

File ref: SJ 38/2

County: Merseyside **Site Name:** Dibbinsdale

District: Wirral

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Local Planning Authority: Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SJ 338815 **Area:** 53.2 (ha) 131.5 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 108 **1:10,000:** SJ 38 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1979 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1983 **Date of Last Revision:** 1989

Other Information:

1. Site boundary changed at this revision with the addition of Foxes Wood.
2. Parts of the site are managed as a reserve by the Cheshire Conservation Trust.
3. Other parts of the site are managed as a Local Nature Reserve by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Dibbinsdale is located 8 km south-west of Birkenhead immediately adjacent to the town of Bromborough. The majority of the site lies along Dibbinsdale Brook with a small area along Clatter Brook. The underlying rocks are Triassic Sandstones of the Sherwood Sandstone Group with dry acidic brown earth soils on the upper slopes and wetter base-rich alluvial soils at the base of the slope.

The main habitats included are semi-natural broad-leaved woodland, which covers most of the site, reed swamp, fen pasture and neutral grassland. This is the largest block of semi-natural woodland of its type in Merseyside and it contains typical examples of ash-wych elm and valley alder woodland, each of which supports a rich flora and fauna. Woodland in the valley of Dibbinsdale and Clatter Brook has been recorded since 1818 although it is likely that some parts of the wood are much older.

Ash-wych elm woodland covers the majority of this site and is characterised by an abundance of ash, pedunculate oak and sycamore. Wych elm, holly and beech are also frequently found with birch and rowan occurring on the more acidic soils. Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* and horse chestnut have been planted in certain parts of the wood and some regeneration of these species has taken place. Hazel, hawthorn and elder are the predominant shrub species in the understorey with guelder rose *Viburnum opulus* present on the more base-rich soils. The ground flora contains abundant ivy and bramble with bracken, creeping soft-grass, foxglove and bluebell characteristic of the more acidic soils and dog's mercury, giant fescue, false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*, enchanter's-nightshade, primrose, sanicle and wood avens on the more base-rich soils. More local species include common field cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense* and early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula*.

The ash-wych elm woodland grades into alder woodland along the valley floor. Alder, grey willow, crack willow and osier are the main species in this community. White willow *Salix alba* and Italian black poplar *Populus nigra var. italica* have been planted in places. The understorey is composed of red currant, black currant and gooseberry. Indian balsam *Impatiens grandulifera*, meadowsweet, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, common nettle and reed canary-grass are the principal components of the ground flora. Other species include yellow iris, cyprus sedge, remote sedge, marsh marigold and water forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*.

The reed swamp, which is now an uncommon habitat in Merseyside, is quite extensive in places along the stream and dominated by common reed. Other species include reed canary-grass, great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*, yellow iris, water-pepper *Polygonum hydropiper* and celery-leaved buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus*.

The fen pasture is characterised by wood small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos*, floating sweet-grass, creeping bent, common nettle, meadowsweet, soft rush and Indian balsam. Other species include yellow loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris*, marsh pennywort and wavy bitter cress *Cardamine flexuosa*.

The remainder of this site supports neutral grassland which is dominated by false oat-grass, common bent, Yorkshire fog and sweet vernal-grass. This grassland community contains ladies mantle *Alchemilla vulgaris* which is characteristic of old pasture.

Dibbinsdale is important for birds with 61 species breeding regularly including tawny owl, kingfisher, green woodpecker, great spotted woodpecker, nuthatch, tree creeper, willow tit and grasshopper warbler.

Dibbinsdale contains a rich invertebrate fauna especially molluscs which are associated with the calcareous springs.