



Application for the Protection of

Mirrlees Fields

**as a
Local Green Space**

within the Stockport Local Plan 2017

Submitted by

Mirrlees Fields' Friends Group (MFFG)



The Proposal and Its Context

1. The Proposal

Mirrlees Fields Friends Group (MFFG) is proposing that the area known as Mirrlees Fields (currently designated as Strategic Open Space) should continue to be **protected and receive the designation of Local Green Space**, as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework, in Stockport's Local Plan 2017.

In this paper we provide our reasons for the proposal. In summary, these are:

- a) The contribution that Mirrlees Fields makes to the health, recreation and welfare of the local community
- b) The unique heritage asset deriving from the history of the Mirrlees Fields
- c) The special role of Mirrlees Fields in the green infrastructure of the Borough, particularly in relation to the surrounding populations
- d) The unique landscape of Mirrlees Fields which supports a wide range of biodiversity in an urban setting
- e) A green space of intrinsic, long-standing and deeply felt value to local people

This report outlines why we believe Mirrlees Fields should be protected and receive the designation of Local Green Space, as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework, in Stockport's Local Plan.

The information contained in this report, and associated Annexes, is relevant to the assessment of the site. It highlights how Mirrlees Fields contributes positively to the issues contained in the Stockport Local Plan Issues Paper and that need to be addressed through the policies and land allocations in the Local Plan.

2. Background to the Proposal

2.1 Mirrlees Fields Friends Group

This proposal is submitted by the Mirrlees Fields Friends Group (MFFG), originally known as the Mirrlees Fields Action Group, which was created in 2007 with support from Stepping Hill local Ward Councillors.

It was formed in response to growing concern in the local community about the long term future of the space known locally as Mirrlees Fields. At the time, it appeared to be the intentions of the landowner, MAN Diesel and Turbo UK Ltd, to sell the Fields. There were fears that building development would take place. Ultimately it was the fact that SMBC had designated the Fields a Strategic Open Space in the Unitary Development Plan Review, 2006 that closed down this possibility.

Subsequently, the group re-formed itself as a Friends Group and has worked in partnership with MAN Diesel, both parties sharing an interest in ways in which the local community could derive greater benefit from the Fields. MAN Diesel have asserted their position relating to the Fields on numerous occasions:

The green space is currently privately owned by MAN Diesel & Turbo UK Ltd. We have stated on numerous occasions that the company has no long term aspirations to retain ownership of the land and that we are committed to bring the fields into wider use for the community to enjoy.

MFFG is now a formally constituted local community group and small charity based in the Stepping Hill ward of Stockport with over 600 supporters.

The principal terms of reference of MFFG are:

- To work in partnership with the landowners and other relevant organisations to bring the area known as Mirrlees Fields into wider community use.
- To ensure Mirrlees Fields becomes a well-managed and safe public space that will enhance the quality of life for local people.

2.3. Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

The Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT) has been involved with Mirrlees Fields since 2012. The CWT expressed an interest in adding the Fields to their portfolio of sites if the landowner had been willing to transfer ownership. In 2014 CWT signed an agreement with MAN Diesel Turbo Ltd to assist in the management of the Fields to promote biodiversity and MAN Diesel Turbo Ltd became a corporate sponsor and member of CWT. An ecological survey was undertaken and a spatial plan for the future management of the Fields was created (see Annex 1 Map 3). CWT personnel assisted with the improvement to footpath 126, and the acquisition of three interpretation boards. As part of the CWT's lottery funded 'Natural Futures' Project volunteers days have been supported by CWT staff. CWT have also led nature walks, including bat walks on Mirrlees Fields.

2.4. The National Planning Policy Framework – Local Green Space

The NPPF states that local communities, through local plans, should be able to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them, by designating land as Local Green Space. Any green area to be designated as Local Green Space will need to meet the criteria set out in paragraph 77 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

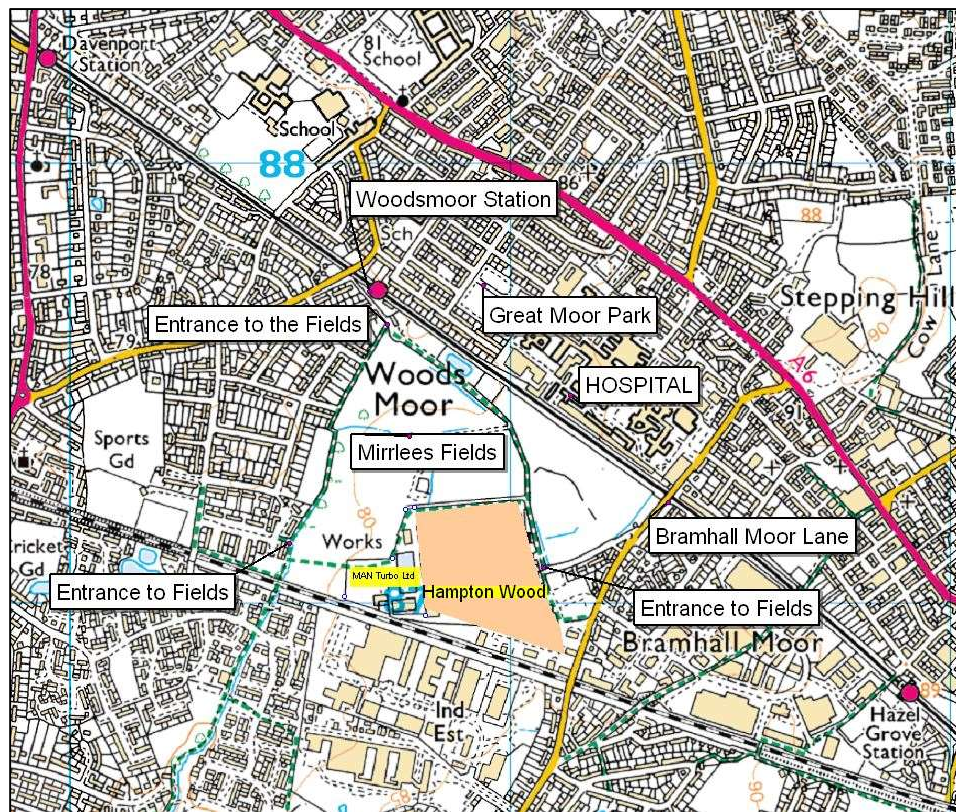
NPPF paragraph 77.

The Local Green Space designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. The designation should only be used:

- *where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves*
- *where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife*
- *where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land*

The subsequent sections of this report underline how Mirrlees Fields not only addresses issues contained in the Local Plan Issues Paper, but also meets the criteria required of Local Green Space.

3. The Site, Mirrlees Fields



Location of Mirrlees Fields

- 3.1 The site known as Mirrlees Fields is a 24 hectare natural and unmanaged, green open space located in the Stepping Hill ward of Stockport. It is bordered by Woodsmoor, Great Moor, Bramhall, and Hazel Grove.
- 3.2 It is within easy walking distance of five residential areas: Woodsmoor, Great Moor, Hazel Grove (Bramhall Moor), New House Farm Estate, and Hampton Wood (new housing built on the old Mirrlees brown field site).
- 3.3 The area has never been built on and remnants of field patterns dating back to at least the 19th century are traceable. The site was also once the sports and recreation ground for approximately 1000 employees based at the Mirrlees Blackstone plant. Active management of the recreation grounds ceased during the 1980s and natural succession ensued - an ecological process whereby, without intervention, all open ground reverts to woodland. The historic farm use, the recreational use, and more recently, the informal recreational use and grassland cutting has created a notable mosaic of habitats including woodlands, meadows, hedgerows, scrub and ponds.
- 3.4 Mirrlees Fields constitutes a green space within the typology used by the Department for Communities and Local Government:

"natural and semi-natural urban green spaces – including woodlands, urban forestry, grasslands, common land, wetlands, areas of open and running water, wastelands, derelict open land and rock areas".

'Planning for a Natural and Healthy Environment': Department for Communities and Local Government. Consultation paper on a new Planning Policy Statement: Planning for a Natural and Healthy Environment. London: 2010.

- 3.5 Mirrlees Fields is designated as a Strategic Open Space in Stockport MBC's Local Development Framework Core Strategy. It was originally scheduled in the Unitary Development Plan Review, 2006, and adopted in the LDF Core Strategy, 2011.

See appendix i P44-47 of

http://www.stockport.gov.uk/2013/2994/developmentcontrol/planningpolicy/LDF/udp_policies, ^ THIS LINK ISN'T WORKING ^

The rationale for the strategic open space designation is as follows:

Explanation: Certain large areas of open land are not suitable for designation as Green Belt, for example because they are isolated within the urban area, but nevertheless perform an important strategic function. These areas add to urban quality: promoting health and well-being, helping to support regeneration and improving quality of life for communities by providing visually attractive green spaces close to where people live.

Furthermore, the Stockport UDP Review specifically mentions and highlights the following attributes of the Mirrlees Fields Strategic Open Space:

Mirrlees area, Woodsmoor - Extensive stretch of open ground (about 29 ha.) including grassland, semi-natural areas of nature conservation interest and recreational uses. Major contribution to Green Chain network and significant visual contribution to urban fabric. Valuable open lung within largely built-up suburban area. Potential for increased recreational use. Adjoins area of deficiency for public open space.

4. The contribution that Mirrlees Fields makes to the health, recreation and welfare of the local community

Note: The following sections have been broadly grouped into the issue areas contained within and, where possible, linked back to specific paragraphs of the Local Plan Issues Paper (LPIP).

4. Health, Culture and Communities

4.1 LPIP Issue 4.6

Public health is a key issue to consider, and the land-use planning system should consider this matter as a central issue

There is strong evidence which links contact with green spaces within an urban environment and improved physical and mental health.

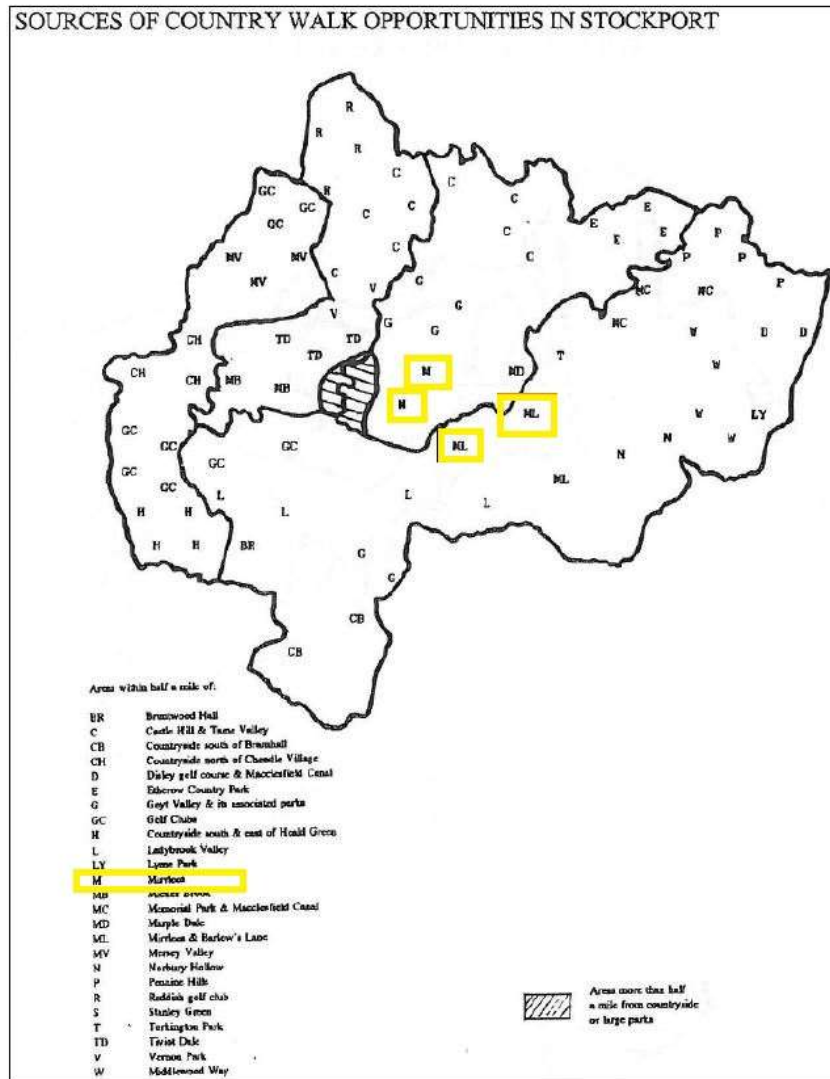
"Recent studies have provided evidence of multiple benefits from urban green space, through various mechanisms, and with potentially differential impacts in various populations."

Urban green spaces and health, WHO, 2016

There is significant and growing evidence on the physical and mental health benefits of green spaces. Research shows that access to green space is associated with better health outcomes and income-related inequality in health is less pronounced where people have access to green space

Health Equity Evidence Review 8: September 2014

Mirrlees Fields contributes greatly to the health of the local community. It is regularly used for walking, jogging, cycling. Visitors to the Fields enjoy exercising in the green environment, away from roads and the urban environment. The Fred Perry Way crosses the Fields (FP 126), and there are two other Rights of Way (FP 124 and 127) regularly used by walkers. Mirrlees Fields are listed in the Public Health Report 2017 as an 'opportunity for country walks.'



As Stockport's Public Health Report, 2017, says:

Greenspace is important not only because of its contribution to opportunities for active leisure and active travel but also because physical activity in green surroundings appears to be more beneficial to health than activity in indoor or urban settings. In addition greenery appears to reduce stress, raises the human spirit and promotes well-being .(Section 1)

Findings from a recent survey of users of the Fields (see Annex 2), which received 403 responses, undertaken in the local community this summer, found that over 75% of respondents use the fields for physical and mental health reasons. 75.2% of respondents cited 'to walk for exercise, relaxation, to be with friends', as a reason they visited the Fields. It is also a popular route to walk through (42.7%) and to walk with or play with children (2.8%). (See attached Survey of Mirrlees Fields Users Report.)

- 4.2 Comments of users of the Fields emphasise the importance the Fields have to their well-being. Some referred to specific impacts such as,

'I have lost lots of weight and become much fitter whilst walking there!'

'I have arthritis and it is vital that I keep active so that I don't seize up as this would increase my pain and isolation.'

But most refer to the general health benefits of walking on the Fields. Typical are comments like these:

'They are one of the reasons we moved here and now our mobility is more restricted they are essential for our exercise routines to maintain our health.'

'I truly believe this is good for my mental health, it re-sets you after the stresses of daily life.'

'This green space is very important to me as a place to visit to switch off, meet people, get exercise and enjoy the wildlife.'

- 4.3 Stockport's Public Health Report, 2017, comments that leisure, especially in green spaces, 'can be a source of social interaction. The strength of social networks is a major determinant of health, to such a degree that loneliness and isolation can be as strong a health hazard as poverty. Forms of leisure which bring people together and lead to social networks are therefore very valuable for health'. (1.2)

It is clear from the responses to the survey that the Fields features strongly in the local community as a place for socialising and relaxing, as comments such as these illustrate:

'Having suffered mental health issues I would find it detrimental to my mental health not being able to visit the fields on a regular basis.'

'We use the space for walking a family dog and our two young children get the sense of being out in the countryside. We don't have a car and so this is an essential space for us to be safely outdoors without having to travel far. We all always feel so healthy after visiting... Not just physical exercise but mental health is renewed also.'

- 4.4 In addition to the use of the fields by the local community, it has through engagement with the local NHS trust that MFFG and local employers, started to be used for health walk opportunities, with dedicated information resources to support this.

Stockport Council has recently secured funding from Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) through TfGM's 'Active Community Fund'. The Council, partnering with MFFG, Stepping Hill Hospital and Bracondale Medical Centre is investing in infrastructure and marketing to further promote the fields as a location for health walks so as to improve public health in the area. The project will evaluate health impacts on targeted groups of patients. (See Annex 4).

- 4.5 MFFG has also co-operated with the Senior Public Health Nurse at Stepping Hill Hospital to produce a map of healthy walking routes from the hospital for staff and patients. (see Annex 1: Map 5). Promotion of these routes commenced in the Hospital in summer 2017.

5. The Role of Sport and Recreation

5.1 LPIP Issue 4.12:

The NPPF recognises the role of sport and recreation as a fundamental part of sustainable development ... The protection and provision of opportunities to participate in sport is seen as fundamental to the health and well-being of communities.

5.1.1 The recent community survey highlights the value placed on the fields by local residents as an area used for sport and recreation. Cycling is also popular. 15.9% cycle through the Fields to get somewhere and 16.6% cycle there for relaxation and exercise. There is also a significant number, nearly a quarter, who use the Fields as a running route (24.3%). (See attached Survey of Mirrlees Fields Users Report).

5.1.2 MFFG, working with the Greater Manchester Orienteering Society, has just completed the installation of an orienteering course on the fields. A specialist orienteering map was commissioned (see Annex 1: map4). Local schools and Scout groups financially contributed to production of orienteering maps, course design and installation of marker posts to enable local children to participate in orienteering exercises on the fields for years to come.

6. Food growing, allotments and community gardens

6.1 LPIP Issue 4.16

New provision, either through the splitting of existing plots or the identification of new sites, is required if Stockport is to meet the national standard. It is important to provide such facilities as they encourage a healthy lifestyle and social interaction and can be an important part of the eco-system. National guidance advises planners to support people in making healthy choices, including promoting access to healthier food.

Mirrlees Fields plays an important role in relation to food growing and community gardens. Funding was secured through the Urban Orchard Project to create a community orchard, which MFFG and other volunteers maintain. Through working with Cheshire Wildlife Trust, MFFG is also managing the existing flora on the site to facilitate increased access to the edible fruits that grow in abundance on the fields already.

7. The unique heritage asset deriving from the history of Mirrlees Fields

7.1 With reference to LPIP 4.21

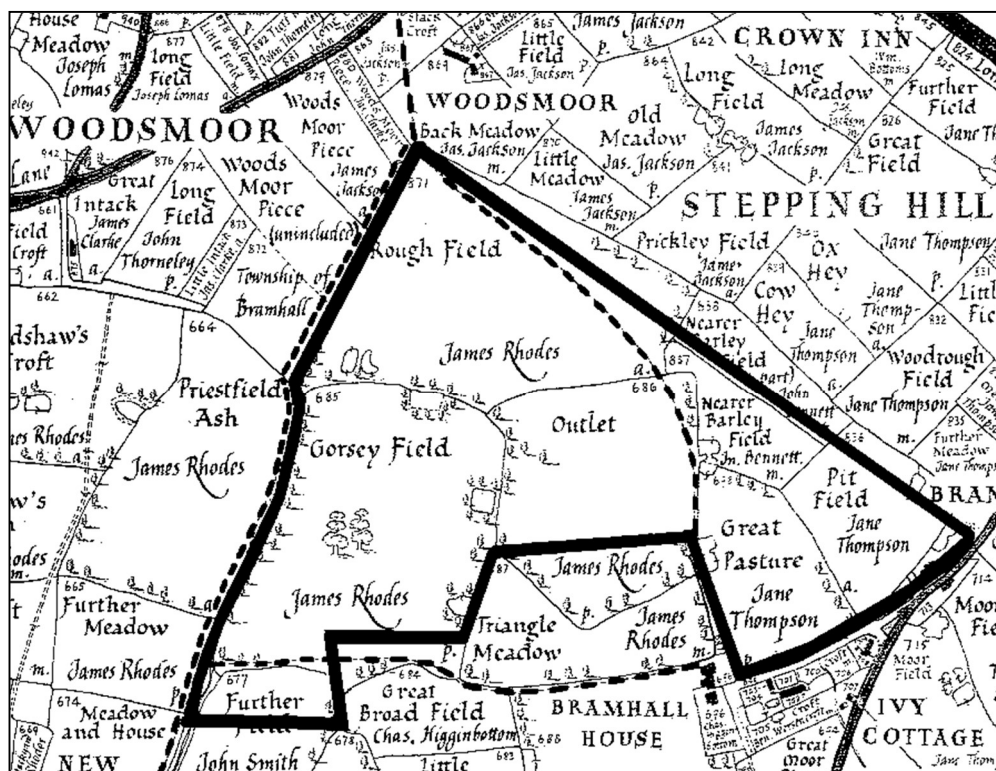
The NPPF requires the conservation of heritage assets so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life for this and future generations. Local plans should develop policies to conserve, enhance and enjoy the historic environment as a strategic priority.

MFFG consider Mirrlees Fields to be a heritage asset. The attached 'Historical Significance of the Fields' report (see Annex 3) provides full evidence of the history of the Fields, their uses and how they have been physically and culturally shaped.

7.2 The historical usage of the Fields has shaped and influenced how the local community use and value the space today. As a result of their history, the fields

bring character and distinctiveness to the local area and they play an important social, cultural and environmental role in the lives of those who use them.

- 7.3 The use of the Fields by the Mirrlees Sports Associations is still a recent memory in the minds of many older residents. There is continuity between its recent past for recreation and its current use for different kinds of recreation.
- 7.4 Mirrlees Fields have only ever been put to two uses – firstly as agricultural land supporting dairy farming between the 17th and 20th century and, secondly, as sports fields between 1907 and 1986. Both previous usages can be traced in physical features of the landscape that can still be evidenced on the Fields today, including:
- Old field boundaries dating back at least to the early 18th century
 - Ditches marking the boundaries of the original fields
 - Butts and reins (ridges and furrows) used in the 18th and 19th centuries as a means of draining land used for arable crops
 - The position of current rights of way that were bridleways connecting farms that were in existence from the 17th century
 - A large hollow that was originally a pit dug either for marl or for clay for brickmaking
 - The remaining traces of the fairways and bunkers of the Mirrlees Golf Course



1842 Tithing Map showing bridleways connecting farms.
Now they form the rights of way that cross and border the Fields



The remaining traces of the fairways and bunkers of the Mirrlees Golf Course and the ridged 'butts and reins'

8. The special role of the Fields in the green infrastructure of the Borough, particularly in relation to the surrounding populations.

A Multi-Functional Resource

8.1 Mirrlees Fields is currently designated as a Strategic Open Space and forms part of a wider 'green chain' incorporating the Happy Valley local nature reserve and the Ladybrook Valley. As such, we believe the fields contribute to and should be classed as Green Infrastructure as defined by Natural England.

In the developing Greater Manchester Spatial Framework, green infrastructure is included within the heading of Social Infrastructure and is subsequently categorised as 'Critical Infrastructure'.

It is MFFG's view that the important role played by Green Infrastructure and the strategic open space of Mirrlees Fields in particular, is a multi-functional resource that delivers ecological and quality of life benefits for the local community.

8.2 The fields contribute positively to several Green Infrastructure benefits as listed in Table 1 *Benefits of Green Infrastructure* including:

- Land and Property Values

- Health and Wellbeing
- Recreation and Leisure
- Quality of Place
- Food Growing
- Educational Resource
- Biodiversity
- Climate Change Adaption and Mitigation
- Improved Air Quality

8.3 Mirrlees Fields has been used for community events including nature walks, bat walks, 'fun days' and even a local dog show. The recent community survey demonstrates that over 74% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement 'I value the Fields as a community resource' (see Annex 2).

A grant was received from Stockport Hydro's Environmental Challenge to erect three interpretation boards at the three entrances to the Fields. MAN Diesel & Turbo Ltd also contributed to the cost of these boards.

'Once the future of the fields can be ensured, I believe that they can be better used for more "organised" recreation eg sports, education.'

'Not for myself but the various events are an interest for the younger ones. For a lot of people it is an important place for meeting people and socialising, when they would otherwise be quite isolated.'

'My family have enjoyed the fun days that have been organised in recent years on the fields.'

'I have enjoyed taking part in the events organised by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust.'

'Community groups and children's group value and use the space.'

'I value the fields very highly as an informal community resource, where all sections of the community are equally free and entitled to enjoy it. This results in a self-policing space where we all take responsibility for managing the space and have a sense of ownership.'

8.4 For the last 6 years there have been annual visits to Mirrlees Fields by the Year 3 pupils of Great Moor School. Hosted by a local historian who has researched the Fields extensively, and with the permission of MAN Diesel, the children have walked the footpaths learning about how the Fields were once farmland, and then sports fields, and now a natural green space. Each year, and with great enthusiasm, the children have speculated on what crops the farmers grew, spotted wildlife and gathered conkers, acorns and birds' feathers.

This is the feedback from the first cohort, now 14 years of age.



These benefits should not be overlooked in the pursuit of new housing or other economic development sites.

9. The Proximity of the Fields to Surrounding Populations

- 9.1 The Stockport Local Plan Issues Paper recognises the need to safeguard and ensure there is sufficient high quality open space to meet the needs of local people. The recent community survey reiterates the value placed on the fields by the local community and the wide range of functions the fields deliver to local people.
- 9.2 In particular, the proximity of the Fields to significant populations is a key asset. There are five groups of residents who are within walking distance of the Fields - Woodsmoor, Hazel Grove, New Farm estate, Great Moor and the newly built Hampton Wood estate. There are no other significant areas of green space available to these groups of residents within a mile (the nearest being Happy Valley and Torkington Park).
- 9.3 The recent survey of users of the Fields demonstrates that walking to the Fields is by far the most common mode of travel. 93.8% of visitors to the Fields walk there, 16.4% sometimes cycle there and only 10% use a car. This not only links to the health benefits of the Fields but demonstrates the importance of the Fields to these local communities.
- 9.4 88.6% strongly agreed with the statement 'I value the Fields as a green space near me', which indicates that easy access to the Fields because of its close proximity to residential areas is very important in the opinion of these respondents.

Typical comments include:

'We do not have a car so cannot easily get to other similar 'wild' places. Places where children can roam safely, climb trees and play in nature without feeling like it's enclosed by houses and purpose built. They need to feel like they are exploring.'

'I am able to walk to the fields from my home, which is an asset in the growing urban sprawl.'

'The roads are so busy and polluted, it is great to be able to walk somewhere nice.'

(See attached Survey of Mirrlees Fields Users report.)

10. Conditions Countering the Loss of Areas of Green Space such as Mirrlees Fields

- 10.1 The NPPF presumes against the loss of these areas of green space except under specific conditions, one being that an assessment has identified the open space as surplus to requirements. Stockport Council's own Open Space Assessment and Open Space Standards Paper both underline that Mirrlees Fields is both a high value and high quality site and as the only area contributing to the Natural and Semi Natural Greenspace provision in Stepping Hill Ward. These papers clearly highlight that Mirrlees Fields as a local open green space is not 'surplus to requirements'.
- 10.2 As stated, page 40 of the Council's recent Open Space Assessment, Table 5.2: *Key to sites mapped* lists Mirrlees Fields as both a high value and high quality space.

- 10.3 Not only is Mirrlees Fields the only 'Natural and Semi Natural Greenspace' in Stepping Hill Ward, on page 32 of the Open Space Standards Paper *Table 3.9 Current provision against recommended Stockport quantity standard* indicates that Stepping Hill is actually deficient in terms of Natural and Semi Natural Greenspace. Furthermore, the bordering area of Bramhall and Cheadle Hulme South is also deficient in terms of this type of open space. Any loss of Mirrlees Fields would greatly increase the deficiency of this kind of space in both areas.

11. A Species-Rich Landscape with a Range of Important Natural Habitats

- 11.1 The Fields have, as previously mentioned (3.3), been subject to the process of 'natural succession' after their use as sports grounds ended in the 1980's. As a consequence, increasing areas of the open ground are reverting to woodland. Mirrlees Fields contributes to the local biodiversity, particularly as a green space in an urban context. The ecology of the area was surveyed by the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit in 2008. This report concluded:

'It is my opinion that the site does not meet the new SBI Selection Guidelines, but that it sits well within Stockport's planning policy framework of the Local Wildlife Site system, as described within Policy NE1.2 of Stockport's adopted UDP. The site supports habitats and animal species, some of which are Biodiversity Habitats and Species, either nationally or locally. These biodiversity features - including the range of animals and in particular birds - also provide extensive enjoyment for the visitors that use the area and enable an appreciation of local wildlife due to the site's good access, which is unusual in Stockport.'

In 2014, MFFG, working with Cheshire Wildlife Trust and MAN Diesel and Turbo UK Ltd produced, in 2014, a Spatial Strategy for the fields which outlined how to further develop the fields' ability to deliver even more for the local community (see Annex 1: map 3).

As part of the Spatial Strategy an ecological survey was commissioned which highlighted the presence of a number of Biodiversity Action Plan listed species as being present on the fields. Given the sensitive content of this report, it is not publicly available, however we would be able to share the reports' findings with Council Officers.

MFFG's own surveys have identified the following species:

Birds

Mallard
Grey heron
Mute Swan
Canada goose
Moorhen
Kestrel
Sparrowhawk
Buzzard
Golden plover
Lapwing
Snipe
Black headed gull
Feral pigeon
Woodpigeon
Collared dove

Tawnl owl
Swift
Great spotted woodpecker
Swallow
House martin
Meadow pipit
Grey wagtail
Pied wagtail
Wren
Dunnock
Robin
Blackbird
Fieldfare
Song thrush
Redwing
Mistle thrush

Whitethroat	Water vole
Blackcap	Brown rat
Chiffchaff	House mouse
Willow warbler	Grey squirrel
Goldcrest	Hedgehog
Long tailed tit	
Willow tit	Butterflies
Coal tit	Small tortoiseshell
Blue tit	Painted lady
Great tit	Red admiral
Nuthatch	Peacock
Treecreeper	Comma
Jay	Speckled wood
Magpie	Meadow brown
Carrion crow	Large white
Jackdaw	Small white
Starling	Orange tip
House sparrow	Common blue
Chaffinch	Small copper
Greenfinch	Large skipper
Goldfinch	Small heath
Siskin	
Redpoll	Bees
Bullfinch	Buff tailed bumblebee
	Large red tailed bumblebee
	Honeybee
	Mining bee
Mammals	
Common shrew	
Pipestrelle bat	
Natterer's bat	
Badger	Amphibia
Fox	Common toad
Rabbit	Common frog
Field vole	Smooth newt

- 11.2 As part of the Spatial Strategy document, ecological enhancements were listed so as to improve the ecological importance and biodiversity of the site. MFFG facilitated the planting of over 1,000 trees made up of various native species in addition to the creation of a hazel grove and a community orchard.
- 11.3 Furthermore, as part of CWT's Stockport Scything network, volunteers undertake scything days to support the establishment of the newly planted trees as well as helping to maintain the 'meadow' areas of the fields and maintain the species rich grasslands. This work is even more important now following the recent construction of a housing development on the former MAN Diesel and Turbo UK Ltd factory site which has created access issues and prevented the mowing of the meadow area by local farmers.
- 11.4 MFFG undertakes regular clearances each summer to eliminate the invasive plant, Himalayan Balsam, and plays an active part in ensuring that other invasive species that can be dealt with safely by volunteers, do not establish themselves on the site.
- 11.5 Visitors to the fields value it as green space where they can view wildlife and a natural environment. 76.9% strongly agreed with the statement that 'I value the Fields for Wildlife'. Comments support the importance of the Fields for its range of birds, plants and trees.

'The Fields provide a beautiful natural environment and an important habitat for some rare wildlife. They give us a chance to learn about our world and how to preserve it. Not to forget the fact that we really cannot afford to be chopping down any more trees if we want to leave a legacy for our children for some time to come.'

'The birds, now buzzards nesting too. The insects, especially the bumble bees. Rabbits hopping round. It feels like the countryside.'

'The fields are alive with wildlife and great to educate children'.

'Fantastic wildlife, Buzzards, Sparrow hawks, Badgers, Rabbits, Squirrels, Butterflies, Bees, Dragonflies to name just a few.'



12. A green space of intrinsic, long-standing and deeply felt value to local people

- 12.1 Mirreles Fields is well-used and well-loved by local communities. It is viewed with affection by both new and long-time visitors. For many it is part of their daily life and integral to their sense of 'belonging' in the area. It has emotional resonance as well as being a practical health benefit.
- 12.2 Almost a quarter of respondents in the recent survey (24.8%) reported that they visited the fields daily, some of them visiting twice daily. Almost 30% (29.8%) go on the Fields 3-4 times a week and another 22.1% go on the Fields weekly. These respondents can all be characterised as very regular users of the Fields and they make up over three quarters (76.7%) of the respondents. A further 12.9% visit about once a month.
- 12.3 It is also apparent that many people have been visiting the Fields for many years. 61.3% have been using the Fields for over five years (see Fig 2 in the attached Report) and some of these have been walking on the Fields for many years and some for a lifetime (see Fig 3) and these comments illustrate.

'As long as I've lived here, I have visited the fields - about 15 years. I would say I visit them more now than I used to - good for clearing my head after a stressful day at work.'

'Was born and grew up in Woodsmoor and have always walked our dogs there - I am now 57 so that's a long time.'

'I've lived in the area for 21 years and used the field in each of those years.'

- 12.4 The significance of the Fields is best illustrated by the fact that 84.4% of respondents, 340 citizens, strongly agreed with the statement that 'The Fields are very important to me'. This is also borne out by what they say about how they feel about the Fields. For example:

'The fields are vital for local residents and for people further afield. Everywhere is getting increasingly built up and areas like this are important for the health of local people. They are also an important part of our local heritage.'

Green space is so vital for physical and psychological health this is a much valued area by the community and an area we want to keep.

'Because they are an important part of my life. I can't imagine not being able to walk across them or that they won't always be there.'

'The fields were my son's playground when he was growing up. He still visits them often, as do I. I love that I have a peaceful haven so close, where I always feel totally safe - there are always one or two people around walking dogs etc, which is good for the sense of community - so important to maintain this.'

'They are a unique space in the local area for recreation, relaxation and simply enjoying the natural environment. They also provide an amazing space for my young children to explore nature and play in a way that can't at home.'

13. The Future of Mirrlees Fields

'Community engagement is key to sustainable enhancement of urban green space' according to the Report of the National Audit Office (2006). MFFG is one of 4,000 community groups which the Report recognised as having a key role in improving the local environment, by *'bringing new life to green spaces and encouraging a wider range of uses'*.

2.26 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister sees the voluntary and community sector as having a vital role to play in the delivery and management of good quality, well designed, safe public spaces. They regard the sector as a major source of skills, knowledge and expertise, and believe it can facilitate community engagement.

National Audit Report: Enhancing Urban Green Space, 2006

permission and help to organise a series of well supported community events on the Fields, including eco tours, bat walks, a dog awareness day, two school tours, nordic walks and orienteering taster sessions.

These have been well-appreciated:

'The community events that have been held in the fields are fantastic - local community stuff that children can get involved in, and learn more about their environment - this kind of thing is really valuable.'

With the aid of a grant from the local authority, our volunteers up-graded an access pathway. All of these events have been designed to involve local people and raise awareness of the potential of this space for a range of uses. We estimate that in total almost 500 people have taken part, many of whom had never used the fields before. Furthermore, the planting of 1000 saplings as part of The Big Tree Plant with our partners Red Rose Forest involved local schools and volunteers. CWT has supported volunteers to undertake scything of the grasslands, a community orchard has been planted, and volunteers regularly pick up litter and clear undergrowth.

13.3 For the Fields to have a healthy future, continuation of these community based activities will be essential. In the immediate future, the TFGM Active Travel Community Grant will see patients from Bracondale Medical Centre and Stepping Hill Hospital walking on the Fields. The upgrading of FP 126 and converting FP127 to a bridleway will facilitate easier access, particularly for those with disabilities. New benches and signs will also improve accessibility. These will be in addition to the existing interpretation boards and benches erected with the support of the landowners MAN Diesel Turbo Ltd.

13.4 The Fields have in the past been something of a 'hidden gem' and not well-known across the borough. As one correspondent said, MFFG needs to:

'Advertise their presence so that the wider Stockport community know about them and are able to benefit from the rare greenspace in our town. Especially at local schools, playgroups and post office'.

Recent collaborations with Stockport and Greater Manchester organisations promises to increase public awareness. The Active Travel grant mentioned above creates links with Stockport MBC and two NHS centres and will be advertised across the Travel for Greater Manchester region. The orienteering course will also be made available and promoted across the whole Greater Manchester Orienteering Association Area (see <https://gmoa.org.uk/>) which stretches to Bolton and Wigan, as well as involving two local schools (Stockport Grammar and Stockport School).

13.5 Continuation of the liaison with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust, of five years standing, holds out the possibility of more effective management of the area to increase biodiversity, as well as creating educational opportunities for schools, youth groups (like the brownies, girl guides, cubs and scouts) and the general public. The popularity of the bat walks illustrates the public appetite for knowledge of their natural surroundings. The Spatial Plan includes areas for a wildflower meadow and a 'nature area' where valued species can be protected. Sightings of buzzards nesting on the Fields created great excitement and illustrates how the 'wilding' of the Fields can be developed for the future.

13.6 One of the noticeable trends in recent years is the growth of local running and jogging clubs. In close proximity to Mirrlees Fields both Bramhall Runners and Davenport Runners have expanded their membership considerably over the last few years. The possibility of formal and informal collaboration with local running clubs will create new opportunities for exercise and recreational use of the Fields to be expanded further.

13.7 The upgrade of FP 127 to a bridleway, with lighting, will encourage greater use of this route throughout the year. Links with other local cycle routes can be promoted to increase awareness of the Fields as a cycling destination, for example with the recently approved Ladybrook Valley Cycle Route.

13.8 In the recent survey of users of the Fields (see Annex 2) respondents were invited to give their views about the future of the Fields. There was a strong feeling that the Fields should be retained as a green space. Of the 233 who commented on the future of the Fields, a total of 198 either explicitly said they wanted to 'keep it green', or 'preserve for wildlife' or implicitly said they wanted the Fields to be protected, for example by saying the Fields are 'a valuable open space and place of natural beauty'. 8 respondents implied that they would accept some limited development and 15 explicitly accepted the need for some development on the Fields. (See Annex 2).

Conclusion

MFFG believe that the contents of this report, and its associated annexes, clearly evidences how Mirrlees Fields meet the criteria necessary to be classed a 'Local Green Space', as defined in the NPPF, given that the fields are:

- very close to the community they serve
- demonstrably special to the local community for a variety of reasons including recreational value, tranquillity and richness of wildlife
- local in character with historical connections to the local area and, surrounded by built development, not an extensive tract of land.

Mirrlees Fields meets the criteria for Local Green Space as defined by the NPPF and should be designated within the Local Plan as Local Green Space, protecting it from future development.

Annexes to this report

1. Maps of Mirrlees Fields

- Map 1 Location map from Stockport MBC's 'My map'.
- Map 2 Mirrlees Fields showing rights of way (OS 1:25000)
- Map 3 Mirrlees Fields Spatial Plan for the Fields (CWT, MAN and MFFG)
- Map 4 Mirrlees Fields Orienteering map (Greater Manchester Orienteering Association)
- Map 5 Mirrlees Fields Health Walks (Stepping Hill Hospital)

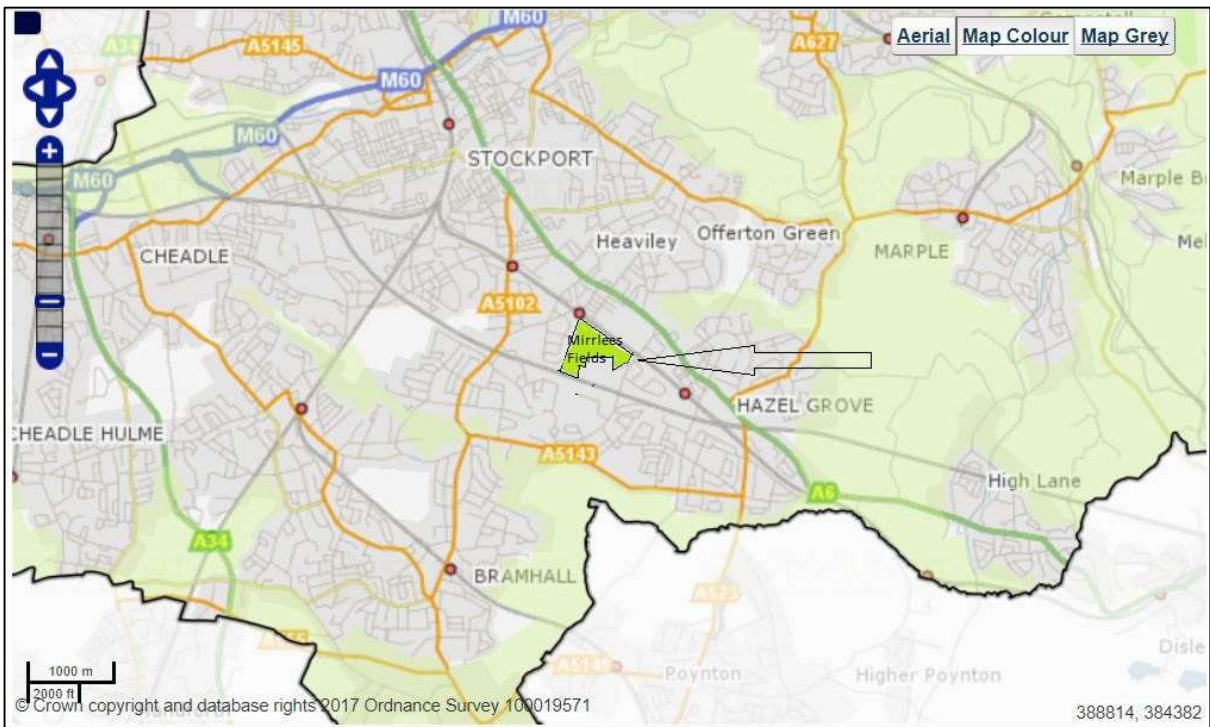
2. Report of the Survey of Users of Mirrlees Fields (July - September 2017)

3. Historical Significance of Mirrlees Fields

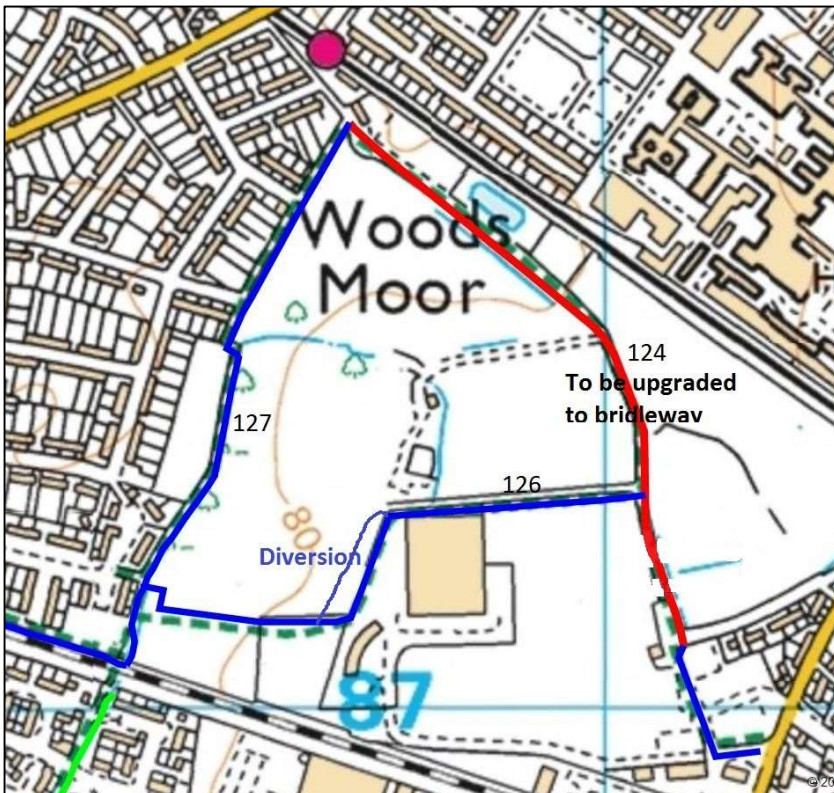
4. Active Travel Community Project Brief (2017)

Annexe 1. Maps

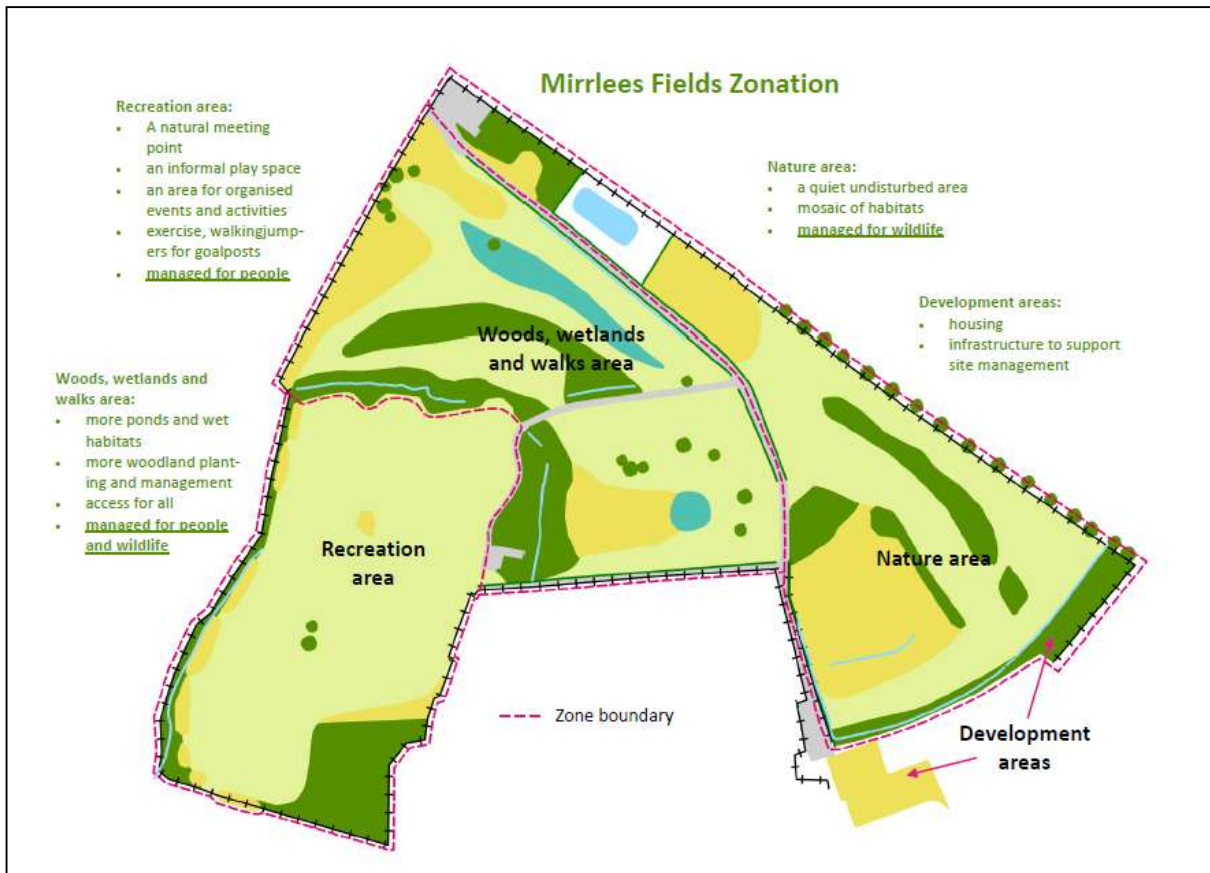
Map 1 Location map from Stockport MBC's 'My map'.



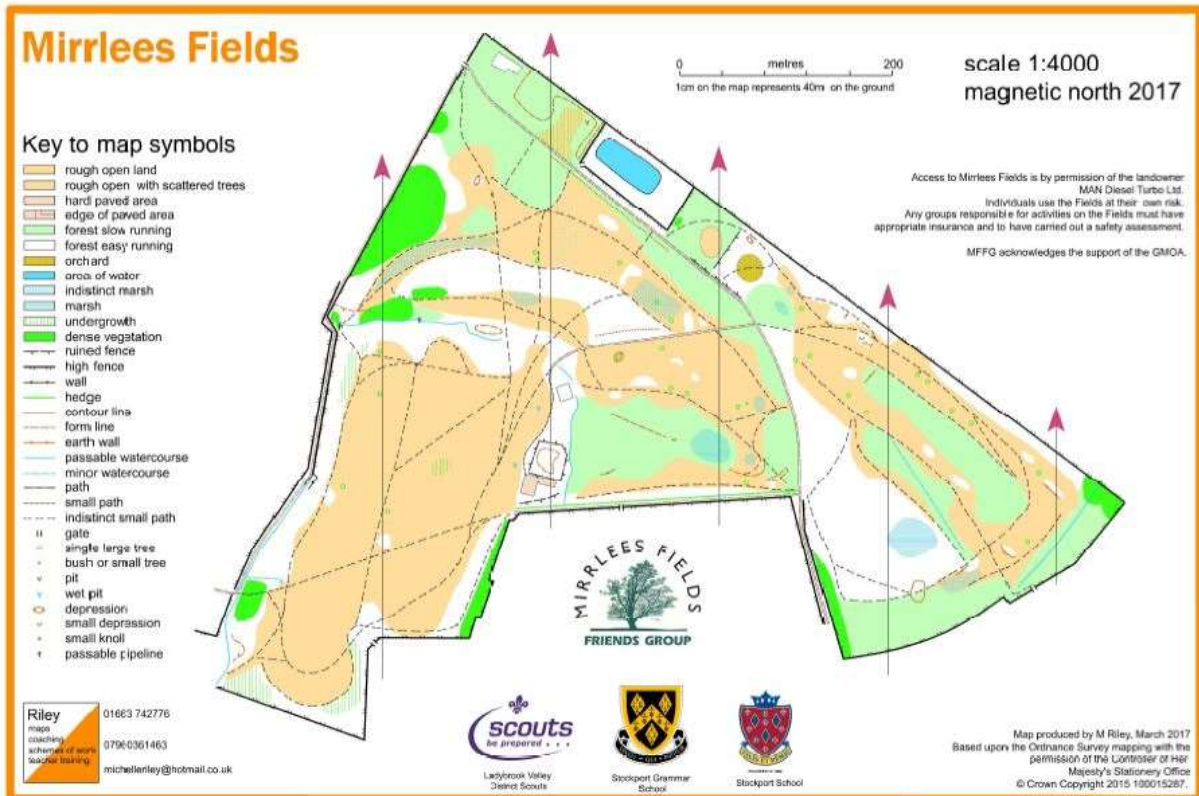
Map 2 Map 1 Mirrlees Fields showing rights of way (OS 1:25000)



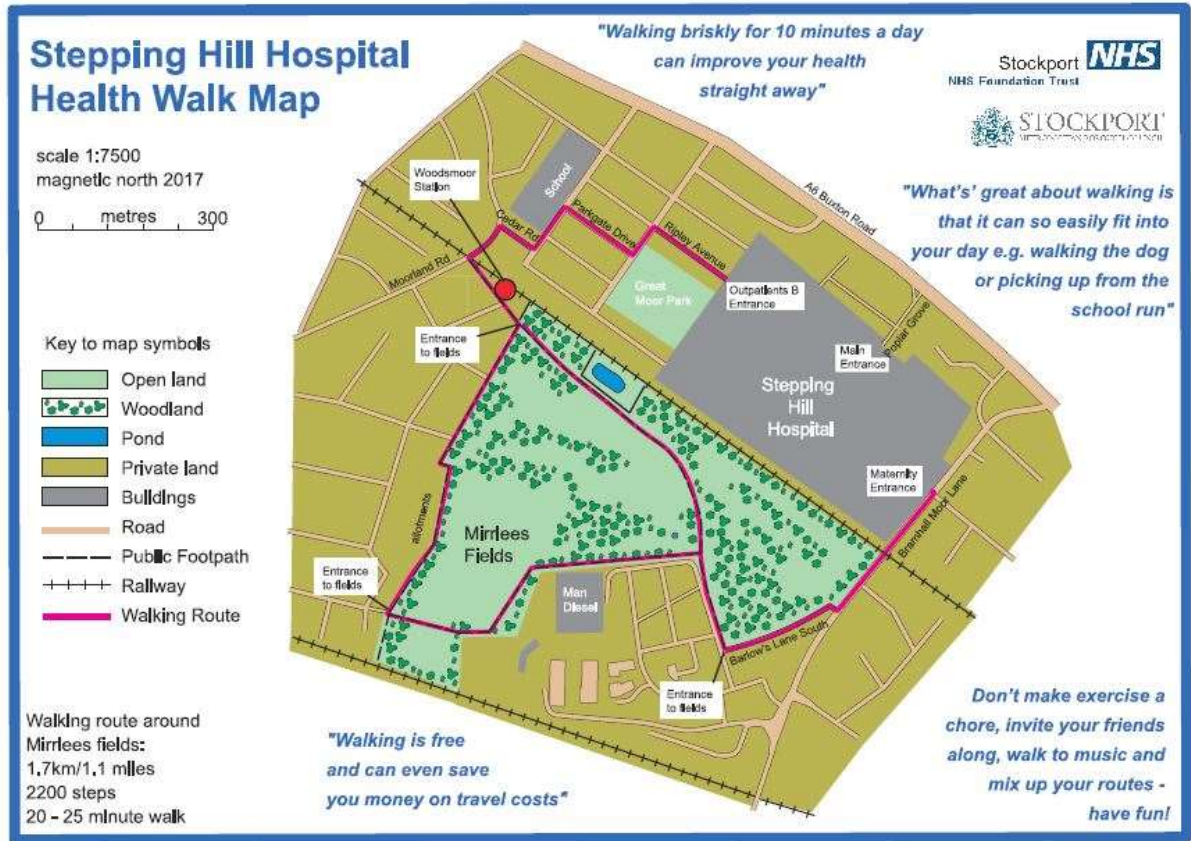
Map 3 Mirrlees Fields Spatial Plan for the Fields (CWT, MAN and MFFG)



Map 4 Mirrlees Fields Orienteering map (Greater Manchester Orienteering Association)



Map 5 Mirrlees Fields Health Walks (Stepping Hill Hospital)



Annex 2**Survey of Mirrlees Fields Users July - Sep 2017****A Summary**

This report summarises the responses to a questionnaire made available to users of the area known as Mirrlees Fields between July and September 2017.

403 completed questionnaires were received.

The findings from this sample show:

1. Three quarters of respondents visit the Fields either every day, 3 or 4 times a week, or weekly.
2. 61.3% have been using the Fields for over five years, some for all their life, but there is also evidence (21.3%) of new arrivals in the area discovering, and making use of the Fields recently.
3. By far the most popular way to get to the Fields is by walking (93.8%), a further 16.4% cycle.
4. Respondents cited multiple reasons for visiting the Fields. 54.3% are walking with a dog, but by the biggest number of respondents (75.2%) went there to walk for exercise and relaxation.
5. The percentage of respondents who 'strongly agreed with the following statements was:
84.4% 'The Fields are very important to me'.
76.9% 'I value the Fields for the wildlife'
88.6% 'I value the Fields as a green space near me'
74.2% 'I value the Fields as a community resource'
6. Future of the Fields:
233 respondents expressed a view about the future of the Fields.
 - 135 explicitly wanted to retain the Fields as green space.
 - 63 implied they wanted the Fields to be retained as a green space
 - 8 implied they would accept some development on the Fields
 - 15 explicitly accepted some development on the Fields
7. The characteristics of the respondents were as follows:
 - 13.5% aged 19-34
 - 53.9% aged 35 - 59
 - 29.4% aged over 60
 - 40% male/60% female
 - 60% from SK2
 - 27% from SK7
 - 10% from SK3

The Report

1. Collection of the survey data and sample

The survey was open from July 29th until September 21st. Responses were provided by paper copy (59), by email attachment (28) and by completion of a Google online survey (315). The total number responses were 403.

The survey was advertised on the Mirrlees Fields Friends Group website, facebook page, by email to the MFFG contacts list and other forms of personal request. The responses are therefore not necessarily representative of all residents in the areas surrounding Mirrlees Fields, but represents the views of those who were motivated to complete the questionnaire.

2. The survey

The data was collected using a questionnaire.

There were seven questions which covered

(1) number of visits to the Fields in 2017,

(2) number of visits in the last month,

(3) length of time visiting the Fields,

(4) method of travel to the Fields,

(5) reasons for visiting the Fields,

(6) level of agreement with the following statements

(i) The Fields are very important to me,

(ii) I value the Fields for wildlife,

(iii) I value the Fields as a green space near me,

(iv) I value the Fields as a community resource, and

(7) respondents' views, if any, about the future of the fields. Respondents' age, gender and postcode were requested.

3. Usage of Mirrlees Fields

Almost a quarter of respondents (24.8%) reported that they visited the fields daily, some of them visiting twice daily. Almost 30% (29.8%) go on the Fields 3-4 times a week and another 22.1% go on the Fields weekly. These respondents can all be characterised as very regular users of the Fields and they make up over three quarters (76.7%) of the respondents. A further 12.9% visit about once a month.

In most cases the data collected on usage over the last month supported the conclusion that most of our respondents visited the Fields very frequently, which is indicative of the high volume of usage made of this green space.

It is my commuting route on foot (walking or running).

I use it to walk to Hazel Grove, Stepping Hill hospital, walk the dog,

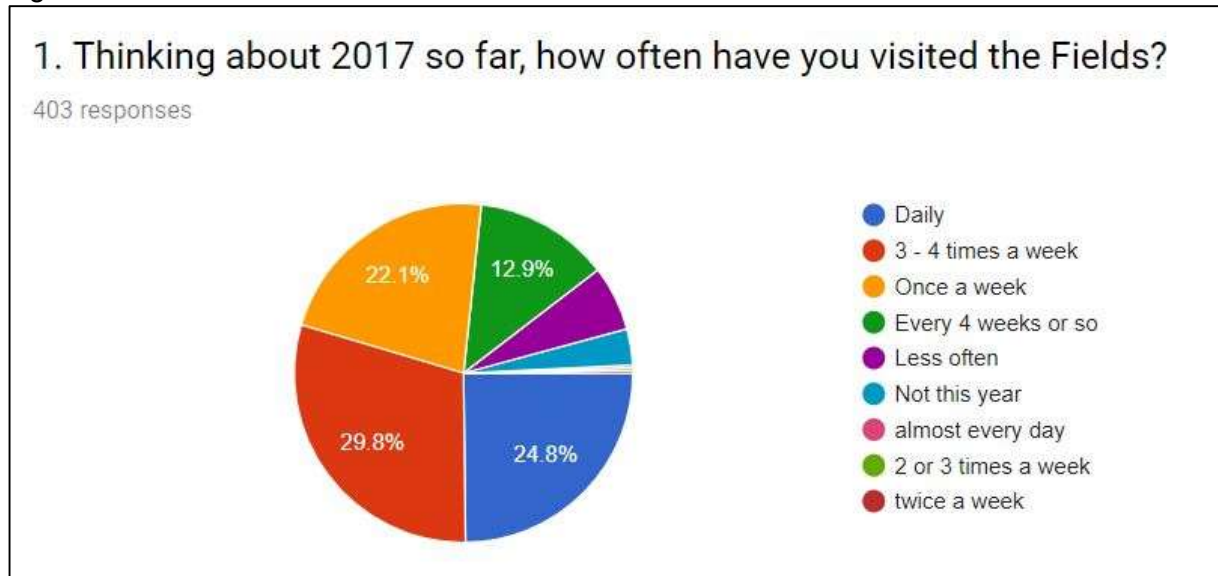
Also good to walk to Sainsburys but in a calming place.

They are all safe short cuts for pedestrians and a sanctuary where we can enjoy the wild life in natural habitat to help relax and unwind.

It's been lovely to see the grass and wild flowers growing so high and also to see the bumble bees feeding in the red and white clover. And the blackberries are about ready to be picked - I make jam with them every year.

Despite the variable weather my dog and I always get immense pleasure from our walk. When wet, boots are essential.

Figure 1.



4. Length of time using the Fields

It is also apparent that many people have been visiting the Fields for many years. 61.3% have been using the Fields for over five years (see Fig 2) and some of these have been walking on the Fields for many years and some for a lifetime (see Fig 3).

However, there is also evidence of new arrivals in the area discovering, and making use of the Fields. 21.3% have been visiting the fields in the last five years, and 6.9% in the last year. This suggests that the Fields are attracting new visitors whilst also retaining the loyalty of those who have known the Fields for many decades.

Figure 2.

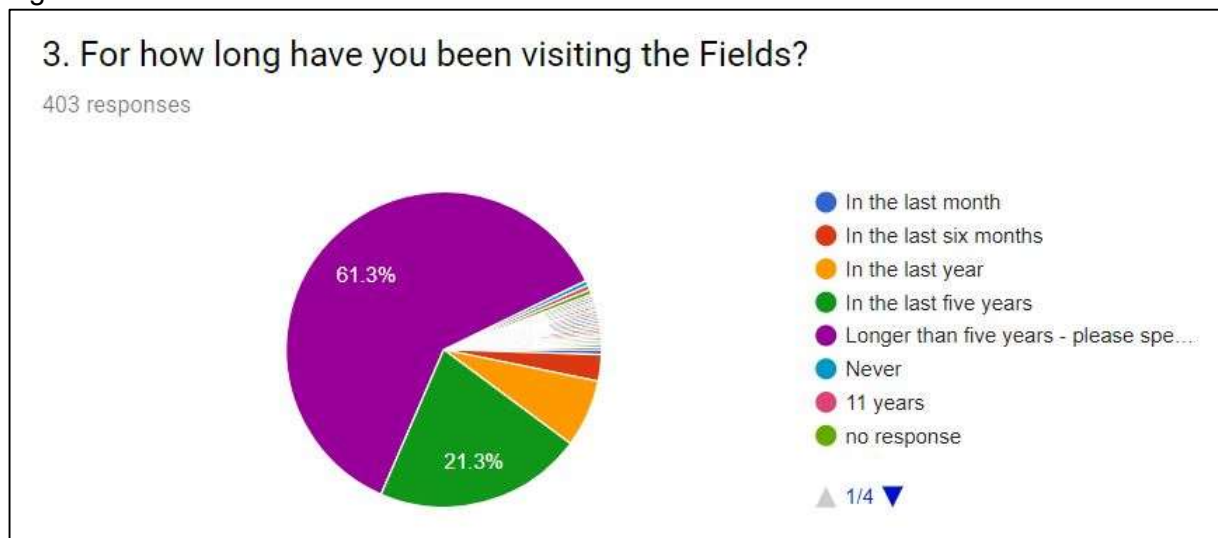
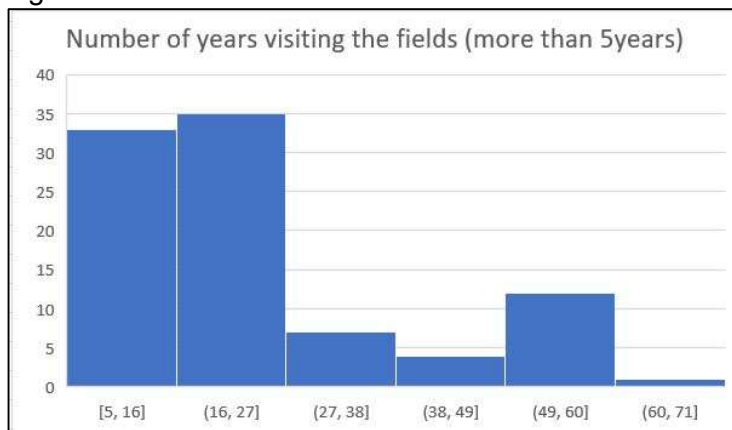


Figure 3.



As long as I've lived here, I have visited the fields - about 15 years. I would say I visit them more now than I used to - good for clearing my head after a stressful day at work.

Was born and grew up in Woodsmoor and have always walked our dogs there - I am now 57 so that's a long time

I've lived in the area for 21 years and used the field in each of those years

Have been using the fields for over 20 years. Dog walking/walking/jogging.

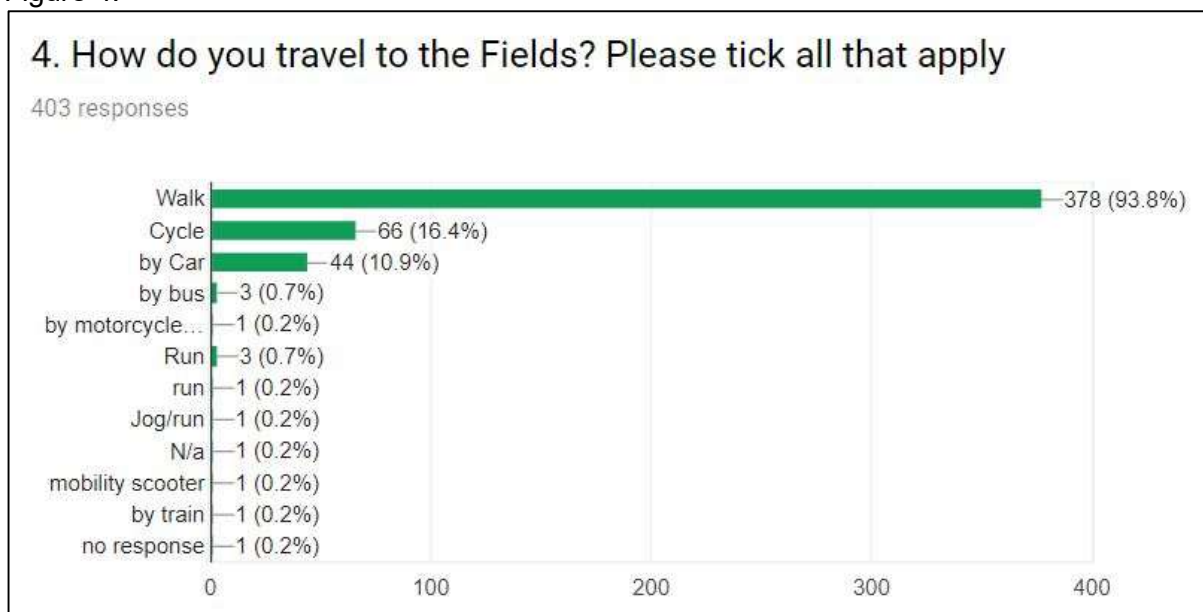
I have visited the fields for the past 8 years every day with my dog. I get great pleasure being out in the fresh air sometimes twice a day regardless of the weather. I have made many friends on my daily walks - two legged and four legged!

Fields have been well loved for many years

5. Travel to the Fields

By far the most popular way to get to the Fields is by walking (93.8%), a further 16.4% cycle and 10.9% drive to the Fields.

Figure 4.



We do not have a car so cannot easily get to other similar 'wild' places. Places where children can roam safely, climb trees and play in nature without feeling like it's enclosed by houses and purpose built. They need to feel like they are exploring.

I am able to walk to the fields from my home, which is an asset in the growing urban sprawl.

To be able to enjoy undisturbed, open land, rich in nature, without needing to use transport and adding to the pollution and congestion on our roads is deeply valued.

The roads are so busy and polluted, it is great to be able to walk somewhere nice.

Enjoy cycling with my children along the path.

6. Why do people go on the Fields?

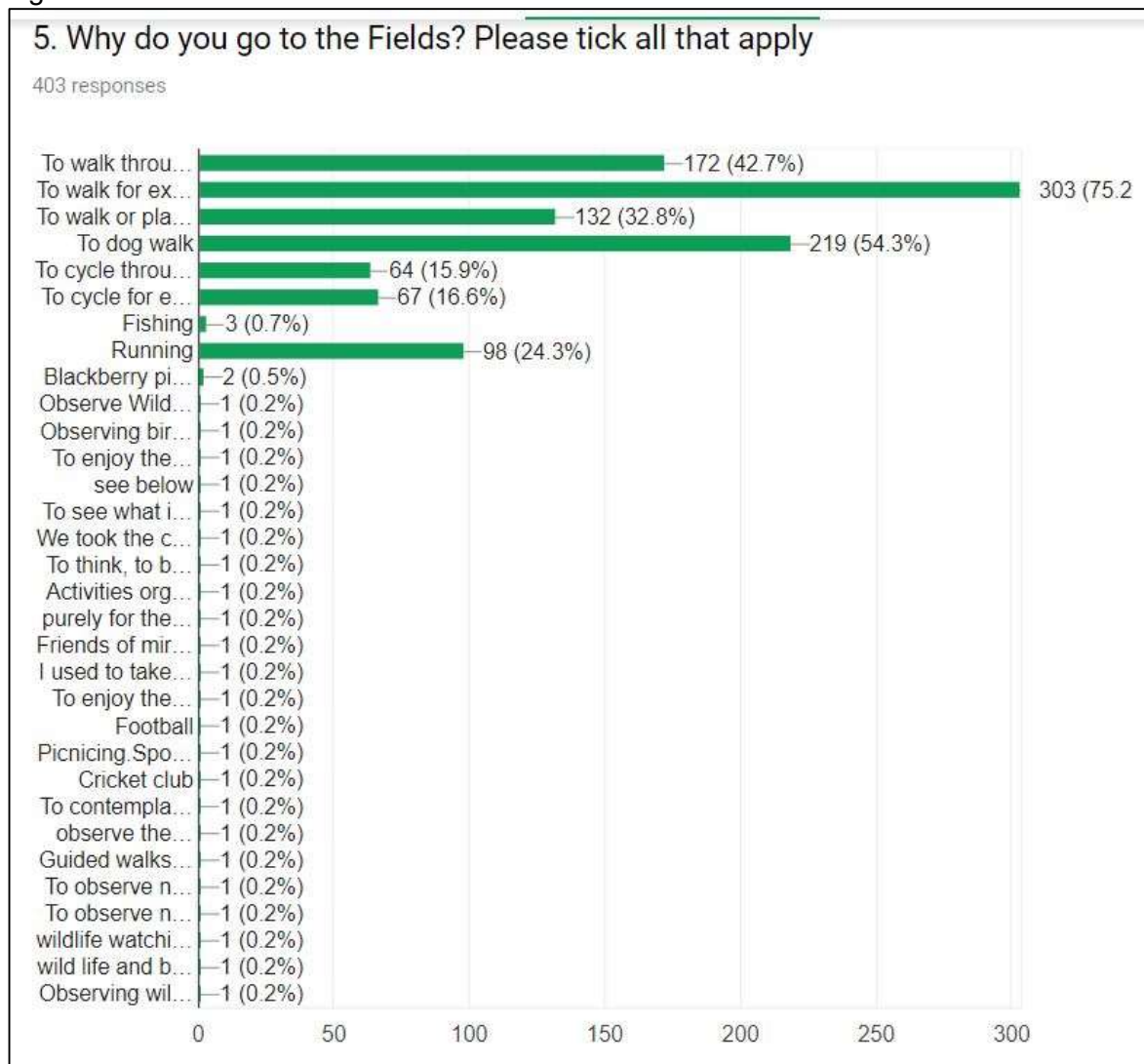
Many respondents indicated that they had multiple reasons for visiting the Fields. 54.3% are walking with a dog, but by far the biggest largest number of respondents (75.2%) cited 'To walk for exercise, relaxation, to be with friends' as a reason they visited the Fields.

It is also a popular route to walk through (42.7%) and to walk with or play with children (2.8%). Cycling is also popular. 15.9% cycle through to get somewhere and 16.6 cycle there for relaxation and exercise. There is also a significant number, nearly a quarter, who use the Fields as a running route (24.3%). (see Fig 5).

These responses indicate the vital role that the Fields play in the health and well-being of locality and for surrounding areas.

See Figure 5.

Figure 5.



The fields bring the community together and are enjoyed by all ages. I have made many friends while using the fields. I walk and relax there and enjoy community events. They inspire a sense of togetherness and pride in the area.

To be in an open natural space away from traffic. Look at the plant life and animals through the seasons. I feel safe on the field on my own.

way to meet new people to avoid feeling isolated

I have also attended guided bat walks with the Cheshire wildlife trust and value the opportunity to learn of the rich array of wildlife making their homes in the fields.

I dog walk, walk through to get to great moor, to see how the nature is getting on

Nice large safe area for children to run around in. It is a convenient short cut to get to hazel grove to walk or cycle.

General well-being a place to renew, think, problem solve and relax

Go fishing but usually photograph wildlife around the pond

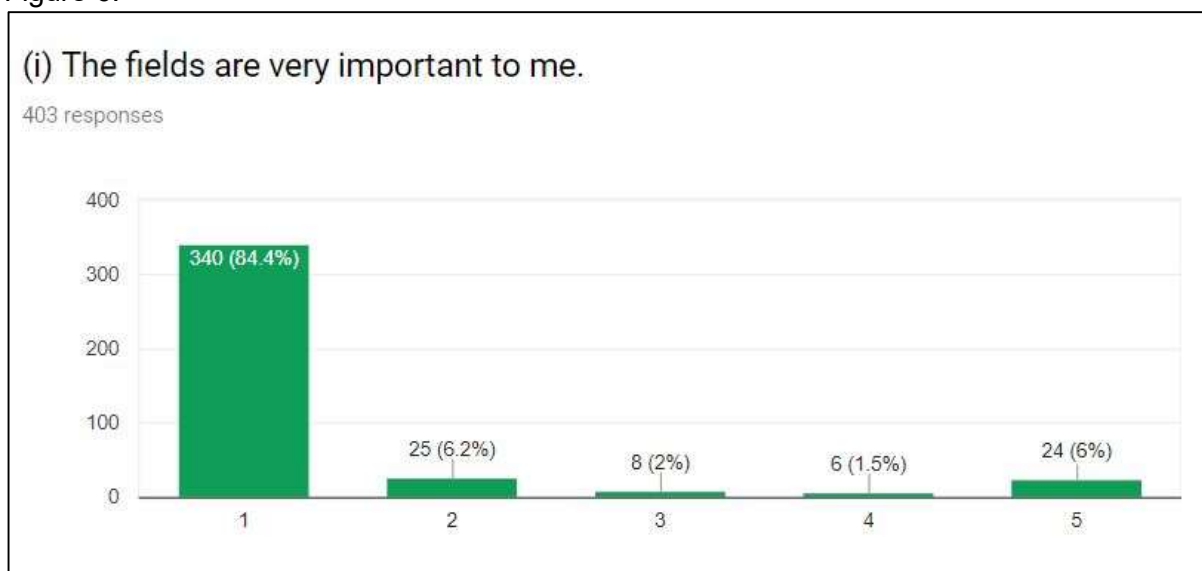
7. Value of the Fields

The questionnaire asked respondents to rate whether and to what extent they agreed or disagreed with four statements on a scale 'strongly agree', 'Agree', 'Neutral', 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'.

7.1

The first statement was 'The Fields are very important to me' and the overwhelming majority (84.4%) said that they 'strongly agreed' with this statement (see Figure 6).

Figure 6.



82 respondents commented on why the Fields are important to them. Below is a sample of 20 comments.

*I feel the fields, although privately owned, are part of the heritage of the area and that they should be protected permanently for future generations of the local community.
Would be upset if we lost this beautiful space.*

I thoroughly enjoy my regular walks through Mirrlees Fields, as does my dog!!

What little green space we have left in urban areas needs to be preserved.

The fields are vital for local residents and for people further afield. Everywhere is getting increasingly built up and areas like this are important for the health of local people. They are also an important part of our local heritage.

The fields are a distinctive open space for Stockport residents

A beautiful route away from the stinking, snarling traffic.

Space with wildlife is valuable to the community

Green space, quiet, enjoy the wild flora & fauna

They are important to the community

Because they are an important part of my life. I can't imagine not being able to walk across them or that they won't always be there.

The fields were my son's playground when he was growing up. He still visits them often, as do I. I love that I have a peaceful haven so close, where I always feel totally safe - there are always one or two people around walking dogs etc, which is good for the sense of community - so important to maintain this.

Natural environment which needs a protection order

Relaxing quiet atmosphere

The fields are one of the biggest reasons for us continuing to live in the Woodsmoor area. They are beautiful and such an important aspect of life here.

Being in the open on the fields improves my physical and mental well-being.

A lovely place to hear the silence away from the congested and crowded roads that surround this area.

The fields bring mental and physical health benefits to my life on a huge scale.

One of the most important local recreational areas, even more so if building on green belt is approved!

I started to visit the fields regularly after experiencing a period of ill health (depression). This green space is very important to me as a place to visit to switch off, meet people, get exercise and enjoy the wildlife.

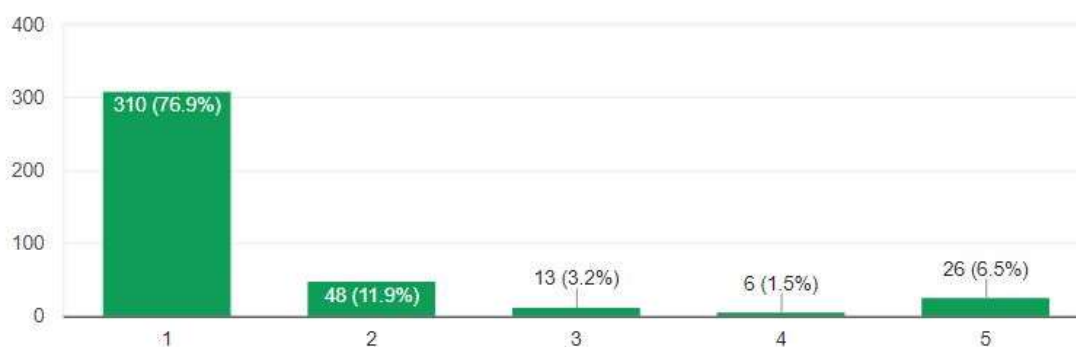
They are a unique space in the local area for recreation, relaxation and simply enjoying the natural environment. They also provide an amazing space for my young children to explore nature and play in a way that can't at home.

7.2

The second statement was 'I value the Fields for the wildlife'. Three quarters (76.9%) of respondents 'strongly agreed with this statement.

(ii) I value the Fields for the wildlife.

403 responses

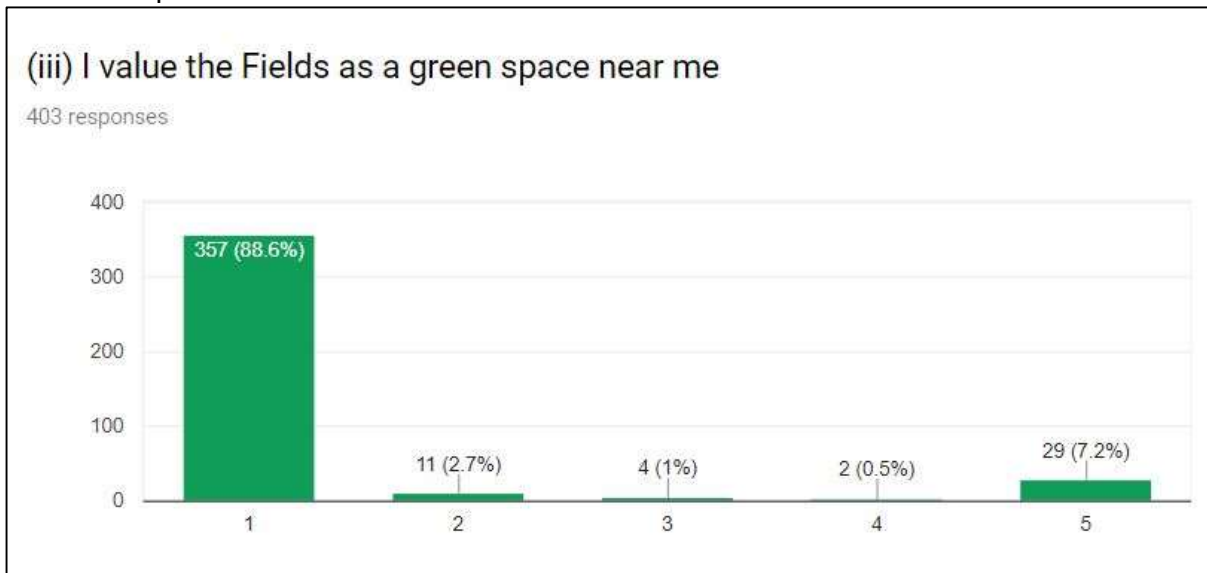


There were 81 comments made in support this statement. Here is a sample of comments:

There is a very varied wildlife community on these fields and they deserve to be protected (2)
Its a beautiful open wild space, and part of the reason I bought a house in this area.
the wildlife and its diversity of the area gets better year on year.
To see the rabbits, buzzards, bullfinches and wild flowers through the season
So many types of birds and beautiful trees that you don't often see elsewhere.
The Fields provide a beautiful natural environment and an important habitat for some rare wildlife.
They give us a chance to learn about our world and how to preserve it. Not to forget the fact that
we really cannot afford to be chopping down any more trees if we want to leave a legacy for our
children for some time to come.
The birds, now buzzards nesting too. The insects, especially the bumble bees. Rabbits hopping
round. It feels like the countryside.
Especially the birds.
The fields are alive with wildlife and great to educate children
Fantastic wildlife, Buzzards, Sparrow hawks, Badgers, Rabbits, Squirrels, Butterflies, Bees,
Dragonflies to name just a few.
I have been on some of the wildlife walks / events which are, again, good for community links as
well as being fun and interesting, also excellent for children.

7.3

The third statement was 'I value the Fields as a green space near me with which 88.6% 'strongly agreed' demonstrating the significance of the Fields as a local green in the opinion of these respondents.



There were 72 comments on this statement. Here is a sample.

Being in a green space is good for my health and mental well-being.
It is important to have access to an area like this within walking distance, without needing to make
a car journey.
It's an unspoilt oasis, I feel blessed to have it nearby.

There are fewer and fewer places for our future generations to use and enjoy. Fields like these are vital for our community. There is nowhere like it without having to get in your car and drive.

Part of what makes Stockport so nice is the amount of green space. I like the "history" of Mirrlees - spotting the old golf course and seeing it change as nature runs wild (helped with some planting of new trees)

You feel you could be in the middle of the countryside, the quiet and birdsong are wonderful.

It is the nearest green space that feels like you can get away from it all. Safe to run and walk there friendly and community feel

7.4

The fourth statement was 'I value the Fields as a community resource (e.g. for events, nature walks, running or other sports, education, a place to meet people)'. 74.2% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement and another 11.4% agreed with it, making a total of 85.6 in agreement.

(iv) I value the Fields as a community resource (eg for events, nature walks, running or other sports, education, place to meet people)

403 responses



Once the future of the fields can be ensured, I believe that they can be better used for more "organised" recreation eg sports, education.

It's amazing how friendly everyone is when they meet up on the fields whatever the purpose. Builds up the feeling of community.

The fields are an important outdoor educational and community resource

I have made links and friends that I would never otherwise have met

Not for myself but the various events are an interest for the younger ones. For a lot of people it is an important place for meeting people and socialising, when they would otherwise be quite isolated.

My family have enjoyed the fun days that have been organised in recent years on the fields.

I have enjoyed taking part in the events organised by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

Community groups and children's group value and use the space

I took my children here regularly when they were growing up enabling them to appreciate the value of wild spaces from an early age, my eldest has gone on to be a countryside ranger for a living

– the fields are a beautiful area of woodland. It would be of huge benefit to South Manchester to see the area being utilised more as an open space if Stockport council would adopt it for the right reasons, not more houses. The area has already been dramatically reduced in size over the years. Saving the last of the fields is vital to the area.

I value the fields very highly as an informal community resource, where all sections of the community are equally free and entitled to enjoy it. This results in a self-policing space where we all take responsibility for managing the space and have a sense of ownership. I would be very concerned if one particular group were to assume greater entitlement and squeeze other users out, and thereby diminish the sense of collective ownership and responsibility.

It is a valuable resource for school visits, orienteering, bird and bat walks, community orchard, dog show, a place to meet people, the fishing pond. There is potential for more use by the hospital, scouts, families and schools in the future.

8. Future of the Fields

The questionnaire invited comments on the future of the fields in the following way, 'We would be interested in any views you may have about the future of the fields'.

There were 243 comments made. We have attempted to categorise the comments with respect to whether they explicitly or implicitly rejected development, explicitly or implicitly accepted some development and those which were neutral on the issue of development, perhaps the comment related to some other matter about the future of the fields.

Comments classed as A 'explicitly stating there should be no development'.

These statements use phrases like Mirrlees Fields being 'preserved', or 'keep them as they', or 'should remain green', 'must not be built on'.

I feel very strongly that they should remain as "Green" open spaces, open to the public and managed properly, probably by the Council's Sports/Recreation department. I do NOT feel that the fields should be built on. Any further building (houses or industry) would also worsen the already awful traffic problems we have in this area.

A green space in a built up area is unfortunately becoming rare but is vital for the well-being of residents. Such spaces should be treasured forever.

The fields must be preserved. They are an important asset and would not have remained and developed had it not been for the devotion and work of a group of people and the Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

I understand the need for housing, BUT, in all the areas I have witnessed these treasured greens paces are not used for providing affordable housing for young people but luxury housing with maximum profits. Also, it is cheaper to use green belt rather than brown site, will they only be happy when we are a concrete mass. Green spaces are so important to peace of mind and well-being.

The fields are a much loved and valued resource and a sanctuary in an urban area. They should be kept as a green space in the future.

Comments classed as B 'implying that there should be no development'

These comments talk in appreciation of the green space and its value to the local community, which imply that the Fields should remain green

Green space is so vital for physical and psychological health this is a much valued area by the community and an area we want to keep. It would be an utter shame for people and wildlife if it was

covered in tarmac for a building development site. We need this green space in Stockport, it's hard to find somewhere this much wildlife in Stockport. These fields are essential to the community and wildlife of the area, providing open spaces for recreation, And aiding the health and wellbeing of the community, open spaces are being progressively squeezed out, often in the pursuit of money, to the detriment of the environment and health of the community.

Comments classed as C were taken as implying that the respondent is willing to allow for or accept some limited residential development'

Houses are being squeezed in near MAN diesel and of course nothing done to improve local infrastructure. Any building near these fields must be very carefully controlled.

I know that affordable housing is a serious issue now, and I dislike the "not in my back yard" mentality. But there is a happy medium. I would like to see the fields preserved as a cared for, valued oasis alongside residential communities.

I hope not too much will be used for housing

Would be a real shame if housing built but there is a housing need

Comments classed as D explicitly approving of some residential or other development.

*I would hate to see them developed, as in other areas of Stockport and surrounding places that have thrown up ugly, expensive, unimaginative estates. The only possible good use if it must be developed would be **some kind of community building project**, building eco-friendly sustainable affordable homes for the thousands of people who can't afford to get on the property ladder, on a small section of the fields. It would be a feather in Stockport's cap if it was publicised and covered properly, proving that Stockport is a progressive and caring borough.*

*I think it's important to reserve all the fields, but particularly the one next to the railway line, just in case (and in hope) it might be possible sometime in the future **to build a new hospital there**, using the existing hospital site for commercial development*

Personally I feel that some of the fields could be built on (as long as they are affordable homes) and that we should seek concrete agreement that no more will be sacrificed for future profiteering. I would say about 15% of the fields could be used to build more housing.

Traffic will be horrendous. Some limited housing would be OK

The community must be realistic. The fields have to be maintained and this costs money we don't have. We need to do some kind of deal with the landowners so that some development is allowed in return for a genuine green open space, held and financed in perpetuity.

Comments classed as E were not directly relevant to question of possible development on the Fields.

Putting a play area on there for the children who love to visit!

Recommend new/additional tree and shrub planting as screening around perimeters of recent and future housing developments

It would be good to see the fields used for educating children and adults about the wildlife that lives around them. Also good for recreation purposes i.e. Sports and community fundraisers.

More accessible for general public with incentives to visit - improved pathways, play facilities for younger children, etc

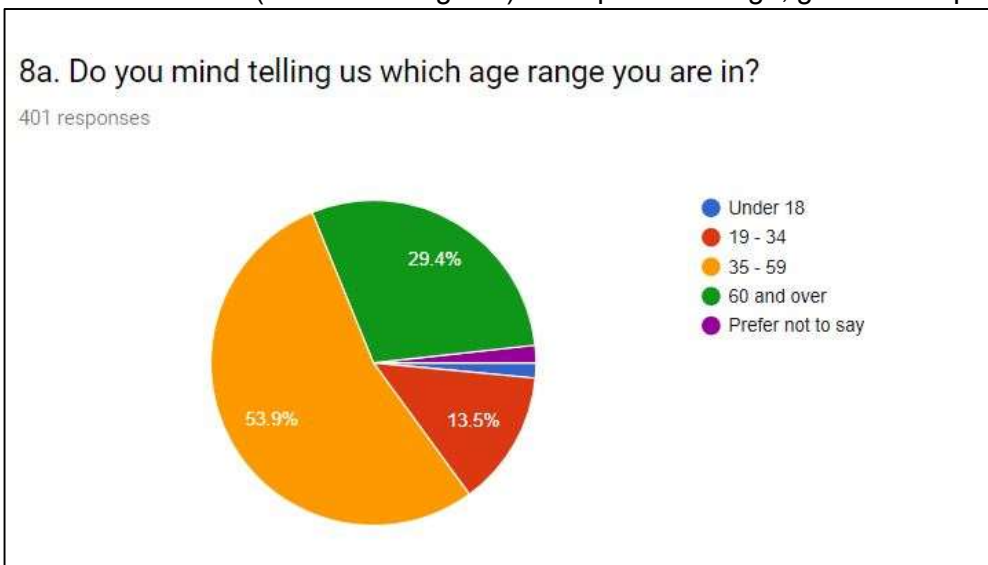
I'd like to see the paths and lighting done that was promised as part of the section 106 agreement. This would facilitate a good walking / running route. There are a number of elderly/disabled people who could benefit from this space with the right access.

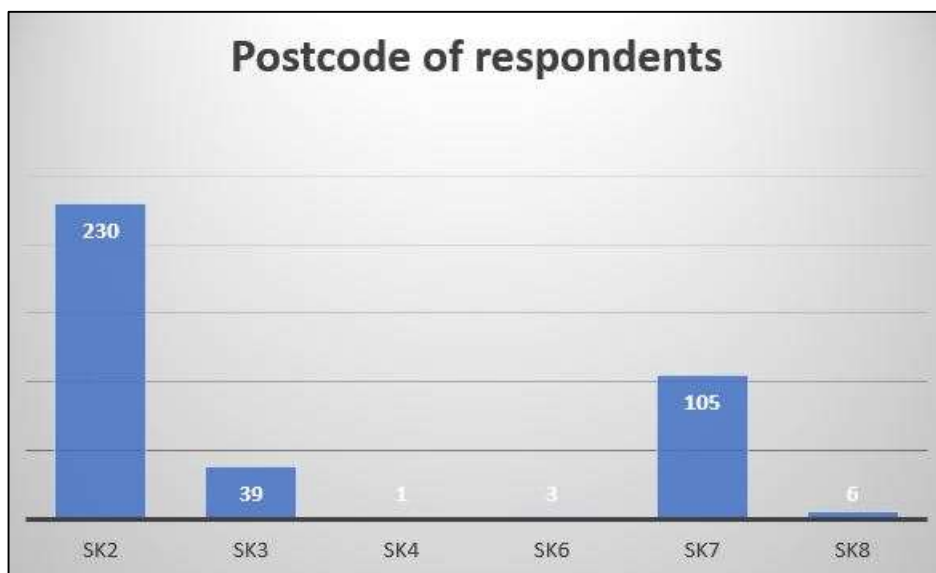
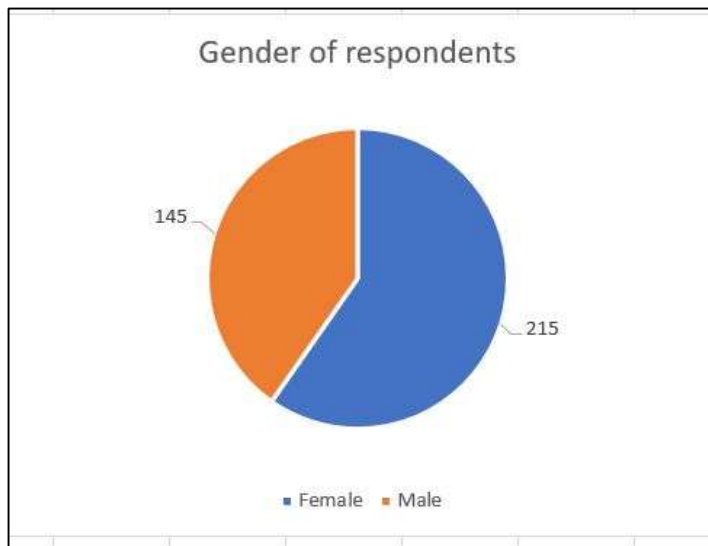
The findings from the 233 respondents who gave their views about the future of the Fields are as follows.

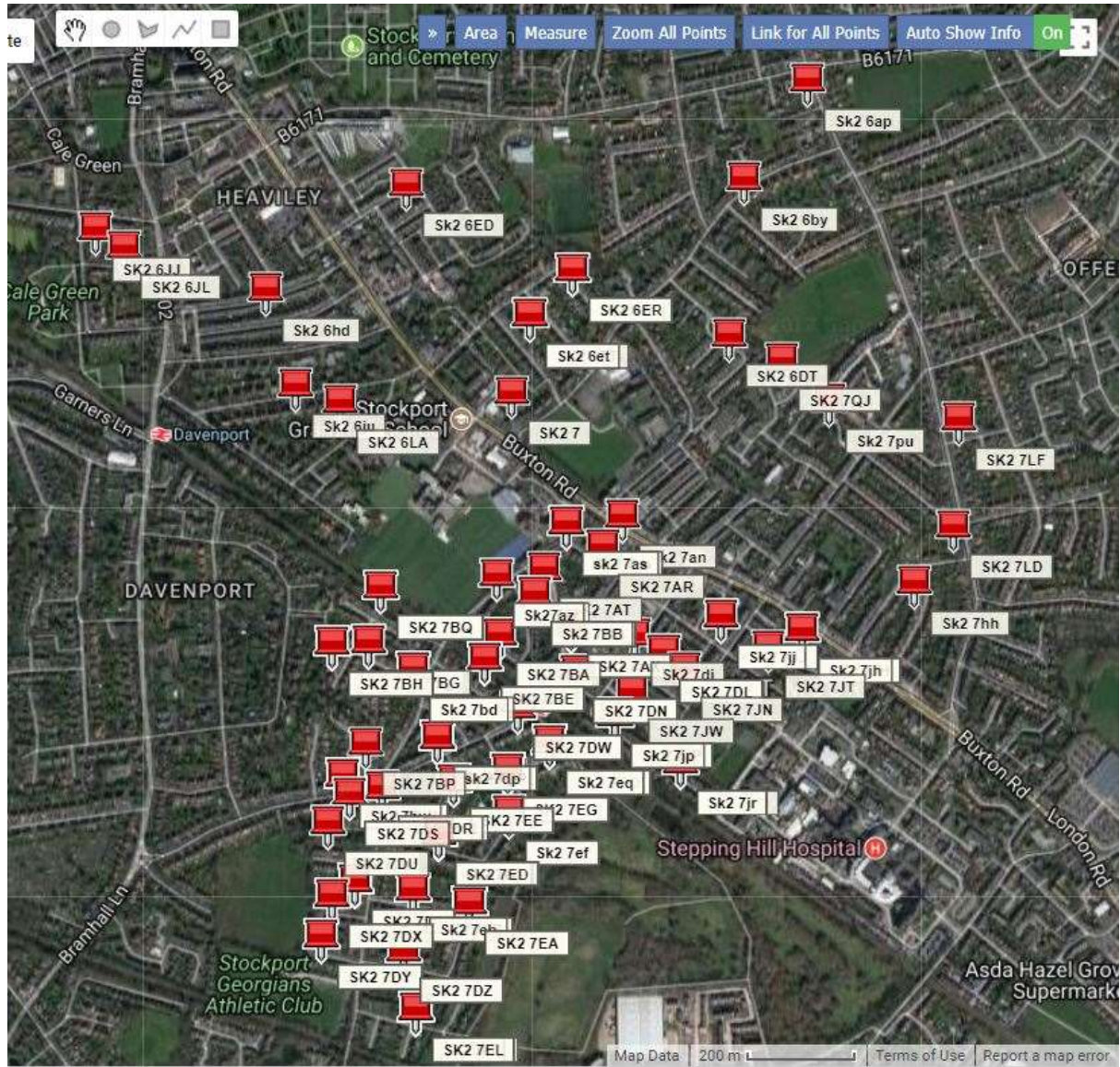
A	retain as green space	135
B	imply keep green	63
C	imply accept some building	8
d	accept some development	15

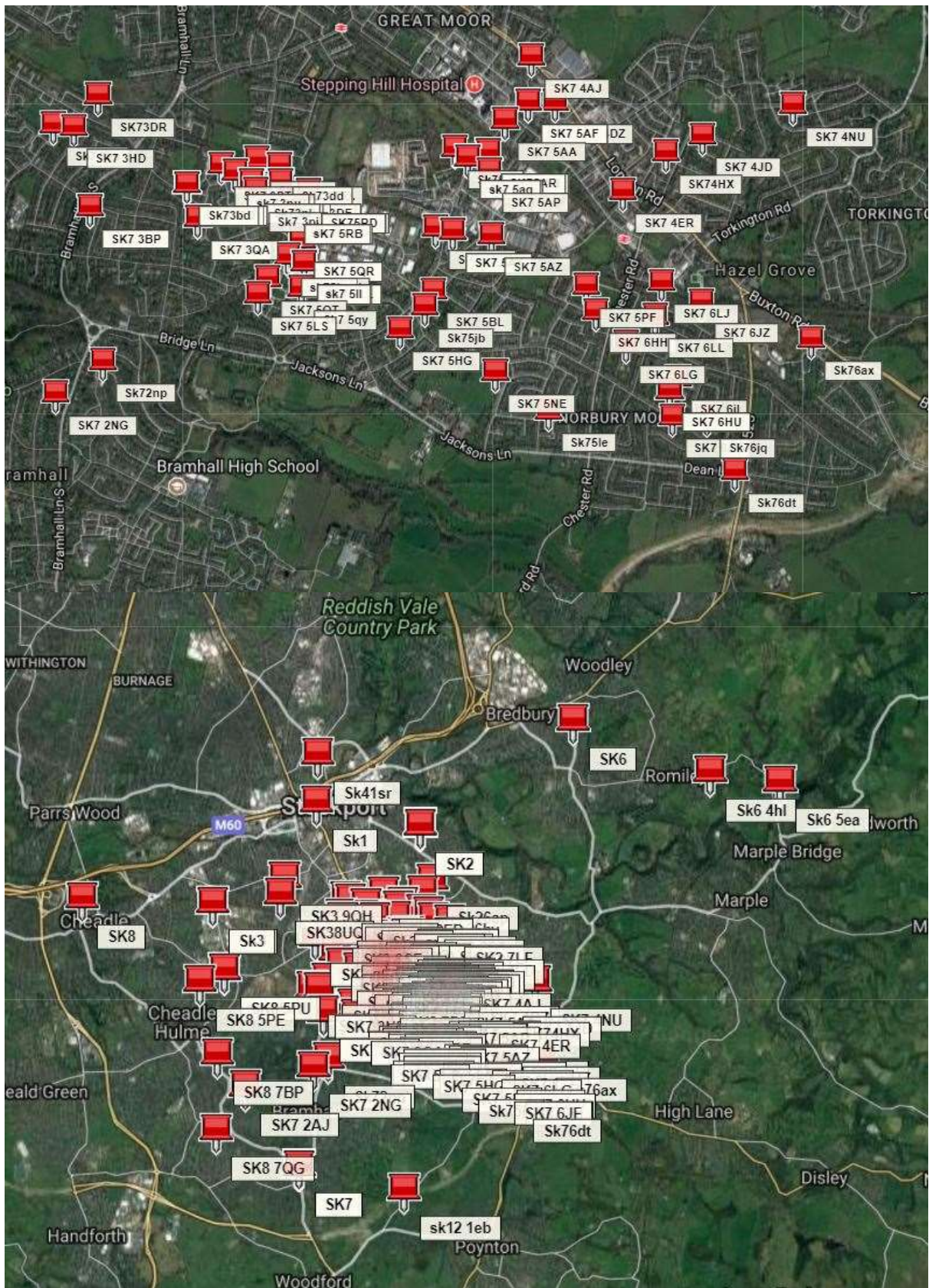
9. The characteristics of respondents

Data was collected (where it was given) of respondents' age, gender and postcode.









Annex 3

THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MIRRLEES FIELDS

Mirrlees Fields have only ever been put to two uses – firstly as agricultural land supporting dairy farming between the 17th and 20th century and, secondly, as sports fields between 1907 and 1986. What follows is some background to the history of these usages together with an outline of those aspects that can still be evidenced on the Fields today.

The key points of historical evidence are the existence of:

- Old field boundaries dating back at least to the early 18th century
- Ditches marking the boundaries of the original fields
- Butts and reins (ridges and furrows) used in the 18th and 19th centuries as a means of draining land used for arable crops
- The position of current rights of way that were bridleways connecting farms that were in existence from the 17th century
- A large hollow that was originally a pit dug either for marl or for clay for brickmaking
- The remaining traces of the fairways and bunkers of the Mirrlees Golf Course

1. First References to the Land

The land can be dated back to when it was a part of the Bramhall Manorial Estate which was first mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. It lay between two 'moors' (originally peat bogs), Snibbs Moor (now Woodsmoor) and Bramhall Moor, both of which were sources of fuel for the earliest settlers. The earliest reference to Snibbs Moor dates from 1336 at the latest, and possibly from before 1300ⁱ. By the 16th century the moors had been drained and the surrounding land had been put to agricultural use by tenant farmers who leased the land from the Davenports of Bramhall Hall.

2. The Earliest Farming Tenants

82 tenants were recorded as inhabiting Snibbs Moor in the New Court Book of the Manor of Bramhall in 1632ⁱⁱ. More detailed records a century later from the same courtⁱⁱⁱ and referring to the same area point to the land now known as Mirrlees Fields being leased by two farming families. They were the Gouldens and the Leadbeaters who resided at New House Farm^{iv} and Bramhall House Farm^v, respectively.



Fig 1. Bryant, 1831

3. The Field Boundaries and Names

Drainage was a constant preoccupation of the Manorial Court with tenants being instructed to keep the ditches clear that marked the boundaries of their fields (as well as acting as drainage channels) The following entries include field names that were to appear 120 years later on the 1842 Tithe Map of the area:

*"We paine William Leadbeater to lay a Cart platt in the end of the new ditch he hath made in his Turfe-room at the side of the **rough field** betwixt this and the 29 September."* 1722

*"We paine William Leadbeater to Clense the ditch betwixt his Kill-field and Jonathan Goldens **Priestfield** and make the fence sufficient betwixt now and the 7th August next."* 1722

There is little reason to believe that either the field names or boundaries surveyed in 1842 had changed to any great extent over the previous century.

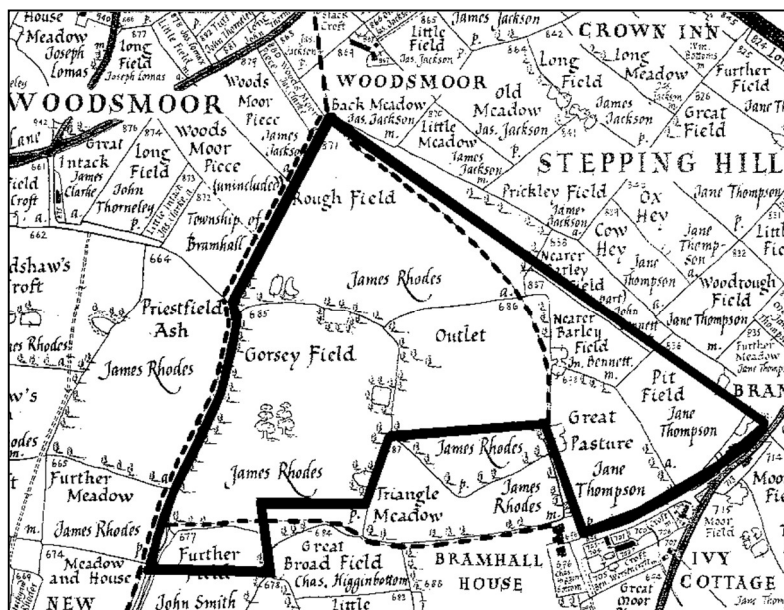


Fig 2. 1842 Tithe Map with an outline of Mirrlees Fields



Fig 3. 2005 aerial view of Mirrlees Fields

Remarkably, the field boundaries that can be seen on the 2005 aerial view of the Fields correspond almost exactly with those on the 1842 Tithe Map, having remained unchanged for a further 150 years. **It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the field boundaries contained within Mirrlees Fields today are those that were laid out in the 16th and 17th centuries.**

Even when the golf course was laid out (see Sports Fields), it didn't interfere with these boundaries. From 1986, when the golf course fell out of use until the present time, nothing has changed. As a consequence, the green space today still contains the field shapes it had in the 18th century, and possibly earlier.



Fig 4. Mirrlees Fields in 2017, still showing the old field boundaries marked by trees and shrubs

4. The Ditches and the Stream

The stream, or brook as it was known locally in earlier times, (and very fondly remembered by older local residents as a place they played as children) takes an erratic path across the Fields. It emerges at the corner of the field closest to Stepping Hill Hospital and leaves as it goes under 'Echo Bridge' (near Kinross Avenue and under the old Midland railway line) feeding eventually into the Ladybrook at Bramhall Green.

In fact, in the 20th century the original interconnecting field ditches were used as means of draining surface water from newly built housing and industrial developments surrounding the fields. Conduits were constructed. The result is that a more regular flow of water runs through the ditches giving the impression of a stream.

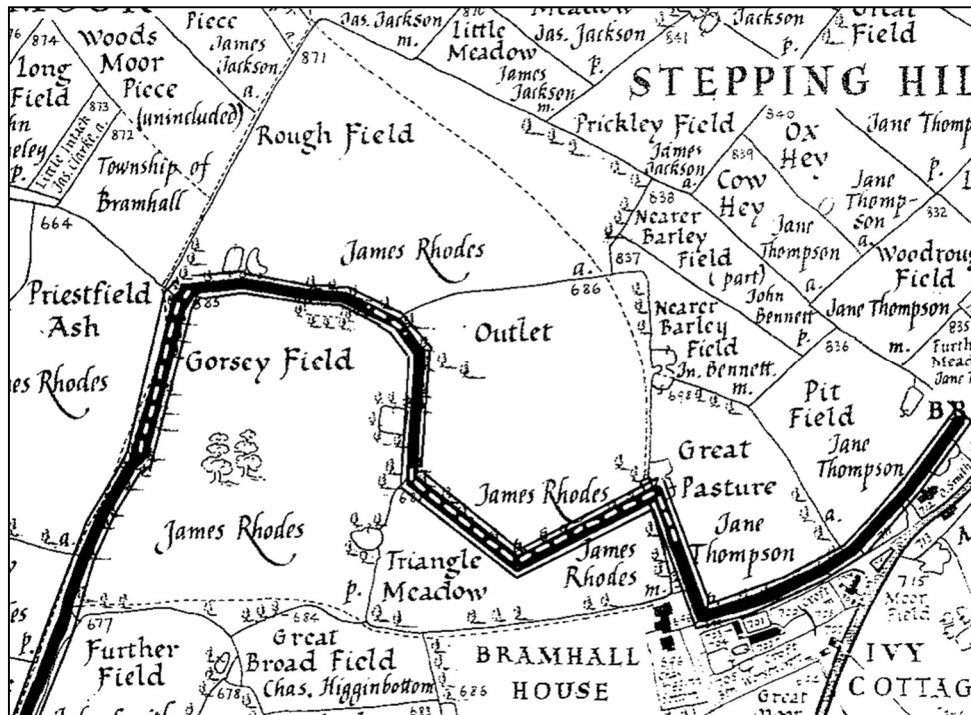


Fig 5. Course of the stream across Mirrlees Fields. The dotted lines indicate sections where it is culverted. The section in Triangle Meadow lay beneath the factory site, and now lies under the Hampton Wood housing estate.



Fig 6. 'Echo Bridge' under the old Midland Railway line



Fig 7. Stream with culvert and reinforced banks, photographed in 1927

On the ground there are still several ditches that evidence the historical field boundaries. On modern maps these are shown as apparently randomly situated drainage channels and water courses. Physical evidence of the ditches still remains in several places on the Fields, easily detectable using modern or old maps.

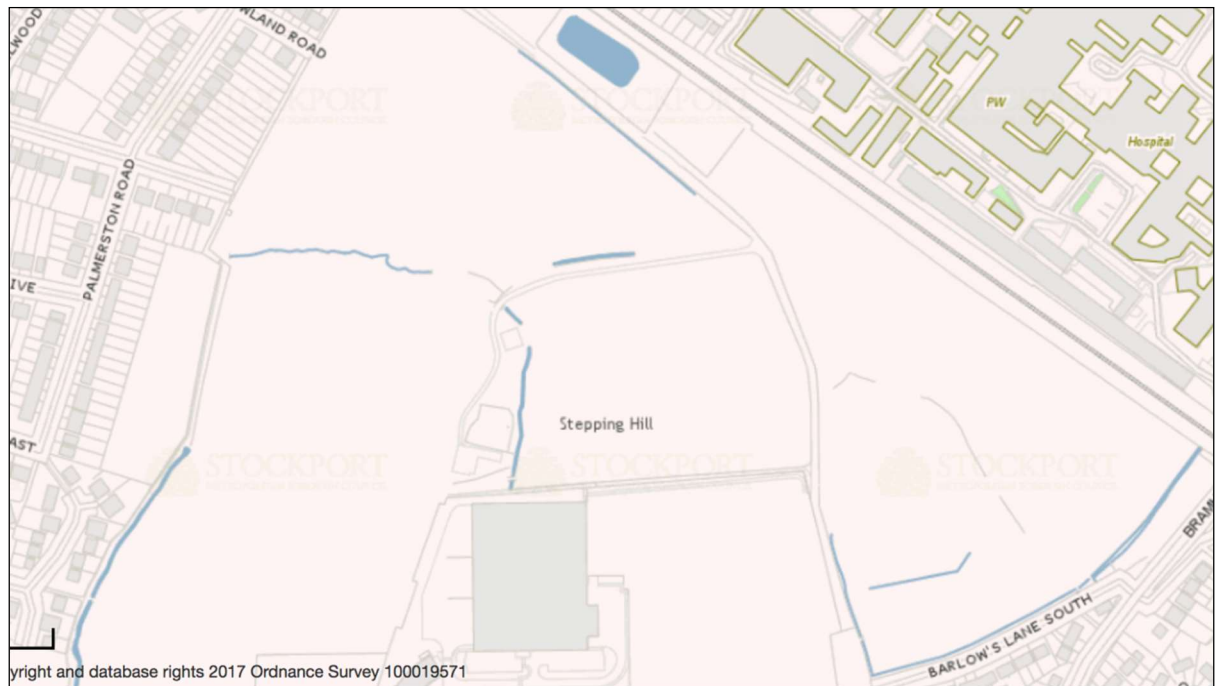


Fig 8. Current map with ditches showing up as drainage channels and water courses corresponding with field boundaries

5. Butts and Reins

There are ridges and furrows still very evident on the fields today, particularly at the top of the field closest to the railway. From centre to centre the butts are about 7 metres apart, sometimes less. Known in the 18th and 19th centuries as butts and reins (Cheshire dialect for ridges and furrows) they were used to drain fields. Water from the raised butts drained into the reins which in turn drained into ditches at the edges of the fields.

Created using horse and plough, they are not, as once thought, evidence of medieval farming practices. Peter Pownall, a Bramhall farmer, noted in his diary in 1782: "Drewd Pottatoes Ground in to Butts", and in 1786: "Drewd summer work [land that had lain fallow] into Butts".^{vi}

A good example of these ridges can be seen in Figures 9 and 10.



Fig 9. 1934 aerial view of Pit Field and Great Pasture



Fig 10. Aerial view of butts and reins in the same fields in 2017

6. Footpaths

The footpaths that cross the fields were part of an early network of bridle paths that connected the farms to each other and to Woodsmoor Lane and Bramhall Moor Lane. Now the paths form rights of way across the fields and along the stream, one of them being part of the Fred Perry Way. Figures 7 and 8 show that the position of the footpath cutting diagonally across the fields hasn't changed. It would have connected Bramhall House Farm to Woodsmoor Lane. The path along the lower, southern boundary of the Fields originally connected Bramhall House Farm to a bridleway leading down to New

House Farm. When Mirrlees extended their site into the field named 'Outlet' in the mid 20th century, the path was repositioned. It now runs alongside the MAN Diesel warehouse.

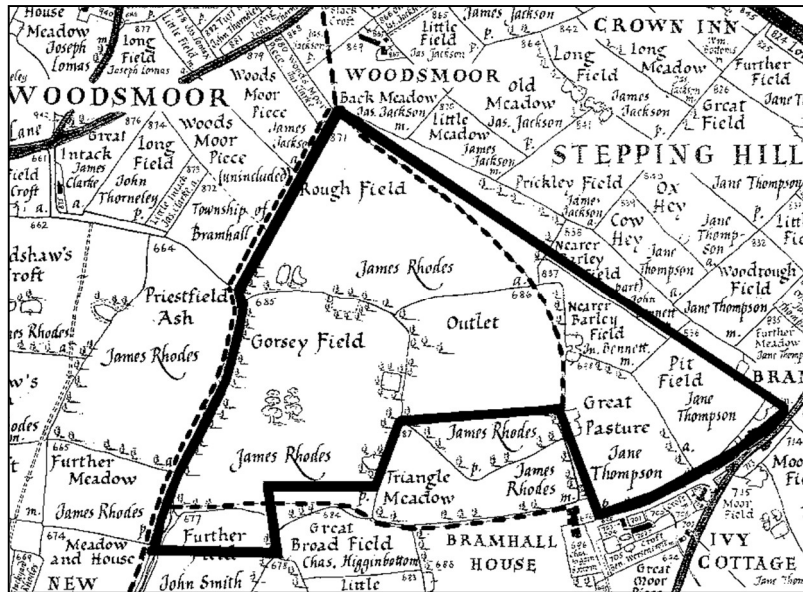


Fig 11. Tithe map showing the perimeter of Mirrlees Fields now and the line of the footpaths in 1842



Fig 12. Aerial view of the diagonal footpath, 2017

7. Ponds and Pits

There were numerous large ponds on the Fields, some up to 50 metres in length. They were known as 'pits' in earlier times. It is possible to discern two of the hollows on Mirrlees Fields where the ponds were before they were drained.

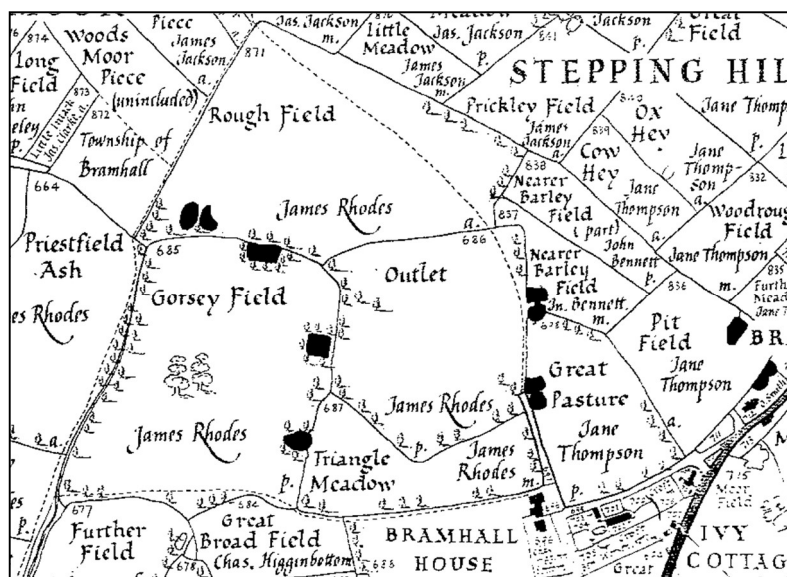
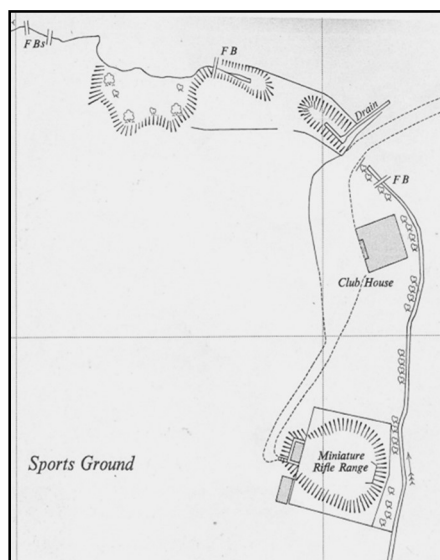


Fig 13. The ponds on Mirrlees Fields. One is still discernible in the corner of Rough Field and the other is the middle one of the three in Gorsey Field.

The ponds have two possible origins. They could have been marl pits: from the 1300's onwards, manorial landowners encouraged their tenants to extract marl, a substance made up of clay and lime, to be spread over farmland to increase its fertility. The Bramhall Court Rolls make mention of the use of marl and many of the fields on the tithe map are called 'Marl Field'.

Alternatively the ponds may have resulted from digging for clay for brickmaking, a means by which farmers supplemented their income. In either case, the 'pits' created filled with rainwater and became ponds.



The middle pond on Gorsey Field was large enough, it is recounted, for children to cross it on a makeshift raft. Now it is a hollow filled with overgrowth and debris but in the 1950's it was turned into a rifle range.

Fig 14. The site of the miniature rifle range, in Gorsey Field backing on to the stream that emerges close to the corner of the MAN Diesel warehouse.

8. The Sports Fields

The Mirrlees, Bickerton & Day factory was built in 1907 on land leased to the founders by John Emmott Barlow, then owner of Bramhall House and its farm. The company soon bought that land and then much of the remaining land surrounding the factory site in 1922. In the process, they became the landlords for New House Farm and Bramhall

House, from whom they took farmland, initially to build a golf course and subsequently for two bowling greens, three tennis courts, a cricket pitch, a football pitch, a hockey pitch and the previously mentioned rifle range. The Mirrlees Sporting Association was run by Mirrlees employees from the 1930's until 1986, when it was closed by Mirrlees Blackstone with a view to the Fields being sold for housing development. Ultimately the planning application was turned down by the Department of the Environment and Transport on the grounds that the houses would have been exposed to unacceptable levels of noise from the testing of diesel engines, then being manufactured in the factory. The application had been strenuously resisted by past and present employees who, together with local residents, had formed an action group under the acronym of SCRAM: Sports Clubs and Residents Against Mirrlees.

9. The Mirrlees Golf Course

The 1900's saw a growing enthusiasm for setting up sports clubs. The first in Woodsmoor was established by golfing enthusiasts from Disley in early 1906. The Davenport Golf Club, as it was called, was situated at the north western corner of what is now Mirrlees Fields. Its life at Woodsmoor was brief. The land on which the course stood was leased to Mirrlees, Bickerton & Day in 1907-8. The club moved to Torkington, Hazel Grove, opening as the renamed Stockport Golf Club in 1909.

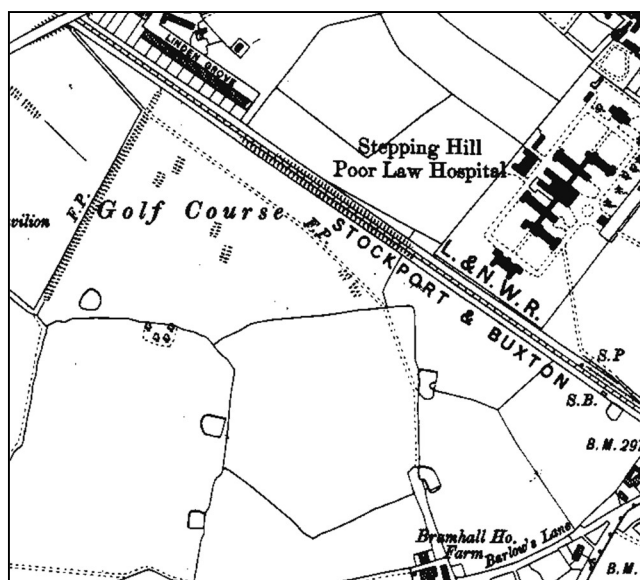


Fig 15. The first golf course on the fields, 1911 OS map permission of the National Library of Scotland

The course was taken over by Mirrlees. Factory employees brought down from the parent company in Scotland expanded the original course until the start of the First World War interrupted their efforts. They saw their course become a wasteland when it was used as a testing ground for tanks produced at the Mirrlees factory. After the war the course was resurrected with two army huts used to make the clubhouse situated in the northern most corner of the fields. The course was used by both the Mirrlees Sports Association members and private members for a further 60 years before its closure in 1986.



*Fig 16. The course in the 1970's with the hospital in the top right hand corner
Website: Emapping Victorian Cheshire, Cheshire Archives & Local Studies*



Fig 17. The course in the 1960's with the Stepping Hill Hospital maternity block in the foreground

Of all the sports facilities, physical evidence remains on the Fields only of the golf course. But it is a dominant feature of the landscape. There are some older residents of Woodsmoor and Bramhall Moor who remember the times when the Mirrlees groundsman was master of the Fields, taking a pride in keeping the greens immaculate and children away from the course. Now, where there were small copses planted to separate holes and fairways, these have now become mature trees and shrubs lending the Fields a sense of a natural space that is no longer marshalled or manicured.

Notes

ⁱ The reference is contained in a land deed concerned with Sir John Ardern of Stockport granting the son of Robert del Brugge “a place of waste lying upon Snibbs Moor”ⁱ. A later document of 1577 mentions “Stoppport More, also called Snybbes More”

ⁱⁱ Clemesha, H. W. 1921 *New Court Book of the Manor of Bramhall, 1632-1657*, Chetham Society, NS 80. vol. iii.) A copy is held at Stockport Heritage Library

ⁱⁱⁱ *Bramhall Court Rolls 1716-32*, photocopy of transcript of originals. A copy is held at Stockport Heritage Library

^{iv} The ‘new house’ that became the name of the farm was built in 1668 replacing an older building thought to have belonged to a William Hall de Priestfield

^v The first William Leadbeater, a dairy farmer died in 1589. There were a further four more generations of the Leadbeaters at the farm before the last, Isaac, died in 1725. His inventory was witnessed by his neighbour, Jonathan Goulden of New House Farm.

^{vi} Coutie, H. 1989a *The Diary of Peter Pownall: a Bramhall Farmer 1765-1858*, Congleton, Old Vicarage Publications

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Annex 4

Active Travel Community Project – Project Brief

Name of Project	Mirrlees Fields Walking & Cycling For Health Project	Lead Officer Name & Contact Details	Jim Gilligan Secretary Mirrlees Fields Friends Group jimgilligan@hotmail.com
Name of Local Authority/Lead Body	Mirrlees Fields Friends Group (supported by Stockport Council)		Russ Boaler Consultant for Physical Education, Sport & Physical Activity
Location(s) of Project	Mirrlees Fields, Woodsmoor, Stockport		Services to People Town Hall Stockport SK1 3XE Tel: 0161 474 3941 Mob: 07891 949016 russ.boaler@stockport.gov.uk

<p>Project Summary <i>Include any criteria for engagement/involvement (or restrictions)</i></p>	<p>This is a multi-partner project and aims to establish: (i) a Health Walking Route of just over one mile in the heart of a densely-urbanised area of Stockport and adjacent to Stepping Hill Hospital and, (ii) improve a link within Stockport's wider cycling network that will be available to everyone regardless of cycling proficiency. The route will follow public rights of way, which are due to be up-graded. It is intended that this will cater for a range of people, including able-bodied workers seeking gentle lunch-time exercise, those undergoing therapy or rehabilitation at the hospital & provide a through route for those accessing the Newby Road Industrial Estate and Bramhall Moor Technology Park (ongoing work to upgrade the existing footpath to enable cycles, as well as pedestrians to use it, will also provide direct cycling access to the industrial estate & nearby housing development, so avoiding the A6).</p> <p>The project will also support the further development of the local Collaborative Practice (All Together Better) initiative. This programme commissioned by Stockport Together has developed coproduction between General Practice staff and patients of Bracondale Health Centre which is located close to Mirrlees Fields & will help establish a local walking group.</p> <p>Funding accessed through this grant will be used to provide bench seating (particularly important for older people, those with mobility restrictions & in/out patients undergoing rehabilitation using walking as a means to increase activity levels), signage - both motivational (including the health benefits of walking & cycling) & general route information, and the printing of water-resist maps.</p> <p>The Friends Group is fully constituted, has charitable objectives and is currently awaiting confirmation from HMRC of charitable status.</p> <p>The main Public Right of Way through Mirrlees has been shown on several editions of the published cycle map as a 'please walk your bike' link, meaning that it has not officially been a cycle route.</p> <p>This will change: a wide range of developer-funded improvements, complemented by the proposals of this Community Active Travel Project, will enhance conditions and network connectivity for both pedestrians and cyclists. Many nearby streets are lightly trafficked, and so potentially suitable to use for free cycle training for residents and others who may be described as 'intermediate level' cyclists, and walking and cycling events. It is anticipated that community supporters of the project may be interested in receiving TfGM's cycling and walking newsletter, signing up for cycle training, and any further relevant information.</p>
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<p>Costs <i>Provide a breakdown of all costs</i></p>	<p>5 x Natural bench seating @ £465 ex VAT each.</p> <p>8 x Lectern style low-level signs – approximate cost of £150 each</p> <p>Printing of initially 6000 A5 size water-resist maps at cost of £69 +VAT per 1000 copies</p> <p>Total £3939 + VAT</p> <p>NB: If successful, funding should be paid directly to Mirrlees Fields Friends Group</p>	<p>Funding <i>Provide details of all funding</i></p>	<p>Additional match funding to the development of the wider scheme include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £945 Stockport Grammar School Parents Teachers Association, Stockport School and Ladybrook Valley District Scouts • £2,125 MAN Diesel • £100 Stockport Hydro Environmental Fund • £950 Stockport Council • £600 via GoFundMe Appeal • Community events have generated £1100
<p>Outputs and Outcomes <i>Provide details of expected outputs and outcomes for the overall project</i></p>	<p>Increased numbers of patients walking (Stepping Hill Hospital & Bracondale Health Centre)</p> <p>Increased numbers of staff walking (Stepping Hill Hospital & Bracondale Health Centre)</p> <p>Improved health outcomes for targeted groups (anonymised data from Stepping Hill Hospital & Bracondale Health Centre)</p> <p>Increased number of walkers (general population)</p> <p>Increased number of cyclists (once bridleway upgrade is completed)</p>		
<p>Evaluation <i>Provide details of expected evaluation including method and timescales</i></p>	<p>Stepping Hill patient/staff use numbers – quarterly (Target – an average of 30 users per quarter)</p> <p>Walkers’ survey – Annually (Target 150 users)</p> <p>Usage figures through number of maps issued – quarterly (Target – an average of 100 maps issued per quarter)</p> <p>Bracondale Health Centre patient/staff use – Annually (Target 50 users)</p> <p>Mirrlees Fields Friends Group Facebook page survey – every 6 months (Target 100 users)</p> <p>Mirrlees Fields Friends Group Facebook page comments board – number of comments every 6 months with sample quotes (Target 100 positive user comments)</p>		

Exit Route <i>Provide details of how you expect benefits of project to be sustained</i>	Engagement in the wider Walking for Health Programme Access to the Stockport Walkaday Programme Individual/family walks Stockport/GM cycling network National Cycle Network –(62 & 85) Ramblers Association Age UK Walks Nordic Walking Active transport workplace and community schemes Stockport Cycle Users Group Support Stockport Actilife Programme
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