

A SPOT OF HISTORY

From the local 1842 tithe maps Dave Mann has ascertained that the Mirrlees Factory site was principally owned by a Mr James Rhodes (or James Higginbottom Dave to clarify) while the Fields and New House Farm were owned by Lady Maria Davenport. The factory site was occupied by Mr James Rhodes.

The Mirrlees Blackstone company which first began diesel engine production in the current site at the beginning of the last century, traced its origins back to a partnership founded in 1840 in Glasgow dedicated to the manufacture of cane sugar machinery.

After investigations into the practical possibilities of a new internal combustion engine patented by Dr Rudolf Diesel, an agreement was signed in March 1897 whereby the patentee was granted an exclusive licence for the manufacture and sale of the 'diesel engine' in Great Britain. Following this agreement, the first engine was completed in November 1897.

It was shortly after this that the diesel engine business of the Company at Glasgow increased so rapidly that a decision was reached to manufacture diesel engines at Hazel Grove, near Stockport in Cheshire. To this end Mr. Charles Day, then Chairman of the Company, came to Cheshire and with the financial assistance of Mr H.N. Bickerton of the National Gas & Oil Engine Company Limited they formed Mirrlees, Bickerton & Day Limited and the construction work culminated in the factory being opened during October, 1908, for the manufacture of diesel engines.

The first diesel engine Mirrlees built, Mirrlees No1, still exists and is on display at the Anson Museum, Poynton, which opens to the public at Easter.

More recent history of the area will be published in the next issue of the Newsletter and on our web-site.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE MIRRLEES FIELDS ACTION GROUP

The MFAG exists to act as a local resident group that will liaise with the local community, local councillors, the SMBC Planning Department, MAN Diesel Ltd and its preferred property developers in working towards the implementation of an environmentally sustainable strategy for the future of the Mirrlees site.

If you support us in trying to protect the fields now and for future generations then why not join us as a member of the Action Group. There is no cost to membership and you will be kept up to date on the latest information about the Fields.

We distribute a newsletter to all who sign up as members. Newsletters have been distributed by e-mail (to those who have an e-mail address) and by hand delivery to those who do not have e-mail.

- Do contact us if you have not been receiving the periodic newsletter
- Please let us know if your contact details have changed
- Join the group if you have not already done so, by completing the form below.

CONTACT: info@mirrleesfields.org.uk

I want to be a member of the Mirrlees Fields Action Group

Name:.....

Address:.....

Telephone: Email:

Please return this to our Membership Secretary at 21 Belstone Close, Bramhall, Skoctport SK7 3QA



Future of the Fields remains unknown

New buildings for MAN Diesel

Action group gets a web-site

Litterpick on April 19th

FUTURE OF THE FIELDS LIES WITH COUNCIL

Stockport Borough Council has issued reassurances that Mirrlees Fields will not be built on. Despite the fears that arose last year when MAN Diesel announced that they wished to sell the site, the Council have said consistently that the designation of the Fields as a 'strategic open space' gives it the strongest protection against development that they can give.

The company that was originally given the brief to develop the whole site, Orbit, has withdrawn its interest. Attention has now turned to the question whether the Council will acquire the Field. Various options are being considered.

- The Council could purchase the Fields outright.
The Council could take a long lease of at least 25 years.
- A third possibility is some kind of partnership in which stewardship of the Fields would be the responsibility of MAN Diesel, the Council and local residents through a 'Friends of Mirrlees' Group.

All these options will have to be negotiated with MAN Diesel.

No formal decision has been taken by the Council at the present time as to whether it will acquire the Fields. The Council is currently undertaking a risk assessment and investigating likely costs. Councillors are keen that the area should generate enough income to cover its maintenance costs, but it is not clear yet how this would happen.

MAN Diesel has stated that the future of the Fields will be considered as part of Phase Two of their planning (see below for details of what's happening in Phase One).

In the current economic conditions the future of the Mirrlees Fields remains uncertain.

Public Consultation on the future of Mirrlees Fields

Both the Action Group and Council leaders want to consult with local residents on their views about on the future of the fields. We hope that a survey by the Council will go to all residents asking for their views on some possible future scenarios. A minimum action, low cost, scenario could focus on maintaining the existing paths. More costly plans could involve bids for grants from organisations such as Natural England, Manchester Airport and Groundworks.

If you are not already a member, join the Mirrlees Fields Action Group to be kept informed and make sure your voice is heard.

MAN DIESEL GETS GO AHEAD FOR NEW BUILDING

Regular users of the Fields know that demolition and construction work has been happening on the factory site over the last few weeks. This follows MAN Diesel getting planning permission to go ahead with two new buildings on the western side of the site. At a special meeting of the Area Committee in December, Councillors considered and approved, with some conditions, plans for a new three storey office block and a large 'industrial unit' 105 m long, 80 m wide and 15 m high.

The company were given permission to proceed with their plans in order to keep MAN Diesel in Stockport. We are assured that this will protect existing jobs, and will create a few new jobs and a small training facility on site.

What the Group said about the planning application

We **objected** to the felling of the boundary trees on the western side which has opened up a view of the buildings that were previously partially hidden. We also **objected** to the location of the warehouse block which will be within 9 metres of the boundary fence. We **asked for more details** about

- planting of trees,
- the boundary fence,
- the risk of contamination to the streams,
- the noise levels from the new factory which will sometime be operating 24/7,
- and plans for lighting, especially on the service yard which will be adjacent to the Fields.

We **requested improvements** to the footpaths to encourage access from Woodsmoor Station and reassurances about future traffic flows.

We **complained** about the failure of the company to provide a plan for the development of whole existing factory site. This failure leaves many questions unanswered about the future of the remaining buildings and future use of the area.

What the Group achieved

The conditions imposed were:

- The warehouse should be coloured dark green to help it blend with the environment.
- All existing trees should be protected and plans for planting replacement trees on the western boundary must be submitted.
- Further information on lighting, the boundary fence and ways of dealing with potential pollution must be submitted to the council.
- The company must also contribute to improving the footpath to Woodsmoor Station.

Building began on February 9th and we will be keeping a close eye on developments to ensure that the conditions are all met.

STOP PRESS

MAN Diesel have appealed against the requirement that the industrial unit should be dark green and have requested that they be allowed to use the corporate colour 'goosewing grey'. The Action Group consulted members by e-mail and 53 responded. 26 said that they thought they grey was acceptable, 15 said that we should object to the variation, and 12 said that they did not have strong opinion either way. This response has been reported to the planning department with a selection of comments representing all opinions expressed.

Also approximately 400 yards of the main bridleway across the Fields has been improved by the Council.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE GROUP

The AGM was held at Great Moor Junior School on November 18th. About 35 people attended and heard a report on the activities of the Action group over the previous year. It was reported that we have 570 members (check with Hilary).

The AGM endorsed the objectives of the MFAG to be as follows:

- to retain and enhance the existing open space at Mirrlees
- to seek to prevent increases in the amount and flow of traffic to and from the Mirrlees site
- to promote the potential of the Mirrlees site as a community resource for recreational, outdoor leisure and sports activities
- to retain open access to the Mirrlees Fields for members of the public and local residents.

The Committee were re-elected with David Gosling as Chair, Sue Bailey as Secretary, Gene Allen as Treasurer, Hilary Fletcher as Membership Secretary. Martin Hallworth was welcomed onto the Committee.

WHAT RUBBISH!

The stream that runs alongside the allotments is looking good thanks to the CUPS (Clean UP our Stream) group. Other areas, including the main track across the Fields and the Fred Perry Way, are spoilt by litter among the bushes.

We are putting together a working party to meet on **Sunday 19th April** at 10:30 to spruce the area up and we need as many volunteers as possible. It's an ideal opportunity to get to know other likeminded people, muck in and spruce up the area before summer. So bring along some family, friends, bin bags, a pair of gloves and a flask on Sunday 19th April.

WEB-SITE

The Action group will soon have its own web-site. We are now the proud owners of mirrleesfields.org.uk. We are designing the web-site and will be adding content to the site over the next few weeks. Peter Goodwin will be looking after the web-site for us and we are grateful for local printers, T.R. Shone, for their help in designing the web-site. You will soon be able to contact us and leave comments about the Fields via the web-site.

WILDLIFE NEWS

Charlie Gallagher reports that a pair of tawny owls have been heard late evening and at night on the fields. Now that the stream is clean, pied and grey wagtails can be seen along the banks, and a pair of kingfishers have been seen down stream from the railway bridge. Altogether, over fifty species of birds have been seen on the Fields.

Pipistrelle and Natterer bats will become more common as spring approaches in the evenings and night times. Among mammals, water voles inhabit the streams, and rabbits, foxes and badgers have all been sighted on the fields. We also have smooth newts, and common frogs and toads. 'Greenspace' the forum for Stockport's green areas and parks is encouraging people to report sighting so of water voles. If you see any water voles on Mirrlees, contact Cheshire Wildlife Trust at Bickley Hall Farm, Bickley, Cheshire, SY14 8EF or tell Christine Hession [christine.hession@btinternet.com].

There is a wide variety of trees on the Fields. The list includes oaks, some of them at least 200 years old, and silver birch, hazel, lime, alder, poplars (grey, Italian and black), willows (pussy, osier, crack and white), yew, larch, Norway spruce, beech, holly, ash, rowan, whitebeam, cherry, blackthorn, hawthorn, and elder. Look out for a guided tree walk in the Spring.

Next time you walk across the fields, count how many of these 24 species you can spot!