

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Developer forced to issue a retraction after misleading the public in consultation on controversial plans for Ryebank Fields in South Manchester**

The fiercely-opposed scheme, which would see 120 units built on what is currently a green oasis in Chorlton with more than 1,400 trees and a rich variety of wildlife, is going through a second round of consultation, which ends on 1<sup>st</sup> November.

During a public webinar run by developers Step Places and Southway Housing, Harinder Dhaliwal, Managing Director of Step Places, referred to Ryebank Fields as a “Brownfield” site, when it is in actual fact classified as ‘Greenfield’. (1) This is significant as Manchester City Council has a ‘Brownfield first’ policy for development. Despite infuriated residents immediately sending in comments correcting Mr Dhaliwal, the developers’ panel failed to retract this misinformation during the webinar. In a retraction published five days later after complaints from campaigners, they again failed to clarify that the site is registered as ‘Greenfield’.

Sarah Benjamins, a spokesperson for Friends of Ryebank Fields (FORF), commented, “It’s shocking. Either it was a mistake that calls Mr Dhaliwal’s professionalism into question, or it was a deliberate misrepresentation of the truth in order to sell a vision for the fields that the community has already wholeheartedly rejected.”

Supporters of the Save Ryebank Fields campaign have described the second round of consultation as a farce and accused the developers of “running scared” of the local community. The public exhibitions of the developers’ plans during the first consultation in January / February 2023 attracted large protests from the communities of Chorlton and Stretford. Consultation results published by LexComm (a PR firm acting for the developers) showed that over 78% of responses opposed development on the fields, with just 16% in favour.

The second round of consultation denied the local community an opportunity to comment in-person and instead offered a single webinar with the developer team. However, many members of the community were given less than 24 hours’ notice of this event, meaning they were unable to attend and submit questions.

Residents who had signed up to receive email notifications of developments in the consultation process were not informed of the current round of consultation until six days after it launched. Despite an assurance from LexComm that it would go out on the day the consultation was announced, the e-bulletin was only sent out after campaigners had sent multiple emails to LexComm pointing out this omission and Friends of Ryebank Fields had sent out a mass email to its supporters urging them to complain.

Information provided by LexComm shows that 7,000 brochures were delivered to the local community. However, Friends of Ryebank Fields’ research shows that there are estimated to be between 20,000 and 25,000 people living within a fifteen minute walk of the site – the majority of whom were not notified of the existence of the consultation or the webinar until the evening before it.

Those who did attend the webinar were left angry and frustrated by the format, which did not allow attendees to see questions that had been asked, or to confirm whether their questions had been answered. Despite an assurance from LexComm that questions sent in which were not answered in the webinar would receive email responses, members of the local community are still waiting for a response.

FORF has made a formal complaint to LexComm about the lack of notice given for the webinar and asking for a justification of why no in-person consultation has been offered. FORF has further requested an extension to the consultation in view of the delay sending out the e-bulletin and a second webinar, but has not received a response to these concerns.

Local resident Julie Ryan summed up the feelings of many supporters of the Save Ryebank Fields campaign: "The whole consultation process has been a sham - most of my questions remain unanswered. I've never heard so much greenwash and spin. It's a disgrace."

ENDS

1. Source: Greater Manchester Open Data Infrastructure Map, produced by GMCA

Photos / interviews available on request

View the developers' webinar here: [Ryebank Chorlton](#)

For further information contact [ryebankfieldsfriends@gmail.com](mailto:ryebankfieldsfriends@gmail.com) / Hannah Stanton on 07811 658 635

Find out more about the Save Ryebank Fields campaign at [www.saveryebankfields.co.uk](http://www.saveryebankfields.co.uk)

Ryebank Fields is public land that was gifted to 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 when the land has naturally re-wilded into a richly biodiverse wildlife haven. Developers, Step Places and Southway Housing Trust, acting on behalf of MMU, now plan to destroy the land for expensive housing. Local residents are furious as Ryebank Fields is public land that was gifted to MMU under covenant for educational purposes only and the University now want to cash in at the expense of residents and wildlife.

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