

# **Evidence for the Environmental Audit Committee's Inquiry: Aligning the UK's economic goals with environmental sustainability**

Submitted by Laura Blake, Chair of the Thames Crossing Action Group

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## **Introduction**

My name is Laura Blake, I am Chair of the Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG). We represent thousands of people who are opposed to the proposed Lower Thames Crossing (LTC). More info on us and our concerns and issues with the proposed LTC can be found on our website [www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com](http://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com)

## **Reason for submitting evidence**

As a group we feel very strongly that more needs to be done to align the UK's economic goals with environmental sustainability.

All too often the emphasis is put on financial growth and benefit, but very little is taken into account in regard to the environmental sustainability benefits, including not only the health and well-being of our planet and the environment, but also including our own health and well-being.

After all what benefit is there in having lots of money; but no clean air to breathe, or a planet that can continue to support life?

For that reason we feel it important that we take advantage of this opportunity to submit our response in the hope it will help with the inquiry.

## **Evidence**

**1. How does the way the Government currently uses GDP in setting macro-economic policy affect the development of environmental policy and of cross-departmental action to achieve the UK's environmental goals?**

The current use of GDP, and policies focus way too much on purely the financial economic growth, and doesn't give significant value to the environment.

Take the National Policy Statement for National Networks (NPS NN) for example. It is extremely outdated and doesn't take into account the relevant environmental commitments that our country

has already made. Let alone accommodate opportunity to move forward with development of more environmental and sustainable options.

Government and National Highways talk of the economic growth and benefit of the proposed LTC (and other road projects) yet fail to adequately and realistically consider the cost of the proposed LTC on the environment and associated health and well-being.

There is also a distinct lack of joined up thinking and actions. For instance millions spent on tree planting, yet billions are being spent on destroying trees and nature by projects such as LTC etc.

There is also the environmental aspect of air pollution, and again the fact the Government focus more on the financial economic benefits of projects like the proposed LTC, rather than the cost to not only the environment but also the associated healthcare costs.

Projects like LTC also destroy huge amounts of agricultural land, which in turn has an impact on the environment in a number of ways, not only directly destroying and negatively impacting the land/environment, but also due to food then having to travel more miles due to lack of agricultural land, meaning increased carbon footprint.

## **2. How could GDP, or other current measures of macro-economic activity, more fully account for human and natural capital assets? What are the challenges and/or opportunities in moving to a way of measuring economic progress which takes greater account of such assets?**

Human and natural capital assets have to be taken into account, because unless we do so we will not have clean air to breathe or a planet to support life, let alone be able to sit and count any money! Our survival is the ultimate 'opportunity'.

Some highlights of our suggestions for opportunities:

- We have to save and protect our environment; we cannot continue to allow hugely destructive projects like LTC continue. A review of the Government's road building programme is needed.
- More weight needs to be given to the Climate Change Committee's recommendations to Government.
- National policies need to be reviewed to reflect environmental commitments, and policies need to be suspended until such reviews and updates have been made.
- We need legislation on air pollution, and for it to be enshrined in UK law and enforced as a matter of urgency.
- We need to improve on things like noise, light, water, pollution levels
- We need to consider current and future flood risks more seriously

- We need to fully consider how we can benefit from nature to help make improvements to our quality of life. Evidence shows nature has true value for our health and well-being. Plus nature/re-wilding can be beneficial in regard to flooding etc.
- We need to look at a true green economy, where not only are we saving and protecting nature and the environment, but also investing in it.
- We need to take urgent action to ensure we move forward in a positive and environmentally supporting way, because the longer we leave it the worse the situation will be and the more investment will be needed.
- Stricter regulations need to be put in place in regard to greenwashing, which is also a serious issue
- We also note from our experience with LTC that not only do we feel that not enough recognition is being given to the costs to nature, the environment, and associated health and well-being, but also that there is not enough clarity and transparency in regard to disclosing the estimated financial cost, or predicted economic benefit figure. When consultations are happening and decisions are being made it is important that all costs whether they be financial, natural, or health costs are disclosed. Also that the information is released in a timely and transparent way, not through inadequate consultations and forcing people to wait until Development Consent Order applications are accepted, as is the case with the proposed LTC.
- Plus more needs to be done to calculate the long term environmental impacts of projects such as the proposed LTC, and consider and take into account the associated costs of such impacts. A prime example would be the cost of developing and implementing a resilience strategy for the Critical National Infrastructure. We have actually just responded to the Joint Committee for National Security Strategy's inquiry on this<sup>1</sup>.
- The costs of the consequences of destructive and harmful development projects need to be included when considering benefit cost ratio.

The absolute worst case scenario if we are wrong is that we end up with a greener, cleaner world to live in. However, if those who feel the GDP is more important are wrong the consequences don't bear thinking about. Can we really afford to gamble with putting GDP over the environment and a healthy and sustainable future for all?

### **3. How effective has the Government's response to the recommendations of Sir Charles Bean's Independent Review of Economic Statistics (2016) and Professor Sir Partha's Dasgupta Review of the Economics of Biodiversity (2021) been to date?**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/critical-national-infrastructure-and-climate-adaptation-inquiry/>

Respectfully we have to state that in our opinion there is a lot of talk from Government, but very little in the way of actions to back up all the talk. We need more action to back up all the talk and fast. How can we believe there is any true understanding or willingness to act whilst the Government continue to push ahead with hugely destructive and harmful projects like the proposed LTC?

*(We opt not to comment on points 4,5,6 thank you.)*

**7. How might the public, businesses, financial institutions and the financial system react to any move away from GDP as the primary indicator of prosperity? What challenges could this present for policymakers, and how might these be overcome?**

In our experience more and more of the public are voicing stronger and stronger opinion that we simply cannot continue as things are, with the focus being on the short term financial benefits for the few overriding the overall long terms benefits and health and well-being of both humans and the environment as a whole.

Clearly those standing to benefit most financially will be the ones most likely to throw up objections. Sadly most of the time they are also those who are in position to influence Government decision makers. We would respectfully draw attention to the fact that it is the majority who vote for future Governments.

There is a reason the Government and their associated companies have seen an increase in legal challenges, and action groups and campaigns against their proposals, and that is because we are not happy with what is being proposed, and it is not in line with the country's legal commitments, especially in regard to environmental issues.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to present our paper to you in relation to this public inquiry. We hope you will find it of interest and helpful to all aspects on which you were seeking evidence. Please don't hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss further.