

## **Chairman's Report for the Financial Year 2012-13**

**The Financial Year 2012/13** was a successful one for the Trust with all aims outlined in last year's report being either completed by the year end or well underway.

It has been a good year for Tree Planting within the Forest of Marston Vale with a further 14,000 native trees and shrubs planted over 10 hectares to expand the existing Bedford Green Gateway between Wootton and Kempston to over 60 hectares of woodland.

**The tree planting** engaged around 500 people from the local community, schools and businesses. A successful innovative element this year was linking tree planting with a geo-caching event, bringing the experience of tree planting to a new audience. One type of tree usually planted as part of a range of native broadleaf trees was missing this year - Ash

**In a year when Ash die-back** was very much in the news, as reported cases of Calara seemed to march from the East towards our Forests, it did highlight the fragility of our native species to pests and disease. This was shown by the felling of some of the original older trees in the Millennium Country Park; Poplars which had been attacked and destabilised by the larvae of the hornet clear winged moth.

**It was timely that around the same period**, funding was secured to run a new pilot project to re-introduce native English Elm trees to the Marston Vale. Using seedlings from trees that appeared to show forms of natural resistance to Dutch Elm Disease, which wiped out so many Elm trees in the 1970's. The young trees are being tended in a new tree nursery built by volunteers, prior to then being planted at selected sites around the vale and their health monitored as they grow and mature. Lets hope this is a success and that in time similar breeding of resistant stock will allow Ash to once again be a dominant feature of our landscape.

**Another pilot programme** involves the Trust assisting the Forestry Commission in designing and testing the Woodland Carbon Code – a new voluntary standard for woodland creation projects in the UK. Independent certification to this standard provides assurance and clarity about the carbon savings of these sustainably managed forests.

**Any visitor to the Forest Centre** can't fail to notice the new addition of the timber barn, which serves as a workshop and store plus firewood processing area. A perfect base for handling timber extracted from our growing woodlands, converting it to firewood and kindling, as part of sustainably managing the Trusts forests.

**Seventeen schools, Cub Scout and Brownie groups** from the area came for Ranger-led education and information visits. Plus the Trust organised eleven children's activity half days throughout the year, engaging around 1000 children in various adventure, design, art and habitat exploration events

**New adventure play equipment** has been installed to transform the play area, resulting in a greater number of children with a broader age range enjoying the facilities. The official opening was conducted by children's representatives from all class groups from Church End Lower School, from Marston Moretaine.

**During the year the Trust** and its wholly owned trading subsidiaries Marston Vale Services and Marston Vale Farms, donated via covenant £68,254 and £163,900 respectively to the Trust. As a result of this year's activities, the charity's unrestricted General Fund has decreased slightly **£1,015,531**. However of this figure, **£265,039** is represented by fixed assets and **£750,492** by net current assets, which is

equivalent to in excess of 12 months of the Forest Team costs in accordance with the charity's updated reserves policy.

**Access and Biodiversity** projects to be funded this year include 'Paths 4 Communities' which will deliver a suite of interpretation media at the Millennium Country Park, to promote the available public access that is available across the Marston Vale. In addition a new permissive bridleway was secured providing a much needed off-road link from Lidlington to the Millennium Country Park.

**In the Bedford River Valley Park** A joint funding application with Bedford Borough Council was successful and will facilitate a Bedford River Valley Park Heritage Interpretation Project, to Install media to explain the rich and diverse history of mans activity on the landscape in that area, from the Neolithic (4,000BC) to construction of the Bedford to Cambridge Railway. Work has begun and is due to finish in 2015.

**In all the activities**, events, projects and day to day workings of the Forest there is one element that runs throughout the organisation and that is the dedication and professionalism of the staff and volunteers who make all of this happen! This organisation would not be were it is without those who put in all the extra effort and in particular the volunteers who through there unstinting effort add an extra equivalent of 5 full time staff – a very valuable contribution for the Trust.

Report delivered by the Chairman

Debbie Hassall

Marston Vale Trust Annual General Meeting  
18<sup>th</sup> November 2013