.

- Foul water drains carry waste water from toilets, sinks, baths and household appliances to the sewage treatment works. This water is treated before it can safely flow back into river and



If household appliances are accidentally connected to the surface water drain, instead of the foul water drain, waste water from sinks, toilets and washing machines go straight into watercourses.

Untreated sewage effluent in the water causes oxygen levels to drop drastically, sewage fungus covers the bed of the watercourse like a blanket and in more severe cases the river can no longer support fish, insects and animals that live in and around the water.

If a misconnection is the likely cause of pollution, the local water company and the Environment Agency will try to find out which property it is coming from. The householder will be notified and it becomes their responsibility to arrange for the problem to be resolved. Details of the property are passed through to the Environmental Health Department of the local authority. An Environmental Health Officer will serve an enforcement notice on the householder to put the misconnection right within a set time period, or face prosecution.

Ammonia is toxic and can kill sensitive organisms. Ammonia results from the partial breakdown of organic matter e.g. sewage. As noted above untreated sewage effluent results in low dissolved oxygen in the water.

**What can we do?** One way we can reduce our input of phosphates is by using washing powders and detergents that do not contain this chemical. We can also check on misconnections on our property. More information is provided on the Environment Agency website www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/pollution/water/31424.aspx.
Any sort of drainage that is dark and smelly e.g. runoff from silage and leaking from a farm into a ditch or other watercourse can be reported to the Environment Agency as a pollution incident 0800 80 70 60. Those of you with a septic tank should have it regularly serviced.

(left)Planting reeds in the Dibbin flood plain.
Any pollution that enters the river can be countered by reed absorption. Natural filtering.

## A Walk around Dibbinsdale

**Saturday 25th May 2013, 10am - 12pm**
**Cost: FREE**

Trace the local history of the nature reserve and go back in time from Victorian Estate, Medieval Hospital, Viking Battle, and Triassic dinosaurs. This walk is free but donations to Friends of Dibbinsdale are welcome on the day.
Meet at The Rangers Office,
Woodslee Cottages, Brotherton Park and
Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve, off Spital Road, Bromborough.
Leader: Pete Miller

**All welcome no booking required.**
**Contact: 0151 334 9851**