THAMES CROSSING
ACTION GROUP
www.tcag.info

3rd May 2022

Dear Lord Goldsmith

I am emailing you, as Minister for State, as Chair of the Thames Crossing Action Group. A community group who represent thousands of people who are opposed to the Government's proposed £8.2bn Lower Thames Crossing road project between Kent and Essex.

We understand that your responsibilities include environment, climate, biodiversity, conservation, animal welfare, forestry policy, green recovery, lead for Forestry Commission, and Lords Minister for environment (including Environment Bill).

The England Trees Action Plan (ETAP) state the Government's pledge is not only to stem the tide of nature loss, but to turn it around - to leave the environment in a better state than they found it in.

It is also stated that trees and woodland have a vital role in delivering net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, achieving the goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP), as well as delivering on the Government's ambitions to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

In addition, planting vastly more trees in England, and protecting and improving our existing woodlands, will be key to the Government's plan to achieve net zero.

Also that we must protect the precious ancient woodlands and veteran trees which have stood for hundreds of years. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) also outlines that any development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitat, such as ancient woodland, should be refused unless there are exceptional reasons to do so. How can the proposed LTC be such a reason? Especially when it is not fit for purpose, and would still leave the Dartford Crossing over capacity.

We know that Government intends to spend over £500 million on trees and woodlands in England between 2020 and 2025. £500m planting trees, yet £8.2bn on a project that would destroy and impact trees, woodland, and ancient woodland. Giving with one hand, but taking away with the other, just doesn't seem right.

We understand that Government are also funding Natural England (NE) to review and update the Ancient Woodland Inventory. This is good, but NE are struggling with their workload, and reviewing and considering awarding Ancient Woodland status is time consuming. What about the ancient woodlands that are under threat and risk being destroyed, whilst we wait for NE to consider their Ancient Woodland status?

When and where can we learn more about the new Long Established Woodland' category? What protections will that offer? How and how quickly can this new status be awarded?

We do not feel National Highways have an accurate survey of trees and woodland for the proposed LTC plans, although it is hard to fully comprehend since they refuse to share adequate info with us or NGOs like The Woodland Trust. We know of at least one woodland that would be destroyed by the LTC, if it goes ahead, that from our local knowledge alone we have asked NE to consider for Ancient Woodland status. We

do not blame NE as their resources are limited, and we imagine demand upon them is considerable since so much of our natural environment is under threat.

As you know and will appreciate these ancient and long established woodlands are irreplaceable and need to be protected, we cannot risk losing them. Is it really acceptable that projects like the proposed LTC are being pushed through without even identifying and acknowledging these valuable woodlands?

We know that 25YEP goals are for cleaner air and water, plants and animals which are thriving, and a cleaner, greener country for us all.

It states that "*We will achieve clean air by - Meeting legally binding targets to reduce emissions of five damaging air pollutants. This should halve the effects of air pollution on health by 2030*." and yet the proposed air quality targets that are presented in the current Environmental Targets consultation are for World Health Organization (WHO) 10 standards on PM2.5 by 2040. There is evidence to show that WHO-10 is attainable by 2030, so why not set the target for 2030?

Another of the proposed new environmental targets is to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030. It is said this will contribute to the government's commitment to protect 30% of land by 2030. Yet the proposed LTC would have a huge impact on nature and habitats.

There is also a target to increase tree canopy and woodland cover from 14.5% to 17.5% of total land area in England by 2050, and that the tree and woodland targets could see a total of 170 million tonnes carbon dioxide sequestered by the end of the century.

However, let's put that into perspective, capturing 170 million tonnes of carbon by the end of the century, roughly 77 years' time, yet the proposed LTC alone is estimated to emit over 5 million tonnes of carbon from construction and the first 60 years of operation.

Areas impacted by the proposed LTC already suffer with illegally high levels of air pollution. **Toxic air contributes to 36,000 premature deaths every year. The impact of air pollution costs the NHS up to £20 billion per year.** There is also evidence that the entire proposed LTC route would fail on PM2.5 WHO-10. National Highways are not even proposing to filter the air from the tunnels section of the proposed LTC. Do we not all deserve the right to breathe clean air?

The proposed LTC would destroy homes, lives, health, greenbelt, woodlands (including ancient woodland), agricultural land (including grade 1 listed), solar farms, wildlife and habitats, countryside (including an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), the environment (over 5 million tonnes of carbon emissions), communities, and so much more.

Is it right for the Government to be proposing spending £8.2bn on such a hugely destructive and harmful project that is not fit for purpose? We would welcome your comments.

Thank you for your time, we hope to hear from you soon.

Kind regards

Laura Blake
Chair – Thames Crossing Action Group
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