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Good evening,

Following my response to your consultation document, I would like to elaborate further on why the Wincheap orchards/ Merton Park is so important to us as a community.

It was during the lockdown period that the orchard and surrounding fields became such a lifesaver in terms of our mental health and wellbeing as a family. I know that we are not alone in this. Both of our children have autism and during these periods had significant mental health challenges, leading to one of our daughters becoming selectively mute and out of education for 3 years. The orchard was a safe haven for our oldest daughter in particular, who would regularly retreat there when home school became too much. As a parent, I also found the need to escape there from time to time, as the challenges of parenting in such difficult circumstances were overwhelming at certain points. This was the only green space near to home, that we could access at that time within the hour allowed.

Merton park continues to be of huge importance to our family in terms of wellbeing, exercise and meeting with others from our community. Like many others, I have a demanding full-time job which can make exercise and relaxation a challenge to fit in. Being so close to our house makes it much easier for me to fit in a weekly run - around the perimeter of the area which is under threat, from the orchards, up to the rugby ground and back on the path parallel to the A2. My daughter also goes there almost daily, to walk and birdwatch and will ask me at times to join her.

Depriving our community of our only green space would be of huge detriment to our sense of community and wellbeing. It would decimate our community of dog walkers, runners and walkers and have a significant impact on not just our health and wellbeing but the network of relationships which hold our community together.

I also know that it would most significantly impact the children in our community who need our only green space to thrive, be active and develop, away from screens. I also understand that it is of great importance to Wincheap primary school children and the children from our local Special needs school, St Nicholas. It is here that our children can learn about the benefits of nature and how to respect it and to live an active life outdoors.

The biodiversity of this area is without parallel in Canterbury (other than the wetlands) It provides a habitat for at least 38 species of bird, 11 of which are on the amber list and 12 of whom are on the red list - including migratory birds such as the Eurasian skylark. The complete decimation of this ecosystem cannot be justified - which is what would happen if the local plan was implemented.

Best wishes
Olivia Cunnington