

BAE Systems High-Flying Expertise in South Ribble



BAE Systems' heritage in South Ribble dates back to the eve of the Second World War when the company's predecessor, the English Electric Company, built 'Number One Shed' at the company's Samlesbury site.

The site has been a centre of excellence in aircraft manufacturing since the facility was constructed in April 1939 and the first aircraft that was built there, the 'Hampden', not only played an important role in the conflict that was to follow just months later but also became the first in a long line of iconic aircraft to be built by BAE Systems in South Ribble.

Explains Ian Wood, BAE Systems' Samlesbury site director: "The site's genesis may have been born out of an impending war, but its longevity has been as a result of innovation, manufacturing excellence and a talented skills base from our local workforce. Since the first Hampden was built here in 1939, BAE Systems' Samlesbury site has been home to some of the world's most famous aircraft, including the Canberra, the Lightning and, most recently, the Typhoon and F-35."

Investing in the Future

The company is justly proud of both its past achievements and its continuing innovation, both of which will be celebrated by the latest planned additions to the site; full-scale models of the Lightning and the F-35, which are due to land at the site entrance as a permanent display in 2014.

Ian continues: "The Lightning was the first completely British designed jet fighter aircraft able to fly at twice the speed of sound and was built here in Samlesbury. When the first production aircraft made its maiden flight from Samlesbury on 3rd November 1959, it put Lancashire firmly on the map as the home of military aircraft manufacture in the UK.

"The F-35 continues that legacy and the model that will be unveiled here in the summer is being produced from a scanned digital model of the aircraft's Short Take Off and Vertical Landing variant (B model) which is due to enter service in the UK, so it will give visitors their first glimpse of the RAF's next fast jet."

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The new arrivals at the site’s entrance follow significant investment in new facilities by BAE Systems at the Samlesbury plant over the past few years, including new assembly halls, a new hi-tech machining facility and new office and staff welfare accommodation.

Ian continues: “Investment in our facilities is an essential part of ensuring that we remain at the forefront of military aircraft engineering and manufacturing and are ready to address the requirements of a global marketplace. South Ribble Borough Council has been extremely supportive in helping to ensure developments at the site were implemented, in accordance with the necessary guidelines, underpinning the commercial benefits of BAE Systems’ investment in South Ribble both for the company and for the wider regional economy.”

Local Support

Support from South Ribble Borough Council and the other surrounding boroughs has not only ensured that BAE Systems continues to be a major local employer but has put Samlesbury at the centre of the North West’s advanced engineering and manufacturing sector by creating an Enterprise Zone (EZ).

Ian explains: “The creation of an EZ at Samlesbury is evidence of local authorities that work well alongside the private sector to encourage innovation and economic growth whilst considering the needs of their communities. It is from those communities that we recruit many of the skilled and talented people that drive our business here at BAE Systems and the enthusiastic and dedicated workforce here in South Ribble is a significant factor in the success of the site.”

BAE Systems’ Samlesbury site currently employs more than 4,000 people working across a variety of aircraft programmes and functions. Approximately a quarter of the total team work directly on the F-35 Lightning II programme, currently the largest defence project in the world, to create a new stealthy, multi-role, all weather attack aircraft that can operate from land and sea. More than 3,000 F-35 Lightning aircraft are planned for future production, ensuring busy times ahead for the Samlesbury plant.

Ian continues: “Projects like the F-35 mean that we will continue to need a skilled and motivated team here in Samlesbury as the right people are essential for an industry-leading business with world class products like BAE Systems. The availability of that workforce in South Ribble is critical to our success and we’re very fortunate to have many of the skills we need on our doorstep.”

Part of BAE Systems’ success in accessing the skills it needs for its Samlesbury plant has been delivered through the company’s commitment to training and people development. The company has recruited more than 100 apprentices from the local area in 2013 alone, 22 of whom will work for companies that provide BAE Systems’ local supply chain.

Ian concluded: “BAE Systems may have a global reach but our business here in Samlesbury is built on a local employee and supply network. South Ribble Borough Council works hard to ensure that this is a great location to do business which is great for big companies like BAE Systems and for the local businesses that support us.”

