



Air Quality Handbook

11 simple steps to save money,
stay healthy, and improve
Merton's air quality

Let's #BreatheCleanerAir together!



Introduction

First things first, what do we mean when we talk about air pollution?

In the UK the most common harmful pollutants found in the air we breathe are particulate matter (PM), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), Ozone (O₃), Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) and Carbon Monoxide (CO). The root causes of all of these pollutants are generally linked to combustion and fuel burning, generation of power, and road traffic.

Source: <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/air-pollution/types>

Source: <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/air-pollution/effects>

In January 2021 a study commissioned by City Hall and carried out by Imperial College London found that 99% of London exceeds WHO's recommended limits for particulate matter in the air. Even more concerning, the study found that air pollution contributed to the deaths of more than 4,000 Londoners in 2019.

Source: <https://airqualitynews.com/2021/01/25/99-of-london-exceeds-who-air-pollution-limits/>

Taking action to improve air quality is easy and can lead to a healthier, happier life

In this handbook, we've compiled some of the easiest things you can do to improve the air quality in your home, your local area, throughout Merton and beyond!

By taking these simple steps you'll not only be breathing safer and cleaner air, you'll be helping to reduce the emission of harmful pollutants into the atmosphere. When it comes to air quality everything is linked - cleaner air leads to healthier people and an all-round healthier environment. A few actions are all it takes to make a huge difference and make things better on all fronts for people and for the planet.

Learn more about the simple steps you can take to improve air quality here and take our **#BreatheCleanerAir** pledge today!

So why is air pollution such a big problem for human health?

Simply put, breathing in harmful gases irritates the lungs and airways. Imagine you're walking down a grid-locked main road at rush hour and breathing in all the exhaust fumes - would it leave you uncomfortable and short of breath? Now imagine the damage those harmful gases and pollutants do when they build up over time, even when you don't realise you're breathing them in. Particulate matter is especially bad for the respiratory system, as the particles can get lodged deep in your lung tissue. You'll often see the signifier PM followed by a number, usually 2.5 or 10, which symbolises the minute size of the particles.

For example, PM10 refers to particles that are just 10 microns, or 0.001 millimetres in size. To put that into perspective the width of a human hair is around 50-70 microns. The smallest of these fine particles can even pass through cell walls and your bloodstream. Studies have long shown that exposure to air pollution can lead to a higher risk of cancer, lung disease and diminished cognitive skills in later life, as well as an increase in hospital admissions for people with lung and heart conditions.

Air pollution impacts the environment too. From global warming and the greenhouse effect to acid rain and smog, the consequences of the constant release of gases into the atmosphere are vast. Ultimately, these factors all cause damage to the Earth's surface, contaminating water that in turn damages ecosystems and natural habitats. Climate change, rising sea levels, and even the extinction of animal species can all be traced back to air pollution.

While it has traditionally been assumed that the risks mentioned above increase over time and with ongoing exposure to air pollution, a recent study from Nottingham Trent University has discovered the real-time effects of PM2.5 on heart rate variability, electrodermal activity and mental wellbeing.

Source:

<https://airqualitynews.com/2021/02/24/real-time-environmental-changes-impacts-mental-wellbeing/>

More than anything this study shows the importance of acting now to improve the air we breathe - both for our own health and for the world around us.

Get a free air quality report for your neighbourhood today at [addresspollution.org](https://www.addresspollution.org).

Find out more about [Clean Air Day](#) and Sustainable Merton's [Air Quality work](#).



Hayley, Sustainable Merton supporter and founder of [@safe_space_fitness](#)

11 Simple Steps to #BreatheCleanerAir Together!

Step 1: Clean the green way at home (p.4)

Step 2: Green your home (p.5)

Step 3: Improve air circulation (p.6)

Step 4: Walk your way to happiness (p.7)

Step 5: Get on your bike (p.9)

Step 6: Don't be fuelish (p.14)

Step 7: Try carpooling (p.16)

Step 8: Go electric (p.17)

Step 9: Experience the tree-mendous benefits of greening (p.19)

Step 10: Reap the wellbeing benefits of green spaces (p.22)

Step 11: Get involved! (p.24)



Step 1: Clean the green way at home



Use non-toxic and non-chemical cleaning products in the home

We've all spent hours spring-cleaning only to end up feeling nauseous, lightheaded, or with an itchy throat and lungs. These symptoms needn't be a necessary side-effect of a clean house though, and by using natural cleaning products you'll avoid breathing in all those toxic vapours. Ditching the chemicals can also reduce symptoms of irritation or allergy - from itchy skin and watery eyes to wheezing, sneezing, and even congestion. Children and pets can be especially sensitive to chemicals so you'll be doing your loved ones a favour too.

Remember that everything that goes down your sink ends up in the sea, so you'll be helping to save our oceans too!

But surely cleaning products need to contain chemicals to do their job, right? Wrong. Non-toxic cleaners are just as effective in cleaning your home and leave no toxic residue for you to breathe in or get all over your skin. In addition, natural cleaning products are often more cost-effective and go a lot further than their chemical counterparts. You can even make your own multi-purpose cleaners at home. Household staples such as bicarb and vinegar are endlessly versatile, and for more intense cleaning stock up on some castile soap - perfect for cleaning countertops, floors, and just about anything else!

Easy all-purpose surface cleaner

Mix equal parts water and white vinegar, then slice 1-2 lemons and leave the slices to soak in the mixture overnight. Drain the liquid into a recycled or reusable spray bottle and enjoy your fresh-smelling, toxin-free countertops!

The internet is awash with 'top 10' product lists, with suggestions for all budgets and preferences. Whether you want plastic-free bulk-buys or pet-safe and skin-friendly, there's a whole range of products out there. It might take a little research to find the one that's right for you, but as a starting point here is [Country Living top 20 Chemical-free cleaners](#)



Step 2: Green your home



Green your home with air-purifying plants

There's nothing like getting outdoors and enjoying Merton's many public green spaces, so why not brighten up your home and outdoor areas with some greenery of your own? We all know trees are vital for absorbing carbon dioxide from the air we breathe outside, but did you know that the air quality in our homes can be more than 3 times worse than outdoors?

Source:

<https://airqualitynews.com/2019/05/15/uk-homes-toxic-boxes-due-to-indoor-air-pollution/>

The good news is that many houseplants are said to be air-purifying, removing common pollutants and improving indoor air quality by as much as 75%. With fresher air to breathe and something nice to look at, studies have shown that Brits feel calmer, clear-headed and more productive with an indoor plant or two around.

Source: <https://hubpublishing.co.uk/plant-power-over-half-the-nation-states-that-plants-make-them-happier/>

So where to begin with your own home or garden oasis? **Country Life's list** of the 10 best air-purifying plants will give you some ideas to take along to one of our great local garden centres.

Don't worry if you're not the most green-fingered person around - check out **Patch Plants' list** of 'Almost' Unkillable houseplants for suggestions of easy to maintain plant species

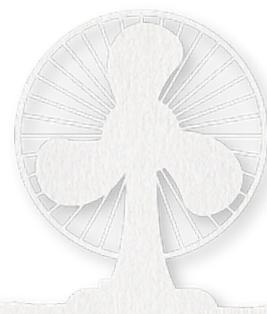
The **Royal Horticultural Society** also offers these top tips for looking after house plants

Before you know it you'll be reaping the benefits of fresher air in your home, and a smile on your face whenever a new leaf unfurls!

Get involved with Sustainable Merton's **community gardening groups** to learn more about plants and bring your green fingers to life!

Plants and trees on private property can make a positive impact on the communities' air quality too. Whether you've got space to nurture a carbon-absorbing conifer in your front garden, or just enough room for a window box and a few plant pots on your balcony or window ledge, every bit helps. This **article** from Permaculture has some more information on how to make the most of greening your outdoor spaces, no matter how big or small.

Step 3: Improve air circulation



Improve air circulation in your home - open windows regularly, use extractor fans when cooking, and be sure to ventilate when cleaning

Cleaning products, heating and cooking, tobacco smoke and even building materials can all contribute to particulate matter that affects the air you breathe in your home.

Find out more [here](#).

Add poor ventilation to the mix and this potentially harmful air has nowhere to go, leading to bad smells, lingering fumes, and in the worst of cases, problems with damp and mould.

The average person breathes in around 12,000 litres of air a day - make sure the air you're breathing at home is clean and fresh!

The easiest way to ventilate your home is simply by opening the windows! While it might seem counter-productive during the winter when you want to keep your home warm, a quick 10 minutes daily with the windows open will pay dividends in allowing fresh air to travel through the building. If your windows have vents, leave them open. They will make little difference to the heating levels in your home but will give stale air

the chance to escape and allow fresh air to get in. It's especially important to open the windows in the kitchen when you're cooking dinner, in the bathroom when you're having a bath or shower, and in any rooms when you're using cleaning products. Ensure that you keep the door to the room closed, as this will keep the cooler air in and stop steamy air from causing condensation problems in the rest of your home.

Another easy fix is to keep the internal doors of your home open throughout the day (except when cooking or cleaning, as above) to allow the air to flow freely from room to room. Ceiling fans and even desk fans are also great at keeping the air moving, so don't save them just for the summer! Counter-intuitively, fans can actually save you money on central heating costs by circulating the warm air around the room and preventing it from simply rising to the ceiling.

Finally, make sure you have extractor fans above the kitchen hob and in the bathroom. Use them whenever you're cooking or bathing, and if it's particularly steamy don't be afraid to leave them on for another 10 minutes after you've finished!



Step 4: Walk your way to happiness



Did you know that the health benefits of walking and cycling outweigh the negative health effects of air pollution? This holds true even in cities with high levels of air pollution!

Ditch the drive

According to a study commissioned by Sustrans, 68% of UK trips undertaken are under 5 miles and 19% of trips are less than 1 mile. Many of these trips are done via car and in traffic, resulting in considerable amounts of air pollution. Consider replacing one drive a week with walking, cycling, or taking public transit. You'll not only save money on petrol and keep fit but will get to better know your community and improve your mental wellbeing.

Merton is the only borough in London to be served by trains, trams, the Underground, and buses.

Upgrade the school run

In the UK, a staggering 86% of children are breathing dangerous levels of toxic air. The British Lung Foundation notes that children are more vulnerable to polluted air due to smaller, still developing airways and breathing more rapidly than adults. Continued exposure to air pollution can increase their risk of developing asthma, infections like pneumonia, and lung cancer. Perhaps even more alarming is that

sitting in traffic can actually be more harmful to a child's health. Professor Sir David King, a former government chief scientific adviser, **writes** that air pollution is more harmful to children in cars than outside as children are more likely to be exposed to a concentrated form of air pollution from toxic gases by surrounding vehicles.

Fortunately, remedying this problem can be as easy as walking or cycling. Parents, if you are routinely driving your child to school, consider making the school run more fun with Walking Wednesdays or Fitness Fridays! Set aside these days to incorporate an engaging walk to and from school. If you live near other families, why not try forming a Walking Bus with other school children?



Strengthen your physical and mental wellbeing

Did you know that going on a 30 minute walk can not only lower your risk of heart disease but also decrease the risk of stroke by 35% and Type 2 diabetes by 40%? If you're unable to walk for long periods of time or want to walk but are worried about heavy items, consider building up your strength in small increments. This could begin with a short 10 minute walk or cycle ride, or parking your car a little further away than normal and walking the rest of your journey.

As so many of us have experienced heightened sensitivity to anxiety, low moods, or even depression due to the pandemic, it's important to spend time focusing on your mental health, alongside your physical health. Something as short as a brisk walk around your block has proven to boost mood and energy during the day and may contribute to a better night's sleep.

Save money

Petrol in the UK is among the most expensive in Europe. Factor in car maintenance, metered parking and parking permits, and the cost of using a car keeps going up. Replacing a two-mile drive with walking or cycling once a week would result in reducing wear on your car by over 100 miles each year, saving you not only money but also time that would otherwise be spent sitting in traffic.



Step 5: Get on your bike!



Cycling 101

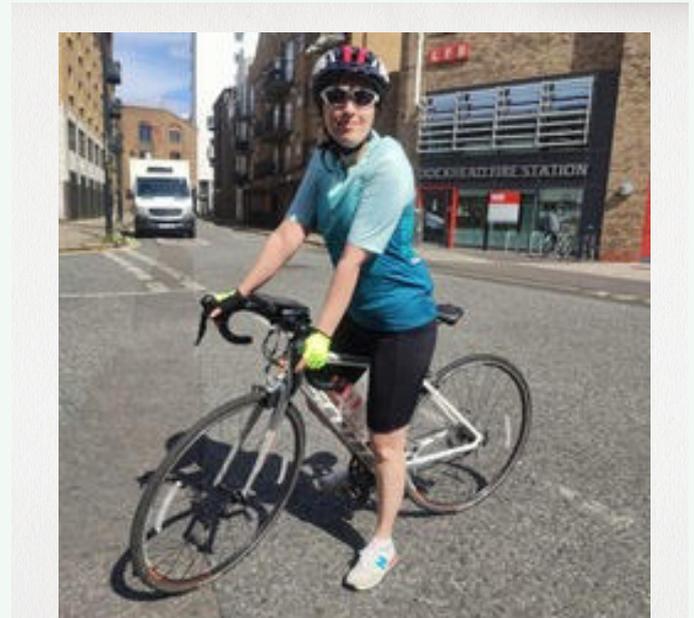
Your first bike

Cycling doesn't need to be an expensive means to get around and there's certainly no obligation to don Lycra while riding. Consider the cost of a monthly TFL card from zone 4 to zone 1: £204.30. Now consider the cost of using a bike. Purchasing bikes second-hand, using a cycle-share scheme, or taking advantage of your place of work's "**cycle to work**" scheme are not only more sustainable for the environment but can also greatly reduce your monthly travel expenses, allowing you to put the money saved towards something else.

Want to try before you buy? Merton Council has partnered with **Peddle My Wheels** which allows Merton residents to trial a bike for a small monthly fee of £10 for children or £20 for adults. If you end up liking the bike you've used, you are able to purchase it at a discounted price. Unsure about which bike is best for you? Not to worry - they have a wide variety designed to fit your needs including folding bikes, electric bikes, and even cargo bikes designed to carry larger loads.

The Bike Project, an organisation that provides second hand bikes to refugees and asylum seekers, recently opened a chapter at 42 Station Road in Colliers Wood and offers reasonably priced bikes, accessories, and bike services, meaning Merton has even more options when it comes to affordable cycling.

Unsure about where to look for a second-hand bike? Cycling UK offers advice on places to buy, how to avoid buying a stolen bike, and what things to look out for before purchasing. Once you have your bike, be sure to register it free of charge with the UK's national bike register.



Maria - Sustainable Merton
Community Champion

"I learned to cycle as a child, and only started cycling again a few years ago in an attempt to save money on transport and not rely on public transport. I had a terrible bicycle, but it saved me so much money and time, and I slowly became more confident riding in heavy traffic. My top advice to someone trying to gain more confidence cycling on the road would be to learn to keep their balance cycling with only one hand and/or cycling glancing behind them, as they will constantly use hand signals and glance at traffic coming from behind."

- Maria,
Sustainable Merton Community Champion



Bike maintenance

Similar to maintaining a car, bike maintenance plays an important role in ensuring your bike will be running smoothly and safely. The UK's own **Global Cycling Network** has numerous instructional videos on cycle care, covering everything from **how to wash your bike** in a flat or in a garden to **how to fix a puncture**. Merton's Dr. Bike periodically offers free bike maintenance checks at Wimbledon Centre Court and the Wandle River trail entrance near Sainsbury's in Colliers Wood. Be sure to check Merton's Council's **website** for the most up to date information on sessions.

Cycle confidently and safely

There are plenty of local and London-based organizations aimed at helping people gain bike confidence. Organisations such as **Cycle Sisters** work to help women in particular gain confidence. Feeling unsure about the road? Parks such as **Morden Hall Park**, Morden Park, and the Wandle Trail are great for beginner cyclists who want to practice a bit before riding alongside cars. Richmond Park also has car-free paved roads in the centre of the park, with a **cycle-for-rent shop**, car park, and café next to Roehampton Gate.

Recent improvements to cycle routes, including clearer bike lane markings and newly installed barriers, mean that cycling on the high streets in Merton is becoming safer and more accessible to new cyclists.



Cycle 42 in Colliers Wood, home to [The Bike Project](#)

Addressing cycling concerns



There has been a huge increase in cycling and walking during the pandemic, as the streets emptied of cars, and more people took advantage of the daily outdoor exercise allowance. However, as the UK Government has begun to plan the route out of lockdown, walking and cycling needs to be supported and encouraged. Last year, the Government announced £2bn of funding for walking and cycling, with proposals such as low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) and improved cycle lanes and walkways.

The benefits of cycling are numerous, with health and fitness continuing to be one of the key motivators. Other motivators include cost-saving over other modes of transportation, cycling being an enjoyable and convenient way to commute, and a social activity to do with family and friends. More recently, there has been a substantial growth in the number of bicycle users who consider the environmental advantages (e.g. better air quality, less congestion, more efficient transport) as their main motivator. The most common barriers cited for people not taking up cycling include fear of being involved in a collision, too much traffic, poor road conditions and lack of confidence.

After taking up cycling more seriously for the past year, I fell in love with it, and want to see more residents in Merton cycling. With collision risks and lack of safety being the most relevant discouraging factors, I do agree that cycling is a personal choice based on both the benefits and risks. However, with a greater proportion of the population being willing to cycle, there will be increased demand and pressure on the Government to address these issues and allow for greater cycling infrastructure improvements.

1. Road safety

Safety on the road is the main deterrent to people taking up cycling, and in many instances, this can play an especially important role into making someone afraid of cycling in traffic. However, there are some points I would like to address. Please note, this is aimed at people who already know how to cycle.

- A)** Be aware of everything on the road. You need to have a high level of awareness of the drivers' turning intentions, even when they do not indicate, your position in relation to a driver's blind spot, and any potholes, as well as objects/hazards such as rubbish, wheelie bins, car doors, etc...
- B)** Maintain high visibility at all times. With most collisions occurring because the cyclists were not seen (or seen too late), it is vital to make sure you are seen at all times. Ride in a visible position on the road and make sure the drivers see you, by wearing high visibility and reflective clothing, as well as using the mandatory front and back lights when riding in the dark.
- C)** The Highway Code for Cyclists is available [here](#). The rules are not only beneficial for you, but for other road users as well. Make sure you know the rules of the road and follow them all the time.
- D)** Signal your intentions early. To be able to do this, there are two important things to know: first, the hand signals (which can be found [here](#)), and second, how to keep your balance riding with only one hand, or looking back. So, make sure you learn these skills in a safe space (park, quiet road) before cycling on the road.

2. Lack of proper infrastructure

What puts many cyclists at greater risks is the lack of cycling infrastructure. Fully segregated cycle tracks are the best option for cyclists, however many cycle lanes do not meet this standard. Cycle Superhighways and Quietways are both great ways to stay safe on the road.

Here is a map of all existing cycling infrastructure within Merton.

3. Bike Theft

Many new cyclists are afraid that their bike might get stolen, but there are some ways to help prevent that from happening.

A) One of the first things I did after getting my bicycle was to register it at **BikeRegister**. This is a highly-effective deterrent to bike thieves.

B) Make sure you have recorded details of your bike and good photos.

C) Always double lock it, using two good quality locks, with at least one being a D-lock.

D) Lock the frame and both of your wheels to a cycle parking stand.

E) Your bicycle should be as close to the parking stand as possible so that it is hard to manoeuvre.

F) Always remove lights and other accessories so that they do not get stolen.

4. Faulty bike

Maintaining a bicycle can be hard work, but a faulty bicycle will mean you are more likely to be seriously harmed. Get your bicycle serviced whenever you feel it needs it, depending on how often you cycle. There are many tutorials online with maintenance tips for beginners.

5. Weather factors

It takes a lot of dedication to cycle in a downpour, however, this is simply your choice. For less favourable weather conditions, I suggest investing in a few basics like a good waterproof jacket and shoes, warm socks for winter and a padded saddle cover for added comfort.

For a free adult Bikeability cycle training in Merton, check [cyclinginstructor.com](https://www.cyclinginstructor.com)

Free TfL' online Cycle Skills course available **here**.

Websites:

The Highway Code - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code/rules-for-cyclists-59-to-82>

Essential hand signals - <https://roadcyclinguk.com/how-to/technique/essential-guide-road-cycling-hand-signals-calls.html>

Cycling infrastructure in Merton - <https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/LIP-Existing%20Cycle%20Infrastructure.pdf>

Cycling instructor website - www.cyclinginstructor.com

TfL's online Cycle Skills - <https://cycle-skillsonline.tfl.gov.uk/#registerIndividualModal>

Active travel apps



Travel Tools

Given that we're living in an app-based world, there's never been an easier time to track and gamify your walks, runs, and cycling trips. Fitness apps such as **Strava** (free for basic use, paid for premium athlete-focused use) and **Komoot** are among the most popular in London, with more coming to the marketplace each year. Most of these apps will track the total amount that you've walked, run, cycled, etc. and package your end-of-year stats.

Local transit apps such as **Citymapper** and the newly launched **TfL Go app** are available free of charge for Android and Apple phones. These offer up-to-date timetables, maps, and other important information for your walking, cycling, or transiting journey. Citymapper even has a calories burned calculator!

Better know your streets

By getting off the high streets, you're ensuring a bit more peace of mind not only being further away from traffic but knowing that you're breathing cleaner air. Many fitness and travel apps feature local hotspots, highlighting routes that are commonly taken, giving users comfort in knowing that they are using a well-established and frequently travelled route.



Step 6: Don't be Fuelish!



Reduce Your Fuel

Road transport is one of the primary sources of air pollution in Merton, as vehicles emit harmful gases such as nitrogen oxides (NOx), particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10) and carbon dioxide (CO2) from the exhaust pipe directly into town centres, school zones, and busy residential areas, harming people's health and damaging the local environment.

Help us improve our local air quality within Merton by being more conscious about your vehicle use around the borough. This can also save you a lot of fuel and money!

A great way to reduce air pollution is to go car-free, but we understand this isn't always practical. So, if you can't say goodbye to your car just yet, here are a few ways to help lower your air pollution impact:

Don't idle your car. Turn off your engine when parked, stuck in traffic, or at a red light (even if it's only for a minute!).

Leaving your vehicle engine running when parked or stuck in traffic releases toxic pollutants, causing harm to people's health as they breathe in the air around you. Exposure to air pollutants from vehicle exhausts (NOx and PM) causes short-term health effects such as coughing and exacerbated asthma. While, well known long-term health risks associated with vehicle pollution include lung cancer, strokes, respiratory conditions, and cardiovascular disease.

An idling vehicle engine can emit as much as twice the amount of air pollutants as a vehicle in motion, producing enough harmful gases to fill up to **150 balloons** every minute.

Switch off when you drop off

Idling outside schools during morning drop-offs and afternoon pick-ups is a particular problem as children's developing organs make them more vulnerable to the effects of pollution. For example, high levels of vehicle air pollutants have shown to increase the occurrence and prevalence of childhood asthma and wheezing. In more severe cases, childhood exposure to pollution has been linked to severe asthma attacks and seizures: in December 2020, Southwark Coroner's Court in London officially ruled that exposure to excessive roadside air pollution was a significant factor in the death of a nine-year-old schoolgirl, Ella Kissi-Debrah, in 2013.

By pledging to switch off when you drop off today, you are helping to protect our children's lives.

Common Myths of Idling

Myth: Turning my vehicle off and on uses more fuel than leaving the engine running.

Fact: Idling for an hour can waste more than half a gallon of fuel. It is estimated that between 5-8% of a person's fuel use occurs while idling, so idling wastes more fuel and money than you might think.

Myth: If I leave my engine running when parked on a yellow line, I won't get a fine.

Fact: Local authorities can issue a fine between £20 to £80 for emission offences if you are caught with your engine running while stationary [1].

Myth: Frequently restarting my vehicle can cause damage to the vehicle engine.

Fact: Turning off your vehicle has little impact on the engine. Excessive idling, however, can damage your engine's components, including the exhaust system [2].

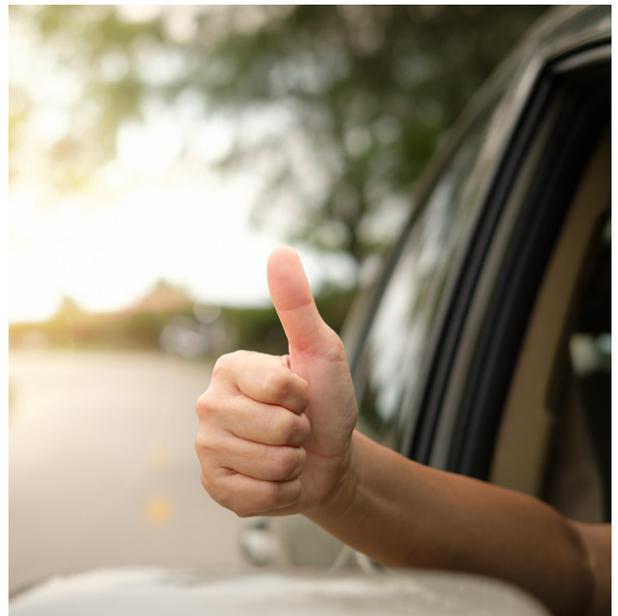
Myth: It's cold outside and leaving my engine running helps to warm up the car.

Fact: Idling is not an efficient way to warm up your vehicle, even in the winter months. Driving slowly during your first mile is most efficient to warm the vehicle, and your heater will stay warm for 30-60 minutes when you turn the ignition off. [3]

By switching off your engine when stationary, you can not only improve our local air quality and protect residents' health but also avoid potential unwanted fines and use less fuel - resulting in cost savings! Small actions such as this can make a large difference to society and the planet!

References

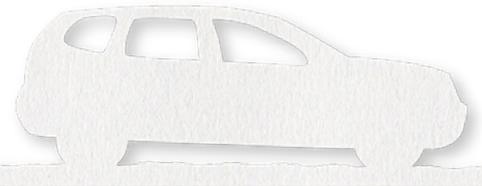
- [1] Independent, 2019
<https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/driving-fine-air-pollution-engine-london-westminster-council-gove-a8912696.html>
- [2] Gov UK, 2019
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2002/0110423887>
- [3] Merton Council, 2020
<https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/pollution/air-quality-and-air-pollution/tackling-idling>



Pledge to stop idling today

Fill in this form to pledge your support for our Merton Council's anti-idling campaign, and let's #BreatheCleanerAir together!

Step 7: Try carpooling



Avoid multiple car journeys, and save time and money, by carpooling with friends, family, colleagues, or fellow parents.

If you're travelling to the same destination as friends or family, why not suggest carpooling? By travelling together, you can save money on fuel and parking, and have that long overdue catch up. Not only is carpooling socially and economically favourable, by having fewer cars on the roads, you will also be helping to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and reduce air pollution health costs!

Carpooling is also a great way to maintain current, or create new friendships with people who live nearby. Organising a car share club for school drop-offs, for example, can help you keep in touch with local parents and can be an added bit of fun for your children. By alternating the days you do school drop-offs, you are also freeing up your schedule in the mornings to run some errands, get the house in order, or simply, relax.

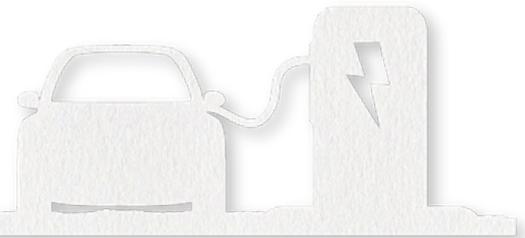
Instead of taking multiple car journeys, offer or take a lift today to reduce the number of vehicles on the road, clean up our streets, and keep in touch with your friends.



Sustainable Merton Community Champions Gabriel and Jackie monitoring air quality in Merton



Step 8: Go electric!



Switch to a cleaner car. If you're considering buying a new car, choose an electric vehicle or plug-in hybrid on your next purchase.

By switching your car to electric, you can make a significant positive contribution towards improving the air quality in our borough. Pure electric vehicles produce zero tailpipe emissions, which means no carbon dioxide or air pollutants are emitted when driving; while plug-in hybrid vehicles produce significantly lower emissions than their petrol and diesel counterparts. Electric vehicles are also quieter than conventional vehicles, so switching to electric will create a healthier, happier, and more peaceful place for residents, pedestrians, and cyclists.

You may have heard that the UK has committed to banning the sale of petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030, but did you know Merton has already invested heavily in electric vehicle charging infrastructure across the borough?

The London Borough of Merton has a target to ensure 85% of residents are within a 10-minute walk of an electric vehicle charging point, so you can guarantee you'll never be too far from one! You can find your nearest charge point via the **[Zap-Map App](#)** – an excellent resource that can be viewed as an app on your phone and online, which gives you real-time information about the location and availability of charge points.

If you have off-street parking, installing a home charging point may be your best option, and you're in luck as the government's Electric Vehicle Homecharge Scheme grant can fund up to 75% of the installation costs in your home.

Hear from a local Merton resident on owning an electric vehicle in Merton:
Meet Stuart. Stuart has owned an electric vehicle since March 2020.

What advice would you provide our readers looking to purchase an electric car?

"Don't be afraid to take the plunge and go straight to 100% electric! There are a wide range of EVs available, read the reviews on them, and select one that suits your needs and budget. If you park your car on the street in a controlled parking zone remember that Merton Council only charges around £10 for an annual parking permit for an EV. Get the Zap app on your smartphone and practice with it even if you don't yet have an EV."

Hear more about what Stuart has to say about owning an electric Vehicle in Merton, [here](#).

With no road tax or congestion charges to pay, and lower insurance rates, running costs are low; which means you will be saving money in the long-term and doing your part for the environment!

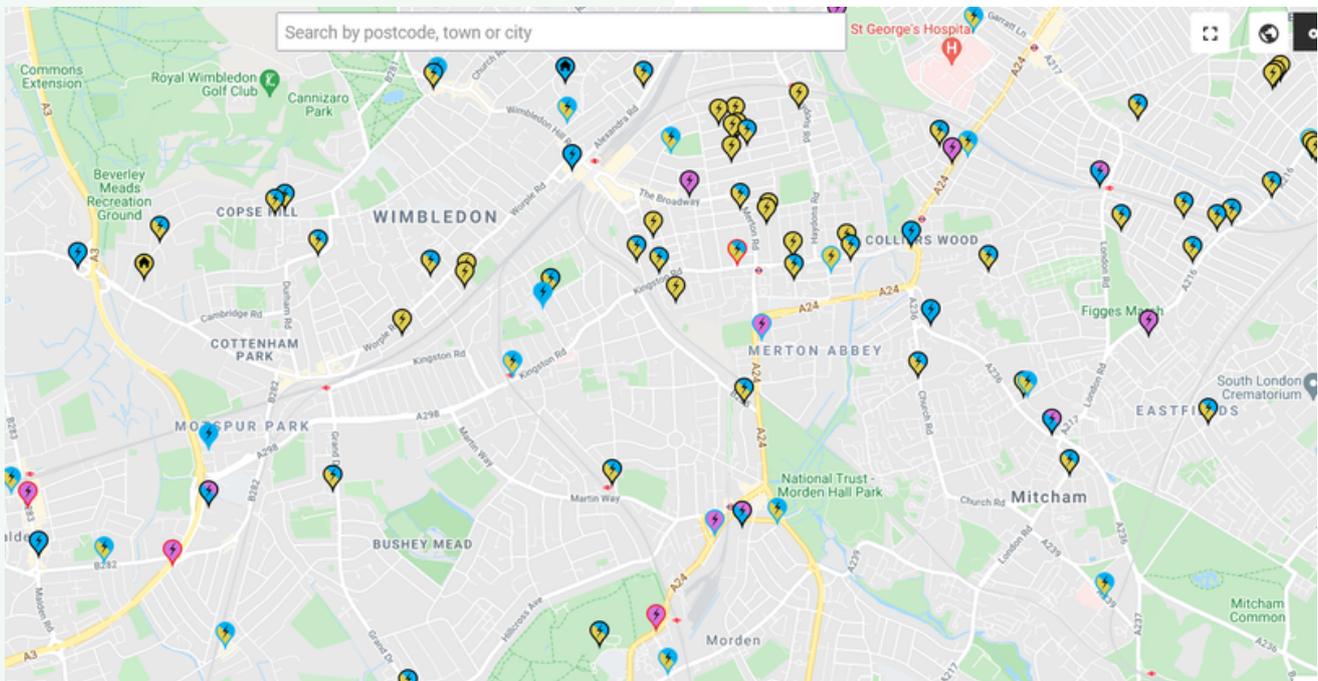
Thinking about purchasing an electric vehicle?

Sustainable Merton has your questions answered in this mini blog series. Check out our blogs below on:

- [What's it really like to own an electric vehicle?](#)
- [Top things you should know when thinking about purchasing an electric vehicle](#)



Sarah, electric car owner



The Merton Zap Map

Step 9: Experience the tree-mendous benefits of greening



Why "Greening"? It is Healthy for your wellbeing and the planet!

Trees play an important role in climate adaptation, absorbing air pollution emissions and providing wildlife habitats which maintain and increase biodiversity. Trees produce oxygen, intercept airborne particulates, and reduce smog, enhancing a community's respiratory health. Access to trees, green spaces, and parks promotes greater physical activity, and reduces stress, while improving the quality of life in our cities and towns. Urban landscaping, including trees, helps lower crime rates. Studies show that urban vegetation slows heartbeats, lowers blood pressure, and relaxes brain wave patterns.

How can you contribute to making Merton a greener and healthier place for everyone? Private land such as gardens hold around two-thirds of the trees in Merton. Therefore, through "greening" up your garden and front yard, you can have a very positive impact for the community!

Trees take several years to grow, mature and reach their full ecological potential. Older and mature trees offer superior CO₂ absorption abilities relative to the less mature trees. Hence apart from planting new trees, it is vital that we conserve existing mature trees. Individuals, organisations, and businesses can conserve old mature trees and also maximise the amount of vegetation where possible: from adding a window box to removing the paving, installing a green roof, or adding sustainable drainage on their land.



Don't have your own garden? No problem! There are still many ways you can contribute to greening Merton. You can support community planting by joining volunteer groups such as the Merton Tree Wardens, a "Friends of" groups such as the Friends of Morden Park - Morden Park & Playing Fields Association. Businesses can sponsor local tree planting events, water newly planted street trees, or take up free tree offers available through organisations such as the Woodland Trust.

How can you contribute to greening Merton?

- **Plant vegetables and/or fruit.** Whether it is salad in a window box, fruit bushes in the flower beds or chillies in a sunny spot, growing your own will save you money and reduce your carbon footprint. Home grown fruit and vegetables is also really healthy and tastes delicious
- **Commit to spending 30 minutes in a green space every day for your own health and wellbeing.** Trees have been found to enhance mood, improve self-esteem and lower blood pressure. You could go for a walk/run during lunchtime, take a dog for a walk, have lunch in the park, or kick a football around after work. See our article on page 10 for more ways you can enjoy nature.
- **Help green public spaces by watering street trees.** Mature trees provide shade for people, provide connections between habitats, and can absorb several tonnes of carbon. As spring moves into summer, young street trees can suffer from a lack of water, so water young street trees near your home and help them thrive for many years to come. Reach out to the [Merton Tree Wardens](#) to find out more.

- **Join a community planting project** to make some friends, get active, and help increase tree cover in Merton. Trees are best planted in winter, but now is a good time to join community planting to help identify sites for planting and raising funds. Examples of local groups you could get involved with include Merton Tree Wardens and a "Friends of" group such as the Friends of Morden Park - Morden Park & Playing Fields Association.
- **Bring the wellbeing benefits of nature home by replacing some of your concrete paving with vegetation.** Mass paving over gardens since the 80s and 90s is bad news for carbon capture and local flood defence, but also bad news to local wildlife (birds, mammals and insects and invertebrates) who rely on pockets of green spaces for their homes and feeding grounds. Restore small green spaces and plant suitable trees in your gardens where you can. You can go from a concrete jungle to a green oasis by creating a green roof, adding a window box or removing garden paving.
- **Avoid cutting down mature trees in your garden.** Unless there are safety concerns, avoid cutting down mature trees. Mature trees are important for wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, and recreation. They can even provide shade to your home in the winter and help to keep you cool.
- **Create a wildlife haven by providing a critter with a home and make food available to encourage wildlife.** Adding a bird box, a bee hotel or a dead-wood pile helps create habitat for many creatures. Wildflowers and bird feeders will help to attract more wildlife to your neighbourhood. If you want to improve a space for wildlife, contact [Habitats and Heritage's green hubs project](#) or become a [National Park City Ranger](#). These are also great learning activities to do with your children.

Pledges- for Businesses

- To increase the tree cover I will organise or sponsor a tree planting event. Businesses could organise or sponsor a tree planning event by working with the Merton Council or local charities.
- To maintain green cover, I will adopt a green space. Businesses could adopt and maintain mature trees or a green patch by working with the Merton council or local charities.

Level Up:

To conserve old and mature trees, write to the Merton council to strengthen the Tree Protection Order (TPO) regime to protect mature trees on private land. Protecting mature trees will have an even more profound effect on slowing global warming in the coming decades, since immature trees sequester far less CO₂ than older ones. Citizens could write to the council or start an online petition to ask the council to strengthen the scope of TPO to protect mature trees on private land.



Rehane, Sustainable Merton
Community Champion

Step 10: Reap the wellbeing benefits of green spaces



As the crocuses and daffodils begin to bloom and the days grow longer, exploring Merton's parks and green spaces is a great way to escape your flat and reap the many health benefits of nature. To me, a green space is an oasis of calm amidst a hectic city life and Merton contains some of the most diverse and beautiful places in London. Whether you're looking for a long ramble, a place to kick a football around, a beautiful picnic spot, or somewhere quiet to read and reflect, there is a green space for you!

Check out the [Go Parks Merton website](#) which will tell you all the amenities each green space offers so you can plan your day with confidence.

What are the benefits of spending time in nature?

Spending time in nature has been linked to numerous mental and physical wellbeing benefits. These include decreased blood pressure, reduced headaches, faster healing, reduced stress and anxiety, improved mood, improved productivity, improved self-esteem, and improved overall wellbeing. Green spaces also offer a relaxing environment to spend time with friends and family, meet new people, and connect with your community. For some, green spaces also offer a place of spiritual enrichment

The benefits of nature are well recognized by healthcare professionals, and doctors are even prescribing time in nature through what are called Green Prescriptions (check out the [NHS forest project](#) to learn more).

So next time you're going for a run, planning a gathering, or looking for somewhere new to spend time with your kids, take it outside!

Not sure what to do in a green space? We've got you covered!

There are endless ways that you can use green spaces in Merton no matter your interests. Here are just a few suggestions:

- **Get physical:** walk/run, cycle, play tennis, use an outdoor gym, walk your dog
- **Get social:** go on a picnic, play frisbee, visit a playpark with your kids, join a community garden
- **Get artsy:** paint or draw, collect leaves for a collage, photograph nature
- **Interact with nature:** go bird watching, pond dipping, fort building, or tree climbing
- **Take some me time:** read a book, listen to music, meditate
- **Give back:** volunteer for your local Friends Group or [join a local litter pick](#)
- **Attend an event:** Keep an eye on the website of your local green space for their latest organized events and activities

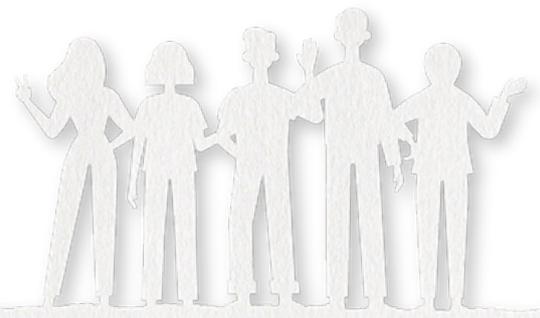


Sustainable Merton CEO Diana Sterck and National Trust Ranger Richard planting trees in Modern Hall Park

Looking for something different? Here are some more creative and fun ideas for using green spaces:

- **Geocaching:** Geocaching is essentially a giant, worldwide outdoor treasure hunt where you search for 'caches' using GPS apps on your phone. There are lots of caches in Merton to find! Start your adventure at www.geocaching.com
- **Park runs:** Walk or run your way through these free, weekly 5km community events that take place Saturday mornings. Park Runs are positive, social events where you can meet new people and get active. Your closest event is the [Wimbledon Common Parkrun](#).
- **Foraging for blackberries:** Merton is full of these tasty treats so why try foraging, then make yourself a delicious crumble for dessert.
- **Plogging:** Love running and helping the planet? This is for you! Plogging (jogging + plucking), a trend that started in Sweden, involves jogging and picking up litter at the same time. Search #Plogging on Instagram to join in.
- **Nature-themed apps:** There are plenty of apps that will help you quickly learn more about the nature around you, and take you on an adventure at the same time. The apps Seek and Nature Passport are a great place to start
- **Family scavenger hunt:** "Gamify" outdoor exploration by treating your kids to a nature scavenger hunt with very little prep. Search "Nature Scavenger Hunt" on Pinterest for lots of printable ideas.
- **Instagram inspiration:** What better backdrop is there than nature? Head to your local green space for your next Instagram shoot!

Step 11: Get involved



1) Community Champions

Sustainable Merton's Community Champions are a group of 175 local volunteers, passionate about contributing to a healthier, happier, and more sustainable Merton. Join us and work within your community to encourage residents to live more sustainably for the benefit of themselves, their children, and the environment. As a Community Champion, you will have the opportunity to get involved with a wide range of activities relating to air quality, waste, energy, and food.

Why get involved?

- Make friends
- Get active and enjoy the wellbeing benefits of nature
- Learn employable skills
- Give back to your community
- Help the planet

Find out more and register to become a Champion [here](#).

2) Take our #BreatheCleanerAir Pledge

By taking the [#BreatheCleanerAir](#) pledge, you will be committing to doing your bit to help clean up Merton's air. Small actions add up, so if we each decide to make a change today, we can all play our part in tackling air pollution.

Take our [#BreatheCleanerAir](#) pledge [here](#).

3) Climate Action Group - Greening Merton Subgroup

Merton Council is encouraging residents to make public pledges to do their address the climate emergency. Take your pledge [here](#).

4) Sustrans Big Pedal

The UK's biggest inter-school cycling, walking, wheeling and scooting competition. Sustrans Big Pedal inspires pupils, staff and parents to be amazing and take active journeys to school. To find out more, go to <https://bigpedal.org.uk/>

5) Friends Groups and Residents Associations

Find your local friends group through Go Parks London [here](#)



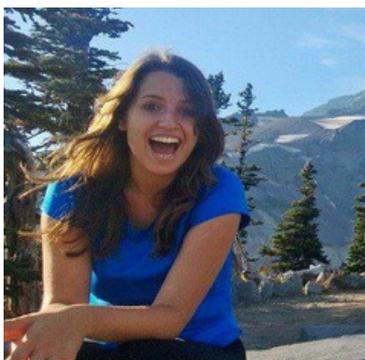
Community Champion Gillian and Councillor Joan Henry at Phipps Bridge Community Garden

Contributors



Author: Community Champion **Ailish** is passionate about improving our air quality as it is so beneficial for protecting the local environment, tackling climate change, and delivers numerous health benefits. Through this handbook, she hopes to improve awareness around air pollution and encourage Merton residents to make small changes to their everyday lives to help us improve our borough's air quality.

Author: Community Champion **Kathryn** loves getting outdoors to enjoy fresh air in Merton's beautiful green spaces. Since working on this project she's become more aware of how the air quality around us affects everything from our health and well-being to climate change and beyond. She hopes this handbook inspires you to take some small steps towards improving Merton's air quality.



Author: Prior to moving to London, Community Champion **Taylor** worked on the US Department of State's public diplomacy programs and is passionate about developing partnerships for social good. She became involved with Sustainable Merton in 2020, first as a volunteer at the Phipps Bridge community allotment and later joined the air quality team. You can find her working at Zéro, Merton's first zero-waste shop.

Author: Community Champion **Uday** has well-rounded experience of Investment Oversight, Risk Assurance, and Governance within the Financial Services industry. He believes that climate risk is investment risk. Uday is passionate about transitioning away from the present scale of climate risk and passing on to the next generation a legacy of environment that is diverse, has predictable weather/climate patterns and is safe.



Graphic Designer: Community Champion **Jo** joined Sustainable Merton two years ago and has helped out on a number of campaigns to help the local community take steps towards a greener, more sustainable lifestyle. She loves all things zero-waste and can often be found enjoying one of Merton's lovely parks, gardens and recreation grounds.





Community Champions at Mitcham Community Orchard and Gardens

Version 1

May, 2021

Get in touch:

info@sustainablemerton.org