

## Tom Hawkes

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**From:** Abigail Stavroulakis-McMahon [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 20 October 2025 17:34  
**To:** Consultations  
**Subject:** Formal objection to the proposed Merton Park development on Wincheap Orchards and Fields

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### --Email From External Account--

Dear Councillors at Canterbury City Council,

(The following is sent on behalf of David Lindo)

I am writing to express my strong objection to the proposed Merton Park development, which would see around 2,000 houses built across the Wincheap orchards, fields, and playing field.

As a broadcaster, writer, and naturalist - known as The Urban Birder - I have dedicated my career to connecting people with the nature that thrives, often unnoticed, in the UK's towns and cities. I have seen first-hand how urban wildlife can flourish when given space to coexist alongside people. I have also seen how quickly it vanishes when those spaces are destroyed. Most importantly, are the benefits to the mental health of the local people will suffer if this site were to be destroyed.

**I am deeply concerned that what is being proposed in Wincheap is the eradication of a thriving and irreplaceable ecosystem.**

The Wincheap orchards and fields are a living, breathing habitat. It is an intricate patchwork of fruit trees, hedgerows, open grass, and scrub that provides food, shelter, and breeding sites for an astonishing variety of birds and other wildlife.

Many bird species have been recorded there by local observer Bethany Cunnington, who has meticulously logged and photographed each sighting. Among them are **numerous species on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern, the UK's highest category of threat.**

Red-listed species include; European Greenfinch, Eurasian Skylark, Common Starling, Yellowhammer, Spotted Flycatcher, Fieldfare, Common Linnet, Cetti's Warbler, Herring Gull, House Martin and House Sparrow. These are all species whose populations have plummeted nationally in recent decades.

In short, **the site is a sanctuary for birds struggling to survive elsewhere.**

If the development proceeds, the result will be total habitat destruction. The complex web of food sources, nesting cavities, and microhabitats that have built up over decades cannot simply be recreated. **Once the bulldozers move in, the birds will not return.** Nor will the bats, insects, or small mammals that depend on this space. **It will be a permanent and irreversible loss.**

**I am also deeply concerned from a national perspective.** The UK is already among the most nature-depleted countries in the world. At a time when local authorities are being urged under the Environment Act 2021 to protect and enhance biodiversity, this proposal does the opposite.

Despite its modest size, **this patch of land holds national significance.** Spaces like the Wincheap orchards are becoming vanishingly rare in Britain. There are fewer and fewer fragments of semi-natural habitat that continue to support red and amber-listed birds whose populations have collapsed across the country.

**Protecting Wincheap is a contribution to the broader effort to halt biodiversity loss across the UK.** To sacrifice such a site would be to undermine national conservation priorities at the very moment we can least afford it.

**I therefore urge Canterbury City Council to:**

- Halt or significantly reduce the scale of the Merton Park development.
- Commission a full independent ecological assessment, including breeding bird surveys, before any decisions are made.
- Designate the Wincheap orchards and surrounding land as a *Local Wildlife Site* or *Community Nature Reserve*.
- Engage local conservationists, schools, and residents in developing a management plan that enhances biodiversity and community access rather than erasing it.

As someone who has spent years championing urban wildlife plus as a Patron of the Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory, I implore Canterbury Council to reconsider this development, to look beyond short-term gains, and to recognise the long-term ecological value of this land.

Once it is gone, it is gone for good.

Yours Sincerely,

David Lindo

*The Urban Birder*

Broadcaster | Writer | Naturalist | Photographer | Conservationist