

Annex 3. Survey of Mirrlees Fields Users July - Sept 2017

Survey of Mirrlees Fields Users July – Sept 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 was 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,

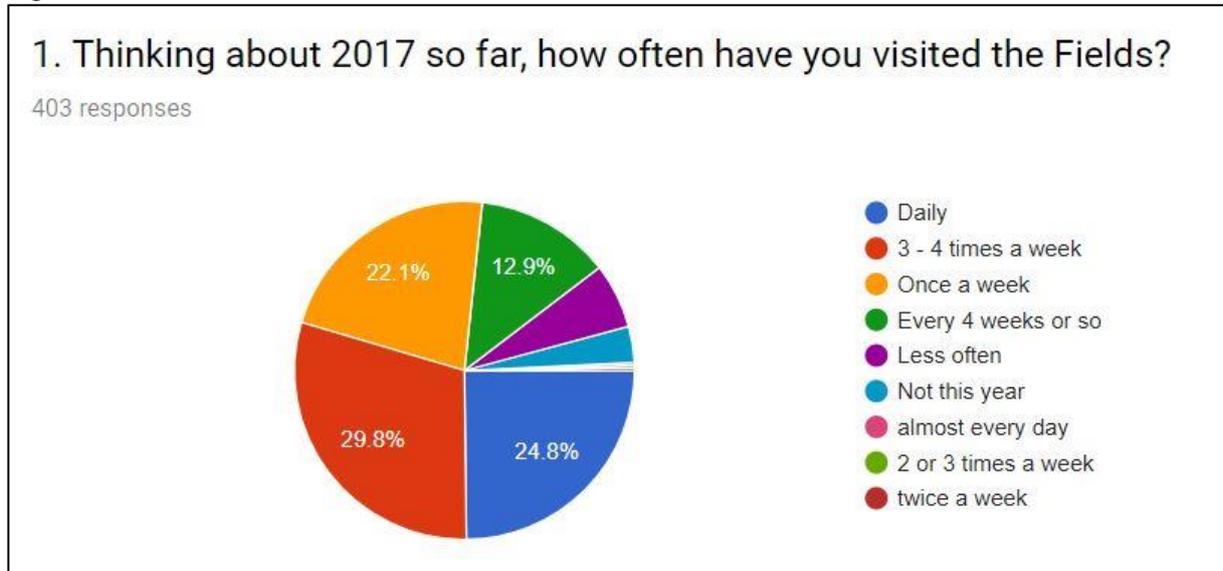
Also good to walk to Sainsburys but in a calming place.

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.

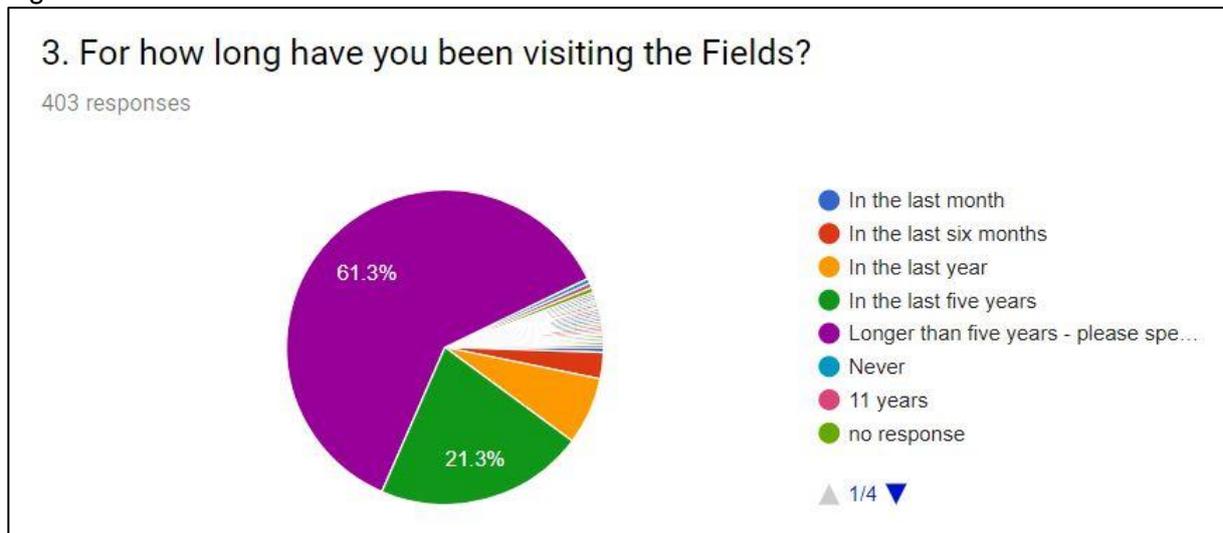
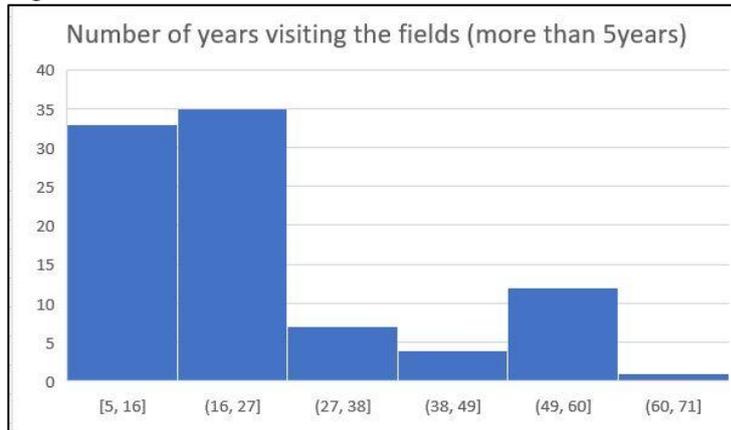


Figure 3.



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 ou 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.

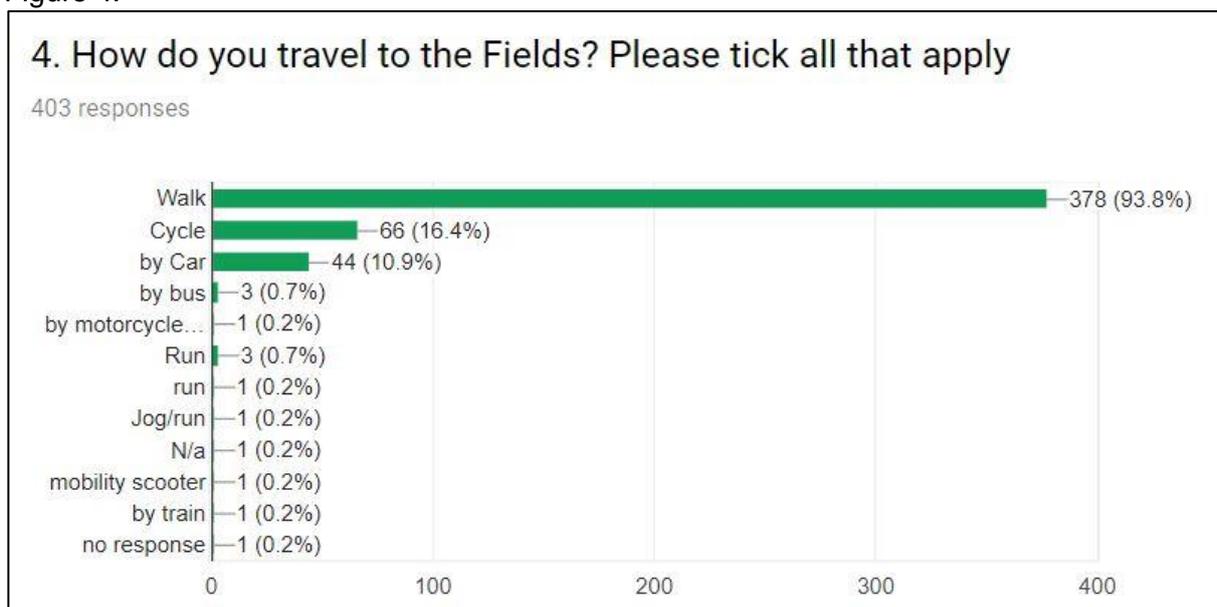
I have visited the fields for the past 8 years every day with my dog. I get great pleasure being out in the fresh air sometimes twice a day regardless of the weather. I have made many friends on my daily walks - two legged and four legged!

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?

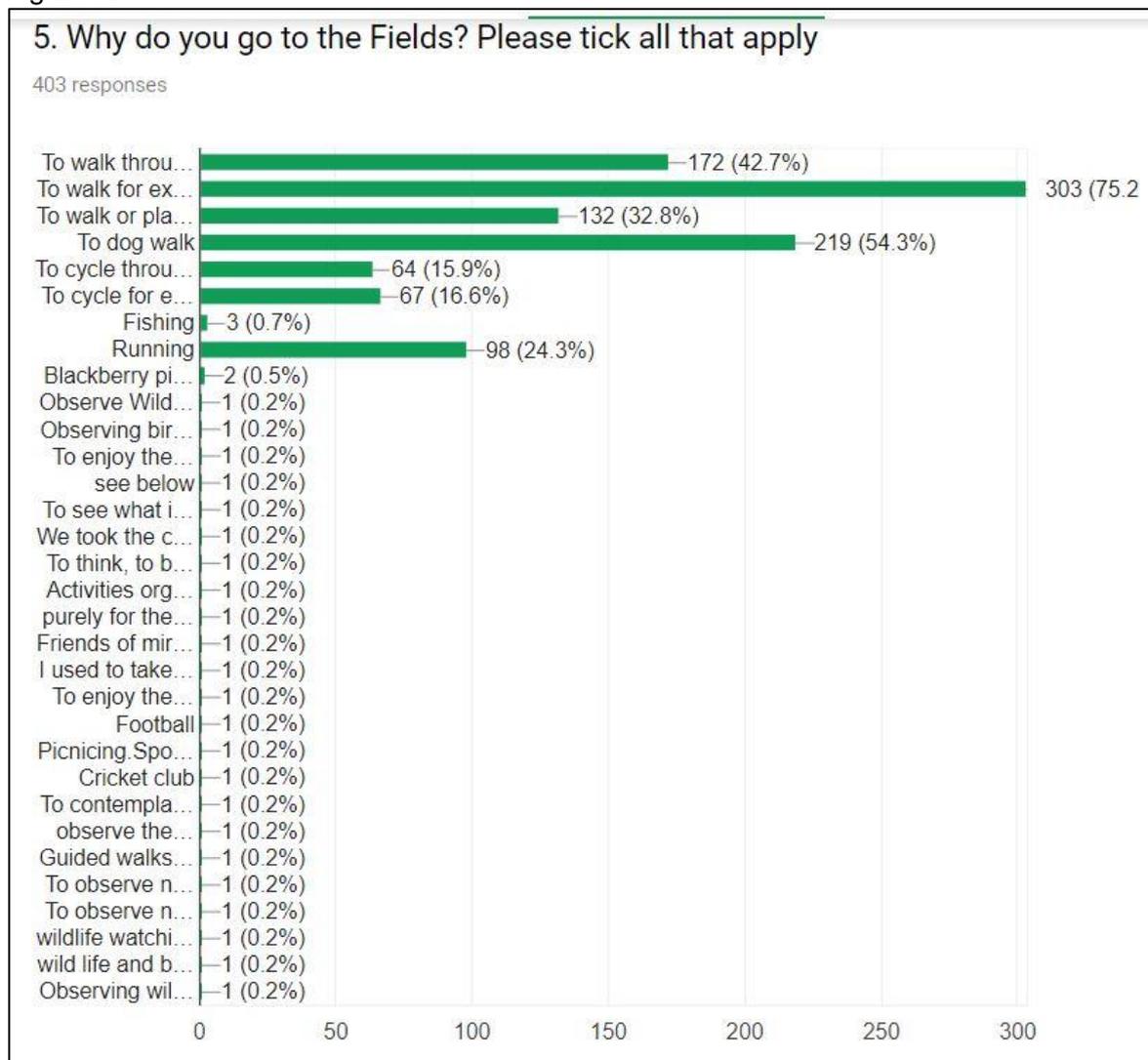
Many respondents indicated that they had multiple reasons for visiting the Fields. 54.3% are walking with a dog, but by far the biggest largest number of respondents (75.2%) cited 'To walk for exercise, relaxation, to be with friends' as a reason they visited the Fields.

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. sk2 Tee

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

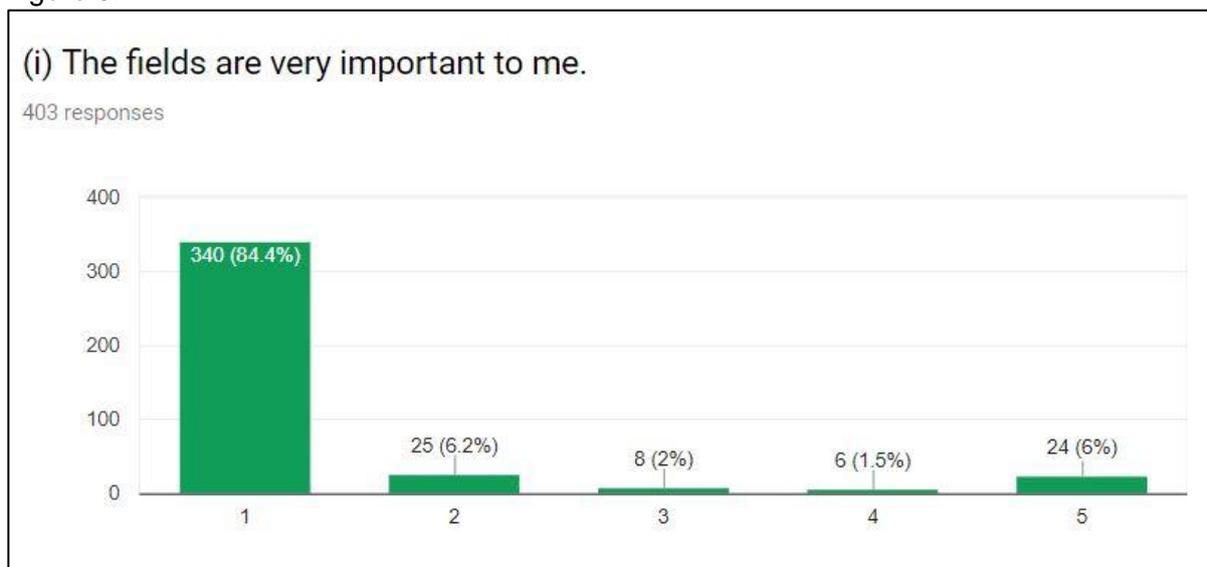
7. Value of the Fields

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 envi rent 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.

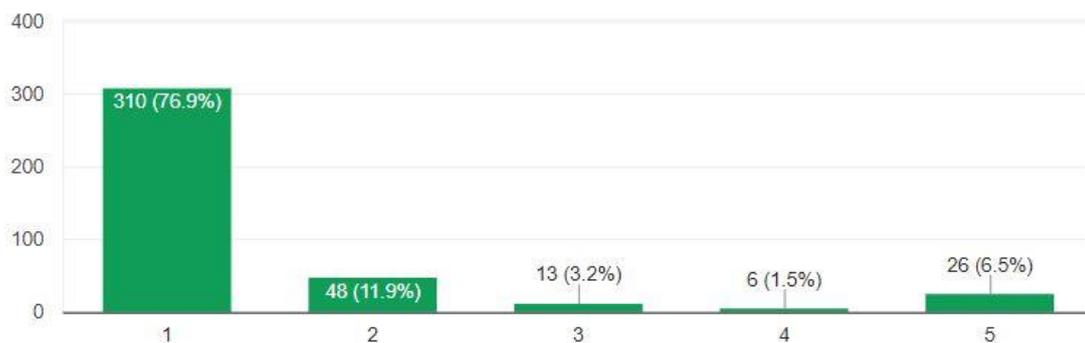
They are a unique space in the local area for recreation, relaxation and simply enjoying the natural environment. They also provide an amazing space for my young children to explore nature and play in a way that can't at home.

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.

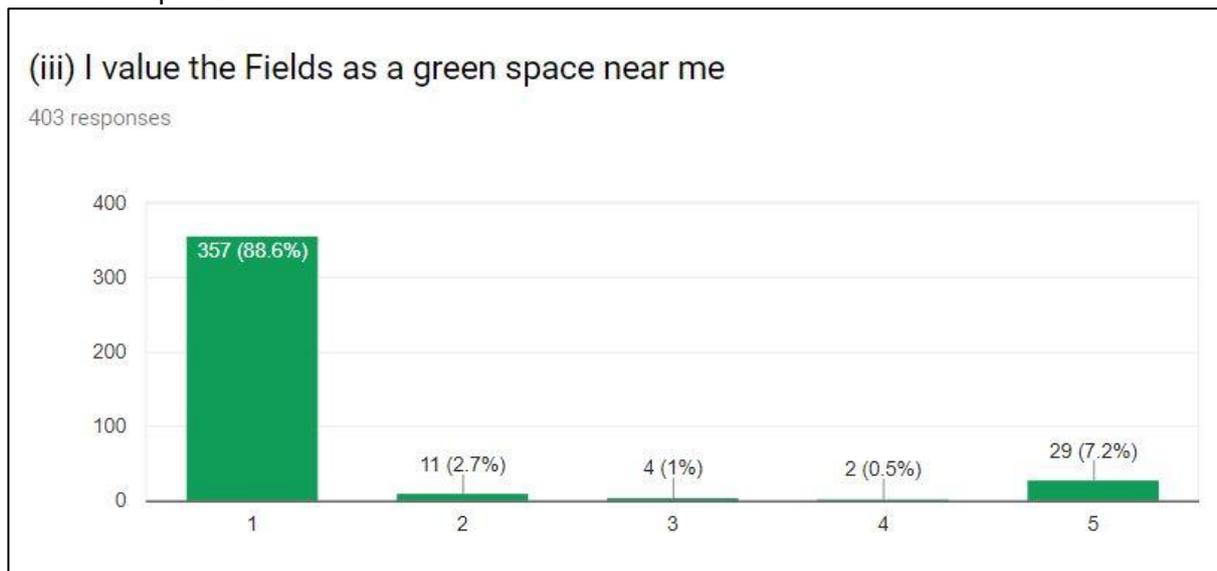
The fields are alive with wildlife and great to educate children

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.

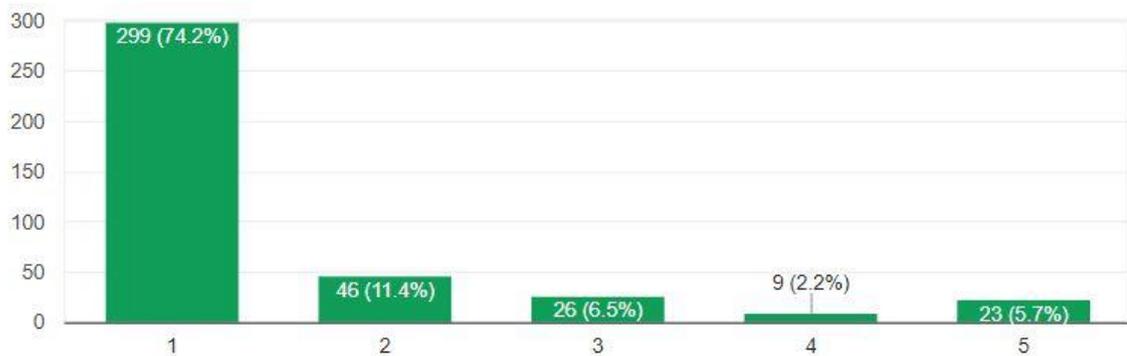
It is the nearest green space that feels like you can get away from it all. Safe to run and walk there friendly and community feel

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 piece 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 some time 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.

