Ryebank fields: research and findings

Councillor Chantal Kerr-Sheppard

12th September 2026

1. Purpose of this dossier

This document records all investigations undertaken in relation to Ryebank Fields and the proposed residential development (Planning Application Ref: 142223/FO/2025).

Note on national planning policy

A revised National Planning Policy Framework was published in August 2026, replacing the version published in December 2024. Its national decision-making policies took effect on 17 August 2026 and apply to the determination of this application. The revised Framework is structured by policy reference rather than paragraph number.

Quotations in this dossier taken from documents produced before 17 August 2026, including consultation responses, Council reports and minutes, refer to the previous version of the Framework and are reproduced as written. Where this dossier itself relies on national policy, the current policy references are used.

It provides:

- a complete record of all lines of enquiry pursued;
- the outcome and current status of each investigation;
- an evidence-based assessment of environmental and planning issues;
- a reference document for potential future appeal or scrutiny.

2. Summary table: investigation status

Section	Status Summary
3.1 Ownership	Manchester Metropolitan University owns Ryebank Road Fields following previous Manchester City Council ownership. An Education Acts restriction on the parent title was cancelled in January 2023 as a superfluous entry; HM Land Registry has confirmed such restrictions have not been carried forward to derived titles since August 1986 and this does not indicate any irregularity in the 1992 transfer.
3.2 Planning History (1997 Appeal)	Planning Application Appeal dismissed; relevant context only
3.3 Site Development History	Site consulted upon in 2017 with a majority of respondents opposing the draft Framework and the proposed 70 homes. Final Framework approved under delegated officer authority rather than by Executive resolution. Both the housing development application 142223/FO/2025 and the community application 143413/FO/2025 are proposed for determination at committee on 24 September 2026, the community application being nine months beyond its target decision date.
3.4 Greenfield vs Brownfield	Ryebank is greenfield and Manchester has more than enough brownfield land to meet its housing targets. The site is excluded from the Open Space Assessment and was not assessed for Local Green Space designation, in both cases on the basis of its inclusion in the SHLAA. Legal Services has confirmed no internal documents are held explaining that exclusion decision.
3.5 Environment Agency & United Utilities	EA: Significant unresolved contamination and groundwater risks identified; investigation incomplete UU: Formal objection maintained as of 1st July 2026. United Utilities explicitly state granting permissions without resolving their objection is not their recommended approach as the development may not be implementable in its current form. The developer's Remediation Briefing Note of 20 August 2026 confirms site investigation remains incomplete and remediation techniques are not yet finalised. Its statement that no monitoring programme is presently in place is difficult to reconcile with MMU's recorded expenditure of £142,186 on emergency asbestos removal between 2019 and 2025 and the Council's requirement to monitor the site for surface asbestos. The Badger Risk Assessment of 4 August 2026 confirms badgers are exposing asbestos-containing material at the surface and states the affected areas are not currently subject to any formal inspection or management regime.

3.6 Human Health and Risk Assessment Limitations	Contamination confirmed with likely risk to controlled waters; evidence incomplete and development dependent on future investigation and remediation Environmental Health confirmed on 11 September 2026 that the site was risk assessed under Part 2A in 2021 and placed in Category 4 (lowest risk) in its current use, with a quarterly landowner monitoring arrangement agreed with the Council and considered adequate unless anything substantially changes.
3.7 Flood Risk & Drainage	Flood risk evidence evolved during determination; mitigation proposed; overall impact dependent on design compliance rather than demonstrated improvement The Longford Brook Statement of August 2026 confirms it has not been established whether a culvert exists beneath the site, with the investigation required proposed to be undertaken after the grant of permission.
3.8 Biodiversity & BNG	Significant on-site biodiversity loss is identified (-40% habitat units; -81% watercourse units), with policy compliance dependent on unconfirmed off-site mitigation. May rely on Natural England credits.
3.9 Historic England / Nico Ditch	Developer concludes neutral heritage impact; however, both Historic England and archaeological evidence confirm that the significance of the Nico Ditch remains unestablished and dependent on post-permission investigation
3.10 DMMO / Public Rights of Way	No Public Rights of Way exist; DMMO application tested and refused, with use determined to be permissive rather than “as of right”.
3.11 Development in Chorlton	Manchester City Council's own July 2026 Chorlton & Chorlton Park Housing Pipeline identifies 190 homes already on site and a further 418 approved or submitted across both wards, a total of 608 including Ryebank Fields. Excluding Ryebank Fields, the pipeline delivers 488 homes, of which 169 are affordable. Ryebank Fields is the only site in the pipeline comprising natural and semi-natural open space, and the only greenfield site that remains undetermined.
3.12 Efficient Use of Land / Brownfield Preference	The development plan (Places for Everyone SO2/SO3, paras 4.10 and 4.12) expresses a brownfield preference; 374 homes (147 affordable) already secured in Chorlton ward on brownfield and town centre sites; Ryebank is the only undetermined greenfield site in the pipeline and the only natural and semi-natural open space. Housing benefit weight reduced accordingly under NPPF S4 and HO7. No sequential test is asserted.
3.13 Manchester Metropolitan University Sustainability Position	Manchester Metropolitan University states that “Preserving biodiversity in an urban area like Manchester is vital” and that biodiversity should be “protected and enhanced”, while the proposal involves development on land described as a “rewilded green space”
4. Current Assessment	The central question for the planning committee is whether sufficient evidence exists to ensure environmental risks are fully understood and manageable prior to determination,

	rather than prematurely granting permission while deferring critical investigations and unresolved constraints to post-approval conditions
5. Material Planning Considerations Arising	Sixteen questions arising from the evidence, each relating to a **material planning consideration, submitted for the purpose of ensuring these matters are addressed in the officer's report and are before the Planning Committee at determination.**

3. Investigation status in detail

3.1 Ownership

Ownership

Manchester Metropolitan University owns Ryebank Road Fields, Stretford following previous Manchester City Council ownership, Land Title Register GM603008. The Title was transferred from one organisation to the other in 1992.

- *(15.05.1992) The land in this title has the benefit of the following rights granted by but is subject to the following rights reserved by a Transfer of the land in this title dated 2 March 1992 made between (1) The Council of the City of Manchester (the Transferor) and (2) Manchester Polytechnic (the Transferee)*
- *Title absolute: 1 (25.03.1993) Proprietor: THE MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY Higher Education Corporation of all Saints, Manchester, M15 6BH.*

The parent title, LA126294, held by Manchester City Council, previously carried a restriction at Proprietorship Register entry B2, dated 3 October 1967, in the following terms:

Except under an Order of the Registrar no disposition by the proprietor of the land is to be registered unless made in accordance with the Education Acts 1944 to 1964 or some other Act or authority.

This restriction does not appear on title GM603008. HM Land Registry has confirmed in correspondence dated 27 August 2026 (reference T379LPV) that the restriction was cancelled from the parent title on 23 January 2023 at the direction of the Registrar, pursuant to paragraph 5(d) of Schedule 4 to the Land Registration Act 2002, as it was considered a superfluous entry. It has not been stated who asked for this amendment.

HM Land Registry further confirmed that since August 1986 it has been their practice that such restrictions are no longer required to be complied with and are not carried forward to new registrations, on the basis that local authorities have extensive statutory powers and are subject to extensive statutory controls, such that the restrictions no longer serve a useful purpose. The restriction was accordingly not carried forward to any title derived from the parent title following that change in practice, including titles GM603008, GM964000 and MAN415126.

The absence of the restriction from title GM603008 therefore reflects a change in national HM Land Registry practice applying to all derived titles, and does not indicate any irregularity in the 1992 transfer.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Land Title Register GM603008
- Land Title Register LA126294
- HM Land Registry correspondence to Councillor Kerr-Sheppard, reference T379LPV, 27 August 2026

3.2 Planning History (1997 Appeal)

The planning history of the Ryebank site includes a previous Planning Application submitted by Manchester Metropolitan University not held on the Manchester City Council website but will be retained in the Manchester City Council Archives available on request. The proposal was for *"a maximum of 96 dwellings"*.

The applicant's case

The application was accompanied by a planning statement prepared by Dunlop Heywood on behalf of Manchester Metropolitan University. The statement describes the site as "*an area of flat grassland extending to approximately 4.6 hectares (11.6 acres) in size"*, records that the northern section was then laid out to provide two football pitches, and that the southern section, whilst mown, was not used for any formal purpose. A shale all weather training pitch and a sports pavilion of approximately 4,500 square feet were present within the southern section.

The statement records that *the "entire site is within the ownership of Manchester Metropolitan University and is wholly private with no public rights of access. The land is not traversed by any public rights of way."* That position is consistent with the outcome of the Definitive Map Modification Order investigation set out at section 3.10 below.

On the loss of the playing fields, the University argued that this was compensated by its acquisition from Shell UK of a 10.58 hectare sports facility at Carrington, producing "*an overall net gain of planing [sic] fields in the region of 5.89 hectares (14.5 acres)"*, and that *an alternative replacement facility of an enhanced nature has been provided in advance of the proposal to develop the Ryebank Road site."*

On the purpose of the proposal, the statement records that "*it is intended that if planning consent is granted, the site will be sold to generate revenue. The revenue will be set against the university's overall capital programme."*

On informal use of the site by residents, the statement records that "*although wholly private, some local residents may have a perception as to the use of the area for informal purposes such as dog walking"*, and argued that the proposed play area would be "*genuinely public as opposed to the nature of the current use of the site."*

Adequacy of Longford Park as alternative provision

The statement argued that, by reason of the site's proximity to Longford Park, "*the local area is well provided for in terms of informal recreation space."*

That argument was not accepted. The Inspector concluded that the proposal would result in the "*loss of playing fields in a part of the City… not well provided with outdoor playing space"*, and that the alternative provision at Carrington would not deliver "*equivalent community benefit*." The presence of Longford Park adjoining the site was therefore not treated as sufficient to offset the loss of open space at Ryebank Fields, and the same conclusion was reached in respect of the substituted provision at Carrington.

The application was **refused** by Manchester City Council and then appealed. A local inquiry and site inspection took place in June 1997, and **the appeal was dismissed** in August 1997.

The appeal, determined in 1997, in which Manchester Metropolitan University sought outline planning permission for *"residential development, including public open space and children's play area"*, following refusal by Manchester City Council.

The **appeal was dismissed by the Planning Inspector** (appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment) who identified the primary issue as *"the effect of the proposed development on playing field provision"* alongside whether University's alternative facilities would provide *"equivalent community benefit"*.

In assessing the site, the Inspector confirmed that the land formed former playing fields ("*The site is not designated as playing fields in the UDF, but neither are all other playing fields so Identified, The "non-designation" does not mean that Policy L1.2, which is concerned with both public and private sports facilities, does not apply to the site"*) and emphasised that playing fields *"whether public or private, are of special significance for their recreational and amenity value. When not required for their original purpose, they may be able to meet the growing need far recreational land in the wider community. In this respect, the fact that the playing fields are not currently in use neither reduces their value or potential for recreational use nor give particular weight to the appeal proposals. "*

The Inspector ultimately concluded that the proposal would result in the *"loss of playing fields in a part of the City… not well provided with outdoor playing space"* and that alternative provision at Carrington (Sport Centre) would not provide an *"equivalent community benefit"*.

As a result, the development was found to conflict with policy *"by causing harm to the long-term recreational Interests of the local community"* and this *"would be unacceptable"*, and the appeal was therefore dismissed.

To note, the letter also states that "*Community can refer also to 'the public in general or a body of persons in the same locality'* not just University students or Sports Club Members.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- The Planning Inspectorate APPLICATION NO: 049013/00/S0UTH2/95 document title: 1997 appeal 049013_OO_SOUTH2_95—1093309
- The Planning Inspectorate Appeal Decision, reference T/APP/B4215/A/96/274140/P5, August 1997

- Planning statement prepared by Dunlop Heywood on behalf of Manchester Metropolitan University in respect of land at Ryebank Road, Chorlton (undated, submitted with the 1995 application)

3.3 Site Development History

Other documents and meetings may exist before this line of evidence as well as between the dates below in reference to Ryebank Fields but these have not been researched or requested.

28 June 2017
The Executive of Manchester City Council was informed of Manchester Metropolitan University's Estate Strategy 2017-2027 which did not identify Ryebank Road within the list of surplus assets referenced in the report *"Arising out of the creation of both campuses the University worked with the City Council to develop and implement a disposal strategy for the University's surplus assets such as the Didsbury Campus and the Aytoun Campus."*

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- MCC Executive Meeting minutes_exec_28_june 2017 available online
- 10_mmu_estate_strategy June 2017 Item 10 - Manchester Metropolitan University Estate Strategy 2017

26 July 2017
On 26 July 2017, the Executive formally proposed the Ryebank Road Development Framework for endorsement
"Exe/17/101 Chorlton– New Residential Growth Opportunities

The third site was a site on Ryebank Road that had been once part of the Manchester Metropolitan University estate but was now surplus to the University's requirements. Through the disposal of that site the University was seeking to ensure that this surplus asset would support investment in the University's future growth whilst at the same time helping to support the city's wider economic growth ambitions. It was felt that the site provided an opportunity to meet the City's need for high quality executive homes, whilst simultaneously investing in its immediate parkland context. The report explained that the site had been vacant for a number of years and had become an under-utilised area of predominantly unmanaged grassland with restricted accessibility.

A draft Ryebank Road Development Framework had been prepared and a copy was appended to the report. *That framework had been prepared to examine the potential for the site to be positively transformed, particularly to consider how the existing environmental and landscape assets of the site could be the basis for a framework for regeneration. The framework was proposing a high quality, low density development of suburban housing with a range of detached and semi-detached units, each with sizeable gardens and driveways for car parking.* ***The appropriate density was considered to be 70 homes as that number should respect and respond to the physical, social and economic context of the site and wider***

Chorlton area. *The report explained that the intention was also for this draft to be now subject to a period of public and stakeholder consultation.*

Decisions:

5. To endorse the draft Ryebank Road Development Framework as appended to the report as a basis for further consultation with local stakeholders and landowners.

To note: **Cushman & Wakefield**, with 5 Plus Architects, prepared the draft Ryebank Road Development Framework July 2017 **on behalf of MMU**

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- MCC Executive Meeting minutes_exec_26_july 2017 available online
- 8 - Chorlton - New Residential Growth Opportunities
- 8 - Chorlton - New Residential Growth Opportunities Annexes

25 July 2018
The Executive received a report on the outcome of the public consultation on the two draft Chorlton Development Frameworks (Item 10, Exe/18/080, "Chorlton – New Development Opportunities", Report of the Strategic Director (Development)). The officer who is now the Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing is listed as a named Contact Officer, alongside the then City Solicitor.

The consultation ran from 16 October to December 2017 and generated over 1,260 responses across the three Chorlton sites, with over 850 people attending six drop-in events.

In relation to Ryebank Road, the report records the following consultation outcomes:

- *"A majority did not agree with promoting the development as set out in the draft Framework"*
- *"The conservation of green space and the protection of the Nico Ditch which runs through the Ryebank Road site was also raised"*
- *"A majority of respondents did not support the proposals for 70 homes on this site"*
- *"A significant proportion of respondents did not support the proposals to link the residential development into Longford Road with the preferred approach being a dual road connection onto both Longford Road and Ryebank Road to the north of the site"*

The report also records that respondents raised the potential for highways issues to be exacerbated, the impact on Longford Park, and the impact of new homes on local school places and GP patient lists.

At paragraph 5.3 the report states that the Ryebank Road site has *the potential to broaden the housing offer and deliver a mid-market priced offer on the former and an Executive home priced offer on the latter.*

At paragraph 5.6 the report confirms that "*the proposals for the redevelopment of this site continue to sustain a low density of circa 70 homes on the site as set out in the original draft Framework"* and that the dual access approach was incorporated in response to consultation: "*the preferred approach*

put forward through the consultation process is proposed to be incorporated into the final version of the Framework. This is a proposal to promote a dual entry to the site off Longford Road and off Ryebank Road to the north of the site. The two access points would not be connected for vehicle traffic." The report notes that "*these proposals will require further discussion with Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council as the access onto that part of Ryebank Road was a concern raised in their response to the Framework.*"

The Executive did not itself approve the final Ryebank Road Development Framework. The decision recorded in the minutes was:

"To note the comments received from stakeholders and delegate authority to the Strategic Director (Development), in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing & Regeneration, to approve the final version of the Ryebank Road Development Framework with the intention that it will become a material consideration in the Council's decision making as a Local Planning Authority."

The final Framework therefore received approval under delegated officer authority rather than by resolution of the Executive, following a consultation in which a majority of respondents did not support the proposals as drafted.

Councillor Hacking, a ward councillor for Chorlton, addressed the meeting and stated that "*there was still some local opposition to any housing development on the Ryebank Road site"* and called for "*a rethink of the type and tenure of the housing proposed for the Ryebank Road site.*"

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- MCC Executive Meeting minutes 25 July 2018, Exe/18/080
- Item 10 – Chorlton New Development Opportunities, Executive 25 July 2018

June 2019

The final Ryebank Road Development Framework was produced in June 2019 by Cushman & Wakefield and 5 Plus Architects, naming John Keyes and Andrew Teage as lead contacts on behalf of MMU, proposing the site for residential development with the Nico Ditch identified as a landscape asset.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Ryebank Road Development Framework, June 2019, fetched directly from manchester.gov.uk/__data/assets/file/0022/123655/ryebank_road_development_framework_final.pdf

January 2022

The Chorlton CLT (Chorlton Community Land Trust) Expectations and Aspirations document of January 2022 confirms the Development Framework had been adopted by Manchester City Council and sets out the CLT's intent to engage constructively with development.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- **CCLT-Ryebank-Fields-Expectations-and-Aspirations-January-2022.pdf**

Between 19 February and 25 March 2024

Public consultation on the draft Chorlton Public Realm Plan DRAFT February 2024 took place

between 19 February and 25 March 2024, produced by **Cushman & Wakefield on behalf of MCC,** and this version contained no Ryebank housing pipeline table. **Therefore the public consultation did not allow for comment on development of the land.**

- Ryebank Fields is coloured green in the plan on Page 14, identifying the space as a Park according to the Key.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Chorlton public realm consultation plan | Manchester City Council

19 February 2025

Manchester City Council's Executive formally resolved to endorse the Chorlton Local Infrastructure Framework (LIF) and Public Realm Plan. The Executive explicitly resolved that this endorsement would allow the document to become *"a material consideration in the Council's decision-making role as Local Planning Authority."*

- The adopted Chorlton LIF Final Draft February 2025 features a housing pipeline table on page 5 explicitly listing "Ryebank Road" as a committed site delivering exactly 42 affordable homes, 78 market homes, and 120 homes in total.
- The development was not subject to public consultation.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Executive Meeting Minutes of the meeting held 19 February 2025 Meeting Minutes
- Appendix - Chorlton LIF.pdf

28 February 2025

Planning application 142223/FO/2025 is formally validated by the council, meaning it was physically submitted on or around the exact date of the Executive meeting above.

Description

Erection of a residential development comprising 120 dwellings (including a mix of housing types and tenures) together with open spaces, landscaping, sustainable drainage features, cycleways and pedestrian footways, vehicular accesses and highways, parking provision and other associated works

28 August 2025

The Community Planning application 143413/FO/2025 is formally validated by the council.

Description

Change of use of former university playing fields to community woodland and meadow.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Planning Application: 143413/FO/2025
- As of 8th September both the housing development Planning Application 142223/FO/2025 and the Community Planning Application 143413/FO/2025 are understood to be proposed for determination at the same meeting of the Planning and Highways Committee.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Planning Application: 142223/FO/2025

Both the housing development Planning Application 142223/FO/2025 and the Community Planning Application 143413/FO/2025 are proposed for determination by the Planning and Highways Committee on 24 September 2026. The Community Planning Application was validated on 28 August 2025 with a target decision date of 19 December 2025. The housing development Planning Application was validated on 28 February 2025. The statutory determination period for major applications in England is 13 weeks from validation.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Planning Application: 143413/FO/2025
- Planning Application: 142223/FO/2025

3.4 Greenfield vs. Brownfield

The Ryebank Fields site is consistently treated as greenfield land in planning terms, and this is directly supported by the evidence of its physical characteristics and planning history. The Planning Inspectorate Appeal Decision (T/APP/B4215/A/96/274140/P5, 1997) confirms that, although no longer actively used, the site "*The land is now unkempt although it still has the general appearance of a sports field"* demonstrating that it retained its character of open, undeveloped recreational land rather than previously developed land.

This aligns with the Ryebank Road Development Framework June 2019 which states that *"The site's land use designation has subsequently been altered by Manchester City Council for the purposes of its statutory Development Plan. It is now designated as* ***natural and semi natural open space*** *and not playing pitches. Development proposals will therefore be assessed against relevant policies related to its classification as a natural and semi-natural open space in the Core Strategy that was adopted in 2012."* and frames development around these open-space characteristics rather than the redevelopment of existing built form

In strategic planning evidence, the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) 2025 subsequently classifies the site as a *"greenfield"* housing site with a capacity of 120 dwellings, marking a clear shift in its treatment within policy. However, the underlying evidence base does not indicate that the site has lost its defining characteristics as open land, and the Inspector's finding that playing fields are *of "special significance for their recreational and amenity value"* and that their *disuse "neither reduces their value or potential for recreational use"* remains directly relevant.

Whether the site is previously developed land

Whether a site is greenfield or brownfield is determined by the definition of previously developed land at Annex B of the National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026). That definition is:

"Land which has been lawfully developed and is or was occupied by a permanent structure and any fixed surface infrastructure associated with it, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed). It also includes land comprising large areas of fixed surface infrastructure such as large areas of hardstanding which have been lawfully developed. Previously developed land excludes: land that is or was last occupied by

agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed but where provision for restoration has been made through development management procedures (including development related to minerals extraction, waste disposal by landfill and renewable and low carbon energy development, where provision for restoration exists); land in built-up areas such as residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments; and land that was previously developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape."

Ryebank Fields falls within three of the exclusions in that definition, any one of which would be sufficient.

First, the site comprises former clay pits subsequently used for waste disposal. The definition excludes land developed for minerals extraction and waste disposal by landfill where provision for restoration exists.

Second, the site was in use as playing fields until 1996 and is designated by Manchester City Council as natural and semi-natural open space. The definition excludes land in built-up areas such as parks and recreation grounds.

Third, the site has been subject to natural regeneration for approximately thirty years. The definition excludes land that was previously developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape.

Ryebank Fields is therefore not previously developed land for the purposes of national planning policy, and is greenfield land in planning terms.

The planning framework material and subsequent strategy documents assume residential development. The Open Space Assessment May 2025 does not include Ryebank Fields within its inventory of green-space provision, meaning the loss of biodiversity and green space will not be recorded as such, nor as an area deficit in green space. The December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework required planning policies to be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities, including deficits and surpluses. That wording does not appear in the August 2026 Framework. Its plan-making Policy HC1 1(d) instead provides that local plans should *"Set local standards for the provision of different types of recreational land and facilities, including for play, sport, informal recreation and allotments. In doing so plans should draw upon relevant national standards and best practice, tailoring these as necessary to local circumstances and evidence"*, with the accompanying footnote referencing the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework, Fields in Trust standards and Sport England guidance.

These are plan-making provisions, relevant to the adequacy of the Council's evidence base rather than to the determination of an application; the decision-making test is Policy HC7, set out below. **Under either the former or the current national approach, an Open Space Assessment which omits sites expected to be developed cannot provide the understanding of existing provision on which local standards depend.**

The Public Pack for the Council meeting of 26 November 2025 records that "*The 2025 Open Space Assessment (OSA) confirms that Manchester currently falls far short of national guidelines for access to both nature and play spaces, with the greatest deficits in the most densely populated areas*" (Public Pack Agenda Document for Council Meeting 26/11/2025 10:00)

Current national policy: HC7

Policy HC7 of the National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026), a national decision-making policy, provides that development proposals "*should not result in the loss of existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, other formal and informal play space and allotments*, unless one of four circumstances applies:

a. *An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements*;

b. *The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality, in a location which offers comparable or improved accessibility for the community it serves*;

c. *The development is for public service infrastructure, and the resulting loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and/or quality*; or

d. *The development is for alternative open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.*"

On the evidence set out in this dossier, none of these four circumstances appears to be established. In relation to HC7(1)(a), the Open Space Assessment of May 2025 does not assess Ryebank Fields, the site having been excluded at paragraph 3.6 on the basis of its inclusion in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. An assessment which excludes a site cannot clearly show that site to be surplus to requirements. In relation to HC7(1)(b), no replacement open space provision is proposed. HC7(1)(c) and (d) do not apply, the proposal being for residential development.

Policy S4 of the same Framework provides that development proposals within settlements should be approved unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects, and identifies at S4(2)(a)(ii) that the circumstances in which this is likely include where a proposal would have a substantial adverse impact in relation to the application of the policies for existing recreational land and facilities (HC7), Local Green Space (HC8) and areas of particular importance for biodiversity and geodiversity (N6).

Development plan policy: JP-G6

Policy JP-G6 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, adopted 21 March 2024 and forming part of the statutory development plan, provides that "*existing urban green space will be protected and enhanced in balance with other considerations"*. The supporting text at paragraph 8.49 confirms that urban green infrastructure includes "*nature reserves, woodlands, allotments, cemeteries, former rail corridors, and other undeveloped land*."

Paragraph 8.53 of the same Plan records that "*less than half of Greater Manchester residents currently live within 300 metres of an accessible natural green space of at least 2 hectares in area"* and that "*the places of greatest deficiency tend to be the more densely developed urban areas"*. It further states that making best use of previously-developed land "*can only result in quality places if it is accompanied by considerable improvements in the accessibility, quality and functionality of green space*."

Additionally at Meeting of the Council, Wednesday, 26th November, 2025, it was recorded in minutes that *"The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Council (SHLAA) shows that Manchester has more than enough brownfield land to meet its housing targets. With capacity for over 80,000 homes against a Places for Everyone (PfE) target of 60,000 by 2040, there is no immediate need to build on*

greenfield sites" and *"The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)* ***requires open space to be protected*** *unless* ***robust evidence*** *shows it is surplus to requirements (Para 104). Inaccessible open spaces and greenfield land listed in the SHLAA are excluded from the OSA. This obscures the true picture of provision and makes it harder for the city to plan effectively for healthier and more resilient neighbourhoods."*

[Note: the Council minute quoted above cites Para 104 of the December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework. The equivalent provision in the August 2026 Framework is Policy HC7(1)(a).]

This is particularly relevant in the case of Ryebank Fields, as the evidence indicates that sites identified for development within the SHLAA may not be fully reflected in strategic Open Space Assessments, even where they retain characteristics of functional green space. As a result, land such as Ryebank Fields and similar sites, described as open, semi-natural space and historically of recreational value, may be treated as housing sites within the evidence base, while their contribution to accessible green space is not fully recognised.

This has implications not only for Ryebank Fields itself, but also highlights a broader risk that the contribution of similar greenfield sites may be under-represented within strategic assessments, particularly where they are simultaneously identified for development.

Exclusion from the Open Space Assessment

The Open Space Assessment (May 2025) does not include Ryebank Fields within its inventory of green space provision. Paragraph 3.6 of the OSA states that sites appearing on the 2022 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment are excluded from the assessment. The same paragraph then provides in full: *"However, any SHLAA or Employment Study site which is currently considered open space should still be assessed for its open space value on an individual basis as part of any planning application for that site, in line with national and local planning policy."* Application 142223/FO/2025 is a planning application for that site.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment is a technical background document. It does not allocate sites for development and confers no planning status. Inclusion within the SHLAA does not constitute a planning permission, a site allocation, or a formal development proposal.

Exclusion from Local Green Space assessment

The Local Green Space Assessment identifies Ryebank Fields, Lower Medlock and Bob's Hill as sites not progressed for assessment. The covering report to the Executive of 8 July 2026, “Manchester Local Plan – Draft for Consultation (Regulation 19)”, states at paragraph 3.15:

“The main aspect is based on the expectation that the sites are intended to be for development, and the specific reasons are set out as to why the sites should not be brought forward as Local Green Space.”

The identical wording appears in Appendix 1 (Local Green Space) to the same report.

Under the December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework, which was in force when the Local Green Space Assessment and the report to the Executive of 8 July 2026 were produced, the test for Local Green Space designation (paragraph 106) is whether the space is capable of enduring beyond the end of the plan period. Which Framework governs the examination of the emerging Local Plan falls to be determined under the transitional arrangements at paragraphs 4 to 9 of Annex 1 to the August 2026 Framework. The three sites were not assessed against the NPPF criteria of beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity or richness of wildlife.

None of the three sites benefits from planning permission. Planning application 142223/FO/2025 remains undetermined.

Absence of a documented decision trail

In response to a direct enquiry, the Group Leader Physical Infrastructure, Legal Services, confirmed by email on 10 July 2026 that no internal officer reports, briefing notes or committee papers are held in relation to the decision to exclude SHLAA sites from the OSA baseline.

Correspondence with the Director of Planning

On 19 August 2026 the Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing for Manchester City Council responded to correspondence on this matter stating that "*any comments and/or questions must be made in the context of the formal Regulation 19 consultation* and that these *will be addressed by the Inspector appointed to hear the Examination in Public.*"

The Open Space Assessment was published in May 2025, fifteen months before the Regulation 19 consultation opened on 17 August 2026.

Significance

Three conclusions follow from the material set out in this section.

First, Ryebank Fields is greenfield land. It falls within three of the exclusions from the definition of previously developed land at Annex B, and nothing in its treatment within the SHLAA, a technical document which confers no planning status, changes either its physical character or its designation in the development plan as natural and semi-natural open space.

Second, Policy HC7 is engaged and none of its four circumstances is established. No replacement provision is proposed, and the proposal is neither public service infrastructure nor alternative recreational provision. The surplus circumstance at HC7(1)(a) cannot be established because the assessment it requires does not exist: the site was excluded from the Open Space Assessment on the basis of the prospect of its development, and paragraph 3.6 of that Assessment states that a site in this position should still be assessed for its open space value as part of any planning application. That assessment has not been produced. Until it is, there is no evidential basis on which the loss of this open space could be found to satisfy national policy, and the officer's report should contain it.

Third, the evidence indicates a circular relationship between the two exclusions. The prospect of development is relied upon to exclude the site from the Open Space Assessment and from Local Green Space assessment, and the resulting absence of recorded green space provision and of designated protection then forms part of the evidence base against which the application falls to be considered. Under Policy S4(2)(a)(ii), a substantial adverse impact in relation to the application of Policy HC7 is identified as a circumstance in which the benefits of development within a settlement are likely to be substantially outweighed. The loss of an unassessed, designated natural and semi-natural open space, in a city whose own Assessment records that it falls far short of national guidelines for access to nature, is such an impact.

These conclusions arise in a ward where, as set out at section 3.11, the Council's own evidence records that housing need is already being met on previously developed land.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- The Planning Inspectorate APPLICATION NO: 049013/00/S0UTH2/95 document title: 1997 appeal 049013_OO_SOUTH2_95—1093309
- The Planning Inspectorate Appeal Decision, reference T/APP/B4215/A/96/274140/P5, August 1997
- Ryebank Road Development Framework, June 2019, fetched directly from manchester.gov.uk/__data/assets/file/0022/123655/ryebank_road_development_framework_final.pdf
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment - list of sites | Manchester City Council
- Open Space Assessment | Manchester City Council
- (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Council, 26/11/2025 10:00
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Full Council Meeting 26th November 2026 Printed minutes PDF 151 KB
- Local Green Space Assessment
- Manchester Local Plan – Draft for Consultation (Regulation 19), covering report to the Executive, paragraph 3.15, 8 July 2026
    - Appendix 1 (Local Green Space), Executive papers, 8 July 2026
- Correspondence from the Group Leader Physical Infrastructure, Legal Services, to Councillor Kerr-Sheppard, 10 July 2026
- Correspondence from the Director of Planning, Building Control and Licensing to Councillor Kerr-Sheppard, 19 August 2026

3.5 Environment Agency

The Environment Agency 16th June 2026 response to Planning Application Ref: 142223/FO/2025 represents the most significant technical evidence in relation to contamination and environmental risk at Ryebank Fields. The formal consultation response dated 16 June 2026 confirms that the site *"has been subject to historic waste disposal",* with ground investigations identifying *"adverse concentrations of contamination… very likely to pose an unacceptable risk to controlled water receptors."*

The Environment Agency identifies multiple deficiencies in the submitted evidence by the developers, including the absence of sampling for persistent organic pollutants, despite the composition of waste materials indicating their likely presence. It further recommends additional ground investigation and a more comprehensive groundwater sampling programme, confirming that the **current understanding of contamination and its impact on the aquatic environment is incomplete.**

A critical issue identified is the presence of non-aqueous phase liquids (NAPLs) across the site, which the Agency states *is "indicative of contamination which will require remediation"* and *is "in direct contradiction of the detailed risk assessment which suggests no remediation is required."* This demonstrates an inconsistency within the developers' own technical submissions.

The Environment Agency confirms that it raises no objection in principle only subject to the imposition of strict planning conditions, including the requirement for a detailed remediation strategy, further investigation, and verification of remediation works. "***Without these conditions we would object to the proposal in line with paragraph 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework because it cannot be guaranteed that the development will not be put at unacceptable risk from, or be adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of water pollution"*** The Agency also confirms that responsibility for securing and enforcing these conditions rests with the local planning authority.

Current national policy: P2 and DM6

Policy P2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026) provides that sites proposed for development "*should be suitable for their proposed use"* taking into account "*ground conditions, including any risks arising from land instability or contamination* and *the extent to which any such risks can be mitigated*." Policy P2(2) provides that where land is remediated it should, as a minimum, "*not be capable of being determined as contaminated land under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990*." Policy P2(4) provides that responsibility for securing a safe development rests with the developer and/or landowner.

Policy P2(3) provides that "*adequate site assessment information, prepared by a competent person, should be available to inform these considerations"*. **The evidence set out above indicates that the site assessment remains incomplete, the applicant's own consultant having confirmed on 20 August 2026 that further investigation is required and that remediation techniques have not been finalised, and the Environment Agency having confirmed that persistent organic pollutants have not been sampled for and that both the extent of contamination and its behaviour remain uncertain.**

Policy P3(2)(f) provides that development proposals should assess and mitigate impacts where the development could have an unacceptable adverse effect on water quality.

Policy DM6(1) provides that planning conditions should only be attached where they are necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms, relevant to the development and to planning considerations generally, sufficiently precise to be capable of being complied with and enforced, and reasonable in all other respects. Policy DM6(3) provides that "***conditions that are required to be discharged before development commences should be avoided, unless there is a clear justification*.**" Under the Town and Country Planning (Pre-commencement Conditions) Regulations 2018 a pre-commencement condition may not be imposed without the written agreement of the applicant.

It is also noted that policy L2(1)(a) provides that substantial weight should be given to the benefits where a development proposal would achieve the remediation of "*despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated or unstable land*."

Subsequent correspondence from the Environment Agency's Groundwater and Contaminated Land (GWCL) team (EIR2026/26408) confirms that the Agency has been unable to comment on the

adequacy of the proposed remediation scheme, stating that further site investigation and assessment is required based on the information provided by the developer.

Importantly, the Environment Agency **also states that insufficient information exists to determine whether contamination requires remediation in the site's current undisturbed state,** and that it is *"unable to provide a response... as insufficient information has been collected to assess the possible risks to the aquatic environment."* This indicates that the environmental baseline of the site is not fully characterised

In relation to environmental risk, the Agency confirms that contaminants are present and are *"likely to pose an unacceptable risk to aquatic environmental (Controlled Waters) receptors"*, **but does not conclude whether this risk arises only under disturbance or exists in the current condition. Instead, it highlights that contamination and associated risks require further investigation**, assessment and, where necessary, remediation, indicating that both the extent of contamination and its behaviour remain uncertain.

The Environment Agency also clarifies the limits of its remit, stating that it cannot assess risks to human health, which fall to the Council's Environmental Health team, and **cannot provide a view on whether development is required to make the site safe or on alternative land-use options.**

The Environment Agency evidence demonstrates that:

- contamination from historic waste disposal is confirmed,
- there is a likelihood of unacceptable risk to controlled waters,
- key elements of the investigation (including pollutant sampling and groundwater assessment) are incomplete,
- there are unresolved contradictions within the developer's technical evidence, and
- the acceptability of the development is dependent on future investigation, remediation and regulatory control.

This establishes that the environmental condition of the site is not fully understood at present, and that development is being progressed on the basis of conditional acceptability and future mitigation, rather than demonstrated environmental certainty.

United Utilities

United Utilities Water Limited submitted a formal consultation response to planning application 142223/FO/2025 on 1 July 2026 (reference DC/25/544v3). The response maintains a formal objection on two grounds and raises additional infrastructure concerns which have not been resolved at the point of determination.

<u>Objection 1: Drainage</u>

Following review of the submitted Drainage Strategy (Renaissance Associates, reference RBM-REN-XX-XX-RP-C-00002 Rev P05, May 2026), United Utilities confirm that whilst the proposed strategy for disposal of foul and surface water is acceptable in principle, key elements of the detailed drainage design are missing from the submitted drainage plan. No information has been provided regarding finished floor levels or existing and proposed ground levels. United Utilities state this information must be provided prior to determination.

Objection 2: 1275mm Sewer Overflow Pipe

A 1275mm sewer overflow pipe crosses the site. United Utilities state that its alignment has only been identified through CCTV survey data, which they do not consider sufficient to accurately confirm the location, depth and alignment of the asset. Ground Penetrating Radar surveys and/or trial holes are required. Until this information is provided, United Utilities state there remains uncertainty regarding the relationship between the proposed development and the existing sewer infrastructure and critically the impact on the site's developable area. Their objection cannot be withdrawn until this is resolved.

United Utilities explicitly state: *"Should planning permission be granted without resolution to our objection, which is not our recommended approach as the applicant may discover their plans are not implementable in their existing location."*

Additional Infrastructure Concerns

A large diameter trunk main is located along the northern boundary of the site. It must not be built over and an access strip is required. A large diameter public sewer overflow pipe crosses the site. United Utilities will not permit building over it and require an access strip for maintenance or replacement. An easement dated 21 February 1962 (United Utilities reference E040/00331/3) exists in the vicinity of the site with restrictive covenants that must be adhered to. It is the applicant's responsibility to obtain a copy of the easement document.

Relationship to Other Evidence

The United Utilities concerns, taken alongside the Environment Agency response and the Longford Brook evidence, demonstrate that the site contains multiple complex and potentially interrelated buried water features and pathways, including Longford Brook and its culvert, former clay pits, groundwater pathways, the 1275mm overflow pipe and other United Utilities assets. Considered together they reinforce the point that the site's physical characteristics are unusually complex and that several statutory consultees have required further investigation before they can be satisfied. Cadent Gas has also raised concerns regarding apparatus crossing the site. Whilst these may ultimately prove capable of resolution, they add to the cumulative picture of multiple statutory undertakers identifying infrastructure constraints that require further work before the development can be considered genuinely deliverable.

Developer's Remediation Briefing Note, August 2026

On 20 August 2026 E3P Ltd, the Geoenvironmental Consultant appointed by Step Places, issued a Remediation Briefing Note (reference 17-403-L5-3) in response to concerns raised regarding remediation of historic contamination on the site, including concerns raised by parents of pupils at St John's RC Primary School and by local elected members.

The briefing note confirms that site investigations have identified Made Ground to a proven depth of 13.50 metres below ground level, and that the Made Ground is impacted by contaminants including *heavy metals, naphthalene, non-volatile polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, asbestos, semi-volatile organic compounds, volatile organic compounds and hydrocarbons.*

The briefing note confirms that site investigation remains incomplete. It states that *the final remediation techniques are to be finalised following the completion of further site investigation works* and that *site investigation works have been limited to date due to site restrictions associated with dense vegetation that could not be removed, easements relating to gas and sewer pipelines,*

protected species and the site being accessible by the public. It further states that *some supplementary investigation is required in specific areas once access constraints are removed.*

This corroborates the position set out by the Environment Agency in its response of 16 June 2026 that key elements of the investigation remain incomplete. The briefing note is dated 20 August 2026, after both the Environment Agency response and the United Utilities objection, and confirms that at that date the remediation techniques for the site had not been finalised.

The constraints identified by E3P as having limited investigation to date, namely dense vegetation, easements relating to gas and sewer pipelines, protected species and public access to the site, are constraints which would be removed through site clearance following the grant of planning permission. The outstanding investigation would therefore be undertaken after determination rather than before it.

The briefing note does not address the absence of sampling for persistent organic pollutants identified by the Environment Agency.

Existing management of contamination on site

The briefing note states that *at present, there are no active engineered controls, monitoring programmes, or verification measures in place to manage this contamination* and that *leaving the site in its current condition would not address the contamination that has been identified through the site investigation process, nor would it provide any mechanism for reducing or eliminating the associated risks.*

Information obtained from Manchester Metropolitan University under the Freedom of Information Act (reference FOI-01083, request dated 29 October 2025) records expenditure on the site over the period 2019 to 2025 totalling £209,062.71. This includes £142,186.00 on Emergency Asbestos Removal, incurred in each of the seven years recorded, together with annual asbestos staff costs and expenditure on protective clothing in 2020 and 2021.

The Freedom of Information response was provided in answer to a request which recorded the University's own position that *the University expends money and staff resource to insure the site, to carry out regular inspections, including tree surveys and regular pruning of trees on site, and is also required by Manchester City Council's Environmental Protection Department to monitor the site for surface asbestos.* The University provided the requested figures and did not dispute that account.

The recorded expenditure indicates that asbestos on site has been the subject of recurring management and removal by the landowner over a seven year period, and that the University is required by Manchester City Council's Environmental Protection Department to monitor the site for surface asbestos. This is difficult to reconcile with the statement in the Remediation Briefing Note that no monitoring programme is presently in place.

A number of standpipe installations are present on the site. Their purpose, the party responsible for their installation and any associated monitoring regime have not been established from the documents reviewed.

Badger Risk Assessment and EIA Statement of Conformity, August 2026

On 4 August 2026 E3P Ltd issued a Badger Risk Assessment (reference 17-403-L6-1), submitted to the planning application as Appendix 1 to an EIA Statement of Conformity prepared by Asteer Planning LLP dated August 2026. Both documents were prepared in response to a matter raised by an interested third party in correspondence sent directly to the Applicants.

The Badger Risk Assessment confirms that badgers are exposing asbestos-containing material at the ground surface. It records that *surveys have identified occasional fragments of asbestos cement within historically placed Made Ground adjacent to some of the setts* and that *current evidence indicates that badgers are exposing material already present locally within the soil rather than transporting ACM across the wider site.* The extent of the material exposed is not quantified within the documents reviewed.

On the current management of the affected areas, the assessment states that *at present, the affected areas are not subject to a formal long-term inspection or management regime* and that *if badgers expose ACM, there is limited provision for the material to be promptly identified and removed.* It further states that *leaving the site in its current unmanaged condition would therefore retain a comparatively higher long-term risk profile.*

As set out above, information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act records expenditure by the landowner on Emergency Asbestos Removal in each of the seven years from 2019 to 2025, together with annual asbestos staff costs, and records the University's own account that it is required by Manchester City Council's Environmental Protection Department to monitor the site for surface asbestos. The statement that the affected areas are not subject to a formal inspection or management regime is difficult to reconcile with that record.

On the long-term control proposed, the assessment identifies *routine inspection by the public open space (POS) management company, with controlled removal of any suspect material brought to the surface*, together with *permanent fencing* providing *physical separation between future residents and the areas in which badger activity is concentrated*, signage discouraging unauthorised access, and sensitive lighting and habitat design. The assessment states that should asbestos-containing material be exposed, it *would remain within a confined, controlled and publicly inaccessible area rather than an area of routine public use.*

The proposed arrangement therefore requires the ongoing inspection of retained habitat areas for asbestos-containing material, and the removal of any material identified, to be undertaken by a private management company for the lifetime of the development, with those areas fenced and inaccessible to residents.

The EIA Statement of Conformity concludes that the matters raised do not give rise to any new or altered likely significant effects and that no additional information is required under Regulation 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Response 16-06-2026_Redacted-2 (Environment Agency Consultation Response, 16 June 2026)
- Environment Agency GWCL correspondence with Councillor Kerr-Sheppard (June 2026, direct response to enquiry)
- National Planning Policy Framework
- United Utilities Water Limited consultation response, reference DC/25/544v3, dated 1 July 2026
- E3P Ltd Remediation Briefing Note, Ryebank Chorlton, reference 17-403-L5-3, 20 August 2026

- Manchester Metropolitan University Freedom of Information response, reference FOI-01083, request dated 29 October 2025
- E3P Ltd Badger Risk Assessment, Ryebank Chorlton, reference 17-403-L6-1, 4 August 2026
- EIA Statement of Conformity, Asteer Planning LLP, August 2026

3.6 Human Health and Risk Assessment Limitations

While the Environment Agency provides detailed evidence on contamination and risks to the aquatic environment, it explicitly confirms that assessment of risks to human health does not fall within its remit. Responsibility for evaluating risks to human health lies with the Council's Environmental Health Officer (EHO).

The Environment Agency further states that insufficient information is currently available to assess environmental risk in full, including whether contamination requires remediation in the site's undisturbed state. This means that both the extent of contamination and the pathways through which it may affect receptors remain incompletely characterised at the time of determination.

As such, although contamination is confirmed [and some is yet unknown e.g. POPs], and environmental risks are identified, there is no evidenced conclusion within the reviewed Environment Agency material regarding risks to human health for future occupants of the site. The proposed development is therefore reliant on further investigation, remediation and regulatory control to establish acceptable conditions, rather than on a fully evidenced understanding of current risk.
On 9 September 2026 a request was made by Councillor Kerr-Sheppard to the Council's Environmental Health team on four points: whether Environmental Health has provided or will provide a consultation response assessing risks to human health, and whether it will be reflected in the committee report; whether the site has been considered under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in its current, undisturbed state; the monitoring and management currently required of the landowner by the Council; and how the statement in the Remediation Briefing Note of 20 August 2026 that no monitoring programme is in place is to be reconciled with the monitoring requirement recorded in Manchester Metropolitan University's Freedom of Information response FOI-01083. A response was received on 11 September 2026 from a district officer in the Council's Environmental Protection team, Neighbourhoods Directorate. The response confirmed the following.

First, Environmental Health has provided comments on the application on behalf of the team with respect to human health; these have been submitted to planning and should be included in the committee report.

Second, the site was risk assessed under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in 2021, based on its current use, and was placed in Category 4, the lowest risk category. Environmental Health visit the site at least twice a year to check for any changes which may require the risk assessment to be updated.

Third, the University is required to make quarterly visits to the site to monitor the surface for asbestos and remove any material strongly suspected to be asbestos, with the reports shared with Environmental Health. This arrangement was agreed with Environmental Health, who believe it to be adequate for the site unless anything substantially changes.

Fourth, Environmental Health confirmed that, to their knowledge, there are no active engineered controls or verification measures in place to manage the contamination, and no monitoring programmes other than the quarterly visits made by the University's consultants, which are an informal arrangement and a demonstration by the landowner to monitor and manage suspected asbestos-containing materials.

This response concerns risk to human health in the site's current use. The Environment Agency's position on risk to controlled waters, set out at section 3.5, is separate and unaffected.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Response 16-06-2026_Redacted-2 (Environment Agency Consultation Response, 16 June 2026)
- Environment Agency GWCL correspondence with Councillor Kerr-Sheppard (June 2026, direct response to enquiry)

3.7 Flood Risk and Drainage

Flood risk and drainage at the Ryebank Fields site have been assessed through a combination of the submitted FINAL Flood Risk Assessment, the Longford Brook Technical Note, and supporting Environmental Statement material, with additional clarification provided through developer correspondence during the determination process.

The evidence demonstrates that the understanding of flood risk at the site has evolved during the planning application process, rather than remaining fixed at the point of submission. When the application was originally submitted in February 2025, the site was located entirely within Flood Zone 1, indicating a low probability of fluvial flooding. However, subsequent updates to Environment Agency flood mapping have resulted in parts of the site being reclassified as Flood Zone 2, requiring both revisions to the proposed development and the submission of additional environmental information (*Environmental Statement Addendum, May 2026*).

Flood Risk and Drainage was not originally included within the Environmental Impact Assessment. The ES Addendum confirms that *"Flood Risk and Drainage was not a topic scoped into the February 2025 ES"* and that the requirement to address flood risk arose subsequently in response to updated Environment Agency mapping (*Environmental Statement Addendum, May 2026*)

In response to this updated position, the proposed development has been amended to incorporate a range of mitigation measures, including:

- revised site levels;
- sustainable drainage systems (SuDS);
- attenuation storage;
- and maintenance of existing flood flow routes through the site.

The Environmental Statement Addendum confirms that these design changes were required in order to respond to the revised flood zone classification and maintain policy compliance (*Environmental Statement Addendum, May 2026*).

The developer further clarified through direct correspondence with Councillor Kerr-Sheppard that: *"The purpose of these measures is to ensure that the development does not increase flood risk either on-site or elsewhere"* (*Communications between the applicants and Councillor Kerr-Sheppard, June 2026*). Surface water runoff has been assessed through the submitted Flood Risk Assessment and drainage strategy, and the *"design is required to demonstrate that runoff rates will be controlled and that flood risk is not increased to neighbouring land or properties."*

The evidence therefore shows that flood risk has been addressed through design iteration in response to updated information, rather than arising from a stable baseline that remained unchanged throughout the application process. The introduction of Flood Zone 2 areas into the site boundary, and the subsequent amendments required, indicate that the assessment of flood risk has been reactive to evolving technical information during determination.

There remains **no clear evidence within the reviewed Environmental Statement material and supporting correspondence that the proposed development would reduce flood risk beyond the site boundary, or provide wider benefits in terms of catchment-level flood resilience**. Instead, both the Environmental Statement and subsequent correspondence indicate that the objective is to ensure that flood risk is not increased.

Additionally, while the proposed drainage strategy is intended to manage surface water runoff, the development would introduce built form including roads, roofs and hardstanding in place of the existing site. Surface water drainage and runoff have been assessed through the Flood Risk Assessment and drainage strategy, and the design is required to demonstrate that runoff rates will be controlled and that flood risk is not increased to neighbouring land or properties.

This indicates that the management of surface water is dependent on engineered drainage measures, with the performance of those systems to be demonstrated through detailed design and implementation.

United Utilities Drainage Objection

The United Utilities consultation response of 1 July 2026 identifies that key elements of the detailed drainage design remain missing from the submitted Drainage Strategy. United Utilities require the drainage plan to be updated to include finished floor levels and existing and proposed ground levels prior to determination. This confirms that the drainage evidence base is incomplete at the point of determination.

Surface water discharge to Longford Brook

The United Utilities response confirms that the proposed strategy for the disposal of foul and surface water is *acceptable in principle, with surface water draining to Longford Brook.*

Longford Brook is the watercourse in relation to which updated Environment Agency flood mapping resulted in parts of the site being reclassified from Flood Zone 1 to Flood Zone 2 during the determination process, as set out above.

United Utilities expressly state that they are *not responsible for advising on rates of discharge to the local watercourse system* and that *this is a matter for discussion with the Lead Local Flood Authority and / or the Environment Agency (if the watercourse is classified as a main river).*

The reviewed material does not include a response from the Lead Local Flood Authority addressing the proposed rate of surface water discharge to Longford Brook. It is therefore unclear from the documents reviewed whether the body responsible for advising on discharge rates to this watercourse has assessed the proposed strategy.

Current national policy: F4, F5, F7 and F8

Policy F4(1) of the National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026) provides that a site-specific flood risk assessment should accompany all development proposals in Flood Zones 2, 3a and 3b. Parts of the site were reclassified from Flood Zone 1 to Flood Zone 2 during the determination period, and flood risk and drainage were not scoped into the original Environmental Impact Assessment.

Policy F5 provides that the sequential test should be used in areas known to be at risk now or in the future from any form of flooding, subject to specified exemptions. The exemption at F5(2)(a), which applies to sites allocated in the development plan and subject to the sequential test at plan preparation, does not apply, the site not being allocated. Whether the exemption at F5(2)(b) is established, and whether the sequential test has been applied, are matters for the officer's report.

For completeness, dwelling houses are classified as *more vulnerable* development under Annex F, Table 2. Annex F, Table 3 identifies more vulnerable development in Flood Zone 2 as appropriate, and the exception test under policy F6 is accordingly not engaged by the reclassification.

Policy F7(2) provides that where development is proposed in a location known to be at risk from any form of flooding, now or in the future, it should be refused unless the criteria at F7(2)(a) to (e) are met, including that any residual risk can be safely managed and that it can be demonstrated that flood risk will not be increased elsewhere.

Policy F8(2)(c) provides that, in the case of proposals for major development, sustainable drainage systems should take account of advice from the Lead Local Flood Authority. Policy F8(2)(b) requires maintenance arrangements to be in place to ensure an acceptable standard of operation for the anticipated lifetime of the development.

Policy F8(3) provides that development proposals *should where possible remove existing culverts and renaturalise existing river channels, unless to do so would increase flood risk, result in other environmental harm or cause harm to heritage assets*. As the existence and alignment of any culverted watercourse beneath the site has not been established, the application of this policy has not been considered.

Longford Brook Statement, August 2026

A Longford Brook Statement (Renaissance Associates, reference RBM-REN-XX-XX-RP-C-90002, Rev P02, dated 5 August 2026) has been submitted to the planning application. It records the findings of a review of archive records held by Manchester Central Library (Archive Identifier GB127.M723/84/6/5632), which include drawings from 1969 to 1970 showing proposed details for the culverting of Longford Brook through the application site.

The statement records that these drawings are *marked as 'proposed' and not 'as-built' drawings*, that it has *not been possible to locate any of the manholes associated with the culvert that are indicated on the archive drawings*, and that previous intrusive site investigations in the vicinity of the proposed culvert alignment *did not encounter a culvert structure.*

The statement concludes that in order to confirm whether a culvert is located on the site *there would need to be further intrusive site investigation in the form of slit trenches across the site*, and that the Applicants consider these further investigations *could be carried out prior to the commencement of any development on site to establish whether any additional measures are required to help manage flood risk.*

Whether a culvert exists beneath the site has therefore not been established at the point of determination, and the investigation required to establish it is proposed to be undertaken following the grant of planning permission. This is consistent with the position in relation to the contamination investigation set out at section 3.5 and the sewer overflow pipe identified by United Utilities, in each of which a physical characteristic of the site remains unverified with investigation deferred to a post-permission stage.

The statement records that the matter has been discussed with the Lead Local Flood Authority and that the results of the proposed investigations would be submitted to the Lead Local Flood Authority for review and approval.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Planning Application: 142223/FO/2025
- FINAL Flood Risk Assessment.pdf
- Longford Brook Technical Note
- Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary.pdf
- ES Addendum Volume 1 Written Statement
- Communications between the applicants and Councillor Kerr-Sheppard, June 2026
- Longford Brook Statement, Renaissance Associates, reference RBM-REN-XX-XX-RP-C-90002, Rev P02, 5 August 2026
- United Utilities Water Limited consultation response, reference DC/25/544v3, dated 1 July 2026

3.8 Biodiversity and Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity at the Ryebank Fields site has been assessed through the Environmental Statement, supporting ecological reports and the **FINAL BNG Design Stage Assessment & Metric**, with additional context provided by consultation responses and developer correspondence during the determination process.

The submitted Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment provides a quantitative evaluation of the ecological impacts of the development using the statutory biodiversity metric. This assessment identifies a significant reduction in on-site biodiversity as a direct result of the proposed development.

The BNG assessment confirms that the proposed development would result in a:

- **40.05% net loss in biodiversity for area habitats**, and

- **81.07% net loss in watercourse units** (*BNG Design Stage Assessment, May 2026* and UG_1910_ECO_BNG_CALC.xlsm Download (XLSM, 3.5MB))

These figures demonstrate that the proposed development would lead to a substantial loss of existing ecological value on the site.

The BNG assessment confirms that the proposed development does not achieve biodiversity net gain on-site, with the trading rules not satisfied and habitat loss not sufficiently mitigated. As a result, the scheme is dependent on off-site provision to achieve compliance with national requirements

This failure arises because the mitigation hierarchy is not satisfied through the site design. The report concludes that: *"the trading rules were not satisfied by the landscape proposals as the loss of the other neutral grassland, bramble scrub, individual trees, other broadleaved woodland, lowland mixed deciduous woodland, and ditches has not been sufficiently mitigated for onsite"* As a result, the scheme is dependent on off-site compensation to achieve the mandatory 10% net gain required under national legislation.

The BNG assessment identifies that:
- **23.91 area habitat units**, and
- **0.26 watercourse units**

must be delivered off-site in order to achieve compliance (*BNG Design Stage Assessment, May 2026*).

The report also confirms that these deficits arise due to the loss of multiple habitat types, including:
- other neutral grassland;
- woodland;
- scrub;
- individual trees;
- and ditch/watercourse habitats,

with repeated acknowledgement that sufficient mitigation **cannot be delivered on-site due to spatial constraints** (*BNG Design Stage Assessment, Sections 5–10*).

The submitted material confirms that **off-site provision has not been identified or secured** at the point of determination. The BNG report states that *"Offsite units will be secured via a local habitat bank, **if available,** through a Section 106 or conservation covenant agreement, **once planning permission has been granted**,"* and that *"If no suitable local habitat banks are available, Statutory Credits may need to be purchased from Natural England."*. Further correspondence from the developers' state that *"there are currently no suitable habitat banks located within Manchester, Trafford or the wider Manchester Conurbation National Character Area."* (communications between the applicants and Councillor Kerr-Sheppard, June 2026)

This indicates that the mechanism for achieving biodiversity net gain is not currently defined and is dependent on future availability of habitat banks or credits.

Consultation responses from ecological bodies reinforce these concerns. Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU) identified that the proposed compensation is **inadequate** and that the application lacked sufficient detail on off-site delivery at the time of assessment. (ES Addendum Volume 1 Written Statement) The Lancashire Wildlife Trust similarly raised concerns regarding the scale of biodiversity loss and the reliability of the mitigation approach. In response, the developer has

confirmed through correspondence with Councillor Kerr-Sheppard that biodiversity net gain would be secured through planning conditions and legal agreements, with detailed **delivery mechanisms to be finalised at a later stage** (*Communications between the applicants and Councillor Kerr-Sheppard, June 2026*).

In addition to reliance on off-site mitigation, the scheme is dependent on long-term management arrangements. The BNG assessment confirms that *"a long-term management plan (usually 30 years) is required"* (BNG Design Stage Assessment, May 2026).

A Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan has been prepared by Urban Green, setting out the framework for managing habitats over this period, including the use of a management company and the securing of measures through planning conditions and legal agreements. However, this document establishes the management approach in principle and **does not provide fully secured, site-specific delivery arrangements or demonstrate the effectiveness of those measures at the point of determination.**

This introduces a dependency on ongoing management, monitoring and compliance over an extended period, the **delivery and effectiveness of which rely on future implementation rather than evidence available at the time of decision.**

The evidence therefore demonstrates that biodiversity impacts have been clearly identified and quantified, and that the proposed development results **in a significant loss of ecological value on-site.** While the developer proposes to address this through off-site mitigation and long-term management, the delivery of these measures remains **uncertain and dependent on future mechanisms** rather than demonstrated outcomes.

The significance of biodiversity in this case therefore lies not only in the scale of the ecological loss, but in the **reliance on unconfirmed off-site provision and long-term management arrangements** to achieve policy compliance.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Planning Application: 142223/FO/2025
    - FINAL Flood Risk Assessment.pdf
    - Appendix 6.7 BNG Report.pdf
    - Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary.pdf
    - ES Addendum Volume 1 Written Statement
    - Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan
- Communications between the applicants and Councillor Kerr-Sheppard, June 2026
- GMEU and LWT consultation responses in ES Addendum Volume 1 Written Statement

3.9 Historic England and Nico Ditch

The historic environment at the Ryebank Fields site has been assessed through the Environmental Statement, supporting archaeological documentation, Historic England assessment and correspondence with Councillor Kerr-Sheppard, and the developer's submitted Heritage Statement. These sources collectively identify the presence of a linear earthwork within the site that may represent a surviving section of the **Nico Ditch**, a feature of early medieval origin.

Historic England has previously assessed this section of the Nico Ditch for statutory designation. The 2019 designation assessment concludes that the site: "*does not merit scheduling"* (*Historic England Assessment Report, 2019*), with this conclusion based on:

- the **limited survival** of the feature; and
- **insufficient evidence of archaeological potential**.

The report further states that the degree of survival, fragility and archaeological potential *"are not well understood at this stage"* and confirms that, although the feature may form part of a wider historic boundary system, its significance has not been demonstrated at a level sufficient for national designation. However, the same assessment recognises that the site is: *"clearly of strong local importance"* and may be reconsidered if future investigation establishes greater archaeological significance.

This position has been confirmed through subsequent correspondence between Councillor Kerr-Sheppard and Historic England. In June 2026, Historic England reiterated that the site would only be reconsidered where there is *"significant new information or evidence"* and concluded that: *"we do not consider that [Offa's Dyke Journal Volume 6 for 2024] constitutes sufficiently substantial new evidence to justify taking the application forward"* (*Historic England correspondence, June 2026*).

This confirms that, at the point of determination, the Nico Ditch is not designated and that **no additional evidence has yet been identified which materially alters the previous assessment of its significance**.

Alongside this, both the developers Environmental Statement and supporting archaeological documentation acknowledge that the significance of the feature is not fully understood. The submitted desk-based assessments identify the earthwork as a **potential surviving section of the Nico Ditch**, but do not establish its archaeological value beyond identifying possible interest and the need for further investigation.

This position is reinforced by the submitted Project Design for Archaeological Investigation, which sets out a programme of intrusive works required to determine the character, date and archaeological significance of the feature. The requirement for this investigation confirms that the evidence necessary to assess the heritage value of the site is not currently available and would need to be generated through further archaeological work.

Historic England also explicitly identifies that investigation of the site is expected to take place through the planning process, stating that*: "management of the site under the National Planning Policy Framework… will result in the appropriate archaeological investigation"* This establishes that the understanding of archaeological significance is intended to be resolved through

post-determination investigation secured by condition, rather than forming part of the established evidence base at application stage.

In parallel, the developer's **Heritage Statement** concludes that the site itself is of **low archaeological and historic interest**, and that the Proposed Development would result in a **"neutral effect"** on the setting, character and appearance of the Longford Conservation Area (*Heritage Statement, February 2025*).

This conclusion is maintained in the subsequent addendum note, which confirms that design changes, including increased building heights, do not alter the overall heritage impact *"the original heritage impact assessment conclusion remains… [with] an overall neutral effect"* (*Heritage Statement Addendum, April 2025*).

However, these conclusions are based primarily on an assessment of visual and setting impacts, including limited intervisibility and the presence of screening vegetation. They also rely on an assumption that the archaeological interest of the site is limited.

This position is not fully aligned with the wider evidence base. Historic England, the desk-based assessments, and the archaeological investigation strategy all indicate that the **archaeological significance of the Nico Ditch feature has not yet been established**, and that further investigation is required to determine its value.

The evidence therefore demonstrates that:

- the presence of a potential historic feature is acknowledged;
- its national significance has not been demonstrated;
- its archaeological potential remains uncertain; and
- its archaeological significance is dependent on the results of future intrusive investigation

As a result, the assessment of heritage impact is not based on a fully established understanding of the archaeological significance of the asset. Instead, it is dependent on:

- evidence that would be generated after the grant of permission;
- the outcome of archaeological investigation undertaken through the planning process; and
- mitigation measures secured through planning conditions.

The significance of the historic environment in this case therefore lies in the **unconfirmed archaeological value of the Nico Ditch and the reliance on post-consent investigation to establish and manage its significance**, rather than in a clearly defined and fully assessed heritage baseline at the point of determination.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- nico ditch, chorlton-cum-hardy (Historic England Assessment Report, 2019)
- Historic England Correpondence with Councillor Kerr-Sheppard (June 2026)
- Planning Application: 142223/FO/2025
    - Appendix 9.1 Archaeological DBA.pdf
    - Appendix 9.2 Updated Archaeological DBA.pdf
    - Appendix 9.3 Project Design for Archaeological Investigation.pdf
    - FINAL Heritage Statement.pdf
    - ES Addendum Volume 1 Written Statement

3.10 DMMO / Public Rights of Way

The status of public access routes across the Ryebank Fields site has been assessed through a Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) investigation, undertaken by the highways asset management team in conjunction with legal review, and supported by submitted evidence regarding historic public use of the site.

At present, there are **no recorded Public Rights of Way (PROWs)** within the application site on the Definitive Map. A DMMO application was submitted seeking to establish public rights over routes across the site based on historic use; however, this application has been formally assessed and refused.

Under Section 31 of the **Highways Act 1980**, a public right of way may be established where there is evidence of continuous use by the public **"as of right"** for a period of at least 20 years. This requires that use is:

- without force;
- without secrecy; and
- without permission.

The assessment of the Ryebank Fields application concluded that this test was not met.

Evidence submitted as part of the DMMO investigation identified that:

- signage was present on the site stating **"No Right of Way"**;
- subsequent access to the site was explicitly **permitted on a temporary basis**;
- and a number of users were aware of, and acknowledged, these restrictions.

This distinction is critical in legal terms. Where use of land occurs with the **permission of the landowner ("permissive use")**, it cannot give rise to a public right of way, as the statutory test requires use to be "as of right". The presence of permission is treated in law as preventing the accrual of rights, and effectively interrupts or resets any period of use.

The DMMO assessment therefore concluded that:

- earlier use of routes across the site was **contested and not demonstrably "as of right"**;
- later use was **permissive in nature**; and
- no continuous 20-year period of qualifying use could be established.

On this basis, the application to add routes across the site to the Definitive Map was refused.

As a result, the legal baseline for the planning application is clear:

- there are **no legally established public rights of way within the site**;
- informal routes across the site do not benefit from statutory protection; and
- the creation of public rights has been tested and **found not to meet the legal threshold**.

The proposed development would remove existing informal desire lines and replace them with a new internal network of pedestrian routes. As no Public Rights of Way exist, there is no requirement for diversion orders or protection under public rights of way legislation.

The evidence therefore demonstrates that the issue of public rights of way has been **fully examined through the appropriate legal process and resolved**. While the site is currently used informally by

members of the public, that use has been determined to be permissive rather than “as of right”, and therefore does not give rise to legally protected access rights.

The significance of public rights of way in this case therefore lies not in the presence of established rights, but in the distinction between **informal access and legally recognised rights**, with the latter having been explicitly tested and rejected through the DMMO process.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Ryebank Fields DMMO Report April 2021_Final-Signed (1)
- Highways Asset Management and Legal Team Assessment (2021)
- Highways Act 1980 (Section 31)

3.11 Development in Chorlton

Manchester City Council Chorlton and Chorlton Park Housing Pipeline, July 2026

Manchester City Council's own Chorlton and Chorlton Park Housing Pipeline, dated July 2026, provides a site-by-site breakdown of the confirmed housing pipeline across both wards.

For Chorlton ward the analysis identifies 494 homes in total, comprising 197 affordable homes and 297 market homes. Ryebank Fields accounts for 120 of these, comprising 50 affordable and 70 market homes. Excluding Ryebank Fields, the Chorlton ward pipeline therefore delivers 374 homes, of which 147 are affordable.

The individual sites identified for Chorlton ward are Chorlton Baths (50 homes, on site, all social rent), Albany Road (40 homes, on site, all shared ownership), Chorlton Islamic Girls School (22 homes, on site), Chorlton Precinct (262 homes, planning approved), Ryebank Fields (120 homes, planning submitted) and Chorlton Picture House (pre-planning, numbers to be confirmed).

For Chorlton Park ward the analysis identifies 114 homes in total, comprising 22 affordable and 92 market homes, across St Margarets Playing Pitches, 479 Barlow Moor Road, Southern House Mauldeth Road West, 515-521 Barlow Moor Road and 541 Wilbraham Road, with Merseybank Parade and Mauldeth House at pre-planning stage.

Within the Chorlton ward pipeline, every site other than Ryebank Fields is brownfield land, town centre regeneration or the reuse of existing buildings and sites. In Chorlton Park ward, the largest site is St Margaret's Playing Pitches (65 homes), which comprises former playing pitches and is already on site with completion expected in 2026-27. Ryebank Fields is therefore the only site across both wards comprising natural and semi-natural open space, and the only greenfield site in the pipeline that remains undetermined.

The analysis also records an expected completion date for Ryebank Fields of 2030-31, and identifies the eight social rent units at the site as homes for supported housing.

This confirms that substantial and diverse housing delivery is already secured across both wards, across a range of tenures and unit types, on brownfield and town centre sites, without reliance on the development of Ryebank Fields.

The Ryebank Fields proposal therefore represents one component within an already extensive and active housing supply, rather than a scheme required to enable delivery.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Chorlton & Chorlton Park Housing Pipeline, Manchester City Council, July 2026 in correspondence with Cllr Chantal Kerr-Sheppard

3.12 Efficient use of land and the preference for previously developed land (Brownfield)

The development plan for Manchester

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications for planning permission are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Manchester has no adopted Local Plan. The emerging Plan is at Regulation 19 stage and, not having been examined, carries limited weight. The development plan for the city therefore comprises the Manchester Core Strategy (adopted 11 July 2012), read alongside the Addendum to the Manchester Core Strategy (2024); the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document 2022–2039 (adopted 21 March 2024); the adopted Policies Map; and those Unitary Development Plan policies which remain saved.

The National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026) is a material consideration. It is not part of the development plan.

This section identifies the development plan provisions relating to the efficient use of land, and the weight properly attaching to the proposal in light of them.

Manchester Core Strategy

Policy SP1 (Spatial Principles) provides as a key spatial principle that "*The City's network of open spaces will provide all residents with good access to recreation opportunities*", and its Core Development Principles require development in all parts of the City to "*protect and enhance the built and natural environment*". (The former SP1 principle requiring the reuse of previously developed land was replaced by Places for Everyone Policy JP-S1 under the 2024 Addendum, and the brownfield preference relied on in this section is accordingly drawn from Places for Everyone itself.)

The site lies within the South Manchester area covered by Core Strategy policies EC9 and H6. It is not allocated for housing in the Core Strategy, in Places for Everyone, or on the Policies Map. The Ryebank Road Development Framework (June 2019) confirms that the site is designated as natural and semi-natural open space and that development proposals will be assessed against the Core Strategy policies relating to that classification. Those policies are EN9 (Green Infrastructure) and EN10 (Safeguarding Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities), addressed at section 3.4 above.

The Core Strategy was adopted in 2012, but its currency is maintained by the 2024 Addendum, which identifies precisely which parts of its policies have been superseded by Places for Everyone and confirms that the remainder continue in force. Paragraph 2 of Annex 1 to the August 2026

Framework provides that development plan policies materially inconsistent with the national decision-making policies should be given very limited weight; the surviving provisions of SP1 relied on here, concerning open space and the protection of the natural environment, are consistent with that Framework and no reduction in weight arises.

Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan

The spatial strategy for Greater Manchester is set out in the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, adopted on 21 March 2024.

The Plan states that *"The need for new housing, employment, facilities and infrastructure has to be accommodated, whilst at the same time protecting the environment, urban green spaces, the countryside and the identity of different places."* (Efficient Use of Land Resources, paragraph 4.8)

Strategic Objectives 2 and 3 each provide that the Plan will *"Prioritise the use of brownfield land"*. The Plan further confirms at paragraph 4.10 that *"An essential aspect of the efficient and effective use of land will be for authorities to make as much use as possible of suitable previously-developed (brownfield) land and vacant buildings when meeting development needs."*

Paragraph 4.12 confirms the purpose of that approach: *"Maximising the reuse of previously-developed land and delivering higher densities in the most accessible locations will together help to reduce the total amount of land required for new buildings and hence minimise the need for development of greenfield sites."*

Objective 8 provides that development should *"Enhance special landscapes, green infrastructure, biodiversity and geodiversity"* and *"Improve access to the natural environment and green spaces including parks"*.

The nature of the preference

For completeness, paragraph 1.43 of the Places for Everyone Plan records that *national planning policy does not support an explicit 'brownfield first' approach*, and paragraph 1.44 records that the Plan adopts *a 'brownfield preference' policy*.

The provisions set out above are accordingly a preference and a priority rather than a sequential requirement. It is not contended that the applicants were obliged to demonstrate that no alternative site exists, nor that permission must be refused on that basis. There is no sequential test for housing within a settlement, and the absence of a sequential site assessment from the submitted documentation is not in itself a breach of policy.

The relevance of these provisions is to weight. Where the development plan expresses a consistent preference for previously developed land, and where the need said to justify a greenfield release is already being met on previously developed land within the same ward, the weight attaching to the housing benefit of the proposal is correspondingly reduced.

Council position

The approach to brownfield land has also been considered by Manchester City Council through formal resolution.

At the Council meeting of 26 November 2025 it was recorded that *"The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) shows that Manchester has more than enough brownfield land to meet its housing targets. With capacity for over 80,000 homes against a Places for Everyone (PfE) target of 60,000 by 2040"*. The Council resolved to *"continue with the priority and strategy to deliver*

social, council, and genuinely affordable housing on brownfield sites in every ward of our city" and to *"consider strengthening wording in the emerging Local Plan to reflect the 'brownfield preference' principles enshrined within the PfE"*.

Application to this proposal

Policy S4 of the Framework provides that development proposals within settlements should be approved unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects. Policy HO7 requires substantial weight to be given to the benefits of homes which meet evidenced accommodation needs. Both operate through a weighing exercise, and the weight of the housing benefit is an input to that exercise rather than a fixed quantity.

The Council's Chorlton and Chorlton Park Demand Analysis (July 2026), set out at section 3.11 above, identifies 494 homes in the Chorlton ward pipeline. Excluding Ryebank Fields, 374 homes are already secured in the ward, of which 147 are affordable. Within the Chorlton ward pipeline, every other site is brownfield land, town centre regeneration or the reuse of existing buildings; the only other greenfield site across both wards, the former St Margaret's Playing Pitches in Chorlton Park, is already on site. Ryebank Fields is the only site comprising natural and semi-natural open space and the only greenfield site awaiting determination.

The evidenced accommodation need in this ward is therefore already being met, at scale, across a range of tenures, on the class of land which both the Core Strategy and Places for Everyone direct development towards in preference to this site. The proposal is not required to enable that delivery. The 120 homes proposed, of which 50 are affordable, are additional to a supply that is already secured, and the site is not expected to complete until 2030–31.

The benefit of those homes is real and should not be dismissed. But its weight, assessed against the position the Council's own evidence records, is materially lower than it would be on a site where need was unmet or where the plan expressed no locational preference. Set against the adverse effects identified at sections 3.4 to 3.10, and in particular the loss of natural and semi-natural open space in a ward already recorded as deficient in accessible green space, the benefits of the proposal do not survive the balance required by Policy S4.

Remediation costs and viability

Paragraph 4.10 of the Places for Everyone Plan expressly recognises that "*abnormal costs such as those associated with addressing land contamination can have a negative impact on the viability of developing brownfield sites, and so securing funding to support remediation will be a priority*."

In correspondence with Councillor Kerr-Sheppard the applicants have confirmed that *remediation costs are currently estimated by the applicants at between £6 million and £7 million*. That figure is an estimate for works which, on the applicants' own account, have not been finalised, the Remediation Briefing Note of 20 August 2026 confirming that the final remediation techniques are to be determined following the completion of further site investigation.

Policy DM5 of the Framework provides that circumstances in which a viability assessment may be justified include where a development is *demonstrably burdened by costs which were not taken into account in the viability assessment that informed the development plan*. Manchester has no adopted Local Plan and therefore no plan-level viability assessment against which that comparison can be made. The relationship between an unfinalised remediation cost of this scale, the deliverability of the 50 affordable homes proposed, and the weight that can properly be given to those homes as a benefit, is a matter which the officer's report should address.

National policy position

Under the Framework, the requirement to make as much use as possible of previously developed land is contained in Policy L1, which is a plan-making policy. Paragraph 8 provides that plan-making policies should not be used when making decisions on development proposals. The corresponding decision-making policy, L2, gives substantial weight to the benefits of remediating contaminated land and of making better use of vacant and underused land, but does not impose a sequential preference for previously developed land in determining applications within settlements.

The preference relied upon in this section therefore arises from the development plan, and specifically from Places for Everyone Strategic Objectives 2 and 3 and paragraphs 4.10 and 4.12, rather than from national policy. Under section 38(6) those provisions attract the primacy conferred on the development plan.

Significance

The proposal is the only undetermined greenfield release in a two-ward pipeline otherwise delivered on previously developed and town centre sites, on land the development plan designates as natural and semi-natural open space, in a ward the Council's own Open Space Assessment records as deficient in access to nature. The development plan expresses a consistent preference against precisely this. The housing benefit relied upon is already being delivered without it.

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Manchester Core Strategy (adopted 11 July 2012) and Addendum to Manchester Core Strategy 2024
- Open Space Assessment (TEP, May 2025), paragraph 3.6
- Chorlton and Chorlton Park Demand Analysis, July 2026 (section 3.11 above)
- Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document for Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan 2022 - 2039
- Places for Everyone Adoption Statement | Manchester City Council
- Correspondence from the applicants to Councillor Kerr-Sheppard confirming estimated remediation costs
- National Planning Policy Framework, August 2026
- Planning Application: 142223/FO/2025
- FINAL Heritage Statement.pdf
- Full Council Meeting - Wednesday, 26th November, Meeting Minutes

3.13 Manchester Metropolitan University Sustainability Position

Sustainability Position

Manchester Metropolitan University sets out its sustainability commitments through its published strategy on its website, which begins *“Our sustainable university: The steps we’re taking to make sure our university remains one of the most sustainable in the country.”*

The strategy states that *“We’ve set out ambitious targets, aiming to set an example of sustainability for universities around the world.”* And *“We’re committed to becoming a net zero-carbon university before 2038.”*

Biodiversity and Green Space
The strategy explicitly addresses biodiversity and green space, stating that *“Preserving biodiversity in an urban area like Manchester is vital.”* It also confirms that *“we work on a range of activities to identify and monitor habitats and species.”* and that: *“Our Biodiversity specialists offer expertise on estates and public realm developments, ensuring that green space and biodiversity are considered and embedded at every step.”* The University further states that *“We have developed biodiversity procedures to ensure biodiversity on campus is both protected and enhanced.”*

Planning Application Context
Ryebank Fields is described within the developers’ own submissions as

- “a large area of grassland and mature planting”
- “a rewilded green space”

The significance of this issue lies in the absence of evidence demonstrating how the proposal aligns with the University’s stated approach to biodiversity, green space and sustainability in development

Reference Documents, Meetings or Correspondence:

- Our sustainable university | Manchester Metropolitan University
- Planning Application: 142223/FO/2025
- FINAL Heritage Statement.pdf

4. Current Assessment

The central planning question is not whether environmental impacts exist. The submitted evidence confirms that they do. Nor is the question whether mitigation measures could potentially be applied through planning conditions.

The principal issue is whether sufficient information has been provided at the point of determination to demonstrate that the environmental risks associated with the development have been fully understood, properly assessed and shown to be capable of mitigation with an acceptable degree of certainty.

The strongest technical evidence comes from the Environment Agency, which confirms the presence of contamination arising from historic waste disposal and identifies a likely risk to controlled waters. The Agency requires further investigation, additional groundwater sampling, further risk assessment, a remediation strategy and verification measures before environmental risks can be fully understood and managed. It also identifies a direct contradiction between contamination encountered on site and the developer's conclusion that remediation is not required according to the Environment Agency’s June 2026 response.

The evidence base demonstrates a recurring pattern across multiple environmental topics:

- contamination requires further investigation and assessment;
- groundwater risk remains incompletely characterised;
- flood risk assessment evolved during determination following updated Environment Agency mapping;
- biodiversity compliance is dependent upon off-site mitigation that has not yet been secured;
- archaeological significance remains dependent upon future intrusive investigation; and
- a number of critical mitigation measures are intended to be secured through future planning conditions, legal agreements and management plans.

None of the matters identified in this dossier necessarily demonstrate in isolation that the development is unacceptable in principle. However, taken together they present a consistent and recurring pattern of significant technical constraints, contamination, groundwater, buried watercourses, drainage, United Utilities infrastructure, gas infrastructure and biodiversity mitigation which are either unresolved at the point of determination or are proposed to be resolved after planning permission is granted through conditions, legal agreements or post-permission negotiations.

Matters not resolved at the point of determination

The following matters are, on the evidence reviewed, not resolved at the point of determination.

Investigations deferred to a post-permission stage

- Additional ground investigation and a more comprehensive groundwater sampling programme, required by the Environment Agency in its response of 16 June 2026.
- Sampling for persistent organic pollutants, identified by the Environment Agency as likely present and not included in any sampling undertaken to date.
- The piling risk assessment required where piled foundations are utilised, which has not been identified within the documents reviewed.
- Confirmation of the location, depth and alignment of the 1275mm sewer overflow pipe crossing the site, which United Utilities state requires Ground Penetrating Radar surveys and/or trial holes.
- Confirmation of whether a culverted watercourse exists beneath the site, which the Longford Brook Statement of August 2026 states requires slit trenches across the site.
- The supplementary site investigation identified by E3P in its Remediation Briefing Note of 20 August 2026 as required before remediation techniques can be finalised.

Matters deferred to post-permission approval

- The remediation strategy itself, which has not been finalised and which the Environment Agency requires to be submitted and approved prior to commencement.
- The verification report confirming that remediation objectives have been achieved.
- The sustainable surface water drainage scheme and the foul water drainage scheme.
- Finished floor levels and existing and proposed ground levels, which United Utilities state are missing from the submitted drainage plan and request prior to determination.
- Asset protection details for the water main and the 1275mm sewer overflow pipe.

Matters not secured at the point of determination

- Off-site biodiversity units, amounting to 23.91 area habitat units and 0.26 watercourse units, with no suitable habitat bank identified within Manchester, Trafford or the Manchester Conurbation National Character Area.
- The long-term habitat management and monitoring arrangements, stated in the Biodiversity Net Gain assessment to be required for a period of usually 30 years.
- The long-term asbestos inspection and removal regime proposed within the Badger Risk Assessment, to be undertaken by a public open space management company for the lifetime of the development.
- The cumulative question for the Planning Committee is therefore whether it has sufficient evidence before it to conclude that the development is genuinely deliverable, that the site can be made suitable for its proposed residential use, and that environmental and infrastructure risks have been adequately demonstrated as manageable, rather than relying on numerous important matters being deferred to a later stage.

The assessment raises a fundamental question for decision-makers:

Has sufficient evidence been provided to establish environmental and technical certainty before permission is granted, or are substantial elements of that assessment being deferred to a post-permission stage with numerous conditions, at which point the committee's ability to influence the outcome will be significantly diminished?

5. Material Planning Considerations Arising

The following questions arise from the evidence set out in this dossier. Each relates to a material planning consideration and is submitted for the purpose of ensuring that these matters are addressed within the officer's report and are before the Planning Committee at the point of determination.

Whether the site can be made suitable for its proposed use

1. Policy P2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026) requires that sites proposed for development are suitable for their proposed use taking into account ground conditions and contamination, and policy P2(3) requires that adequate site assessment information prepared by a competent person is available to inform those considerations. Does the officer's report address the confirmation in the applicant's own Remediation Briefing Note of 20 August 2026 that further site investigation is required and that remediation techniques have not been finalised?

2. The constraints identified by the applicant's consultant as having limited investigation to date are dense vegetation, easements, protected species and public access. These would be removed only through site clearance following the grant of permission. Can any part of the outstanding investigation be completed prior to determination, and if not, on what basis can the authority be satisfied at determination that the site can be made suitable for its proposed use?

3. Does the officer's report address the absence of sampling for persistent organic pollutants identified by the Environment Agency in its response of 16 June 2026, which is not addressed in the Remediation Briefing Note of 20 August 2026?

4. Has the Council's Environmental Health Officer, as the body responsible for assessing risks to human health, commented on the Remediation Strategy, and does the Environmental Health Officer consider the evidence currently before the authority sufficient to assess those risks?

Whether planning conditions are an adequate mechanism

5. In the event that the outstanding site investigation identifies contamination requiring remediation beyond that currently anticipated, what mechanisms exist to return the matter to the Planning Committee, and what is the position if the pre-commencement remediation condition cannot be discharged?

6. Policy DM6(3) of the National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026) provides that conditions required to be discharged before development commences should be avoided unless there is a clear justification, and policy DM6(1) sets out the tests which any condition must meet. Does the officer's report set out the justification for the pre-commencement conditions proposed, and address whether the matters deferred to those conditions are capable of being resolved?

The existing baseline against which effects are assessed

7. The effects of the development fall to be assessed against the existing condition of the site. Does the officer's report accurately establish that baseline, including any monitoring or management of contamination currently required of or undertaken by the landowner, and the purpose of the standpipe installations present on the site?

Unresolved statutory consultee objections

8. How will the outstanding matters raised in the United Utilities objection of 1 July 2026 be resolved, and will they be resolved prior to determination?

9. Has the Lead Local Flood Authority commented on the proposed rate of surface water discharge to Longford Brook, given that United Utilities expressly state this does not fall within their remit?

10. The Longford Brook Statement of August 2026 confirms it has not been established whether a culvert exists beneath the site, and proposes that the investigation required be undertaken prior to commencement of development rather than prior to determination. On what basis can flood risk be assessed at determination if the presence and alignment of a culverted watercourse beneath the site remains unverified?

11. Policy F4(1) requires a site-specific flood risk assessment to accompany development proposals in Flood Zone 2. Parts of the site were reclassified during determination and flood risk was not scoped into the original Environmental Impact Assessment. Has the sequential test under policy F5 been applied, and does the submitted material satisfy policy F4(1) for a site now partly within Flood Zone 2?

Biodiversity net gain

12. In the absence of any suitable habitat bank within Manchester, Trafford or the Manchester Conurbation National Character Area, how will the mandatory biodiversity gain objective be secured, and where?

Open space and the weight of material considerations

13. Does the officer's report contain the individual assessment of the site's open space value which paragraph 3.6 of the Open Space Assessment states should be undertaken as part of any planning

application for an excluded site? If it does not, on what evidential basis does the report address Policy HC7(1)(a), given that an assessment which excludes a site cannot show that site to be surplus to requirements?

14. What weight is given in the officer's report to the site's designation as natural and semi-natural open space and to Policy JP-G6 of Places for Everyone, and how is the balance at Policy S4 struck, given that S4(2)(a)(ii) identifies a substantial adverse impact in relation to the application of Policy HC7 as a circumstance in which the benefits of development within a settlement are likely to be substantially outweighed?

15. What material planning weight is afforded to the Ryebank Road Development Framework, given that it was produced by consultants acting for the landowner and approved under delegated officer authority following a consultation in which a majority of respondents did not support the proposals as drafted?

Affordable housing delivery

16. Remediation costs cannot presently be established, as the remediation strategy has not been finalised. Is the affordable housing provision proposed secured and deliverable, and does the officer's report address the effect on that provision should remediation requirements increase following the outstanding investigation?