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Link to publication record in Manchester Research Explorer

Citation for published version (APA):
Ashton, J. (2020). A Working Research Report on Ryebank Fields: Its uses and impacts.

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A Working Research Report on Ryebank Fields: Its uses and impacts

Dr. Jenna C. Ashton
In association with the Friends of Ryebank Fields

Contents

Introduction	2
Ryebank Fields	3
Historical Context	3
Research	5
Protecting Urban Nature – why does it matter?	6
Wellbeing and Health across the Life Course	7
Typology and Biodiversity	11
Risks Associated with the Development of Ryebank Fields	15
Future Vision for Ryebank Fields	18
Policy Contexts	20
Conclusion	28
Media Links	28
References	29

Introduction

The focus of this report is to articulate the current uses of Ryebank Fields, and the outcomes and impacts of those uses for people, nature and policy agendas. The following analysis reflects on the emerging findings of the Ryebank Fields surveys and considers the findings in light of existing research evidence of the GHIA project (undertaken over three years). An outline of why urban nature matters to people and the environment in Manchester is followed by two sections thematically suggested by the survey content on: 'Wellbeing and Health across the Life Course', 'Typology and Biodiversity'. The report outlines the future vision proposed by respondents and concludes by outlining the associated risks of developing the site, and relevance of the site to local policy contexts.

Author

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Dr Ashton has 15 years' experience as international curator, arts manager and practitioner and manager of projects. She has worked extensively with vulnerable, repressed and excluded adults and children, and developed productive partnerships with external organisations on key themes of social and ecological justice and creative socially engaged practice for research and teaching.

Ryebank Fields

Ryebank Fields is in Chorlton-cum Hardy, Manchester, and to the north and west is bordered by Stretford, in Trafford. The Fields lie at the municipal and parliamentary boundary between the two local authorities (Manchester and Trafford).

Chorlton-cum-Hardy is a large suburb comprising of two administrative wards: Chorlton (population 14,138) and Chorlton Park (population 15,147) giving a total population of 29,285 (Office for National Statistics 2011).

Parts of Chorlton-cum-Hardy have become 'gentrified' in recent years leading to a misconception of affluence. Chorlton Park ward has significant deprivation, on a variety of measures, with one third of 11-year-olds carrying excess weight, and nearly one fifth experiencing obesity.[1]
Longford ward in Trafford to the north is close to the wards of Stretford, Gorse Hill, and Clifford – all in Trafford – which score far higher on multiple deprivation indexes. In 2019, Clifford, for instance, is in the top 10% of the most deprived parts of the country, with areas experiencing an unemployment rate of 29% and with 57% of the over-60s experiencing "income deprivation" (Trafford 001A and 001D respectively).[2]
Parts of Clifford and Stretford are in the top 10% for deprivation on a range of measures, including income, unemployment, health & disability, whilst parts of Gorse Hill (003C) are in the bottom 10% in terms of the "living environment" – which includes factors such as air quality. According to Public Health England, 36% of 11-year-old children in Clifford are carrying excess weight, and over 22% are obese.[3]
[1] https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/national-child-measurement-programme/data#page/0/gid/1938133288/pat/202/par/E08000003/ati/8/are/E05011350/iid/93108/age/201/sex/4
[2] https://www.trafforddatalab.io/analysis/IoD2019/report/
[3] https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/national-child-measurement-programme/data#page/0/gid/1938133288/pat/202/par/E08000009/ati/8/are/E05000825/iid/93108/age/201/sex/4

Historical Context

Ryebank Fields has played a significant role in the social and cultural heritage of the area. In its diverse past, the land once formed part of the Forest of Arden, an extensive area of woodland, which consisted mainly of Oak and Willow. It's likely that it later became arable land and conceivably formed part of Firs Farm, in Stretford. Later, it is possible that it was part of the original Longford Estate - the hall and park were created in 1857 by John Rylands.

The Nico Ditch which crosses Ryebank Fields dates back to Anglo-Saxon times and is of significant historical importance. Historic England have confirmed its location on the Fields and Dr. Mike Nevell, former Head of Archeology at the University of Salford, and the Greater Manchester Archeological Advisory Service (GMAAS) have stated that it should be protected. The Fields may plausibly have formed part of a wider boundary demarcation, as the line of trees along the northern perimeter still marks the municipal boundary between Manchester and Trafford. The northern field may also be linked to the Grade II listed, Great Stone, as there are other (possible boundary) stones plotted, where the boundary crosses Great Stone Road, close to the north eastern corner of the Fields. The Great Stone is thought to have been the base of an Anglo-Saxon cross shaft.

Ryebank Fields lies on a deposit of boulder clay and around the late 1800s/early 1900s, it became clay pits for Jackson's Brickworks, which stood where neighbouring St. John's School is now. The pits were at least 40 feet deep and stretched across both fields. The brickworks closed in the 1930s and the pits were abandoned and filled with rain water. The Fields became a giant adventure playground and children would sail make-shift rafts across them. Due to safety concerns Manchester City Council decided to fill the pits in and the area subsequently became an unregistered tip for all manner of waste.

In the early 1970s Ryebank Fields was reclaimed by the City Parks Department under Operation Eyesore. The land was then gifted to

Manchester Polytechnic as a sports facility. Local people remember that this was done under covenant for use for sports and recreational purposes only. The land was formally transferred to Manchester Metropolitan University, in 1992, as a result of the Education Reform Act. In 1996 MMU moved their sports facilities to Carrington and since Ryebank Fields has naturally rewilded, evolving into the urban nature reserve it is today.

Up to four generations of some local families have used Ryebank Fields and, in living memory, there has always been public access to the land. Over the years, the local community has adopted and cared for the land, for example by trimming back trees, maintaining footpaths, litter picking and planting a community orchard. The Fields have been used for summer BBQ's, community picnics, Christmas carols, bonfires, Morris dancing, themed walks with local experts, painting events, cross country (including special needs schools across the borough), bio-blitzes, Halloween trails, tai-chi and much more. In the 1980s the Fields were regularly used by the Elim Church as a base for their outdoor activities and community events. In 1996/7 local residents ran a successful campaign to save the Fields from development and in the 2000s submitted a Village Green application.

In 2017 the community launched the 'Save Ryebank Fields' campaign in response to MMU's current development proposals. As a result, local people who have been acting as custodians of the land for many years, formalised to become the Friends of Ryebank Fields. For many, this is the third time they have campaigned to save this land; their spirit and resolve lives on from one campaign to the next and their determination gets stronger. The Friends held their first meeting in August 2017 and became a legally constituted community group in October 2019. Many of the Friends of Ryebank Fields have strong and long-lived connections to the land, but the group is increasingly gaining new members from across Chorlton, Stretford and the wider Manchester area, who recognise the rarity and unique nature of Ryebank Fields and want to play an active role in fighting Climate Change and preserving green space. Many MMU students are also members of the Friends of Ryebank Fields. The Friends work closely with, and take advice from, other community groups and organisations in the area to share ideas and promote best practice.

NICO DITCH

The historic Nico Ditch is a 6-mile linear earthwork which stretches across South Manchester, from Ashton Moss in the East to Moorside, another area of moss land, in Urmston, to the West. It dates to between 600 - 1000 AD and is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086.

The Nico Ditch marks the ancient boundary between the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Mercia and Northumbria. To the South you are standing in Mercia and to the North, as you cross the ditch, you enter Northumbria. The ditch is dug in the 'U' shape typical of boundary demarcation rather than the 'V' shape used for defensive fortifications. Nico Ditch is a linear frontier akin to Offa's Dyke, which formed the Anglo-Saxon boundary between England and Wales, and Hadrian's Wall, the Roman frontier between England and Scotland.

Legend has it that the Nico Ditch was completed in a single night by the inhabitants of Manchester who stood side by side, with each man digging his own height, as a protection against Viking invaders who sailed up the River Mersey in 870. According to 19th century folklore, the ditch was the site of a bloody battle with the Danes which gave their names to the nearby towns of Gorton, deriving from 'gore town' and Reddish deriving from 'red ditch,' however, it's far more likely that these names mean 'dirty farmstead' and 'reedy ditch' respectively.

The name Nico possibly derives from the Anglo-Saxon 'hnickar' a water spirit who seized and drowned unwary travelers, or alternatively from 'næcan' the Anglo-Saxon verb to 'kill.' The ditch is also referred to as 'Mykelldiche' or 'magnum fossatum' meaning the 'great ditch'.

Sections of the Nico Ditch at Platt Fields Park and Denton Golf Course are listed as Scheduled Ancient Monuments by Historic England, however, much of the earthwork has been lost with the ditch at Ryebank Fields possibly being the only remaining section to survive in the West.

-The Friends of Ryebank Fields

Research

Methods

A structured interview via survey was undertaken over two months (December 2019 and January 2020). This was circulated to local residents in the immediate area of Ryebank Fields, ether in print copy or via email (if requested). The seven questions focused on eliciting qualitative descriptions of current activities, self-described benefits of activity and use, perceived impact of loss, personal relationship to space, perceived benefit to others, suggested improvements to the Fields, and comments on local green space provision.

To-date, there has been no effective consultation on the Fields undertaken to expressly understand people's uses, motivations for use, and the impacts of those uses. Additionally, no wider consideration has been given to the impacts of perceived loss of the Fields.

The methods and focus of the survey and this report is informed by research undertaken through the GHIA research project on valuing urban nature – one which was a cross-HEI project across UoM, MMU and Salford, cross-disciplinary, and on which sat advisors from Manchester City Council (ageing, health and environment), Manchester Galleries and Museums Partnership, and Manchester Climate Change Agency. The resulting report: Lindley, SJ, Ashton, J, et al (Jan 2020), *Nature and Ageing Well in Towns and Cities: Why the natural environment matters for healthy ageing,* is available at http://www.ghia.org.uk.

Summary

56 respondents across Dec 2019 – Jan 2020.
Age range 15 – 98 years' old: 15- 29 (4) / 30-59 (30) / 60yrs+ (22)

Identified health and ability challenges:	Activities undertaken at Ryebank Fields:	Articulated impacts:	*Key beneficiaries:
Heart failure Cardiomyopathy Muscular Dystrophy Osteoarthritis high blood pressure Knee pain back problems arthritis sciatica anxiety depression Severe Facet Joint Syndrome Psoriasis Bradycardia Asthma Diabetes (type 1 & 2) Immunology Disorder Osteoporosis Autism Dyspraxia Sensory Processing Dysgraphia	Walking and "wandering" by self; playing by self; walking with friends; walking with dogs; Playing and make-believe with children and grandchildren; Family socialising; Friend socialising; Bird & bat watching and listening; observing nature; Watching seasonal change; foraging for blackberries, apples, raspberries, nettles for jam, jelly, pie making; tree planting, tree spotting; land care; cultural events; biodiversity walks; arts practices – photography and dye-making, sketching; storytelling; learning about species; learning about history of site; meditating; running; cycling; Tai chi; picnics; star and sky-gazing; "forest school" learning.	Freedom; autonomy; fresh-air; relaxation; peace-of-mind; relief from depression and/ or anxiety; de-stressing; escape from urban noise and pollution; a place to recharge after/ during work; a place to talk; place to wander; a place to explore and imagine; connectivity with neighbours; rich biodiversity and types of nature; active engagement in nature; creation of meaningful interactions and memories; sense of place; expressions of care for nature and people; pleasure; enjoyment; improved knowledge of nature and biodiversity; combatting self-isolation; overall sense of wellbeing; curiosity; sensory awareness; long-term residential occupation.	Single parents Carers Those on low incomes Those with health and ability challenges Women Children Family groups *** These groups are also the most likely impacted by any possible loss of the site.**

Protecting Urban Nature – why does it matter?

Manchester is a diverse city of 503,000 citizens, with over 200 languages spoken. The Manchester City Council Forecasting Model projects that by 2027 there will be over 661,000 people living in the city, mostly in city centre wards. Despite recent economic growth, the benefits have not been felt equally by all sections of the population: economic improvements have not been matched by similar improvements in health outcomes or narrowing inequalities. Manchester residents experience higher levels of ill health and early death than other major cities and towns in England. Manchester wards have the lowest levels of green infrastructure than any other local authority borough within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, with its fast-growing population facing increased risk of extreme weather events, from flooding to drought.

Manchester City Council declared a Climate Emergency on 10 July 2019, setting the City's zero-carbon target for 2038. Its Zero Carbon Framework, led by Manchester Climate Change Agency, outlines an approach to reach the target, yet Manchester's carbon budget will run out in 2025. The Manchester Climate Change Framework 2020-25 – scheduled for publication on 28 February 2020 – declares "15 Actions", calling on all residents and organisations in Manchester to "help meet our climate change targets". These actions combine mitigation strategies with adaptation (such as food sourcing, water use, transport, recycling, garden management). Additionally, the City Council's "Our Manchester" (2016) future vision and strategy of the city and Manchester's Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Strategies (2015 – due 2020) have key objectives to involve people, raise awareness and increase understanding of nature and biodiversity.

Urban green infrastructure – the multi-functional network of 'green' and 'blue' spaces in our towns and cities – makes valuable contributions to human health and wellbeing of all ages. A rich evidence-base is emerging on the health and wellbeing benefits of different sorts of green and blue (water-related) spaces. These green and blue spaces exist in many forms. They exist as large patches (e.g. as urban parks and lakes), as corridors (e.g. canals and waterways) and also as a multitude of smaller green and blue spaces within the wider urban landscapes (e.g. private gardens). The existing evidence is helping to inform local, regional, national and international action. However, there are still uncertainties and gaps in our knowledge in helping to understand what is particularly important for health and wellbeing as well as where, for whom and why urban green and blue spaces matter.

Studies have shown positive links between green spaces and health in England. Furthermore, a recent review of 93 separate studies into green-blue spaces and health revealed that most were conducted at the neighbourhood scale and most showed positive associations too. Some benefits are felt more directly than others, but all have a value in terms of the holistic definition of health used by the World Health Organization (WHO), including for physical health, mental health and wider human wellbeing. The more indirect benefits range from mitigating extreme weather and moderating pollution through to helping to foster community ties. It is important to recognise these multiple influences, particularly where the amount of green and blue space is limited and the need for benefits is great.

Urban green and blue spaces have value beyond what they bring to people. Some urban green and blue spaces also provide vital biodiversity functions (e.g. habitat provision and landscape connectivity). This - in turn - helps to support nature and ecosystems more widely. Indeed, it may be the very biodiversity of our green and blue spaces which underpin many of the health and wellbeing benefits that we see. Such benefits are valuable throughout the life course.

We are an ageing and increasingly urban society. In 2019 the median age of people in Europe was 42 and Europe had the highest proportion of people over 65 of any continents (18%). The median age – the age at which an equal proportion of people are younger and older - is expected to increase everywhere in the coming years. In 2016, 18% of the UK population was already over 65 years of age, a proportion which is expected to rise to around

25% over the next 50 years. At the same time the proportion of the population living in urban areas is increasing. The 2018 Revision of the World Urbanization Prospects puts the current proportion of urban dwellers in Europe at 74%. It has been estimated that 83% of the UK population live in urban areas, a figure set to rise to 90% by 2050.

Our ageing urban population brings both opportunities and challenges. There is much to celebrate about later life, such as having the time to try new things and the opportunity to bring a wealth of life experience to others. However, there are also challenges. Some of the most pressing include how to support independent living and living well with long-term conditions and complex co-morbidities. Urban areas may benefit from higher densities of services and associated infrastructure, such as for health, social care and transport, but there are also higher burdens from environmental stressors such as pollution and noise. Stressors are likely to have a disproportionate impact in later life due to the increasing sensitivity and lower adaptive capacity, which tend to come with age. For the increasing numbers of people who live in urban areas this can lead to a greater potential for negative impacts on health and wellbeing. Such negative impacts can be mitigated and managed.
(For full citations and references, please see GHIA Report, 2020, Lindley, SJ, Ashton, J, et al: pp. 19-21: https://ghia.org.uk/outputs/)

Wellbeing and Health across the Life Course

The identified health and ability challenges of the local residents are numerous and varied. These are frequently long-term challenges which individuals have made life adjustments for, such as early retirement or evolving their own care needs, or young people living with health and ability needs. Engagement with the fields is identified as a specific method of self-care – which comes up in each of the survey responses. Even those who do not identify any health issues still express Ryebank Fields as providing a "sense of calm", "relaxation" and "peace", and they acknowledge a key motivation of urban "escape" as a specific draw of Ryebank Fields. For those with significant health and ability challenges, Ryebank Fields is a "sanctuary".

"After I developed depression and anxiety it became a place of not only memories, but of healing – my sanctuary." (57, f)

"A place of tranquillity and peace – like a different world. I can go to reflect, de-stress and unwind, and be alone. It's like running away without having to run. Yet the Fields are a wonderful community place where people talk to each other and are inclusive." (54, f)

"This place is a beautiful escape from the stress of my studies." (23, f)

I hate classrooms, I love being outside." (15, m)

"Basic rights: to breathe clean air and to get exercise and feel free." (68, m)

"[…] When things get tough, the proximity of the Fields make it easier to get away, take time to think, breathe and recalibrate." (54, f)

Ryebank Fields seems to offer very specific benefits to those of working age, in providing a space of calm and an environment to allow for reflection and perspective, which they cannot find elsewhere in the City. Work-related stress is not monitored at MCC Ward level, but is a factor emerging in the residents' motivations to engage at Ryebank Fields.

The following beneficiaries are also prominent, with individuals showing more than one characteristic:

- **Single parents** – a safe space for playing with young children and introducing them to nature and wildlife.
- **Carers** – a free space where personal self-care can be enacted amidst intense physical and emotional caring situations.
- **Those on low incomes** – an inspiring and free space to take children, relatives and friends without impacting household budgets, and not having to partake in paid leisure activities.
- **Those with health and ability challenges** – as above. Those with health and ability challenges are the key users of this space.
- **Women** – a place of safety, freedom and autonomy.
- **Children** – similar to women, and also encouraging play and independence from adults for older young people.
- **Family groups –** a significant finding is the intergenerational use of the site for families. Key memories of use are embedded over 50-year periods. For some, this is also especially important for remembering those who have passed away – so the site becomes one of commemoration. Additionally, it also activates memory recall for those very old and infirm.

What motivates people to connect to nature is varied. Simply having the possibility to visit a local park or canal does not mean that it will improve someone's life. What is important is how the existence of the park or canal helps that person to achieve the various things he or she values doing or being, such as having meaningful social relationships, being able to have independence and autonomy, having a means of achieving self-respect, or facilitating thinking, learning and the sharing of knowledge. Whether the park or canal will make a difference to health and wellbeing depends on a multitude of personal, social and environmental factors leading to a very complex and context specific picture. Through the GHIA project, a wide range of motivations were identified which provide a basis through which others may be attracted to engage with urban green and blue spaces, for example including:

Individual factors motivating engagement with urban green and blue spaces

- Emotional & personal connections to particular places
- Opportunity for personal achievement
- Opportunity for variety and change, including as a result of life transitions
- Having time for participation

"I used to play there in the 1950s and 60s […] I can remember on really hot days how the willow herb flowers and stems used to be covered in hawk moth caterpillars. At school we read a poem about a young boy spending the long summer days out in the fields. That poem revives childhood feelings in a similar way. Occasionally instead of feeling like an elderly sick person I feel like a child." (68, m)

"I have walked this area for over 40 years with many memories." (52, f)

"It is very important to me in that I first went there 30 years ago when my children were small, and so it does have many memories for me." (61, f)

"I have memories of back when I was a student. I didn't have money and found Manchester a shock and had mental health problems. Walking and sitting in the Fields was an everyday event for three years." (47, m)

"I feel like I am back at the farm where I grew up in the Peak District." (55, f)

Social factors motivating engagement with urban green and blue spaces

- Opportunity to meet new people
- Opportunity to share knowledge and skills
- Availability of older place-makers and organisations to which different individuals can relate, both personally and culturally

"Lots of childhood and now teenage memories." (15, m)

"I am a single parent […] full time carer. This was very isolating but using the Fields involves me in the neighbourhoods and community events." (54, f)

"There are a lot of elderly people with dogs who use the Fields. Everyone stops for a chat; I think it's important." (46, f)

"Always see other people enjoying this lovely place and fills me with joy." (30-59, f)

Environmental factors motivating engagement with urban green and blue spaces

- The environmental quality and character of particular places – interesting plants or wildlife and particular colours, shapes, scent & movement
- Signs of care and caring, such as through environmentally sensitive maintenance and links to people and organisations with dedicated maintenance roles
- Accessibility and facilities that help to support engagement

"Walking in Ryebank Fields is very different to visiting parkland which has been managed and controlled. There is a wonderful sense of serendipity to each visit; a rural rather than urban environment." (52, f)

"It's like a breath of fresh air to have the wild space to wander freely in […] Wandering without a set course." (53, f)

"Watching the land change and grow." (60, f)

"To know I am walking in an historic area […] the ancient Nico Ditch, people from 1848 onwards who cared for this land …". (30-59, f)

These varied motivations can also be evidenced at Ryebank Fields. What is clear is the wellbeing and health impact for residents of varying ages and abilities. The types of activities undertaken are also very rich and varied. **The plurality of use is inspired by the diversity of the landscape typology itself.** This is an especially important point returned to later, as it's a driving factor in motivating people's interest and active engagement with Ryebank Fields.

"To see a bird of prey hover and dive, or come across an orchid, produces sheer elation." (74, m)

"Forage for fruits, sketch the wild grasses in the meadow, imagine the possibilities of this social space." (23, f)

"A welcome change from the concrete city centre." (22, f)

Activities featuring prominently in the responses include general **walking**, either by self, with friends, or with children and other family members. The presence of a dog is frequently mentioned. Dog ownership, and therefore **dog walking**, has been noted as a motivation for engagement with the outdoors and increases likelihood of social engagement. Research has shown that the benefits of owning a dog are numerous. An increased sense of well-being, a reduction in stress, and fewer trips to a GP are all acknowledged side effects of dog ownership (Knight and Edwards, 2008). Dog ownership also encourages owners to undertake more regular exercise (Brown and Rhodes, 2006), as has been shown in our participants. Furthermore, as discussed by the Ryebank Fields respondents, dog-walking can help to facilitate sociability. More widely, the city centre lacks opportunities for children and family to engage with large mammals and animal care; dog ownership is therefore an important activity in mental and physical health in urban spaces. Having undertaken research in and on post conflict and conflict areas, mammal interaction and animal care proves an important role in developing empathy in young people. For women especially, dog walking is considered a safe activity in outdoor spaces.

"I feel safe there." (57, f)

"I feel freedom." (61, f)

Intergenerational socialising is an outcome of the varied activity, with different motivations easily co-existing in this site. It is emphasised there is a lack of space-conflict at Ryebank Fields; enough space and varied interests for all, plus the type of nature present seems to encourage people to interact differently than in the neighbouring "manicured" Park. **Culture-led activities** are undertaken, and specifically inspired by the typology of the land and its biodiversity interest.

"Our whole road does a Halloween trail there. It's a place to meet friends" (15, m)

Respondents highlight the existing use of the site by **local schools and children** for learning and creative days. Specifically, older residents share their **memories** of using the site for introducing their children to nature in an urban context, which influenced successive **generations** of families living in the area.

"Children to explore freely, away from tarmac. This wild space is amazing for my son (3). He is learning so much about berries and trees he spots and can touch." (49, f)

As explored through GHIA, losses of urban green infrastructure result in losses of health and wellbeing for local communities. We often think about the health and wellbeing gains that green and blue spaces bring. However, it is important to also recognise how losses of green and blue spaces negatively affect members of the community who have been deriving benefits, and who have been engaged in the direct use of spaces. Even the threat of loss can impact people's health and wellbeing. Ryebank Fields can be successfully mapped onto the Nussbaum model of ten ways to wellbeing, supporting a range of community needs featuring as a significant factor in people's life satisfaction (Figure *Dimensions of Wellbeing*, GHIA report, p. 40).

Wellbeing can be thought of as comprising a number of different dimensions representing aspects of what people can be or do with their lives. One representation developed by Nussbaum (2000)[42] includes:

"1. Life - Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

2. Bodily health - Being able to have good health, to be adequately nourished and to have adequate shelter.

3. Bodily integrity - Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.

4. Senses, imagination, and thought. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a 'truly human' way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one's own way. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.

5. Emotions - Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety...

6. Practical reason - Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life....

7. Affiliation - (A) Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (B) Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails, at a minimum, protections against discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, caste, or national origin. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

8. Other species. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. Play. Being able to laugh, to play and to enjoy recreational activities.

10. Control over one's environment. (A) Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. (B) Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure."

These dimensions are fully compatible with the World Health Organization's definition of health *"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."* and the core WHO principle that *"The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition"*. They have also been used to frame analyses of wellbeing and quality of life for specific older groups.[43,44]

Typology and Biodiversity

It is not only the amount of green cover which is important in the City but also its diversity, i.e. where there is a range of tree, grass, shrub and water cover types. This not only impacts the benefits to wildlife, but also shaped people's engagement. There are some differences in the type and strength of associations between health and green infrastructure. The typology of Ryebank Fields is described as "natural", "wilder", "magical", "not manicured", "raw". It is likened to being in the countryside, which for some also retains a sensory connection to other non-urban spaces of childhood.
The **naturalness** of the space is its primary attraction for all the respondents. It is seen as something unique and special to local users, which is unavailable at other parks. The diversity of nature and wildlife is critical to this sentiment. Users of the green space enjoy watching the birdlife and watching for signs of other wildlife. They also enjoy the variety and naturalness of the plant life in the space. A number of respondents mentioned how watching the **changing season** is important to them, especially for mental wellbeing and also for coping with any changes in their personal lives.
The typology of Ryebank Fields encourages a greater sense of **agency** and land **care** in the space, through use of land products, such as berries and apples for baking, and natural dyeing; and tree planting, tidying, and undertaking biodiversity counts.

"I feel I could be in the countryside, if only for a few minutes." (74, m)

"The joy being virtually in the countryside." (67, m)

Ryebank Fields is perceived as **a layered space**, one with multiple histories, multiple uses, **plurality** of expression, activity, which is also present in its biodiversity and features. We can perhaps consider whether to witness variety in nature has the potential to reinforce positive community attitudes towards social **diversity** and plurality. I draw these two elements together as one seemingly connects to the other in the responses: both the desire to engage in a diverse natural space and the enjoyment and pleasure at the

MILLENNIUM OAKS

"A society grows great when men plant trees in whose shade they know they shall never sit".
-Greek proverb.

In 1999, in the middle of a previous campaign to preserve Ryebank Fields as a public amenity and green space, the population were all encouraged, by the government and others, to plant trees for the Millennium to combat global warming, now more accurately referred to as climate change. Even 'The Archers' (on Radio 4) planted a Millennium wood.

A local resident decided he could help by populating Ryebank Fields with oak trees. He collected acorns from several trees around Chorlton and Stretford (to keep some genetic diversity) and planted a few every time he walked his dogs. One of the trees the acorns originated from is located on the corner of Wilbraham Road and Oswald Road and the other two are in Longford Park. He positioned the trees to complement the existing terrain and flora and to avoid encroaching on the gardens of current residents. Many of the trees were also positioned to combat water-logging of the Fields which is a major problem.

Now, twenty years later, the trees that came up in the first year are a respectable size and more come up every year. We have counted around 150 across the two Fields. He chose oak because of its longevity, its ability to grow to a large size and its iconic Englishness.

A single Oak tree sustains over 280 types of insects which in turn attract birds and wildlife and promote natural biodiversity. Acorns were traditionally used as food and fodder for animals and Oaks are said to have restorative and medicinal qualities. Just walking amongst these trees gives a sense of well-being.

-The Friends of Ryebank Fields

social interactions which are activated due to a shared pleasure and enjoyment of being in the space. **The community cohesion** formulated at the Ryebank Fields site is clearly valued by all the respondents and is acting as an amenity to combat social isolation due to health and ability challenges.

"Somehow it seems to be a place where people speak more freely […] On the Fields people seem much less tense and I have never witnessed and conflict there." (61, f)

"The connection with nature is a far stronger one within the fields than its neighbouring park. You cannot compare the two." (44, m)

"I prefer Ryebank Fields to the park nearby because there is a plethora of wildlife and vegetation that is limited in the park. The bird song is immense […] it is such a beautiful way to start the day surrounded by wild grasses full of glistening spider webs and a beautiful sunrise." (57, m)

"Ryebank changes dramatically throughout the seasons; these things are all very important for us city dwellers, especially as we become more removed from nature and surrounded by more and more new buildings in Manchester." (57, m)

"Longford Park is sterile, manicured and a bit depressing to be honest. Also, there have been muggings […] There is also a road that goes directly through it, so quite dangerous." (47, f)

"Easy access to a wild space is important to me as a creative and environment practice artist." (22, f)

"The parks are manicured and controlled, and no scope for interaction with the land." (54, f)

"Like a Magic Forest" (47, f)

ASPEN GROVE

The Aspen Grove on the northern perimeter is one of the most spectacular features of Ryebank Fields. The path through the centre has been maintained by local people over the years as the woodland has grown and expanded.
The Latin name for the tree is Populus tremula or Populus tremuloides, otherwise known as quaking Aspen due to the way its leaves tremble and shake in the wind. This is due to the fact that one side of the leaf stem is flattened. It is said to be the most restless and fidgety of trees. Its leaves make a watery and fluid sound as they move which can often be mistaken for rain or running water. The poem 'Summer Images' by John Clare talks about a shepherd boy running for shelter from the rain, having been deceived by the wind in the Aspen leaves. In Celtic mythology, the visual effect of an Aspen trembling in the wind was said to indicate the tree communicating between this world and the next. The leaves turn a vibrant gold in Autumn and a crown made of Aspen leaves was said to give its wearer the power to visit and return safely from the Underworld. It's no wonder that local children know it as "the magic forest"

Although there appear to be hundreds of trees there could be just one! Due to the rhizomatic nature of their root systems, Aspen grow in clonal colonies, derived from a single seedling, and spread by means of root suckers. Each tree within a clone has an identical genetic profile. An individual Aspen tree can live up to 150 years above ground but the root system can endure for thousands of years so Aspen is considered to be an indicator of ancient woodlands.

"One of the most remarkable features on Ryebank Fields is the outstanding small woodland, consisting entirely of Aspen trees, which are convincingly all of the same clone. This is evidenced by the very dense spacing and the presence of obvious rhizomes radiating out from the large, old parent trees. Rapid seral change is happening on a yearly basis, with new trees invading the grassland, by rhizomes breaking out at the surface and overwhelming the grassland. It is undoubtedly the best example of seral change, in a forest to grassland, known in Manchester." Robin Grayson MSc, Consultant Ecologist.

-The Friends of Ryebank Fields

"This unique green space has an aura of its own, different to other local green spaces."
(64, f)

"A paradise for wildlife, and what about climate change!" (61, f)

"A magical feel." (72, m)

"I love the chance to watch this wild space change on a daily basis. There is always something new to see – birds, insects, changes in vegetation." (61, f)

A key finding of the GHIA project was the important relationship between **proximity** to green infrastructure and a key association with better health in neighbourhoods with older, low income residents. Indeed, within these older, low-income neighbourhoods the proportion of people within 100m of public parks and recreation land is the *only* statistically significant association with health. Health is not significantly associated with any other green infrastructure metric. Proximity to public parks and recreation spaces is therefore a vital component of ageing well in Greater Manchester's older, lower income neighbourhoods. Where such spaces exist, there is an imperative to protect them for the future health and wellbeing of older people in the city, especially within income-deprived communities.
Income as well as transport availability is very significant in the case of Ryebank Fields. As stated within many of the surveys, **proximity to homes and lack of distance to travel** to experience the space, is a major factor in motivating use and engagement. Many comment on how "lucky they are" to have such a wonderful community amenity of such biodiversity on their doorstep – given the dearth of such spaces in other Manchester locations.

"The central community location means local people can access the Fields from any direction without having to use their car. A gem on your doorstep." (44, m)

As we know, some of the 'wild places' valued by and cared for by communities represent land ear-marked for development or otherwise at risk of being lost to development and this can lead to negative health and wellbeing outcomes. Unfortunately, the losses to health and wellbeing can be caused even before any development occurs. There have been particular examples of large and locally important spaces threatened in this way – and Ryebank Fields can now be added to this list. Such negative experiences also reduce the desire and motivation to participate, to share learning and to experience and care for other spaces. The extent to which the specific health and wellbeing impacts of losses are fully appreciated in planning and development decisions is unclear, yet evidence suggests that the consequences may be particularly acute and long-lasting. Making better decisions today is important not only for the current generation of older adults but also for the older people of the future.

Flood prevention is an important topic for many of the local residents. They feel that their knowledge of the site and the impact of removing trees in particular is not being taken into consideration. Not only is this demoralising for the residents, but it has led to a sense of concern and stress for those living in the immediate area. Impact of Ryebank Fields on urban heat reduction should also be considered for further research.

"I worry about flooding. The fields hold a lot of water and each year our gardens become more flooded." (47, f)

FLORA AND FAUNA

Ryebank Fields is considered to be biodiverse due to the huge variety of plant and animal life it sustains. The Fields' differing habitats provide valuable resources for urban wildlife including a variety of grasses, trees, plants, mammals, birds and insects.

Grasses and vegetation

The grasses noted are crested dogstail, reed canary grass, perennial ryegrass, common couch grass, cocksfoot, red fescue, false oat grass, brome, Yorkshire fog and more.

These are accompanied by plants such as crucifers, vetches, thistles, daisy, dandelion relatives, rosebay willowherb, nettle, elderflower, creeping and meadow buttercup, clover, rare spring fungi; orchids, which enjoy the marshy conditions of the Southern Field, attracting bees with their vibrant colours, and protected English bluebells.

There is also a wide variety of foraging foods available on Ryebank Fields, including fruit trees (apple, plum, pear, peach and cherry), blackberries and wild raspberries, cleavers, elderberries and elderflowers, hawthorn, hogweed, pineapple weed, plantain, allium, nettles, dandelion and three-cornered leek.

Trees

There are over 1400 trees living on Ryebank Fields. These include willow, hawthorn, rowan, hazel, sycamore, birch, ash, acer, maple, oak, sycamore, aspen, poplar, pine and fir trees.

Hedgerows

These consist of hawthorn, laurel, rowan, elder, hazel and more. Further investigation is required to determine if there is a hedgerow amongst the trees at the northern perimeter of the Fields but, if so, it may be classed as an Important Hedgerow due to it marking an official boundary. The hedgerow along the Eastern perimeter of the northern Field is mainly Hawthorn, and is thought be an Ancient Hedgerow.

Insects

Many different species of insects can be found on the Fields including various types of bees, hoverflies, butterflies, damselflies, rare moths, grasshoppers, crickets, ants and beetles that feed, breed and over-winter and many of which have very specific plant preferences.

"Over 20 micro-moth species recorded on 9.12.18 by looking for their early stages. This is a good quantity for December and suggests there must be well over 100 species of micro-moth breeding on this site." (Ben Smart, local lepidopterist.)

Mammals

Ryebank Fields supports shrews, voles, mice, grey squirrels, hedgehogs, foxes, badgers and bats (Category 1 in accordance with Bat Conservation Trust Guidelines):

"Three mature trees have potential for roosting bats and the network of habitats (woodland, grassland, scrub and tall ruderal herb) provide high quality foraging opportunities for bat species". (Prof. Stuart Marsden, Conservation Research Blog (https://stuartmarsden.blogspot.com/2015/06/the-history-and-natural-history-of-mmus.html)

The most unusual animal to have been spotted are muntjac deer, which must make their way to the Fields along existing wildlife corridors.

Birds

Over 70 species of birds have been spotted at Ryebank Fields including resident Sparrow-hawks and Tawny Owl. Local ornithologist, Peter Hines, keeps up to date records of the birds seen on the fields which can be found at: https://ebird.org/checklist/S63504902

-The Friends of Ryebank Fields

Risks Associated with the Development of Ryebank Fields

Many of our respondents expressed concern and dismay at the thought of losing Ryebank Fields or of the space being altered significantly. Alongside the loss of the benefits detailed above, we have identified a number of significant risks posed by the development going ahead. Evidence for these risks is set out below.

Mental health issues: Many residents described the positive influence of Ryebank Fields on their mental and physical wellbeing. For a few, walking or otherwise being in Ryebank Fields is an important part of caring for their mental health and preventing relapses and reliance on health services.

"I would lose my go-to place that has been there all my life […] My whole family would lose four generations worth of memories." (57, f)

"I wouldn't have a space I could walk without being bothered by people. The park is too busy." (15, m)

"Animals, birds, foxes, they would be homeless. I worry what will happen to them"
(15, m)

Social isolation: Our respondents revealed that Ryebank Fields provided themselves and others with a space in which social interaction was normalised and facilitated. Accessing Ryebank Fields offers a space for residents to speak to others, to feel part of a community, to connect with people from other generations, and to transmit knowledge. These were significant factors in helping to prevent social isolation in people in the area.

"Not able to go elsewhere, travel too far." (98, f)

"I do not have a car." (52, f)

Decreased physical activity: In its current layout, Ryebank Fields offers users the opportunity to undertake a number of gentle and therapeutic forms of exercise. Furthermore, the ability to access nature and wildlife, to take part in wildlife volunteering, and to walk dogs in the space was revealed to be important for encouraging residents to exercise.

"Would limit my exercise. I would have to use my car to drive further afield." (55, f)

Nature Deficit Disorder: Nature deficit disorder is a term first used in 2005 by Richard Louv. It refers to the disconnect people feel from nature as a result of not having access to natural environments. An alienation (and feelings of fear) towards nature, and negative mental health states including low mood and lack of attention span are seen as side-effects to this condition. Associated with this disorder is the corresponding 'nature knowledge deficit' which reveals a sense that we no longer know as much about nature and natural habitats as we used to. Respondents feared both that they would no longer have as much access to natural environments themselves, but also that children would be negatively affected by it. Similarly, respondents were concerned that they would no longer be able to share their insights into use of plants, the management of nature, or their knowledge of plants and animals with others, leading to an overall reduction in knowledge of nature.

"It's a space where my children learnt how to interact safely with nature, climb trees, run down gentle slopes." (47, m)

"Other areas not great." (47, m)

Decreased community cohesion: A greater sense of community cohesion was cited as a particular benefit of Ryebank Fields, as it provides a space for community activities as well as a space for social interaction. Of particular importance to respondents was the role of the community in maintaining the space, leading them to view the space as an essential part of their community. Correspondingly, people expressed a concern that losing Ryebank Fields in its current state would impact community cohesion.

Decreased care for place and local spaces: Many respondents are actively involved in the care and management of Ryebank Fields. The space is important as a site of social and cultural heritage for local users. If Ryebank is altered against the expressed wishes of the residents, then they will lose their connection to the local area. Furthermore, respondents will feel that they are being discriminated against. Most worryingly, some residents noted that they wouldn't take part in similar activities elsewhere.

"Everyone who lives locally would have diminished lives." (66, m)

"Green space is rare and shouldn't be confused with parks." (63, f)

"Longford Park is too busy for me and makes me anxious" (57, f)

"This unique green space has an aura of its own, different to other local green spaces." (64, f)

Distrust of policy makers, council representatives and Manchester Metropolitan University: Respondents have responded overwhelmingly that they do not wish this proposed development to take place. There is a sense of distrust towards the local representatives and MMU, who respondents feel have not been open and transparent.

"I feel ashamed of my University." (22, f)

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF RYEBANK FIELDS

Traffic

The proposed development will potentially add 240 cars to the already chronic traffic congestion experienced on both sides of Ryebank Fields. There are 4 local schools which contribute to peak traffic problems. In additions there are three stadiums (Manchester United Football Club, Lancashire Cricket Club and Longford Stadium) with huge capacity, whose users park on surrounding streets, exacerbating the traffic chaos. Additional cars will cause huge local problems both in terms of air quality, pollution and safety.

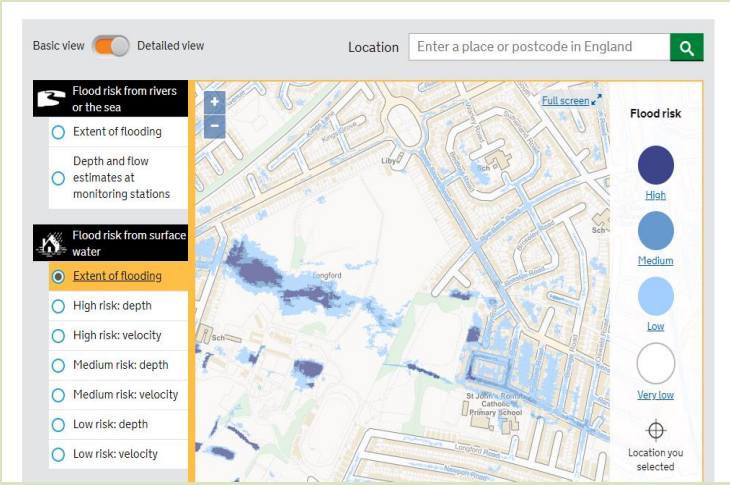
Pollution

In addition to increased pollution from traffic, residents have serious concerns regarding air pollution due to the disturbance of potentially toxic landfill. As Ryebank Fields was an unregistered tip, there are no official records of what is buried below ground. People remember all manner of waste being deposited, including asbestos sheeting and drums of oil and paint. This could be a potential public health risk due to the release of methane, leachates and other toxic materials.

Ryebank Fields sits in a peaceful suburban area, surrounded on 3 sides by housing. Consideration should also be given to the extensive noise pollution that will be generated by development.

Flooding

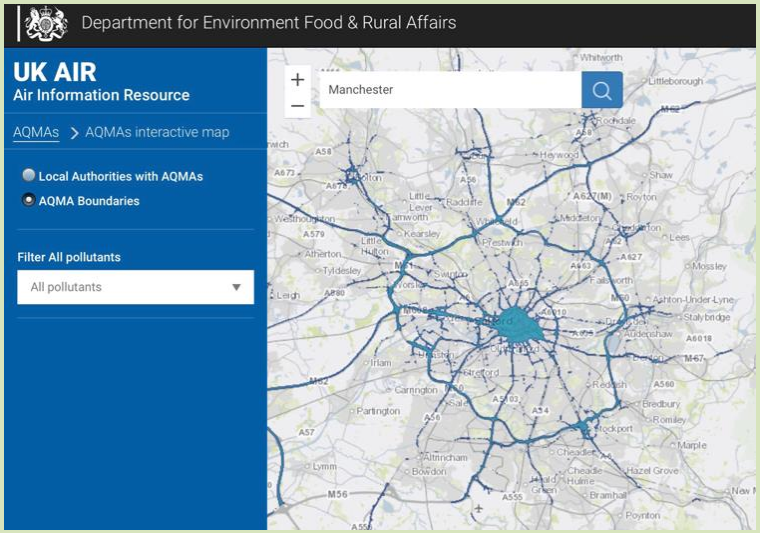
Parts of the site and some adjacent residential areas are at high risk of flooding from surface water as shown below on the flood risk map available on the government website: https://www.gov.uk/check-flood-risk



Many local residents already experience flooding of their gardens and cellars and United Utilities have provided pumps for some of those affected. The impact of the removal of trees and grassland in return for buildings and tarmac would increase surface water flooding and increase the problem.

Habitat destruction

As already outlined, the site has a rich biodiversity which would be destroyed by development. Ryebank Fields is clearly defined in the Manchester Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy's Technical Report as part of the city's existing green infrastructure and categorised as "Open Natural Space". Its existence is crucial to the sustainability of similar green space in the locality, such as Chorlton Ees and Turn Moss, which are all linked via wildlife corridors and are dependent on each other's rich biodiversity.



Manchester has the least green infrastructure of all 10 local authorities within the GMCA whilst pollution levels within the city are consistently high.

Manchester City Council has a responsibility to residents and children of this city, who need clean air to breathe just as much as residents in other boroughs do. It is imperative that Manchester City Council and other stakeholders take immediate action to redress this imbalance.

GMCA – GI PERCENTAGE per Local Authority

LOCAL AUTHORITY	GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE %
Rochdale	**81**.9329 %
Oldham	**81**.0177 %
Bury	**76**.3597 %
Tameside	**74**.4022 %
Stockport	**74**.3069 %
Bolton	**73**.4682 %
Wigan	**73**.0037 %
Trafford	**70**.5066 %
Salford	**67**.3975 %
Manchester	**54**.1266 %

Figures provided by Dr. Matthew Dennis, Lecturer in Geographical Information Science, University of Manchester, via GHIA Mapping Tool.

Damage to MMU's reputation and brand

MMU prides itself on being 'A leading sustainable university', achieving 2nd place in the People and Planet University league ranking in 2019 based on its ethical and environmental performance. The University is privileged to own this wonderful green space, as part of its portfolio and so to forfeit it may appear at odds with its sustainability commitments both to the general public and to those scrutinizing. It is the University's Civic Responsibility to be conscious and accountable for the impact of its actions on the local community.

"Recognising the University's Community vision and commitments, each year we celebrate our place within our local communities as a way to strengthen university-community bonds." Professor Gabrielle Ivinson, Professor of Education and Community at Manchester Metropolitan University.

-The Friends of Ryebank Fields

Future Vision for Ryebank Fields

It is clear from surveys and organisation feedback that the immediate future of Ryebank Fields requires protecting, with steps put in place to acknowledge the site as an urban nature reserve and to support its management accordingly. It is important to keep the site as a semi-natural space, as this offers a unique space for activity, pleasure and wellbeing. The Friends of Ryebank Fields are committed and passionate local residents and wish to continue to work with professional organisations and supporters to develop a sustainable space maintenance and access programme.

There are obvious further opportunities around skills development and training in nature reserve maintenance and urban ecology. Additional partners who would be interested in engaging with Ryebank Fields and its local community include the National Trust North team, Natural England, RHS and the Wildlife Trust – and the universities. There are various fundraising opportunities. In particular, Ryebank Fields has been highlighted for its educational and learning opportunities as a potential forest school, and for students of the current HEI owner, MMU – for ecology, geography, heritage and arts.

As outlined in this report, Ryebank Fields already achieves many of the policy objectives within the Age Friendly and Green and Blue Spaces strategies. The City Council has an exciting opportunity with Ryebank Fields to work with its owner MMU, to ensure an on-going site of engagement, learning and healthy ageing within this community, and activate a flagship project worthy of national and international celebration.

Notably, the community local to Ryebank Fields is already involved in activating the following GHIA Project recommendations for Manchester residents:

- Set up or get involved with local community groups to increase, protect and enhance green and blue spaces, to help design them and to support others' engagement.
- Share your knowledge about your local green spaces.
- Consider using vegetation barriers such as long grasses, shrubs and trees, and think about how green and blue space might be diversified in your local area.

COMMUNITY ORCHARD

The original fruit trees were planted in around 2015 by a local resident who lived overlooking Ryebank Fields. He planted apple and cherry trees, to the rear of his garden, so that people passing by could help themselves to the fruit. Joe is sadly no longer with us but his neighbours and friends have since continued to look after these trees on his behalf and we have continued his legacy by planting more trees in his memory.

In a traditional Wassail event members of the community extended the orchard with a variety of fruit trees including apple, plum, pear, peach and cherry. The roots were christened to bless the trees and wish them longevity and children hung toast in the branches in accordance with ancient rites. In total there are now around 30 fruit trees.

The Community Orchard has been planted next to the oldest apple tree on the fields and is surrounded by blackberry bushes and wild raspberries. We have also planted jostaberry and more raspberry canes.

Two wheels of fairy ring seating have been donated by Alderwood Tree Care for children to enjoy story-telling and educational trips.

-The Friends of Ryebank Fields

FUTURE VISION

The Friends of Ryebank would like to work with MMU to ensure that Ryebank Fields is formally designated as a Statutory Local Nature Reserve.

We also invite the University to make an application to Fields In Trust, a charity that celebrates and supports parks and green spaces by protecting them for people to enjoy in perpetuity. Fields in Trust believe that everyone, irrespective of who they are and where they live, should have the right to enjoy and benefit from local parks and green spaces. They are an independent charity with over 90 years' experience of protecting parks and green spaces. They work with landowners, community groups and policy makers to champion the value of our parks and green spaces to achieve better protection for their future at both local and national level. Details of the organisation can be found at www.fieldsintrust.org

With MMU and Fields in Trust, the Friends of Ryebank Fields can continue to deliver and develop the following:

Community events

- A series of events to engage the local community in celebrating access to nature. FORF organise litter picks, seasonal events e.g. for Christmas, Easter and Halloween etc., bird spotting, nature activities, creative arts and crafts.
- Well-established community and themed walks that take place every Sunday. FORF hold well attended weekly guided walks and each month there is a themed walk such as poetry, local history, mindfulness, botany, photography etc.
- Inclusive outdoor activities to promote a more active and healthy lifestyle.

Education

Local schools use the fields for art workshops, history trips, forest school and environmental awareness. MMU could build valuable links with these primary schools (at least six are within easy walking distance) to inspire potential future students. FORF are developing a range of resources for primary schools to run school trips for key stages on different topics.

Healthy and sustainable food source

- Promote and share safe foraging practices and compile a Ryebank Recipe book.
- Create a Plant and Pick area where members of the community can sow and share produce to cut down on food miles and single use plastic waste and encourage more sustainable eating habits.
- Install a wormery to produce compost.
- Maintain and develop the community orchard.

Volunteering opportunities

With help from Groundwork Trust and other organisations:

- Create a wetland area to help reduce water-logging both on Ryebank Fields and within Longford Park.
- Improve footpaths to make them more accessible.
- Work with the appropriate wildlife organisations to improve habitats for the various amphibian, mammal and bird species and increase bio-diversity.
- Annual community mowing/scything of grassland.

Infrastructure to improve recreational use

- Provide appropriate seating.
- Install information boards and signage to highlight the special features of Ryebank Fields, e.g. history, vegetation and wildlife species.

Let Ryebank Fields be the feature project for MMU to work towards its 'Commitment to Act' to a zero carbon Manchester by 2038:

"Manchester Metropolitan University believes that all organisations and residents in Manchester need to be part of a collective effort to meet our targets and commits to contribute by:

- *Acting now, including accelerating our existing decarbonisation activities, wherever possible,*
- *Taking responsibility for the CO2 emissions from our business activities and working to reduce them to zero by 2038,*
- *Supporting and influencing our customers, residents, suppliers and other stakeholders to take action,*
- *Defining the support we need and proactively asking for it, including asking politicians for policy changes wherever relevant."* MMU website.

-***The Friends of Ryebank Fields***

Policy Contexts

Below are outlined the wider national and regional policy contexts around urban nature, urban ageing and cultural and natural heritage. Ryebank Fields, and its encouraged activity, effectively demonstrates the application of these policies within its semi-natural greenspace.

URBAN NATURE

"Everyone should be able to enjoy the thrill of the outdoors, feeling the change, seeing the flowers bloom, hearing the birds sing. It conjures memories of forgotten childhood adventures, offers rare moments of tranquillity and helps erase the stress of modern life. We need nature nearby." Guy Thompson, previous Executive Director, Natural England.

Natural Climate Solutions

Ryebank Fields, once an industrial clay-pit, turned landfill site and now a reclaimed wildlife haven could be highlighted as a flagship project to help tackle Manchester City Council's Climate Emergency declaration and fulfil MMU's commitment, in their Environmental Sustainability Policy, to "protect and enhance biodiversity across the University and promote it benefits for students, visitors and local communities."

In April 2019 campaign group Rewilding Britain launched a petition calling on the Government to restore nature on a massive scale, to help stop climate breakdown, by rewilding a quarter of the UK's land. Within two months, 100,000 people had signed to show their support and trigger a parliamentary debate which took place in early November. The House responded unanimously in favour of the petition, summing up that "rewilding is essentially integrating natural processes into land management" and acknowledging that much of the government's spend to tackle Climate Change from 2021-2026 will focus on natural climate solutions.

Ryebank Fields is a natural climate solution. The environment here has been naturally evolving and rewilding since 1996 and is now a carbon sink, already active in ameliorating the negative effects of climate change, most specifically air pollution and flooding.

The 1400+ trees absorb CO_2 storing carbon and emitting pure oxygen. A single tree may absorb 48 pounds of CO_2 per year, that's 1 tonne of CO_2 locked-up in 40 years. Each tree provides a day's supply of oxygen for up to four people. (Figures from North Carolina State University, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences). Medium level vegetation (shrubs and forbs) help to "mitigate summer exposures to Ultra-Fine Particles, the very smallest pollution particles (<0.1μm) for which there are no current health-based standards but which are known to have negative impacts on physical health." (GHIA Nature and ageing well in towns and cities)

Historically Ryebank Fields and the surrounding residential area was known as 'The Isles', as it was the location of a series of streams and pools that were tributaries to the River Mersey; Longford Brook is still culverted underground, running from East to West across the middle of the northern field. The whole area lies on a natural deposit of boulder clay which restricts drainage and renders the land prone to severe waterlogging. The 1400+ trees act as a vital, natural flood defence by mitigating pluvial saturation which is also commonplace in neighbouring Longford Park. A single tree can remove 100 gallons of water from the soil around its roots every day with most of this released back into the air by the leaves.

The Northern Forest initiative (announced by central government in January 2018) plans to plant 50 million trees to transform the landscape of northern England, which at just 7.6% woodland cover has a significantly lower amount of trees than the average for England. In 2010 the UK was the least wooded country in Europe (11.8% by area compared to a European average of 44%).

"The Northern Forest will accelerate the creation of new woodland and support sustainable management of existing woods right across the area. Planting many more trees, woods and forests will deliver a better environment for all – locking up carbon on a large scale, boosting wildlife habitat and greening our towns and cities." (Austin Brady, Director of Conservation at the Woodland Trust)

Manchester City Council has committed to this initiative as one of its key factors for achieving carbon zero by 2038. Consultant ecologist, Robin Grayson MSc, has identified two existing areas of Ryebank Fields that already meet the Forestry Commission's definition of a forest or woodland. It is not viable either economically or environmentally to lose any of the 1400+ trees on Ryebank Fields, which already act as a vital green lung and flood defence for the city.

Manchester Green and Blue Strategy

Four objectives have been established to enable the vision of the Manchester Green and Blue Strategy to be achieved:

1. Improve the quality and function of existing green and blue Infrastructure, to maximize the benefits it delivers.
2. Use appropriate green and blue infrastructure as a key component of new developments to help create successful neighbourhoods and support the city's growth.
3. Improve connectivity and accessibility to green and blue infrastructure within the city and beyond.
4. Improve and promote a wider understanding and awareness of the benefits that green and blue infrastructure provides to residents, the economy and the local environment.

The following section outlines research by the Wildlife Trust, National Trust and Natural England which is wholly in-line with Ryebank Fields as a case study of practice supporting nature to thrive in deprived urban communities.

Wildlife Volunteering

The University of Essex undertook a scientific evaluation of the health and wellbeing impacts of Wildlife Trusts volunteering programmes, with participants aged 18-76. The research showed that nature volunteering had the most significant impact on those with low levels of mental wellbeing at the start of the project.

The research showed a range of other benefits, such as increased feelings of positivity, levels of physical activity and contact with nature. People who were already volunteering for Wildlife Trusts had higher levels of mental wellbeing than those who were just starting out yet continued to improve their mental health. This offers an important non-medical service that can help to provide prevention at scale and reduce the current burden on the National Health Service – community-powered health that does not rely solely on medication and traditional service provision.

These findings are also reflected in the comments of the Ryebank Fields users who identify as having mental or physical health or wellbeing issues, which they manage through wildlife volunteering.

The 'Natural Childhood' (2012), a report for the National Trust by Stephen Moss, emphasises "we are at a tipping point" in needing to protect natural spaces for children to explore and understand nature and biodiversity. The lack of spaces for children to safely do this in, particularly in urban environments, is resulting in Nature Deficit Disorder, which includes diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses. These problems continue into adulthood, having a negative impact upon health, education, communities and the environment.
Outdoor learning through community activities, educational trips and forest schools is already effective and engaging children of diverse backgrounds in Chorlton and Stretford. Importantly, intergenerational skills and knowledge sharing is beneficial both for older residents in combatting social isolation, but also for passing on knowledge of greenspace maintenance, and storytelling of local heritage. Children come alive when they visit wild space, they physically interact with the land by planting, sowing, playing and caring. This is a vital grounding for their future and our planet's.

Naturalness and wild spaces

Ecological and planning research also demonstrates the importance of the type of green space that participants engage with. Different spaces have different impacts. Naturalness and wilder areas are not only more beneficial for biodiversity, but they also offer wider psychological benefits for users and participants. Additionally, they enable wider volunteering and management opportunities.

Research shows that psychological benefits increase with the species richness (i.e. increased biodiversity) of urban greenspaces. Additionally, more natural spaces (e.g. landscapes with views of water and/or vegetation and that contain modest depth, complexity, and curvilinearity) are more beneficial for psychological benefits. Other research shows that instead of actual biodiversity, the perception of high biodiversity is also very important for human wellbeing.

Minority communities often lack access to areas of biodiversity, which is an environmental injustice. In the 2011 census the population of Chorlton was 14,138 and is made up of approximately 50% females and 50% males. 79.8% of people living in Chorlton were born in England. Other top answers for country of birth were 2.3% Pakistan, 2.2% Scotland, 2.2% Ireland, 1.6% Wales, 1.6% Northern Ireland, 0.7% India, 0.6% Jamaica, 0.4% Iran, 0.4% Australia. Natural England, the government's adviser for the natural environment, offers strong recommendations to local authorities around meaningful access and engagement with natural (rather than highly cultivated) spaces – particularly in urban environments.

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and engagement with natural (rather than highly cultivated) spaces – particularly in urban environments.

Accessible greenspace, particularly in urban areas, is now becoming recognised as providing some of the fundamental needs of society, rather than just being 'nice to have'. Natural England's definition of greenspace is very broad and encompasses a wider range of spaces than those traditionally considered as either 'natural areas' or parks, gardens and playing fields.

Ryebank Fields falls into this category of wider spaces that are not always best protected from development. Yet it demonstrates a full range of benefits for individuals, the community, and pride in place – as encouraged by Natural England.

Due to the setup of a legally constituted Friends group (FORF) and the potential for funding for continued and expanded community engagement, Ryebank Fields is well placed to fulfil all three underlying principles of Natural England's Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance (ANGSt):

a) Improving access to green spaces.
b) Improving naturalness of green spaces.
c) Improving connectivity with green spaces.

Natural England is encouraging all local authorities to adopt ANGSt as their local standard because of the essential range of benefits to society that it can deliver. In-line with Natural England's framework, Ryebank Fields demonstrates the following social value:

- A reduction in the cost of other infrastructure, such as land drainage as green space fulfils these roles more effectively.
- Reductions in costs of social and health services, as a result of improvements to health and wellbeing.
- Benefits to biodiversity and the mitigation of adverse climate change effects, such as pollutants.

Planning Policy

Ryebank Fields is a GREENFIELD site.
Both national and local planning policy dictate a brownfield led approach to development:

- Paragraph 117 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states:
  "Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed housing needs in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or 'brownfield' land".
- Paragraph 7.23 of the draft Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) states:
  "A key part of the overall strategy is to maximise the amount of development on brownfield sites in the most accessible locations, and minimise the loss of Greenfield and Green Belt land as far as possible".

5. Manchester's five year housing land supply position

5.1 Having regard to the calculating requirement (and making an allowance for a 5% buffer), and to the five-year supply of deliverable sites identified in Annex 1 the five-year land supply position in Manchester over the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2023 is shown in the table below.

5.2 The following table considers Manchester's 5 year position in two assessments. The first assesses the full supply and the second only those sites with full planning permission.

Assessment		Net additional dwellings			
		2018-2023 supply of dwellings	2018-2023 requirement with 5% buffer	Annual requirement	Number of years supply[1]
1.	Full 5 year supply as shown in Annex 1 (adjusted for demolitions)	23056	13,571	2,714	8.50
2.	Sites in Annex 1 with full planning permission (adjusted for demolitions)	19132	13,571	2,714	7.05

Conclusion of 5 year supply assessment

5.3 Taking into account the table above, Manchester has over five years supply of deliverable housing sites even if only sites with full planning permission are considered.

The Manchester City Council Five Year Housing Land Supply Statement (which runs from 2018 – 2023) states in its conclusion at paragraph 5.3 that:

"Manchester has over five years' supply of deliverable housing sites even if only sites with full planning permission are considered."

The table in paragraph 5.2 clearly demonstrates that Manchester currently has in fact got 8.5 years supply of housing, deliverable from brownfield sites alone, and that 7.05 years of this supply already has planning permission in place. (The 120 homes proposed for Ryebank Fields are not even included in these figures as it is a Greenfield site and is therefore precluded under paragraph 4.2b.)

There is therefore no justification in terms of housing need for the development of Ryebank Fields. The fact that it is a Greenfield site and part of the city's extremely limited green infrastructure should be paramount in protecting it.

Loss Associated with Net Biodiversity Gain

Defra have stated that "Proper stewardship of our natural world is at the heart of responsible government" and have recommended that going forward it will be necessary to increase net biodiversity gain on all new developments, from the current 10% to 20%, as put forward by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). On paper this sounds like a positive move, however, it gives no tangible protection to existing green space. Moreover, the Development Framework for Ryebank Fields only sets out to "seek" biodiversity gain.

It is of course necessary to ensure more sustainable and carbon neutral development, but existing green infrastructure must first and foremost be protected. Living walls and green roofs do not make up for the loss and destruction of natural habitat. The planting of grass verges and lollipop trees to replace the woodland, grasses, and shrubs that are systemically being destroyed by site clearances for development is tokenism. Manicured urban landscapes do not provide important habitats for plants, insects and animals as do areas of rewilded vegetation such as Ryebank Fields.
Many academics eschew the premise of net biodiversity gain altogether, maintaining that the losses, especially in terms of community and human impact, far outweigh the gain.

A paper entitled "What is lost through no net loss" by Professor John O'Neill, Hallsworth Chair in Political Economy at the University of Manchester, argues that:

"The concepts of natural capital and ecosystem services that underpin the no net loss approach to environmental policy cannot capture important dimensions of value that are central to human well-being."

The principle of rectificatory or reparative justice lies at the basis of net biodiversity policy.

"The aim of policy is to make such reparations that would leave those adversely affected as well off as they were before the action. However, there are two problems with invoking this rectificatory principle of justice to defend a net gain policy. First rectificatory justice is backward looking. It does not justify future harms. There is an important distinction to be drawn between a polluter paying reparation for harms and damage done and a polluter paying for the right to cause future harm and damage. A central concern about offset markets is that they allow a developer to buy the right to cause biodiversity loss. Second, the appeals to rectificatory justice to defend a net gain policy assumes that there is some level of compensation that could return those who suffer a loss to their previous level of well-being or improve it. This claim assumes that the loss can be compensated. However, there are major difficulties in invoking the idea that compensation is possible that will bring affected partners back to the level of well-being they had prior to the damage. For many damages there is no possible good that substitutes for that which is lost". Professor John O'Neill.

The loss of Ryebank Fields to the environment and local community cannot be repaired in this way. The loss cannot be measured in terms of greenspace alone. It is access to the type, maturity and diversity of natural habitat that is important to people, insects and animals. Moreover, the loss in terms of memories and social interaction from this land cannot be measured or compensated.

URBAN AGEING

Context of an ageing population in Greater Manchester

The world's population is ageing rapidly. According to United Nations and World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates, over 11% of the world population is over 60, with that proportion expected to double to 22% by 2050. In the UK, the trend is even more pronounced. Estimates suggest that by the early 2030s, half of the UK adult population will be over 50, and by 2037 the over 80s group will have expanded to six million.

At a GM level, by 2036 14% of the total population will be 75 and over, this is an increase of 75% from 2011 (from 221,000 to 387,000). An increase in older people in GM living alone, and at risk of social isolation and loneliness is forecast, with related impacts on physical and mental health and wellbeing, with people aged 75 and over at greatest risk. By 2036 one in three men aged 75 will be living alone. GM will see an 85% increase in the number of people diagnosed with some form of dementia by 2036 (to 61,000 people). Ryebank Fields' natural environment offers opportunities for sensory/Dementia walks focussing on the memories locked into the land.

Evidence from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) suggests worsening of levels of health outcomes for younger-old cohorts in the poorest 20% of the population, with increased levels of inequalities between the richest and poorest.

In 2015 key international reports by the OECD and WHO have called for coordinated action at city and sub-regional levels to plan for ageing populations and to take advantage of social and economic opportunities that population ageing represents.

GM is in a unique position, with a wealth of experience and expertise across a wide range of leading academic, policy and practitioners, combined with the flexibilities granted under the Devolution Deals, and the Health and Social Care Strategic Plan, to become the UK's first age-friendly city region and a national leader on ageing in place.
The vision of the Greater Manchester Ageing Hub will be achieved through the delivery of the following strategic priorities:

1. GM will become the first age-friendly city region in the UK
2. GM will be a global centre of excellence for ageing, pioneering new research, technology and solutions across the whole range of ageing issues GM will increase economic participation amongst the over 50s

Chris Phillipson's report (2017) outlines a strategy for Greater Manchester (GM) to help achieve its ambition to be the first 'age-friendly region' in the United Kingdom. The report identifies several policy options designed to assist this objective, building on evidence about demographic, social and economic changes which are likely to affect the region over the next two decades. Two recommendations are of specific importance to Ryebank Fields:

- To recognise neighbourhoods as a crucial resource for improving the lives of older people.
- Utilising the benefits of green and blue infrastructure for raising the quality of life of older adults.

"There are clear physical and mental health advantages linked to mobility outside the home and being in outdoor spaces in particular. Neighbourhoods that are designed to make it easy and enjoyable to go outdoors will help people attain recommended levels of physical activity through walking. Access to natural environments and green open spaces are themselves important in promoting health and well-being." (8)

Securing access to green infrastructure (GI) is an essential part of an age-

friendly strategy, not just for health and wellbeing, and for ensuring caring and skilled communities.

Ryebank Fields, again, demonstrates policies for an Age-Friendly city in practice, not just in theory. The site and its programme of work relays the effectiveness of an interaction between health, active ageing and greenspaces.

Social Isolation

Social isolation represents a significant risk factor for physical and mental health problems. A review conducted by Holt-Lunstad et al. (2010) revealed that individuals lacking social contact 'carry a health risk equivalent to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day and being an alcoholic' and describes social isolation as being 'more harmful than not exercising and twice as harmful as obesity' (Bolton, 2012, p.10). Research also shows that social isolation puts older adults at greater risk of early mortality (Holt-Lunstad et al. 2010; Steptoe et al., 2013), dementia (Fratiglioni et al., 2004), suicide (Conwell et al., 2011), and cognitive decline (James et al., 2011), (Buffel, 12).

Social isolation affects both individuals and the wider community. Health issues arising from isolation and loneliness lead to an increased use of health and social care services as well as a higher number of emergency admissions and GP consultations (Scharf, 2014; Windle et al., 2014), adding significant pressures to available financial resources (Buffel, 13).

Research shows that people with adequate social relationships have a 50% greater likelihood of survival compared to those with poor or insufficient social relationships (Buffel, 3). Increasing social participation and social connectedness contribute to the well-being of older adults. Belonging to a social network makes people feel cared for, loved, esteemed and valued, this having a powerful protective effect on health, and a decreased use of health and social care services (Buffel, 4).

Ryebank Fields easily maps onto the types of recommendations for successful interventions to prevent social isolation, including:

- Active co-production with older people development, management and evaluation of interventions.
- Utilise existing community resources and aim to build community capacity.
- Intervention developed within an existing service.
- Group interventions that have a training or educational component are especially effective at reducing social isolation.

CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

"We must aim to improve access to our heritage and extend opportunities to enjoy and learn about it to everyone in every community." (DDCMS)

National heritage strategies and organisations play an important role in safeguarding our landscape, wildlife and geological features in towns, cities and the countryside. Ryebank Fields is a site of cultural and natural heritage and is rich with storytelling and diverse working-class narratives.

What is deemed "important" heritage has come under scrutiny in the last decade, with increasing emphasis on the importance of the local, regional and marginalised heritage discourses, sites, spaces, customs and everyday collections. Increasingly, inherently valuable material heritage is replaced with a position that favours community identication of valuable "heritage" relevant to people's diverse lived experiences and cultural expression (Harrison and Smith).

Community heritage initiatives are fully supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, in which heritage as a priority research strand.

Community heritage brings people together and increases their pride in the local area. Importantly, "community heritage is anything that makes your area unique and worth celebrating." (HLF) Voluntary and community

organisations, such as the Friends of Ryebank Fields, help to ensure that our heritage is fully valued, and they play an important and growing part in conserving and caring for it.
Ryebank Fields is a site that is valued as a local and living heritage asset within the area and holds many memories for the current older residents who remember the different stages of Ryebank Fields, including stories of the Nico Ditch. Importantly, the local community has played a key role in that transformation, healing and care of a post-industrial natural heritage.

The participation of the community in managing the site has enabled an important degree of self-determination in the community and brings a sense of identity to the area. Activities based in or around Ryebank Fields bring people together with a sense of common purpose and pride, and help to cement contacts between different generations.

Ryebank Fields as a living and evolving space of community heritage enables knowledge exchange between different generations. This is especially important in encouraging younger people and children to learn about greenspaces.

“No other country in the world has such a strong tradition of ‘citizen science’, adding hugely to our knowledge and understanding of our natural heritage, and enabling us to safeguard it for the future. But sadly, these amateur naturalists are now an endangered species. The vast majority of those active in, for example, BTO surveys, are more than 40 years old; most are over 60. As time goes by, we look in vain for their successors.” (Moss, 11).

Ryebank Fields is most definitely a case study that could demonstrate methods for learning and skills development deemed vital to our landscapes and economies by the National Trust and others.

A report by Historic England revealed the vital contribution of heritage to England’s economic prosperity, particularly in relation to regeneration. Heritage is an important source of employment and draws millions of visitors each year. Local historic sites add to the unique character of an area, help to foster a sense of community and have an important role in creating a sense of place and distinctiveness; this in turn attracts people, businesses and investment. The development of Ryebank Fields is already demonstrating this attraction of business. Unfortunately, the very site that is the cause of community cohesion and increased sense of pride in place is the thing under threat.

There is an under-representation of urban ecology and biodiversity within heritage discourse. There has been an increase in practitioners working in areas of creative geographies, arts and ecology and environmentalism; but modes of understanding ecology as living heritage, and methods of capturing and sharing its value, is often secondary to the preservation of material artefacts and buildings. Ryebank Fields is at risk of falling victim to the wider under-valuing of urban biodiversity and natural spaces, despite the obvious importance to healthy ageing and wider skilling opportunities.

UNESCO takes the following description as its starting point for understanding cultural heritage:

“Cultural Heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values. Cultural Heritage is often expressed as either Intangible or Tangible Cultural Heritage” (ICOMOS, 2002).

This description also accounts for the fascinating reuse and social history of the site, which deserves a thorough exploration. Highly respected theorist Doreen Massey talked of places as relational spaces of ‘stories-so-far’. Spaces evolve with community interaction and participation, which ensures community plurality, multiplicity, and co-existing heterogeneity.

Conclusion

This report has outlined how the unique qualities of Ryebank Fields enable individual and community wellbeing, integration, healthy ageing and intergenerational learning and skills sharing. It shows how Ryebank is an asset for the promotion of a more caring and nurturing community, community integration, intergenerational exchange, understanding and appreciation of urban nature and wildlife.

The report draws on research conducted with local residents as well as research conducted as part of the wider GHIA project, and national research, to demonstrate the significance of maintaining this space without development. The space provides a valuable asset for healthy ageing in place and reiterates the contention that Ryebank Fields be protected as a community asset, in order that volunteer labour, expertise and resources invested in its development continue to offer a return to the community.

The danger of losing this site would lead to increased or worsened mental health issues, greater social isolation, decreased physical activity, Nature Deficit Disorder, decreased community cohesion, decreased care for place and local spaces, mistrust of policy makers, council representatives and the local HEI, MMU.

It is requested that the site owner and Manchester City Council take into consideration the report as evidence of best practice in community and individual healthy and participatory ageing and recognise the positive impact of Ryebank Fields both on the community and the environment. We strongly advise and recommend rejection of the planned development.

"It is precious to us all." (55, f)

Media Links

Radio 4, Open Country
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000dgbk

Radio Times
https://www.radiotimes.com/radio-programme/e/kwwpb5/open-country--episode-14-ryebank-fields/

Manchester Evening News
https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/chorlton-ryebank-fields-asbestos-reports-18276530

Manchester Evening News
https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/mmus-ryebank-fields-housing-plans-16675429

Manchester Evening News
https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/fight-chorltons-ryebank-fields-15834250

Place North West
https://www.placenorthwest.co.uk/news/mmus-ryebank-fields-closed-after-asbestos-discovery/

That's TV
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8B7308Zs9Is&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1eCclDtbq78cl0cp_rlg6tSzzMDilxmtT9cnbFUY6XtV7QZTmDYZU_FsU

Mancunian Matters
http://www.mancunianmatters.co.uk/content/100178548-outrage-mmu-ryebank-fields-proposal-could-destroy-100-millennium-oak-trees

The Meteor
https://www.themeteor.org/2019/11/22/sir-richard-leese-says-we-are-open-to-working-with-anybody-we-asked-campaign-groups-what-they-thought-pt-4/

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The Northern Quota
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