

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to register my strong opposition to the proposed development of approximately 1,930 new dwellings on Site N1 in Canterbury, a site which includes historic orchards, open fields, and a playing field. This proposal represents not only an overdevelopment of the area but a severe and permanent loss of green space and biodiversity that cannot be replaced.

These sites are far more than undeveloped land — they form a unique mosaic of habitats that have evolved over decades and now support rare and declining wildlife. The Wincheap orchards, in particular, represent a habitat type that is becoming increasingly scarce in the UK. Traditional orchards remain recognised as a Habitat of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006¹. Research has shown that even small orchard sites can host over 1,800 species of plants, fungi, invertebrates and vertebrates (for example one Worcestershire survey found 1,868 species across just 5.39 hectares)².

The Wincheap orchards are no different; they support a rich and diverse web of life, including pollinators, insects, mammals, fungi, and, crucially, birds of conservation concern. I myself have seen, as have others:

- **Eurasian skylarks** (*Alauda arvensis*): a **Red List** species under the Birds of Conservation Concern in the UK, reflecting a severe population decline. Skylarks require open grassland to breed, and their ground nests are particularly vulnerable to habitat loss and fragmentation.³ Their presence here is a sign of a rare, healthy ecosystem.
- **Kestrels** (*Falco tinnunculus*): also on the **Red list**,⁴ kestrels have been recorded nesting in the area. Nesting kestrels are a strong indicator of sufficient prey (small mammals and invertebrates) and minimal human disturbance, both of which are likely to be lost under large-scale development.
- **Sparrowhawks** (*Accipiter nisus*) and **red kites** (*Milvus milvus*): both species are active in the area. While red kite numbers have recovered in parts of the UK, their presence in urban fringe ecosystems like this one is still relatively unusual and ecologically valuable. Like kestrels, these raptors depend on a robust food chain, meaning their continued presence is a sign of rich biodiversity.
- **Many, many more species of not only birds, but mammals, amphibians, insects, plants and fungi.**

The permanent destruction of this green corridor, which currently provides vital foraging, nesting, and breeding habitat, would be a major ecological loss. Once gone, these habitats and the species they support will not return.

Beyond biodiversity, these green spaces are vital for health and wellbeing. The orchards and fields provide a vital sanctuary for local residents of all ages, myself included, who rely on these areas daily for recreation, relaxation, and a much-needed connection to nature. We live in an urban setting

¹ Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/habitats-and-species-of-principal-importance-in-england> and <https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/4b6ddab7-6c0f-4407-946e-d6499f19fcde/priority-habitats-inventory-england>

² Source: <https://www.suffolkbis.org.uk/habitat/orchards>

³ Source: <https://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/wildlife-explorer/birds/larks-sparrows-pipits-wagtails-and-dunnock/skylark>

⁴ source: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/birds/birds-prey/kestrel>

where accessible green spaces are increasingly rare, and the loss of these orchards and fields would be a profound blow to quality of life, mental health and wellbeing. The cognitive and emotional benefits associated with exposure to natural environments, particularly green and blue space, is backed up by extensive bodies of research.⁵ On a personal note, I work from home and spend most of my time at my desk, I cannot stress how important it is for me and my sanity to have that break in nature.

In addition, the scale of the proposed development is far beyond what local infrastructure can responsibly support. Roads, schools, healthcare, and even the drainage systems are already at or near capacity and the proposed plan does not sufficiently address how these will be adapted to meet a sudden population increase. The traffic in Wincheap is notorious as it is, adding an additional 2000, if not more, vehicles is not going to improve anything.

In light of the above, I respectfully urge the council to:

1. Preserve our traditional orchards and surrounding fields, recognising their irreplaceable value to both wildlife and residents.
2. Reconsider or at least significantly reduce the scale of the proposed development in line with what the area can sustainably absorb.
3. Provide transparent and detailed plans outlining how essential infrastructure will be upgraded to meet any increased demand.
4. Ensure that future development is shaped with the genuine involvement of the local community and reflects **a real, measurable commitment to ecological protection, climate resilience, and green space preservation.**

This is not an objection to the principle of housing but a call for responsible, sustainable planning that acknowledges the ecological and social value of what is at stake. Once these habitats are lost, they are gone forever along with the rare species they support and the essential public benefits they provide.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge the council to take these concerns seriously in the interest of protecting both the natural environment and the character of our community.

Yours sincerely,

Freya Claes



⁵ Source: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/nature-how-connecting-nature-benefits-our-mental-health> and <https://nhsforest.org/blog/news/space-to-breathe-study-shows-value-of-nhs-green-space-for-staff-wellbeing/>