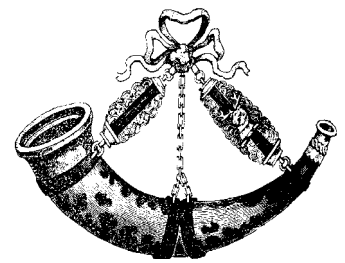




# Letter from Dibbinsdale



## Autumn'11

"Letter from Dibbinsdale" is a newsletter for the people who use the reserve and those who seek to support its conservation and management.

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### *In this issue*

#### *Green Flag Success*

Three cheers for Dibbinsdale. Another year, another Green Flag Award...of course. The audit of the park that results in the Green Flag being awarded is something that should definitely not to be taken for granted. A lot of work has gone into the management of the reserve over the year. It is to the credit of Alan and all those who have helped him that this has been achieved.

Indeed there was a reception with the Mayor of Wirral, Miora McLaughlin, on 15<sup>th</sup> September at Wallasey Town Hall, to express thanks to the rangers and Friends of Dibbinsdale. The mayor expressed interest in visiting the park and we would like to extend a warm invitation to her in the future.

Cllr. Chris Meaden, Wirral Council Cabinet Member for Culture, Tourism and Leisure, said: "It is fantastic that the quality and beauty of Wirral's parks and countryside areas are recognised in this way. Gaining the Award relies on the involvement of the community in the management and development of the parks. The Friends Groups that represent Wirral's winning parks have played a key role in achieving this year's success.



#### *Pacspe Progress*

And what of the future?...The exercise of putting out for tender (privatising ) the ranger service along with the rest of Parks and Open Spaces has been abandoned resulting from a Council decision on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> September. The implications of not going ahead with this plan will have quite an impact, but perhaps not so great as that of having it under private management. Without wishing to be pessimistic, with the staff that has left the service and the level of funding faced by local government the picture is not all roses.

As for Dibbinsdale and the Friends, the picture is a good deal clearer. There is no conflict of interest with our support for Wirral Rangers Service now that it has been kept 'in house'. That is very positive and a focus on drawing up plans will be renewed to help our support for Alan in the coming year.

Details of the PACSPE meeting and indeed the Green Flag citation can be seen at the Rangers Office.

If anyone has a comment on this newsletter, or wishes make suggestions to the Friends of Dibbinsdale(or join!) please contact us(see above)

## ***New Friends Chairman***

Ron Warne, the new Chairman of Dibbinsdale Friends, invited members to a BBQ in the walled garden on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September. The purpose of the BBQ was to introduce him to the members and listen to what thoughts people had about the reserve



### ***After the AGM***

***Ron has in his team Don Davies, David Rome and Peter Miller All duly elected to the Friends Committee in June. Other members of the Friends Committee are also welcome and members of the Friends are invited to contact Ron to express their willingness to support the organization by offering some of their time***

Ron has had a life long interest in natural history. He has a degree in Zoology and Geology. Ron is married and has two married children. He has used Dibbinsdale for over 12 years and lives close to the reserve. He has had a career in the National Health Service and retired in 2010. On a personal note, Ron is approachable, good natured and a sincere individual you can trust.

***Editor***



Mary Bagley, the new head of Countryside in the Council's Parks Service will be coming to Dibbinsdale on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> October to see what has been done on the reserve and discuss with Alan and The Friends what plans there may be for the future

## ***Balsam***

What would be Friends newsletter be without referring to our unwanted vegetation....again? The second year of a contract set up to bring contractors in to get rid of Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed went ahead this year. A new firm, E.L.M, replaced Birchwood Landscapes and great progress was made in extending the area of balsam removal within the reserve.



Treatment early on in the year as well as mid summer was untaken with some success. The balsam plant is quite a resilient non native and keeps coming and coming. The sea of pink flowers has lessened. A volunteer party was active in the reserve in late September 'mopping up' the remains of plants that had survived and threatened to form seed for next year. What was encouraging to see was that there was an emergence of different plants that were no longer dwarfed by their bigger relative. Water pepper, water mint, loosestrife and burdock were all doing much better. Biodiversity, encouraging a wider range of species, is the reason for this work.



Japanese Knotweed is a greater cause for concern because it is a perennial weed that is even more persistent. It has the capacity to be a threat to the built environment too. It can penetrate concrete. (Do not let this plant into your garden!)



## ***Meadow Success***

The meadow near the car park at Woodslee has been an interesting and valuable experiment. Developing a wild flower meadow is not as easy and straight forward an exercise as it may seem. Much of the sown seed has germinated and produced attractive displays of flower throughout the summer. The red poppies within the flower mix have been a real star.



Prepare the ground, seed the ground.....then watch the weeds you had tried to get rid of come back. The development of a meadow is a long term project and the first year's growth has thrown up questions about how to proceed in 2012. The nettles enjoyed the soil preparations in spring and they will need to receive a fatal blow for the next year's flowers to continue through. The wild flowers will be allowed to seed down before the vegetation is cut down and removed. This will give an opportunity to tackle some of the less wanted perennial weeds whilst reducing the soil fertility, hence encouraging better flowers next year. A volunteer's work is never done.



The algae form a thin film over the water. Fish die through lack of oxygen



## ***News in Brief***

### ***Orange Tip Butterflies***

This year was the best year on recent record for the orange tip butterfly. (Thank you to James who is doing a study of them) This corresponded with a warm spring for the emergence of the butterfly. The severe winter didn't appear to have affected them.

### ***Buzzard 'explosion'***

Buzzard are commonly seen everywhere now on Wirral. The valley is no exception. A pair (or more) can be seen regularly. I don't think the sparrow hawks and kestrels are that keen on them. A hobby was seen flying across the reserve recently too. (Thank you Paul for that spot)



Thanks to Carl Huxley for the picture. If you have any spotting, or observations, please contact us (see the email, address on the front).

### ***Pond algae***

Woodslee Pond has had (and is still having) a bad case of blue/green algae. The algae are bad news for fish and aquatic life because it will de-oxygenate the water. The algae pose a small health risk to humans also. (Swimming is not advised for those who are mad enough to try) The treatment for the algae has been applied but it will take time to work. Bales of barley straw are floated in the pond. They 'react' with the algae to purge it from the water. When the barley straw has performed its magic, the soggy mess is pulled out of the pond and disposed of.

*Have you noticed the landscaping work by Alan and volunteers on the edge of the pond? They have transformed the fallen oak into a pond platform and seat.*

### ***Horse Chesnut tree leaf miner***

Have you noticed that many of the leaves of the horse chestnut tree appear brown and blotchy like this picture? This is caused by an insect called a leaf miner. Infestation has been particularly bad this year. The trees health will thankfully not be affected seriously.



### ***A note from Alan the Ranger***

#### ***Bats in the rain***

Plenty of visitors came to enjoy our bat walks at Dibbinsdale and Eastham this year. Eastham was a great success and we observed many more bats than in previous years. The night of the walk in Dibbinsdale however was the wettest of the summer. The group decided not to be put off by this so we went for an evening walk in the rain at Dibbinsdale. This was great fun and enjoyed by all who took part. Next year we are renaming the walk '**Raining Bats and Frogs in Dibby**'

#### ***.The Walled Garden***

The involvement of different community groups and volunteers in the walled garden at Dibbinsdale has gone from strength to strength this year. Awareness of the garden in the wider community has grown due to a number of open days throughout the summer. The Walled Garden is an oasis that offers a place for everyone who wishes to be involved.

#### ***Education in the Park***

One of our long serving volunteers, Maria Delaney. Bsc Hons, is looking into running an adult community education programme for life long learning from the Brotherton Education and Visitor Centre. The courses looking at Countryside Conservation will be sponsored by Wirral Council and should start in the New Year. They will be aimed at adults who would like a taste of the subject and those who may use the course as the start of a pathway to work.

#### ***Wirral Wildlife (2 trees, no candles)***

Wirral Wildlife is 40 this year and to celebrate this they have asked if they can plant two native black poplars ( male and female)in The Reserve. The trees will be planted in November near the site where Woodslee House once stood. This area is ideal for black poplar trees as all poplar species like rich wet soil.

**On a personal note, I would like to say thank you to all the volunteers who have helped me in the park in my first year as full time ranger at Dibbinsdale.**

**Thanks to all those who have contributed to making the park the place it is.**

***Alan Smail. Ranger.Dibbinsdale  
alansmail@wirral.gov.uk***

### ***International Year of the Forest***

Welcome to the International Year of Forests, 2011. The United Nations General Assembly declared 2011 as the International Year of Forests to raise awareness of 'sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.'

In Dibbinsdale, we have a 'forest' that can stand proud with them all. It may be small but its provenance is hard to match. The ancient woodland it represents was part of the Forest of Wirral. This royal hunting ground of the middle ages was once the play thing of Princes of Wales. The Forest had a forester who controlled the hunting and forest management. His badge of office was the Wirral Horn.

The National Trust in 2000 at their AGM passed a resolution that trees should be given as much care as old houses and landscaped gardens. Ted Green, founder-president of the Ancient Tree Forum, gave a talk in Bebington some time ago and said: "Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have a moral obligation to future generations to protect and conserve the gene banks, reservoirs of biodiversity and powerful symbols of our historic culture"

The Government has recently beaten their retreat from its proposed forestry sell off earlier this year. Wirral Council has similarly decided not to 'sell off' the management of its woodland to the private sector.

So in this International Year of the Forest there *has* been something to celebrate for those who hold dear their forest after all. Indeed isn't this something to celebrate in itself. Perhaps we should tell the United Nations! What would be appropriate in 2011 is for Wirral Council to declare its pleasure and pride in Dibbinsdale as well as in its Green Flag...Wirral's own forest. Wouldn't it be good to tell the United Nations that we had honoured the Foresters of Wirral?

