

PRESS RELEASE



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For Immediate Release

When it comes to securing planning permission about the future of Ryebank Fields, where does the real power lie?

"I heard Cllr. John Hacking say they [Councillors] have very limited power when it comes to Developers... I want Local Councillors to know their power and use it for their community, otherwise what is the point of our democracy?" Liz Clay, Chorlton Resident.

"It is wrong to pre-judge and say it would be developed, because the Planning Committee has the right to refuse it." Jack Hollis, Liberal Democrat Candidate for Chorlton Park Ward.

"Saving Ryebank Fields is an issue for everyone in South Manchester...there is enough brownfield land available to meet housing targets." Grace Worrall, Green Candidate for Chorlton Park Ward.

Starkly contrasting views were expressed at the 20th April local election hustings hosted by Chorlton Civic Society when candidates responded to the question:

'Do you support the plan to retain Ryebank Fields as a Community Woodland and Meadow?'

Answering first, Labour and Cooperative Party candidate Cllr John Hacking, whose current Chorlton seat is up for grabs alongside Joanna Midgely's in Chorlton Park Ward, failed to offer a straight yes or no. *"I don't think it's a realistic option"* he said, *"Our"*, he continued, and then, correcting himself *"my view is that it will be developed by the people who own it."*

Initially reluctant to answer on the grounds that Ryebank Fields are not in her ward, Cllr Joanna Midgely was pressed on the basis that she could be on the planning committee that decides the application. She echoed John Hacking.

All other candidates present, representing Chorlton Park ward, the Green (Grace Worrall), Liberal Democrat (Jack Hollis), Social Democrat (Hamed Aden), and Workers Party (Fassah Bibi) unequivocally stated their support for [this plan](#) and pledged their commitment to follow through with that support in the event that any of them were elected and subsequently sat on the post-election [Manchester City Council Planning Committee](#).

Specifically, the Green candidate pointed out: *"Saving Ryebank Fields is an issue for everyone in South Manchester...there is enough brownfield land available to meet housing targets"*, and the Lib Dem candidate challenged John Hacking directly: *"It is wrong to pre-judge and say it would be developed because the Planning Committee has a right to refuse it."*

Local resident Liz Clay was in the audience. She reflected on the meeting as follows: *"I thought the job of Local Councillors was to represent their constituents. However I heard Cllr John Hacking say*



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they have very limited power when it comes to Developers. To me that means no power to help us protect the environment and keep Ryebank Fields as a nature space.... That's why, when I heard what John said, I spoke out from the second row saying 'So you have no power as Councillors then?' I want Local Councillors to know their power and use it for their community, otherwise what is the point of our democracy?"

Ryebank Fields Community Group Chair observes: *"Under covenant that it only be used educational purposes, Ryebank Fields was gifted by the people of Manchester to Manchester Polytechnic (now Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)) as a sports facility in the mid-1970s, making the question of 'ownership' both highly contested and a matter of the City's moral integrity. Further, if land 'ownership' is what it's really all about and Landowners' Developers rule the roost then why have Planning Procedures and Committees at all? There are 30 plus years of blood, sweat, tears and laughter comprising the Save Ryebank Fields campaign to date, alongside the matter of the thousands upon thousands of locally fundraised pounds that have been used to fully engage, in good faith, with a planning process where our elected political representatives - not Land 'Owners' or Developers - are expected to represent us and work alongside us for what is right."*

Since 19th December 2025 the planning application for Ryebank Fields' retention as a community resource (Ref 143413/FO/2025) has been ready to be determined by Manchester City Council's (MCC) Planning committee. This means that all the statutory consultees have assessed the application, any questions they have raised have been answered to their satisfaction and there are no concerns as to its suitability.

The huge numbers of endorsements for our community-led and funded planning application, the huge numbers of objections to the planning application to build 120 executive houses and the large number of supporting comments to designate Ryebank Fields as a Local Green Space during the Local Plan consultation period, clearly show where local communities stand when it comes to Saving Ryebank Fields.

We continue to wait for MCC's confirmation of the date of the Planning Committee that has the power to approve this application.

The written responses from the Chorlton Ward candidates to our letter of the 11th of April asking if they will support our planning application can be viewed on our website using the link below.

<https://ryebankfieldscommunity.co.uk/local-elections-2026>

ENDS

For further information please email ryebankfieldscommunity@gmail.com or call Tom Butler on 07833 358703

Ryebank Fields is public land that was gifted to Manchester Polytechnic (now Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)) as a sports facility in the mid-1970s. The area was formerly a clay pit for Jackson's Brickworks; it then became an unregistered tip and was remediated in 1972 under the publicly funded 'Operation Eyesore' to make it safe to walk and play on. The University abandoned Ryebank Fields in 1996, since which time this Local Green Space has naturally re-wilded into a richly biodiverse wildlife 11-acre haven tended, over four generations, by local people. Developers acting on behalf of MMU, want to destroy the land for expensive housing. Local residents and their supporters are determined to stop this attempt to cash this public land in at the expense of wildlife and humans.