

**From:**  
**To:** [Future Merton](#)  
**Subject:** Comment on proposed local plan  
**Date:** 21 March 2024 12:42:25

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Hello

I'm a resident of Cannon Hill ward, a nature enthusiast and a near daily user of Morden Park. I have the following comment relating to the park. In short, I think the local plan should extend the SINC designation to the WHOLE of the park and not merely part. There is a compelling argument to protect the increasing biodiversity of the part of the park that is not currently protected (ie, the remainder of the former playing fields in the north east of the park)

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The proposed local plan acknowledges that Morden Park is a Borough Grade 1 listed Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, a local nature reserve and falls within Metropolitan Open Land. It's also described as a green corridor. The plan proposes a slight boundary change to the MOL within Morden Park as a result of the demolition and rebuild of the leisure centre.

It does not, however, respond to or acknowledge the recommendation of the Borough Council's 2020 Green and Blue Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Open Space Study that the Site of Importance for Nature Conservation that encompasses most of Morden Park be extended to include the eastern portion of the park, thus finally containing the whole of what was at one time used as playing fields.

There are compelling arguments for extending the SINC thus, as the study itself acknowledges: the park plays a vitally important role in strengthening the biodiversity and ecological resilience of the borough. Despite this part of the park being frequently referred to as 'neutral grassland', it is in fact an extremely rich habitat that supports a range of species. The grasses in the former playing field are a particularly diverse mix and when allowed to grow long in summer provide good habitat for insects, particularly butterflies.

For a start, around half of the UK's butterfly species have been recorded in Morden Park and a growing number breed and feed in this specific part of the park that is unprotected (eg, the Brown Argus, which is pretty unusual in this part of the world). The rough grassland provides a valuable hunting ground for the park's kestrels and their young, which they teach to hunt in the former playing field. At certain times of the year, kestrels are a frequent sight above this field and its adjoining treelines (they particularly like the treeline

separating the former playing field from the field beside the A24 that is still used for sport)

More recently, a pair of hobbies has taken to breeding and hunting in this general area of the park. It's likely that the proximity of the two fenced off ponds are the major draw (there seems to be a growing population of dragonflies/damselflies in the park) and it's possible that the new scrape alongside the new leisure centre may provide a breeding ground for the insects that hobbies enjoy.

In the last year to 18 months, Morden Park's badger population has moved into wooded areas next to the former playing field and badger tracks can be clearly seen going through this part of the park, from the treeline at the Hillcross Avenue end to the scrape beside the leisure centre. There is plenty of evidence of the badgers foraging in the part of the field that is not protected by a SINC and in and around the scrape.

A growing population of greenfinch inhabit the area around the Hillcross Avenue entrance into the park and they are spreading out. Greenfinch have experienced a population collapse in recent decades and are now considered endangered in the UK. Five years ago there were perhaps one or two pairs in the park. Now there are dozens. It's a major success story.

It's also highly likely that there's a healthy and diverse bat population that will feed on the insects breeding and living in the rich mix of grasses in the former playing field. And I haven't even mentioned moths...

It is absolutely worth commissioning surveys to establish the extent of the park's biodiversity, with a particular focus on the lesser observed species such as bats and moths which are very likely highly reliant on the long grasses that are allowed to grow during the summer.

There's a compelling case for incorporating the whole of the park into the SINC and embarking on biodiversity improvements to what is already a surprisingly biodiverse space. Morden Park is absolutely a hub of biodiversity and every bit of it should be protected for this reason, and improved where possible. The local plan should, in my view, extend nature protections to the entire park, rather than leaving part of it exposed to potential alternative uses (such as playing fields, which would cause considerable damage to the biodiversity that is founded on the grasses in the park).

Please consider my thoughts!