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Speculation Regarding the Identity and History of Ryebank Fields at the Executive Committee Meeting

Ryebank Fields Community <ryebankfieldscommunity@gmail.com> 15 July 2026 at 10:26
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Dear Councillor Craig and Executive Committee Members,

We write concerning comments made during the Manchester City Council Executive Committee meeting on Wednesday 8 July 2026, considering the Local Plan, in which Councillor Gavin White sought to explain the use of the term “Ryebank Road” when referring to Ryebank Fields by suggesting that Ryebank Road may previously have run through the site.

We appreciate that during public debate Members may explore possible explanations or historical context. However, we are concerned that this speculation is unsupported by any available historical evidence and therefore may have given those present a misleading impression of the site’s history and identity.

To our extensive local knowledge, there is no historical evidence to demonstrate that Ryebank Road has ever run through Ryebank Fields. On the contrary, the historic maps and plans we have reviewed consistently show that no road has ever passed through the site.

Moreover, despite sharing a similar name, “Ryebank Road” on the Chorlton, Manchester side of the site and “Rye Bank Road” on the Firswood, Trafford side are spelt differently on road signs and maps.

Further investigation into the history of the two roads demonstrates that they were constructed separately. Ryebank Road, Chorlton, was first developed in 1904. In keeping with the numbering conventions of the time, odd-numbered properties were on one side of the road and even-numbered properties on the other, with numbering commencing from Edge Lane, as there was no access from the city end.

In March 1926, properties were renumbered following the construction of new housing on the Trafford side leading from Seymour Grove. As a result, numbering commenced from Seymour Grove, now the end nearest the city. For example, No. 41 Ryebank Road (1904) became No. 254 Ryebank Road (2026). Please see attached document as evidence.

At that time, the land now known as Ryebank Fields was occupied by Jackson’s Brickworks and contained two clay pits approximately 40 feet deep. Consequently, despite the renumbering of properties, the two roads were never joined because of the brickworks operations and the physical separation created by the clay extraction works.

The only occasion on which a road appears to have been contemplated across the site was in connection with an abandoned 1960s proposal for a relief road running along Ryebank Road and linking to a proposed motorway spur from the M63 (now the M60) at Hardy Lane.

In the 1970s, the land was transferred to Manchester Polytechnic (now Manchester Metropolitan University) for use as a sports facility. Contemporary accounts and local records indicate that the transfer was subject to restrictions or an agreement requiring the land to be used for educational and recreational purposes. The site subsequently became known as

Ryebank Playing Fields until the university ceased using it in 1996, after which it naturally rewilded into the biodiverse woodland and meadow that exists today

Given the importance of accuracy in public decision-making, we would be grateful if you could clarify the basis for Councillor White's suggestion. If evidence exists to support the comments he made, we would welcome sight of it. If, as we believe, no such evidence exists, we respectfully request that this is acknowledged, that the comments are retracted, and that future discussions accurately refer to the land as Ryebank Fields.

As Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration, Councillor White has a particular responsibility to ensure that information and assertions introduced during the course of his public duties are accurate, reliable and appropriately evidenced. Decisions concerning planning policy and the future of valued community assets should be based on evidence rather than unverified assumptions. Members of the public are entitled to expect that matters raised by senior elected members during formal decision-making discussions are carefully considered and capable of substantiation.

We would be happy to provide copies of the historic maps and plans in our possession, which demonstrate that no road previously ran through the site and which record its historic use as Ryebank Playing Fields and, before that, as clay extraction pits associated with Jackson's Brickworks. These documents are also readily available in the public domain.

The distinction is important. Repeatedly referring to the land as "Ryebank Road", even if based on speculation rather than fact, risks creating a misleading impression of the site's history and character and obscures the identity of Ryebank Fields, formerly Ryebank Playing Fields, which has long been recognised by local residents as a valued green space.

We will be writing separately to the Executive Committee regarding its decision to exclude Ryebank Fields from the Stage 3 list of sites proposed for Local Green Space designation within the emerging Local Plan. That correspondence will address the merits of the designation decision itself and the evidence considered by the Committee. The purpose of this letter is confined to seeking clarification regarding statements made during the Committee's discussion of the site's history and identity, and to ensure that the public record accurately reflects the available historical evidence.

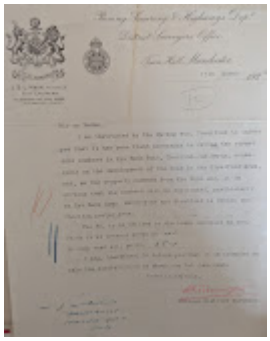
In the interests of maintaining an accurate public record, we ask that you either provide the evidence supporting Councillor White's suggestion or, if no such evidence exists, clarify this position and ensure that future discussions and records accurately reflect the evidence available.

We would be grateful for a written response within 14 days.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Rhetta Moran

Chair
Ryebank Fields Community Group



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