



LEATHER LANE FACTSHEET

A Factsheet to respond to FAQs/myths re. the Campaign to Save Leather Lane Oaks

We are trying to re-route the HS2 line

No we are not. Our campaign is focusing on the over-road that will take Leather Lane over the railway track once it is built. HS2 and their subcontractors EKFB are currently planning to route the over-road to the South of Leather Lane, which would destroy the row of veteran oak trees which is a vital wildlife and highly active bat corridor that is home to at least 7 species of bats including the endangered barbastelle bat.

Our campaign stopped the felling last March. 9 trees have come down for the track itself along with 3 trees for the haul road. There are 87 out of 99 trees remaining and we hope that we can AVOID further damage by rerouting the over-road via the field on the North of Leather Lane.

The Trees are protected

The veteran oaks used to be protected by a Tree Protection Order. All TPOs were overridden by the HS2 Act. However, that does not mean that HS2 can legally fell without justification.

HS2 are planting a green corridor

It remains to be seen whether HS2 fulfils their promise to plant a green corridor as they have been going back on their commitments in order to save money. Even if the trees are planted and grow - this will create a corridor running North – South alongside actual line and will never be able to replace veteran trees. We are in the midst of a climate crisis and need to retain veteran trees as they are key in capturing carbon and outputting Oxygen. Leather Lane runs 1km from East to West and provides the only east-west wildlife connectivity for 7km across the Chilterns. At least 247 hedgerows have been torn down in the Chilterns alone and Leather Lane provides vital foraging and connectivity for bats and other wildlife.

HS2 are committed to net zero loss of biodiversity

This may be the case on paper but on the ground, we can see the reality of HS2's "mitigation" sites such as Bowood where no one has assumed responsibility for maintenance of the saplings.

Any tree planting will never compensate for the loss of veteran trees such as the Leather Lane oaks. The priority for all infrastructure projects needs to be AVOIDANCE of harm, as required by the Mitigation Hierarchy. Our proposal for an over-bridge on the North side of Leather Lane provides this.

The Presence of Pipistrelle bats has been identified and mitigation assessed in HS2's Environmental Statement ("ES")

At least seven species of bat have been recorded on Leather Lane. If HS2 have only assessed the impact on Pipistrelle bats in the ES, they will have failed to assess the impact on at least five other species, including the rare barbastelle bat, rendering the ES deficient and well below the standard required by policy and legislation.

The ES contains the commitment to plant the approaches to the Leather Lane overbridge to integrate the structure into the landscape and maintain and enhance existing habitat links across the route for bats and other wildlife.

Regardless of any commitment to provide compensation planting, the fact remains that where the overbridge crosses the track and cutting itself, there is no proposed planting and so even if any planting either side of this is used by bats or wildlife, it would necessitate this wildlife traversing a very long section of un-vegetated road. This represents a significant gap that bats are unlikely to traverse with any significant ease or regularity and so represents a significant negative effect of the proposed design when compared to the pre-development baseline, and one that is not compensated for by the proposed planting.

HS2/EKFB are engineers. They'll work it out!

The engineers at EKFB have struggled with their own design for the over-road at Leather Lane. Members of the Campaign have asked pertinent questions such as the type and width of road. EKFB's original design was for a 6.5 metre-wide, two-lane road the whole length of the lane, allowing for traffic to travel at 60 mph. This would have necessitated the whole lane of oak trees - 99 in total – being felled. Obviously, this was a completely inappropriate design for Leather Lane and the intervention of the Campaign has ensured that issues such as road width are fully considered along with other measures to save the trees.

The EKFB engineers still struggle to confirm the details of the Western end of the lane 'tie-in' where their over-road would fragment the line of oak trees again as it cuts back into join the original Leather Lane; there is no topography on their design for this Western tie-in and therefore the design is incomplete.

HS2/EKFB use their own independent highly qualified ecologists

We have been engaging with HS2's subcontractor EKFB for a year now and have yet to deal with an Ecologist!

The campaign has engaged the services of the UK's top bat experts Doctor Anna Berthinussen and Professor John Altringham along with senior ecologists from Bioscan to provide detailed analysis of bat data collected at Leather Lane and full reports on the impact and cumulative effect of the fragmentation of the flight corridor and foraging habitat it provides. HS2 and EKFB have not met this level of expertise and we are yet to receive an in-depth Ecological report. Freedom of Information requests to Bucks Council for bat reports on Leather Lane returned our own surveys that were undertaken last May!

It's too late to make a difference

The campaign has shown how much a group of local residents and their supporters can achieve!

We realise that many residents have spent 10 years fighting HS2 and doing their best to save their landscape and livelihoods. Many of those we have spoken to want to save Leather Lane but feel that there is nothing more they can do, but you can!!

In the past year, we have stopped the felling of 99 oak trees along with local councillors and residents and put pressure on EKFB to change their designs in order to save more trees and to protect the Holloway with great effect. We also delayed felling at the track trace last July in order for EKFB to put mitigation measures in place and we continue to monitor this. We have also ensured that HS2/EKFB honour the commitments to the Design Principles submitted by the Chiltern Conservation Board at Consultation to maintain Leather Lane as a single-track road.

We have been in engagement with EKFB since last June and our campaign with its strong ecology and legal arguments is having an impact.

What is the height and gradient of the proposed lane?

Our current design incorporates a 1 in 8 gradient which is the same as the current lane, but could be reduced further with topography detail. It will certainly be no steeper than Leather Lane as it currently stands.

EKFB's design for their Western tie-in will still require 'Departures approval' from Bucks County Council for the speed and gradient issues of their design, as will ours.

EKFB's Western tie-in design also does not show topography either; so although the design looks credible in detail, our engineer is concerned as to its claims. They do not look credible to him. He wishes to discuss this with their engineers. Our engineer has not exaggerated his claims or detail on our design; he feels it would be unprofessional to do so without topographical data to inform the design accurately.

Once the design gets finalised, a piece of software called Auto Track would make sure that farm vehicles and so on can navigate the lane without problem.

Our design does not affect the Copse

This is not actually a copse, it is a flint pit. More importance was given to this than the entire wildlife corridor at consultation stage by HS2 and used as a reason to re-route to the South which we find incredulous. In any case, it will not be touched by the over-road. Our design is outside of the Act limits.

If you would like to respond or get in touch, please contact us at: saveleatherlaneoaks@gmail.com

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