

THAMES CROSSING ACTION GROUP

www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com

Brentwood Borough Council Planning Application Ref: 23/00862/FUL¹

Demolition of grain and agricultural machinery stores. Creation of a community woodland facility comprising: new community building, including staff welfare and office facilities and outdoor terrace, construction of a Forestry England Barn, new vehicular access into a 94-space car, with EV charging points and overflow area; coach parking space, staff and disabled car parking, service yard and vehicle turning circle, surfaced and unsurfaced woodland paths, creation of six new ponds and informal natural play areas, bin store, cycle parking and landscaping (detailed application). Construction of an open sided visitor shelter, modular cafe with covered outdoor seating area, and WC facilities, substation and (outline application all matters, except access, reserved) | Hole Farm Hole Farm Lane Great Warley Brentwood Essex CM13 3JD

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.

Comments

As a community action group, representing those who are opposed to the proposed Lower Thames Crossing (LTC), we feel it important to comment on this planning application, as we have concerns that National Highways (NH) have not been transparent in regard to their plans for Hole Farm Community Woodland.

NH originally announced publicly that Hole Farm Community Woodland was a project to 'improve' biodiversity along their major road network, in this instance the M25. They stated that Hole Farm Community Woodland would be progressed regardless of whether the proposed Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) is granted permission or not.

However, they have also since declared that Hole Farm Community Woodland would be part of the environmental mitigation and compensation for the proposed LTC, which is currently being examined as part of the Development Consent Order (DCO) process.

The Planning Inspectorate/Examining Authority are asking questions in regard to the need for clarity on environmental mitigation and compensation and potential creative/double counting of certain aspects, including Hole Farm Community Woodland.

¹ <https://publicaccess.brentwood.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=RXOVGXDJI6O00>

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We have more info on our website here - <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/hole-farm-community-woodland/>

We also wish to draw attention to the fact that LTC Exec Director, Matt Palmer has publicly stated² that there is a possibility that Hole Farm would be used as a tree nursery to grow trees to plant along the proposed LTC, if permission for the LTC is granted. So please be aware that any promises of trees being planted for the benefit of the community woodland may be for the benefit of National Highways and could be removed to be translocated in different locations.

We are also concerned about the impact National Highways/LTC are having on agriculture at a time when food security is a serious issue. Not only is there a loss of agricultural land and food production, but also the associated environmental impacts of food having to travel more miles thus adding further adverse impact at a time of climate emergency.

We understand and appreciate the need for saving, protecting, and enhancing our natural environment and biodiversity, but this can be done successfully alongside sustainable agricultural farming.

We do not believe that adequate ecology surveys were even carried out prior to NH purchasing the land and declaring they would be improving biodiversity improvements. Instead Hole Farm Community Woodland has been an opportunity for NH to attempt to greenwash the hugely destructive and harmful proposed LTC project.

We would urge caution when it comes to a planning application that appears to lack final design details, particularly since the Hole Farm proposal is so controversial and questionable in regard to its association to the proposed LTC.

We also have concerns that the proposed Hole Farm Community Woodland would result in an increase in traffic, as there is very limited access via more sustainable means such as public transport and active travel.

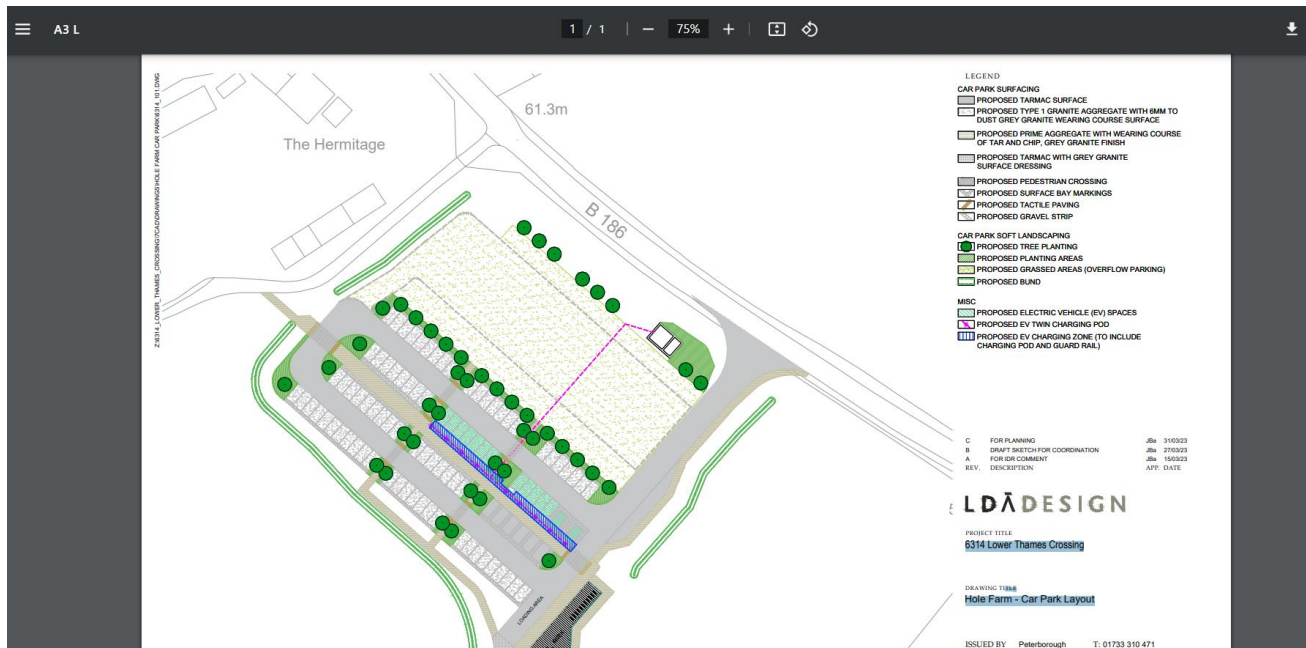
NH are selling the proposal at Hole Farm as a Community Woodland, but we would also draw attention to the fact that many trees have been planted at Thames Chase in efforts to create a community forest as a form of compensation when the M25 was built, and that this woodland is now under threat from the proposed LTC.

² <https://www.thamescrossingactiongroup.com/ltc-at-feb-2022-asela-joint-committee-meeting/>

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We question why planning application document '6314_101 CAR PARK LAYOUT LOWER THAMES CROSSING'³ is detailed as 'Project Title - 6134 Lower Thames Crossing' and 'Drawing Title – Hole Farm – Car Park Layout'.



This again suggests the association with the proposed LTC, which is a separate National Significant Infrastructure Project(NSIP) that is currently being examined as part of the Development Consent Order(DCO) process. Construction of an NSIP cannot legally begin until such time as a DCO is granted. A decision on whether the proposed LTC will be granted a DCO or not is not due until mid 2024 at the earliest. The LTC project has also been rephased by 2 years, as per the Government announcement in March 2023, meaning construction would not begin until at least 2026, and is estimated to last 6-7 years at least.

In conclusion, we believe that National Highways have and are using Hole Farm Community Woodland in an attempt to greenwash the hugely destructive and harmful unfit for purpose Lower Thames Crossing road project. There is a distinct and questionable overlap between this planning application and the NSIP DCO application that needs to be and is being examined and questioned further.

³ https://publicaccess.brentwood.gov.uk/online-applications/files/EA3DE26F1E5F6E73BB5CA55B3DB7BFA1/pdf/23_00862_FUL-6314_101_CAR_PARK_LAYOUT_LOWER_THAMES_CROSSING-1012393.pdf