

RYEBANK FIELDS COMMUNITY GROUP PRESS RELEASE

MMU Vice Chancellor's Ecology Credentials on the Line

"Ryebank Fields already has homes: for birds, mammals, pollinators and over 1400 trees, including a rare black poplar. Please. Halt the project." (Extract from the complaint sent to MMU's Vice Chancellor Malcolm Press)

"An application for Local Green Space designation was submitted to Manchester City Council, over four years ago in April 2020...during MCC's Local Plan Initial Consultation period... Ryebank Fields meets all the criteria required for LGS designation... The current situation means a planning application could be approved before the proposal for LGS designation receives due consideration by MCC... the planning process has to be fair and equal to all the parties involved." (Extract from letter to Andrew Western MP)

Beyond their beauty and health-giving properties nature's treasures cannot speak for themselves and so we human beings must do that. (Local Resident)

14th October 2024

Professor Malcolm Press, Vice-Chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), has received a formal complaint from Ryebank Fields Community Group, one of several groups involved in the Save Ryebank Fields campaign. Now fully informed about the invasive site surveys undertaken by MMU's proposed development partners (Step Places and Southway Housing Trust) on Ryebank Fields between June and July of this year, he has been asked to call an immediate halt to the scheme to destroy Ryebank Fields.

Such action, he is advised, will avert both an ecological disaster and a widespread publicity campaign about the rank hypocrisy of, and greenwashing by, a university which prides itself on its commitment to green sustainability.

Professor Press has been invited to reflect upon both his reputation as an eminent ecologist and the fall-out from the latest site investigations which were ordered to be completed during nesting and breeding seasons, thus posing a danger to wildlife. He has been reminded that his organisation failed to respond directly to submitted video evidence that active nests were present at this time, and deferred to their organisation's PR company, Lexcomm, who made the preposterous claim: "There are no nesting birds in Ryebank Fields".

The complaint itemises concerns including a local community member finding contaminated sample pots left uncollected at surface level, major congestion on local roads that are far too narrow for HGVs or heavy plant machinery and how neighbouring residents and parents at St. John's Primary School raised concerns about the health risks associated from ground disturbances.

Professor Press now knows that a wealth of evidence from the site survey processes exists exposing unacceptable practices and illegal acts; evidence which incriminates both his development partner's operatives and the Greater Manchester Police, who were unwilling to enforce the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act.

In the complaint Professor Press is informed that the community, submitted their proposal to Manchester City Council in 2020, for Ryebank Fields to be designated a Local Green Space.

Once again, we reminded MMU that *“Ryebank Fields already has homes: for birds, mammals, pollinators and over 1400 trees, including a rare black poplar.”*

A copy of the formal complaint to MMU’s Vice-Chancellor has also been forwarded to Andrew Western, MP for Stretford and Urmston. The MP has been made aware that local and wider groups opposed to the destruction of Ryebank Fields are still unable to present a case for the land to be retained as a public green space, Ryebank Fields meets all the criteria for Local Green Space designation. The proposal for LGS designation was submitted over four years ago in April 2020. This was during MCC’s Local Plan Initial Consultation period (Feb-May 2020) and in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.

In the communication our campaign member explains that LGS designation would grant the land protection equal to Greenbelt status and this can only be done during a Local Plan Consultation period. MCC have not confirmed when the next Local Plan Consultation period will be. Meanwhile MMU’s proposed developers (Step Places and Southway Housing) have announced their planning application will be submitted early next year.

The letter to Mr Western MP makes a very valid point *“I’m sure you will agree the planning process has to be fair and equal to all the parties involved...”* and includes a pledge from Labour’s 2024 election manifesto which confirms *“Labour rules out building on genuine nature spots and requires plans to include improvements to existing green spaces, making them accessible to the public, with new woodland, parks and playing fields. Plans should meet high environmental standards”*.

One Local Resident observes: *“Since 1996, when the council first threw out a housing planning application, local people have been protecting this Local Green Space. Beyond their beauty and health-giving properties, natures’ treasures cannot speak for themselves and so we human beings must do that. It is perfectly possible for Manchester to preserve and protect these naturally rewilded fields and ensure that there is enough accessible and affordable housing in Manchester. Pitting these two issues against one another is a completely unnecessary and clumsy attempt to divide and rule. We will be heard. They won’t succeed.”*

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 which time the land 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, plan to destroy the land for expensive housing. Local residents are determined to stop the University’s attempt to destroy this rewilded public green space in the pursuit of profit and at the expense of residents and wildlife.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT ryebankfieldsaction@proton.me or Tom Butler on 07833 358703