

Conservation Management at Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve

P.Ladybridge Phase2

This planned work is part of a larger project to create an improved wetland corridor throughout the nature reserve. North of the Otters Bridge, an area of wetland known as Babbs Meadow, is also part of this scheme.

The work that was undertaken in 2002 at the Ladybridge area of Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve was a habitat creation, flood alleviation and improved access scheme. (See the map –point F) This scheme has been successful in its objectives and the opportunity is being sought to extend the project further downstream on similar lines. A vegetation survey was undertaken along the wetland corridor prior to work being undertaken.

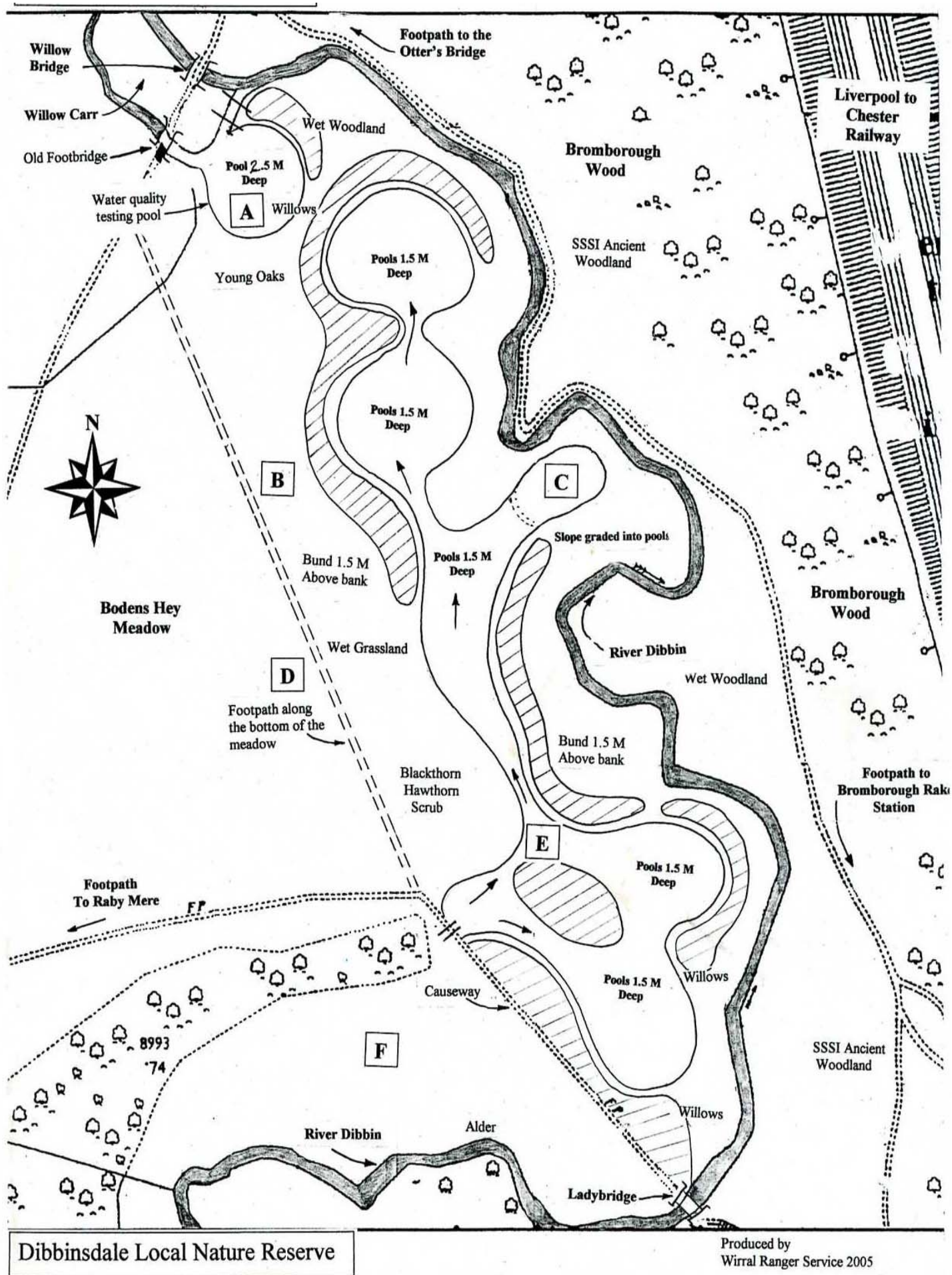
A series of interlinking pools are to be created fed by floodwaters of the adjoining River Dibbin. The first scheme undertaken in 2002 ties in with this idea. Ponded water from the river issues in to the new proposed pools through a pipe in the causeway leading to the Ladybridge. (See Point E on the map). The pools will be shallow and graded so that gently slope into the pools. The material excavated from the pools will be banded to form a series of banks. These will act as potential water vole burrow territory that will be above the level of floodwater. The bunds will help to direct the water to feed the interlinking pools. The gaps in the bunds will allow floodwaters to re-flood the pools.

An existing water vole pool (See the map- Point C) will be developed to encourage the further colonisation of the wetlands flora and fauna. It will be left undisturbed and a pool created adjacent to it leading into the interlinking series. A threshold will pond the water at point C so that the pond will be partially separate from the main body of water. This area will be monitored to assess the population of water voles in the area prior to the work commencing.

An improved and surfaced path at the bottom of the meadow is proposed. (See Point D on the map) The course of the path would follow an existing path line. The surface drainage of the sloping Bodens Hey Meadow creates very wet grassland where it meets the river flood plain. The path would act as a clear marker for management purposes between the meadow and the proposed improved wetland. The course of the path would not necessarily be straight but follow small variations in land contours and new planting. The new planting of hawthorn and blackthorn would mirror what is already bordering part of the wetland near Point E. It would also help to minimise disturbance to the wetland over time whilst providing a valuable ‘eco-zone’ to the adjoining meadow. To improve biodiversity it is proposed that Black Poplars are planted of this part of the flood plain. (See Point B on the map)

At Point A on the map, close to the new Willow Bridge, a water quality testing pool is proposed. This will enable easy access to the water and provide an opportunity to access the water quality of the river over time. A pool was created when the old bridge was bypassed and a new bridge was constructed. This was in effect a pool created by a truncated river meander. This pool borders a wet woodland area known as a willow carr. It is proposed that the pool is enlarged and partially revetted so that it can be used for river dipping. The area would need to be made safe to the public by some carefully constructed unobtrusive fencing. This is a potential good environmental education fieldwork focus because four of the reserves habitat types converge here- wet woodland, dry and wet grassland, and ancient woodland. It is also a convergence of routes through the reserve.

The work would also necessitate the desilting of sections of the River Dibbin. This would be done over three years to mitigate against environmental disturbance. There are a series of river blockages- fallen trees and debris – that would need to be cleared at the same time. Particular care would be taken close to the section of the river near Point C on the map. Over the three years of the project it is proposed that common reed would be encouraged to populate the pools by transplanting existing stock. The elimination of Himalayan Balsam would also be necessary after the disturbance to the seed bank due to excavation. The balance between open water and reeds would be achieved by cutting. The bunds would act as a means to gain access to the pools for machine at a much later date when further maintenance is required.



Original map of Ladybridge Phase 2

Interim Progress Report
Ladybridge Phase 2 Wetland Scheme
Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve-2006- 2007

The planning for the project began in 2006 with the application for funding from the Big Lottery Fund and Breathing Spaces. After discussion with the Friends of Dibbinsdale and following the Autumn Watch programmes on BBC the application was submitted. The plans for the works were a redrafting of a previous unsuccessful bid for funding from SITA in 2005.

The bid emphasised the two main benefits of the project – that of improvements in wetland habit by creating a wetland corridor parallel with the river and that of improvements to access at the bottom of Bodens Hey, adjoining the wetland. The viability of the present scheme had been tested in a previous project of 2003 that focussed on the Ladybridge. Phase two's aim was to extend the series of pools vegetated by reeds further down the valley. The benefit to wildlife and conservation would be to create pollution free refuges from the urban water of the Dibbin. The excavated pools would help provide flood relief storage capacity filter the water with its reedbeds and provide homes for water voles that would be able to create burrows in the banks that would be raised above flood levels.

The improvements to the footpath at the bottom of the meadow would define the two areas of management resulting from Countryside Stewardship agreement from DEFRA. (Oct 2005) Namely the Meadow and the Fen, or Wetland. An all weather surfaced path was proposed. Interpretative information and evaluation and monitoring of the development of the project were the other components of the scheme.

The application was successful and funds were acquired in June 2007. The scheme then needed the consent, or approval of Natural England and The Environment Agency to proceed. Applications for consent were at first considered a formality because there had been an almost identical previous scheme in 2003. This proved not the case. Natural England sent Steven Ayliss to consider the project while Emma Martindale of DEFRA also evaluated the Countryside Stewardship agreements progress. This was in July. Application was also made to the Environment Agency and Graham Todd.(Flood Defences) Natural England was to pass through their consent to EA, and EA to the project. Natural England sent their approval through in late August and EA sent on their approval by early October. The scheme could now proceed before winter flooding rendered contractors work impossible.

United Utilities were consulted with regard to the course of the main sewer that ran underground through the reserve.. Peter Reid of UU sent through plans of the course of the pipe. Griffiths of Newton Hall Farm sent through their estimate which was accepted. The second week in October was agreed.

It only left the marking out of the pools on the ground for the work to commence. The exact course of the sewer was crucial to this. Its course was between two manhole covers at either end of the wetland. The only problem was that the man holes at one end were completely covered by vegetation and finding them proved problematic. All was resolved with some advanced map work involving compass bearings and Sarah Morton, Eastham Ranger, whose eyesight was better than mine. The task day as part of Mersey Basin Week provided volunteers from Levers who marked the outline of the pools with what might be described as 'crop circles'.

Griffiths duly arrived at the crack of dawn Monday 8th October and deployed what seemed like a convoy of excavators and equipment. Robbie Griffiths who led the contractors described it as 'mob handed'. The job was discussed, health and safety forms filled in, signs and path closures put in place and we were off. Mob handed is not a fair description of the efficient and professional way the firm undertook the work. With on site discussions throughout the following days on subjects related to sensitive areas, angles of slope, run offs and gradings of banks, all was achieved ahead of schedule.

The slow process of collecting plant material to colonise the mud strewn pools when finished had begun many months earlier. Rushes, Purple Loosestrife, Common Reeds and Flag Irises had been propagated and assembled in the walled garden to wait transplanting. This was thanks to the work parties of volunteers from a combination of sources but mostly the Environment Agency and Unilever Research earlier in the summer. A water bed had been built in the walled garden by volunteers to house them.

At this point in time the Pest Control Officers team along with The Friends will take forward the transplanting of wetland plants in and around the pools- weather and water levels permitting.

Peter Miller. Ranger. October 2007

On going management

Annual

- Control of Himalayan balsam by strimming
- Felling and stump treating emergent trees(mostly willow)
- Strim edge of wet grassland(three or four times dependant on growth)



Metropolitan
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Project work

- Monitor amphibian and fish populations

Date completed

- De silt pools every ten years

Date completed

- Map & Control Japanese knotweed population(injection with Roundup)

Date completed

- Monitor spread of Japanese knotweed

Date completed

- Coppice mature willows and ashes on a rotation

Date completed

- Transplant common reed to assist colonisation of pools

Date completed

- Re introduction of water voles (followed by control and monitoring of populations/mink trapping)

Date completed



Metropolitan
Borough of Wirral



Ladybridge
June 2008

Ladybridge Phase Two



Excavators dig pools near the river



Pools shaped and ready for planting

Reeds are transplanted from Babbs Meadow to colonise the pools. Pest Control officers help with the work. Reeds are propagated in the walled garden at Woodslee.



Potted plants were planted close to the waters edge

The shape of the pools is determined by the underground sewer pipe that follows the line of the river. The pipe lies between two manhole covers at the bottom of the meadow. Efforts were made to avoid this and the pool the toads use in spring

The 'soft' edge of the pools is an ideal place to plant marginal plants like purple loosestrife, rushes, and flag iris. Access for wildlife in and out of the pools is important



Himalayan balsam(left) was regularly trimmed out in the summer of 2008 so that the plant did not set seed. The middle picture shows the growth of phalaris close to the water in the first summer.



Pool shelf is planted up



Reed growth by Ladybridge phase one pools