

Evidence for the Environmental Change and Food Security Inquiry

Introduction

Thames Crossing Action Group (TCAG) represent thousands of people who are opposed to the hugely destructive and harmful, not fit for purpose £10bn+ 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.

This paper was prepared and submitted by Laura Blake, Chair of TCAG on behalf of the group in response to the Environmental Change and Food Security Inquiry¹ on 20th December 2022. TCAG can be contacted via email – admin@thamescrossingactiongroup.com.

Reason for submitting evidence

As a group we have many serious concerns about the proposed Lower Thames Crossing, including the impacts on the environment and food security, which is why we felt it important to submit our evidence to this inquiry.

The proposed LTC would destroy thousands of acres of agricultural land, including grade 1 listed land. Surrounding areas of agricultural land would also be impacted by things like air, water, and soil pollution, nitrogen deposition etc. It would have a huge impact on our farming community, with loss and impacts to farms that have been in families and communities for many generations.

We have serious concerns that at a time when food security is very much an issue and concern so much agricultural land would be lost and impacted.

The loss of so much agricultural land and impacts to our food security would also likely lead to yet more food needing to be imported in to our country, resulting in more traffic, more emissions, and greater impacts to the environment.

We have serious concerns about hugely destructive and harmful projects like the proposed LTC, and feel it important that these concerns and issues be taken into account at a national level, and feel these particular concerns relate very much to your call for evidence. We thank you for the opportunity to submit our evidence to the inquiry.

¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/7063/>

Evidence

A short summary, as requested, can be found following on after this Evidence section of our representation.

Climate change and food security: projected effect, risks, and mitigation

- ***What are the main risks posed to future UK food security from projected climate change and biodiversity loss pathways?***

Aside from the obvious risks of climate change and biodiversity loss, sadly our own government appear to be a major risk if they continue to try and push ahead with projects like the proposed Lower Thames Crossing (LTC), and other development that is destroying and impacting so much, including our agricultural land and food security.

It's not just through direct loss and impacts of and to land, but also because as more and more land is lost and impacted the need for our food to travel further increases, and thus increases the negative impacts to our environment and food security.

It should also be noted that developments/projects like the proposed LTC take and impact land and food security not just for the physical project itself, but also for environmental mitigation and compensation.

Of course we agree that environmental mitigation and compensation should be put in place, but there is a vital need to consider the impacts such provisions entail too.

Land is taken or impacted because of the project, so more land is needed to mitigate and compensate. But that extra land take also means further impact and losses.

We translocate species as part of these projects, but what impact does that then have on the land that they are translocated to? How would we like it if more and more people were moved into our homes? How would we feel if more and more people shopped at our regular supermarket and the store failed to provide additional stock to supply our needs? This is what we are doing to our natural environment and species when we keep moving and squeezing them into areas that are being condensed more and more as more and more developments are progressed.

Where does the never-ending spiral end? Who is considering the cumulative impacts of all of this?

This is something that needs to be addressed, because what we do to our natural environment we ultimately do to ourselves, as our existence relies on our natural world being able to sustain our existence.

- ***Where does the UK's food come from? On the current climate change trajectory, how will these regions be affected by climate change and what will the impact on UK food security be?***

We need and want our food to come from as locally as possible to reduce impacts and emissions, and also because the fresher the food the better it can be for our health.

The further food has to travel the greater the impacts to our climate and environment. If it has to travel on roads it also adds to congestion, and then there will more likely be the calls for more roads resulting in further destruction and impacts to climate, the environment, and our food security.

With so much of our food being imported we have to consider how it reaches us.

We should be questioning things like why there is no rail connectivity at the Port of Dover.

Rail improvements between Ashford in Kent and Reading in Berkshire would negate the need for the proposed Lower Thames Crossing by removing freight off of our roads and onto more sustainable rail².

Tescos have increased their use of rail freight to the extent that it has helped them with stock levels at times when other supermarkets have struggled.

Ideally we need food to be sourced as locally as possible, but when it does have to travel it needs to be with the least impact possible.

How our food reaches us is extremely important, and it is critical that we avoid the vicious circle of further climate impacts because of our food having to travel more miles, it is a never-ending spiral to a point of no return.

We cannot and should not sit back and expect to rely on other countries, we need to be as self-sufficient with our own sustainable healthy food security as possible.

² <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/rail-and-tram-alternatives/>

We need to be growing and eating sustainably and seasonally, with more education and information about where our food is coming from. We need to be supporting and encouraging people to buy and eat British foods, and supporting our farms with local sustainable farming. Not pushing ahead with projects like the proposed LTC, and other developments, that put our farmers, and food security under threat and at risk.

- ***How do existing UK food production, import, and export practices contribute to climate change and biodiversity loss?***

As already mentioned, the carbon foot print and impacts of importing food, extra traffic, more roads, more impacts to the environment and climate, biodiversity loss etc is a very serious issue and concern.

42% of traffic at Dartford Crossing is goods vehicles. Admittedly not all food, but it is a route that is used by much of our food. National Highways were very quick to point out how important the Dartford Crossing is as a route for our food, during and following COVID.

It is because the Dartford Crossing is so congested that a new crossing has been progressed. But the evidence shows that the proposed LTC would not solve those issues, and the current crossing would remain over capacity, even if the LTC goes ahead³.

The LTC is estimated to emit around 6.6 million tonnes of carbon, if it goes ahead⁴. This hugely destructive crossing in part is needed because of the levels of food miles being travelled, and the need to continue food supplies (and other goods) movement.

Again it is a vicious circle, we are destroying more agricultural land to progress road projects like LTC, so that we can better move the food which we choose or need to import and transport further afield often because we are unable to grow it locally.

The more we destroy and impact our food supplies locally the further food has to travel creating further impacts.

³ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-not-fit-for-purpose/>

⁴ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-carbon-emissions/>

With impacts from climate change and destruction and impacts to our own food supply leading to further need to import and increase food miles. Where does it end? This needs more consideration and actions taken.

- ***How self-sufficient is the UK in producing food? What practices could the UK adopt to become more self-sufficient while reducing the emissions associated with agriculture?***

More consideration is needed in regard to the cumulative impacts to agricultural land. A project here and project there. Huge projects like the proposed LTC attempting to play down the impacts, and do so in the name of economic growth and benefit.

Too many developments are being pushed through, and it all adds up. Projects like LTC need to give more importance to cost of destroying and impacting agriculture and food security.

More real value needs to be put on our food security, agricultural land, and farming.

Being more self-sufficient in the UK for our food is essential to survival, we cannot continue to overlook this, as we are doing at the moment.

The impacts of projects like the proposed LTC need to be considered and challenged. There are other alternatives to huge road projects, but there are not alternatives to having no food to exist.

UK preparedness: Government and market

- ***How has the prolonged heat-wave and drought in 2022 affected food growing in the UK?***

We note that agricultural land that would be lost and impacted by LTC, if it goes ahead, suffered from the fires in the summer of 2022.

Local farmers are already suffering from impacts of the proposed LTC, where crops have been reduced due to investigative works for the project.

Local farmers have previously invested in water supplies and systems for use on crops in the area, which would be lost/impacted by LTC if it goes ahead.

Our farmers are suffering already from the impacts of climate change, and such drought and fires, but also from projects like the LTC, which if it goes ahead would just increase the level of negative impacts to their work, and our food security.

- **How can the UK ensure that enough water is available for crop growing while preventing unsustainable levels of abstraction that can impact the ecology and resilience of our rivers, wetlands and aquifers?**

It is not just ensuring that we have enough water available, we also need to ensure that it is clean and healthy enough to be used for growing our food. Another reason why we need to take better care in protecting our natural environment and not allowing destructive and harmful development, like the proposed LTC go be progressed.

There is more and more evidence coming out about water pollution from roads around the world. This kind of pollution comes from non-fossil fuel as well as fossil fuel vehicles.

To often the pollution from traffic is focused on carbon emissions, which is of course important, but other pollution also needs to be considered and taken seriously.

PM2.5 are the tiny particles from things such as brake dust, and tyre and road wear. Not only are they tiny enough that the deadly particles get into our organs via the blood stream, but they also get into the air, water, and soil. They are not limited to road side either, they can travel thousands of miles, being picked up and dropped on winds many times over, or flowing through our water supplies.

We need to ensure that we are not swapping out one problem for one or many other different problems.

Construction of projects like the proposed LTC also use a lot of water, especially for tunneling when tunnel boring machines needs to have a constant water supply.

The impacts to our water supply from projects like the proposed LTC also include how they impact and change things like flood plains, marshes, and water courses. How can we expect to impact such things and there not be repercussions?

Plus of course huge projects like the proposed LTC are also extremely destructive and harmful, and thus impact our natural environment which leads to further climate changes, including water supply.

At a time of climate emergency, and when we need to be doing all we can to try and ensure a healthy sustainable future for all, including our food security we should not be progressing such destructive and harmful projects.

- ***How will food-producing regions of the UK be affected by climate change? What can the UK do to support adaptation efforts in the countries and regions most affected?***

As already mentioned, food producing areas are already suffering not only from climate change but also from developments like the proposed LTC.

We need to prepare and plan for adaptation, but it is also essential to focus on prevention and further deterioration of our climate, environment, and food security.

It's not good to just push ahead as though it is business as usual with huge projects like the proposed LTC, we need to adapt by moving away from these kinds of projects, and instead opt for more sustainable options. This is of particular relevance to LTC when you consider how much the insanity of progressing with such a destructive and harmful project would be when it doesn't even meet the scheme objectives⁵.

Let's not just push ahead and then figure out ways to adapt to the damage we have knowingly created, rather we adapt to finding ways to reduce, and reverse our impacts in the first place.

⁵ <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-project-objectives/>

- ***What is the Government doing to prepare for disruption to the UK's food supply resulting from climate change impacts or biodiversity loss?***

Sadly we do not feel that our Government are doing anywhere enough. We hear a lot of talk with these things, but no action or legitimate plans to back up all the talk.

We need policies and strategies to be updated and attainable plans actioned to enable the necessary actions to be achieved.

If anything, rather than preparing for the disruption our Government seem to be actually pushing ahead with projects like the LTC that would worsen our food security, worsen biodiversity, and worsen climate change. We need and deserve better. Why are Government spending more on hugely destructive and harmful projects than those that support a more sustainable future?

- ***Does Government's Food Strategy address the risks of climate change and biodiversity loss adequately? Does it prepare the UK to adapt to a world affected by ecological crises?***

As mentioned already, too many policies and strategies but often very little evidence to back up how they propose to reach targets and succeed in aims.

Our food security is reliant on a healthy environment, on biodiversity being able to sustain our existence as well as the planet's stability to support us.

It is not just the obvious issues and concerns regarding risks to our food security either. Without enough healthy nutritious food there will also be implications to the population's health, and that then leads to impacts to the wider economy through healthcare costs, and people being to unwell to work etc.

The proposed LTC alone, would cost £10bn or more, and would be detrimental to many aspects of the Government's Food Strategy⁶.

We need to see real actions to show the Government are taking climate change, biodiversity, and food security seriously. Like our lives depend on it, because they do.

⁶https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1082026/government-food-strategy.pdf

- ***How effective would the market be at securing the UK's food supply in a situation of major food insecurity worldwide? To what extent could Government intervention be needed?***

Government intervention and action is needed now to help ensure we don't get to that stage. Actions like stopping LTC.

- ***Could the UK's land be better used to secure our domestic food supply? What role could community or urban food growing play in increasing the UK's resilience to food shortages caused by environmental change?***

At the moment Government are acting in a way that doesn't even allow our farmers, and communities, to save and protect our existing food supply, let alone plan how to better use and secure our land and food security.

Far from our Government encouraging communities to play a role in increasing our food resilience, it is our communities calling on and demanding our Government stop destroying our farm land and to do more for food security and to protect our environment.

We are having to fight our Government to try and save valuable farm land, to protect our farmers and food security, to save and protect our allotments, homes and land etc.

We need a future with better protection for a healthier environment and more sustainable farming, not hugely destructive developments which are often not wanted, needed, or fit for purpose.

- ***What role should the Government take in ensuring that land is available to secure the UK's food supply in the context of a changing climate?***

Stop the vicious circle of too much, and bad development that is destroying and impacting our land.

The proposed LTC is destructive and harmful. An estimated 6.6 million tonnes of carbon emissions, if it goes ahead, leading to further climate damage. It needs to be stopped now.

Government need to assess cumulative impacts of development and carbon etc, and start acting like we're in climate emergency because we are.

Securing a sustainable food supply

- ***Does the Government's Food Strategy put the UK on a path to a secure and sustainable food supply?***

Again, too many strategies and policies and too much talk about targets and aims but no actions or plans to show how it will be achieved. And other government projects, like the proposed LTC, which go against what is needed to fulfil strategies and targets etc.

- ***What are the most environmentally friendly ways of producing a secure supply of nutritious food?***

Saving and protecting existing farm land. Investment into sustainable farming to support nutritious food, food security, economy, environment.

We need Government to move away from using excuses of economic growth and jobs in attempts to justify projects like the LTC, and to instead focus on investment, growth and jobs in things that ensure a sustainable existence.

- ***What role could a reduction in meat and dairy consumption play in improving food security and what measures could the Government take to capitalise on the trend to plant-based diets?***

Whilst there is evidence to back this up, as a group our response is specifically in regard to LTC, as that is what our group represents people on.

However, we would say that regardless of whether it be for meat, dairy, or other plant-based diets, we cannot keep destroying and impacting the lands that our environment and food security relies upon, with projects like LTC.

- ***What role do food technologies have in mitigating the risks that environmental changes poses to UK food security?***

More focus needs to be put on the absolute basics of food growing, like the land/space, soil and water that are essential and all too easily and often being destroyed and lost. No amount of technologies is going to help if the essentials are not available.

- ***Is there research and development the Government could be funding to provide food security solutions?***

Infuriatingly our Government don't appear to even be doing the basics of saving and protecting our existing UK food growing and supplies.

We would say research into cumulative effects of all the developments on farm land, but whilst this is important to monitor and factor into decision making, we haven't got time for research we need actions now.

It shouldn't be a case of pushing ahead as if it is business as usual and research carried out that would very likely lead to acknowledging too late that pushing ahead with development like LTC is a big mistake.

The emphasis needs to be on pushing ahead and investing in sustainable food security in the UK, with developments being given less importance.

We need food to survive. Growing as locally as possible and reconnecting people to what they eat and where it comes from.

Many of our supporters support our farmers and buying locally. We recognize and identify the importance of UK food security.

We want and need to see Government listening to us and acting in a way to support and promote this, not destroy and negatively impact it with developments like LTC.

Summary

We recognise that there are threats to our food security because of climate change and environmental changes.

However, we do not feel that our Government are doing enough to protect and improve our food security, or lessen and try and reverse the impacts to our climate and environment.

It's not good enough to put Strategies in place and to just talk about targets, aims, intentions etc. We need to see actions to ensure results. We don't need or want to see Government pushing ahead with things that go against strategies and policies, such as developments like the proposed £10bn+ Lower Thames Crossing road project.

Our Government's obsession with build, build, build at any cost, and in the name of economic growth needs to stop.

The cumulative impacts of such projects on climate and food security need to be assessed and considered.

It is a vicious circle to keep pushing ahead as though it is business as usual. Especially when such projects add to the problem.

We cannot afford to keep losing more and more agricultural land. We cannot afford for such projects to impact on farming, the environment, food security and so much more.

Biodiversity is essential to our existence for so many reasons, including the basics needed for survival, like food and water.

We need more importance and value placed on the environment, climate, and our food security. It should not just be about preparing and adapting, we need to be acting to slow down and reverse climate change and strengthen our food security.

Government should be investing in saving and protecting our environment, and ensuring a healthy sustainable future for all. They should not be spending billions of pounds on projects that are not fit for purpose, fail to meet scheme objectives, would worsen climate change, and destroy our agricultural land and negatively impact our environment and food security.

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.