

Healthy Place

Green Space

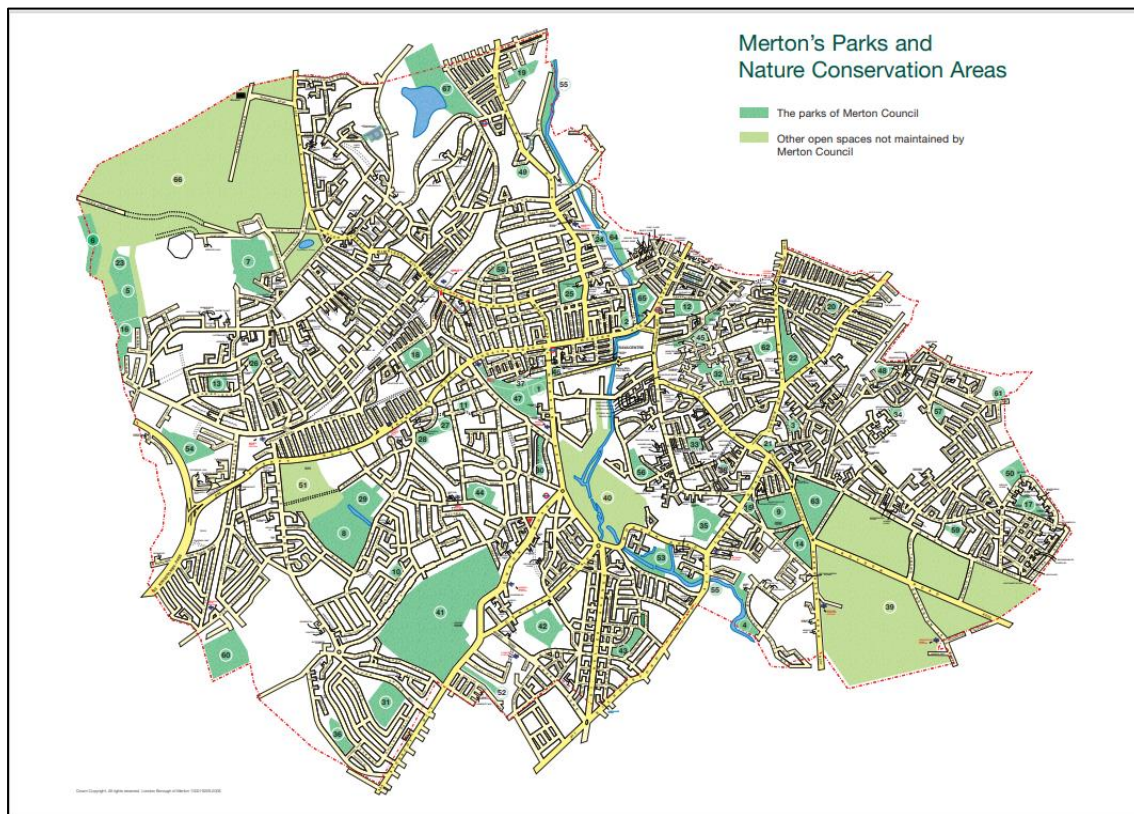
Green space

Green spaces are environments where you can find nature thriving. Green spaces come in many forms such as parks, urban orchards, cemeteries, woodlands, private gardens, allotments. Another common term used is green infrastructure – which refers to the network of greenspace that collectively improves the livability of urban places by providing protection from the elements and an atmosphere to improve our health and wellbeing. Green space can lower ambient temperatures locally, as do water features which may be referred to as blue infrastructure¹. Collectively this infrastructure plays a critical role in the health of the local population to access outdoor spaces for recreation, growing fresh local food supplies and absorbing pollution from the atmosphere. In 2017, the conservatively calculated benefit of Merton’s major greenspaces value to its residents is avoided healthcare costs (£464m), access to recreation activities (£453m), carbon sequestration (£5m), temperature regulation (£14m) and property value (£1.62bn), or £657 per year to each resident².

Merton’s Types of Green Space

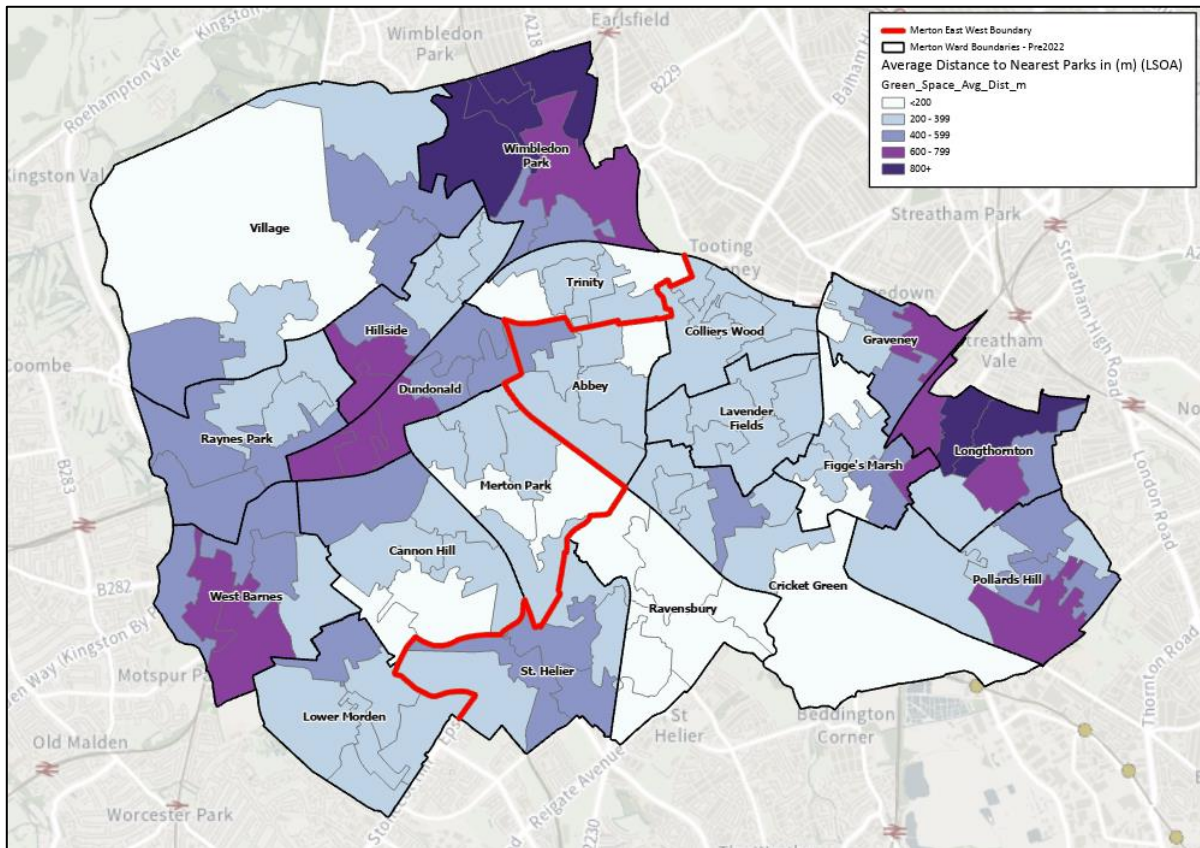
Merton’s Green and Blue Infrastructure Technical Report showed that private domestic gardens are the dominant type of green and blue infrastructure, at over 25% of the borough³, followed by outdoor sports facilities and grassland, heathland or scrubland, which together account for over 20% of the borough (Figure 1. Additionally, there are fourteen major woodlands, green corridors along the railways, and a range of other natural features. Of London’s 32 borough’s Merton has one of the highest proportions of greenspace⁴.

Figure 1: Parks and conservation areas in Merton, local data.



Data also shows 22.4% of Merton residents live within 500m of woodland two hectares or larger, compared with 11.9% of London residents⁴. In Merton, the average distance to a park/public garden is 390m (less than 5 minutes away). However, this varies across the borough, with the average distance to a green space varying from just around the corner (182m) to a 10-minute walk away (818m) across Merton (Figure 2)⁵.

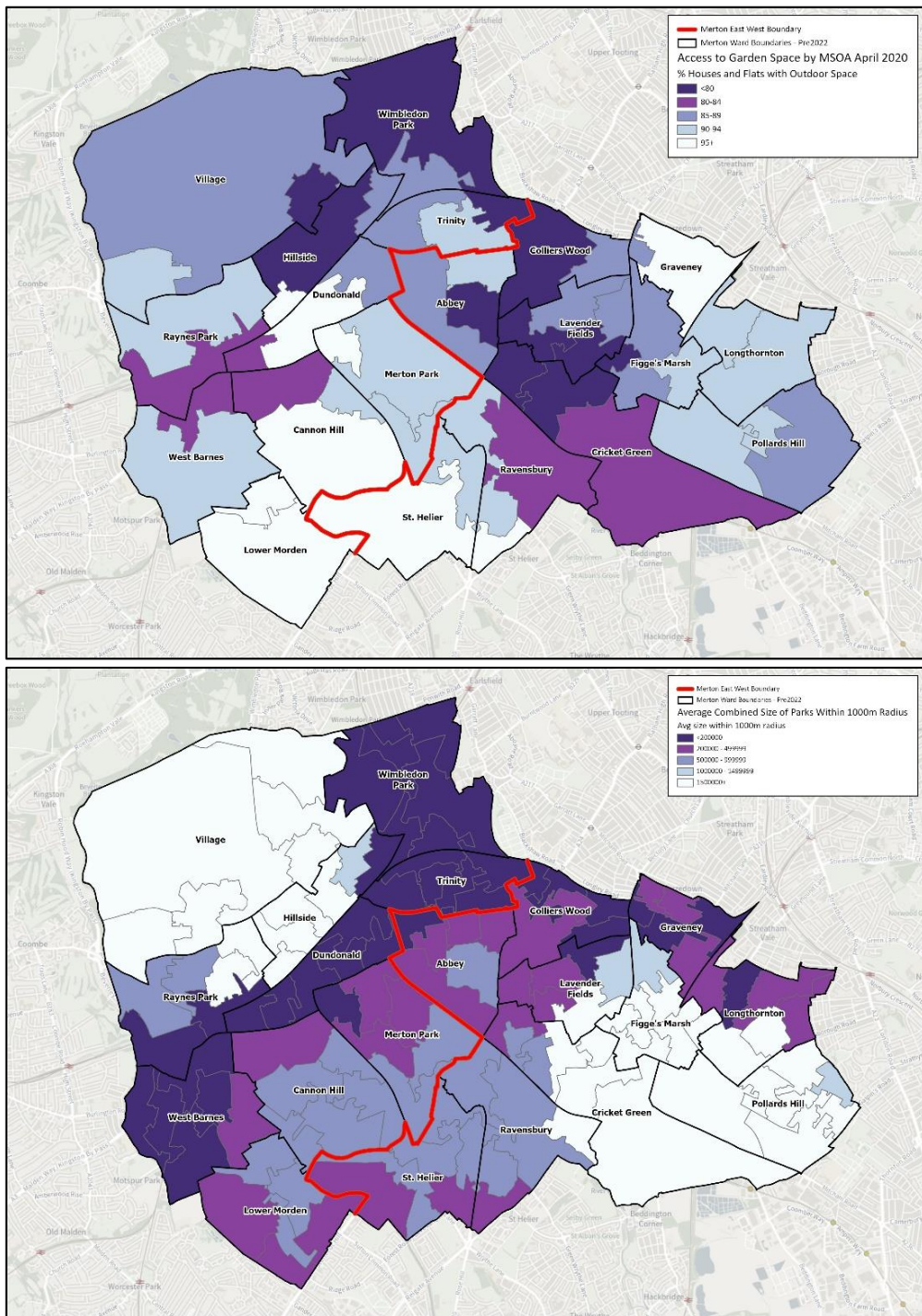
Figure 2: Average distance (m) to nearest parks in Merton by LSOA, 2020. Source, ONS⁵. Please note: The ONS have only included parks in the analysis. For example, Wimbledon Park has been defined by ONS as a Sports facility and not a park as the primary use of the area. ONS analysis does not include: Allotments/Community Growing Spaces, Bowling Greens, Cemeteries, Religious grounds, Golf courses, Playing Spaces & Fields and Tennis Courts. The analysis looks at the distance from postcode to the nearest access point and only includes postcodes that fall within a built up area (urban) and also parks outside the Merton boundary.



Green space is not provided equally across the borough⁶, and where it is lacking it increases the threat of heat island affect where the atmosphere overheats in summer, or floods in summer. In Merton neighbourhoods vulnerable to the 'heat island effect' contain what is classified as greenspace but with few trees and high concentration of grass, surrounded by traffic prioritised environments. Increasing tree cover would improve public health⁷.

The maps (Figure 3) below illustrate the inequalities in access to garden space and in the amount of park space available within 1000m. There are several wards with high access to garden space (Graveney, Cannon Hill, Lower Morden, St Helier and Dundonald⁸).

Figure 3: Access to garden space and average combined size of parks within 1000m, as of April 2020, adapted from ONS⁸.



Service User and Resident Views

The majority of residents report valuing local green spaces more as a result of the pandemic and feel that tackling climate change is important⁹.

Recommendations for future data collection or analysis:

Overlaying maps of access to green space with transport routes, climate risk and health inequalities will identify where gaps in access exist, to enable investment to be directed where it is needed most.

Further Information:

- Transport and air pollution Merton Story 2022 sub-chapter
- [Merton Green and Blue Infrastructure Study](#)

References:

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- ¹ What is Green Infrastructure? [Internet]. Town and Country Planning Association. [cited 30 September 2022]. Available from: <https://tcpa.org.uk/what-is-green-infrastructure/>
- ² London Borough of Merton. Green and blue infrastructure, biodiversity and open space study [Internet]. The Environment Partnership; 2020. [cited 9 December 2022]. Available from: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/system/files?file=1.20giboss20summary20report.pdf>
- ³ O'Reilly J. Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Open Space Study - London Borough of Merton - Green and Blue Infrastructure Technical Report [Internet]. Merton Council. 2019 [cited 30 September 2022]. Available from: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/system/files?file=4.20gbi20report.pdf>
- ⁴ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Public health profiles [Internet]. Fingertips. [cited 30 September 2022]. Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/woodland#page/4/gid/1/pat/6/ati/402/are/E09000024/iid/92814/age/1/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yrr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>
- ⁵ Access to public green space in Great Britain [Internet]. Office for National Statistics. 2021 [cited 30 September 2022]. Available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/datasets/accesstopublicgreenspaceingreatbritain>
- ⁶ O'Reilly J. Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Open Space Study - London Borough of Merton - Green and Blue Infrastructure Technical Report [Internet]. Merton Council. 2019 [cited 30 September 2022]. Available from: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/system/files?file=4.20gbi20report.pdf>
- ⁷ Using Trees and Vegetation to Reduce Heat Islands [Internet]. Environmental Protection Agency; 2022 [cited 16 December 2022]. Available from: <https://www.epa.gov/heatislands/using-trees-and-vegetation-reduce-heat-islands>
- ⁸ Access to gardens and public green space in Great Britain [Internet]. Office for National Statistics. 2020 [cited 30 September 2022]. Available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/datasets/accesstogardensandpublicgreenspaceingreatbritain>
- ⁹ London Borough of Merton: residents' Survey 2021 [Internet]. Merton Council. 2021 [cited 30 September 2022]. Available from: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/system/files?file=202120residents20survey20report.pdf>