

2011 - 2012 Chairs' Report to the AGM of the Mirrlees Fields Action Group (MFAG) November 22nd 2012

Committee of MFAG

After last year's AGM, **David Gosling** resumed the role of Chair but has worked closely with **David Kemp** as the Deputy Chair. Secretary was **Richard Brown**, and Treasurer, **Gene Allen**.

Other Committee members have been **Sue Bailey**, **Carol Condliffe**, **Gail Escott**, **Hilary Fletcher**, **Graham Frith** (Anglers Club), **Mike Gorman**, **Alison Marsden**, **Rachel Stoba** (Communications), **Geoff Taylor**, **Brian Waddington** (Anglers Club), **Dave Brock** (one meeting).

Richard Brown resigned from the position of Secretary early in 2012 and **Sue Bailey** resumed as secretary with **Hilary Fletcher** as the minutes secretary.

Mike Gorman resigned from the committee in September.

A new Chair and Secretary are being sought at the 2012 AGM. **Sue Bailey** is resigning from the committee, but will be continuing independently with the history project. **David Gosling** is resigning from the position of Chair and will stay on the committee.

The committee has met every two months throughout the last year.

Outline Planning Application for Phase 2 of the factory site

The application was finally approved on 2nd March 2012 for a maximum of 203 residential units. The proposed development will now comprise 183 houses and 20 apartments (10%), split as follows:

- 16 detached (8%)
- 114 semi detached (56%)
- 53 terraces (26%)
- 20 apartments (10%)

There will also be a number of move-on business units.

The Council imposed a number of conditions to the approval. In brief those that affect the Fields are as follows:

1. **Upgrading of Public Footpath** FP124S between the western end of Barlows Lane South and the rear of 28 Crossfield Grove to include a minimum 3m width hard surfaced path, gating to restrict vehicle access, signage, landscaping scheme and street lighting to adoptable standard;
2. **Upgrading of Public Footpath** FP126S between the North Western corner of the Man Diesel industrial site and Public Footpath FP127S by provision of a minimum 2m width loose surface path, signage, landscaping scheme and parapets on the bridge over the stream;
3. No development shall take place until an investigation and risk assessment into **contamination at the site**, in accordance with a scheme to be approved in writing by the local planning authority, has been carried out.
The report submitted with the application has identified potentially unacceptable risks from contamination and further investigation is required to ensure **that these risks to the future users of the land and neighbouring land are minimised**, together with those to controlled waters, property and ecological systems.
4. No part of the development shall be occupied until a scheme for **the restoration and re use of Bramhall House has been submitted to and approved** in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development hereby approved shall not be carried out other than in accordance with the approved scheme for the restoration and reuse of Bramhall House.
5. Protection of existing trees on the site.

MFAG written to the Council Planning Office asking that we should be consulted about the design of the upgraded footpaths to ensure they maintain the character of the Fields.

Membership drive

MFAG delivered leaflets to the whole of Woodsmoor, parts of Davenport and Great Moor and streets neighbouring the Fields in Hazel Grove inviting new members and to up-date our e-mail records. A box in the Woodsmoor Post Office was also successful in attracting new members. As a result MFAG now has 78 new members. The on-line membership form continues to bring new members.

In total we have 590 members in 506 households, of whom 219 are on the e-mail list.

These numbers show the strength of local feeling in support of our aims.

The 'Friends of Mirrlees Fields' Facebook page currently has 92 followers.

The fence

MFAG first heard that a new fence was being considered in February 2012. The Chair was given assurances that the new fence would simply replace existing. When the fence began to be erected a number of concerns arose - the height and visual impact of the fence, the line of the fence where it did not follow the existing line, the closing of gaps which have been historically used as entry points to the fields.

MFAG sought a meeting with the management of MAN.

David Gosling and **Rachel Stoba** met with Wayne Jones and Louise Durose on July 31st.

The company explained the reasons for the erection of the fence; namely to improve security and to meet liability requirements. MFAG were assured by MAN that Public Rights of Way would not be affected by the fence, but that all other openings would be closed.

After much discussion the Committee decided **not** to oppose the retrospective planning application for the erection of the fence on two grounds. We recognised the legal rights of the landowner to fence their land and also appreciating that, whatever the future use of the fields, this was an investment in improving security.

MFAG informed members of this decision by a newsletter and by e-mail.

Mike Gorman resigned from the committee so that he could lodge an objection to the fence.

MFAG relationship with MAN

After the difficult meeting reported above it became apparent that it was necessary to build trust between MAN and the committee representing MFAG. **Rachel Stoba**, the MFAG Communications officer, has established regular contact with **Alun Hayes**, (PR consultant for MAN with regards to the Fields). In an email statement to Wayne Jones following the face to face meeting, the Committee acknowledged:

"MFAG looks forward to better communication between us. We are now fully aware that Alun Hayes is our first point of call, and we will channel all requests through him and liaise with him on updates. We agree that trust is important on both sides and for our part we undertake to build an open and transparent relationship with you to aid the process of negotiating a sustainable legacy for the future of the Fields."

This approach was approved by the Committee via a majority vote and we hope this regular communication will enable MFAG to have a constructive relationship with the Company going forward, and a recognised 'place at the table' for any discussions on the future of the fields. In response **Alun Hayes** issued a statement on behalf of MAN which included the following:

Man Diesel & Turbo is committed to working with community, educational and sports groups to bring the 60 acres of private green space into public use to benefit the wider community. The company has no long-term aspirations in retaining the green space.

Any community groups interested in helping shape the plans for the fields for future use should contact Alun Hayes on alun@uk-nlp.co.uk"

Louise Durose (Company Secretary) has agreed to attend the MFAG AGM on 22nd November 2012 to answer questions from members about the future of the fields.

Contact with Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT), Fields in Trust and the Woodlands Trust

The Chair contacted the organisations named above. The Woodlands Trust decided that the Fields did not meet their criteria for 'woodland' – not enough trees!

The Fields in Trust would welcome an application from the landowner to transfer ownership to the Trust as part of the Queen Elizabeth Challenge, but would require assurances about the future management of the area and a sustainable financial and management plan for the Fields.

The CWT showed an interest in the Fields as a site that would encourage interaction between the public and wildlife. Because the fields are in the centre of a large residential area with many schools nearby there is considerable potential for promoting educational and public interest in wildlife. The Living Landscapes Manager, Richard Gardner, has visited the Fields and was encouraged by the environment he saw, and the diversity of wildlife and tree/plant life. The CWT trustees will be considering whether to add Mirrlees Fields to their acquisition strategy and subsequently to open discussions with MAN.

The History Project

Following the well-received presentation to last year's AGM by **Sue Bailey** about the history of Woodsmoor and Mirrlees Fields, Sue and **Roger Sim** have interviewed local residents who have long memories of the area. Sue and Roger have also researched local records and archived maps and photos. It is hoped to have a web-site and a publication in 2013.

Other Activity

1. The web-site has continued to be maintained and developed by Peter Goodwin.
2. A Facebook page was created for 'friends of Mirrlees Fields.'
3. A path clearance day was held in the spring to clear brambles and nettles from the main track between the Anglers' Pond and the entrance from Crossfield Grove. Approximately 20 volunteers attended.
4. Great Moor Junior School children visited the Fields to learn about their history.
5. At the May Council Elections candidates were asked to make a statement on their position relating to the Fields. All supported the idea of the area becoming a community owned public space.