

# **Evidence for the Environment, Food, Rural Affairs Committee**

## **Inquiry: Food Security**

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**

We have many concerns about the proposed Lower Thames Crossing, and we feel some of those concerns, such as the loss of thousands of acres of agricultural land, impacts to farming, and associated food security issues are relevant to this inquiry<sup>1</sup>.

Since our group represents those opposed to the proposed LTC our evidence will be purely in regards to that aspect, but we acknowledge there are of course other factors.

### **Evidence**

**1. What are the key factors affecting the resilience of food supply chains and causing disruption and rising food prices – including input costs, labour shortages and global events? What are the consequences for UK businesses and consumers?**

Development and infrastructure projects such as the proposed Lower Thames Crossing are most definitely affecting the resilience of food security in the UK.

The proposed LTC alone would see a loss of thousands of acres of agricultural land, including grade 1 listed land.

Who is taking into account not only the individual project impacts, but also the cumulative impacts? More and more agricultural land is coming under threat, and being lost and impacted.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/6861/>

Where is the replacement land for all the agricultural land that is being lost and impacted? We can find no evidence that any is being provided, just more and more agricultural land being lost to projects like the proposed LTC.

When considering our country's self-sufficiency, the constant and increasing loss of agricultural land cannot be ignored.

Yes other factors play a part, and yes our agriculture needs to be carried out in a sustainable manner, but there is a basic necessity to stop decimating so much agricultural land if we are to be self-sustainable and have real food security.

## **2. What is the outlook for UK food price inflation in the short and medium term? What policy interventions should the Government consider to manage these pressures?**

With food prices rising, a cost of living crisis, and food security issues a real issue in the UK, we at very least need Government to review projects such as the proposed LTC to ensure their impacts are being considered.

We would state that while we represent those opposed to the proposed LTC, we also acknowledge the importance of the cumulative impacts of all such infrastructure projects that impact agricultural land and food security.

## **3. How are the rising cost of living and increasing food prices affecting access to healthy and nutritious food?**

We draw attention to the fact that often it is the areas most impacted by such large infrastructure projects like the proposed LTC, and others, that already suffer with health issues.

The new crossing is supposed to fix the problems at the current crossing. The Dartford Crossing has a design capacity of 135,000 vehicles per day, yet regularly sees 180,000 per day. That means we'd need to see a reduction of more than 25% to bring it back below capacity. Yet the proposed LTC would take as little as 4% in the am peak and 11% in the pm peak hour. The LTC would also result in around 50% increase in cross river traffic.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly this would not solve the congestion or pollution issues suffered due to the Dartford Crossing.

Air quality is already at illegally high levels in the areas impacted by the proposed LTC.

Those with health issues are often on lower income, and would benefit from access to affordable healthy nutritious food. Yet the very projects that are often creating and adding to their health and well-being issues are also impacting people's ability to access not only a healthier lifestyle but also healthy and nutritious food, as is the case with the proposed LTC.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://lowerthamescrossingthurrock.co.uk/wider-debate-is-needed-on-the-merits-of-ltc-creating-a-new-m25-outer-orbital-route>

The loss of so much agricultural land definitely has a negative impact of food production, and results in food having to travel more miles which increases carbon footprint and also results in longer travel times reducing nutritional value, as the fresher the food the more beneficial.

#### **4. How will the proposals in the Government's good strategy policy paper affect: the resilience of food supply chains? The agri-food and seafood sectors? Access to healthy, nutritious food?**

The food strategy policy paper<sup>3</sup> states:

*"One of our key vehicles for this is the Sustainable Farming Incentive which will incentivise farmers to improve soil quality, invest in hedgerows, encourage optimal use of fertiliser and pesticides, and support regenerative practices such as agroforestry. Other schemes are designed to support farmers to reduce input costs, boost yields and increase profitability, and together will support our ambitious environment targets including to:*

- *halt species decline in England by 2030*
- *treble woodland creation rates by the end of this Parliament*
- *restore 280,000 hectares of peatland in England by 2050*
- *protect 30% of our land and sea by 2030*
- *improve soil health*
- *reduce climate emissions by at least 6Mt CO2 equivalent per annum by 2035"*

And yet the proposed LTC goes against these main targets.

It most definitely would have a negative impact on wildlife and habitats.<sup>4</sup>

It would most definitely destroy and negatively impact woodland, including irreplaceable ancient woodland, ancient, veteran, notable trees, and ancient hedgerow.<sup>5</sup>

It would destroy and negatively impact thousands of acres of land including agricultural and greenbelt land.<sup>6 7</sup>

Some of that land is grade 1 listed, and in no way can building a huge road project across our countryside be considered to improve soil health.

The proposed LTC is predicted to emit over 7 million tonnes of carbon emissions.<sup>8</sup>

Even before the proposed LTC project reaches DCO stage, it is having an impact on our farmers.

Years of investigative works leaving them without the ability to farm as they usually would definitely impacts their ability to produce their usual levels of food.

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<sup>3</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/108202/6/government-food-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/108202/6/government-food-strategy.pdf)

<sup>4</sup><http://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-impacts-on-wildlife>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/impacts-of-ltc-on-forests-and-woodlands/>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-impacts-on-farming/>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-greenbelt-destruction/>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-carbon-emissions/>

The uncertainty and stress that such a huge project has hanging over them for so long.

If it does go ahead then the loss and severing of land parcels would at best put additional pressure on farmers and their ability to produce food, at worst will see farmers having no option but to sell up as farming will no longer be viable, which would also result in job losses.

With the proposed LTC National Highways continue to attempt to greenwash the project, and to fulfil the environmental mitigation and compensation that would be needed for such a hugely destructive and harmful project.

This means that more and more land is being included within the LTC project, the majority of which is yet more agricultural land. Yet where is the mitigation land to replace the loss of agricultural land?

The proposed LTC is not just hugely destructive and harmful, and not fit for purpose<sup>9</sup>, but also does nothing to support farmers and our food security.

We need policies that are ambitious and not contradictory, and the larger picture needs to be considered.

## **5. Is the current level and target of food self-sufficiency in England still appropriate?**

The level and target of food self-sufficiency should be one that means that our country can be self-sufficient, ie support those living in our country with adequate food to survive.

As a country we cannot keep pushing ahead with so much development that results in loss and impacts to our agricultural land and not expect severe consequences to our food security. All too often targets in policy papers are just that, words typed in a report. We need to see actions to back up the talk and targets.

## **6. How could Government's proposed land use strategy for England improve food security? What balance should be struck between land use for food production and other goals – such as environmental benefit?**

Our Government need to ensure better protection for sustainable farming, and our natural environment.

Consideration is needed in regards to the cumulative impacts developments and infrastructure projects are having on our agricultural land and food security.

When destructive and harmful projects go ahead, we need to see mitigation for the loss of agricultural land in addition to the other forms of mitigation.

If these projects are to be progressed, we need environmental mitigation for sure, but we also need mitigation for the loss of farmland.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-not-fit-for-purpose/>

When considered in this way people hopefully start to realise how difficult it is to replace agricultural land.

We need the right balance between saving, protecting, and enhancing our natural environment. We need to ensure food security by means of sustainable farming.

We need clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, adequate healthy soil to grow healthy nutritional food, and a healthy thriving natural environment to sustain our existence.

All too often economic growth and benefit to businesses is rated higher up the list of priorities. The proposed LTC has morphed from being a new crossing to solve the problems at the Dartford Crossing into being about economic growth.

At the end of the day our priorities need to be based on a healthy sustainable future. Trying counting all that economic growth without clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, health nutritional food to eat in a healthy natural environment.

This is one of many reasons we need our Government to focus on essentials like sustainable health food security, and not allow hugely destructive and harmful projects like the proposed Lower Thames Crossing to go ahead.

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.