



23rd September 2022

Dear Maddelyn

Re: Ilona the Lone Oak, Leather Lane



We acknowledge your letter to Sarah Green MP dated 10th August, all contents have been duly noted by Carol-Anne and the Campaign to Save Leather Lane Oaks and Ilona the Lone Oak (known as T14).

It took almost 3 months to receive a reply from you. Carol-Anne wrote to Simon Matthews at EKFB on 18th May and you replied on 10th August, shortly after Carol-Anne left Hammonds Hall Farm. This can be no coincidence.

We are very surprised that you have made a decision regarding Ilona, particularly because the Schedule 17 application for the over-bridge at Leather Lane has not been submitted. Surely the final decision regarding the routing of the over bridge will determine how much space you will have on the Southern Side?

After several prompts, we received your email dated 12th September which fails to provide the clarification we asked for. Your brief response seems to have been prompted by an email you received from Catherine Bunting at Great Missenden Parish Council.

You state in your email of 12 September:

“The tree is in an area that will be used to provide visual screening and a degree of noise mitigation to Potter Row. The root protection area for the tree is very wide and therefore means that the screening, in the form of a bund, cannot be created with the tree in situ.

We are committed to increased planting in this area in the form of a woodland belt and providing an improvement in the biodiversity of the area with both further planting and a greater depth of planting on the eastern slope around Leather Lane. “

The visual screening argument seems particularly spurious - you are proposing to remove a veteran and heritage oak tree with some 18 metre canopy in order to replace it with a pile of earth and feeble saplings that will take years, decades even if they grow, for any trees planted on a new bund to provide the same screening as the lone oak already provides much more effectively.

As far as the ‘*degree of noise mitigation*’ is concerned, we have looked at the GIS mapping again and it appears that you have scope to amend the line of the Bund to avoid the Root Protection Zone (RPZ) within Act limits.

We remind you, once again, of your obligations under the Mitigation Hierarchy. You must AVOID harm where possible. If it is possible to avoid felling this veteran oak, then you must do so. When we refer to Ilona as an Oak, we are encompassing up to 2,300 species¹ that she supports as well as the vital role she is playing in capturing carbon, retaining water and reducing pollution.

We are aware of an earlier communication (18-Jan 2022, Simon Matthews to Carol-Anne O’Callaghan) outlining some considerations regarding the Ilona the Oak, and note that this refers to a 7m high bund surrounding the tree.

However, your recent Schedule 17 application for the ‘South Heath cuttings’ (Proposed Landform Sheet 1)² clearly shows the contour height at the tree position to be 200m, and for the existing land behind Hammonds Hall farm to be 198m – implying a bund height of 2 to 3 metres above the existing ground level. This suggests that building a retaining structure around the oak would be well within the capabilities of your organisation, should you choose to do so. She has a 13.30m RPZ³ would require only around 40m of noise barrier/retaining wall to protect the tree & provide noise insulation, as opposed to the landscape bund that you are proposing. The tree is also over 75m from the track centre, and presumably outside the security fence, so there is little risk of interference with the line, even in the unlikely event of it falling during a storm.

Local opinion is strongly in favour of retaining this veteran and heritage tree, even at the expense of introducing some irregularity in your new landform, and discontinuity in the mitigation planting. As you

¹ [Oak trees and wildlife - Woodland Trust](#)

² http://www.hs2amersham.org.uk/Resources/Construction/SH_cutting/Sched17_1/HS2-PROPOSED_LANDFORM_PLAN_SHEET_1-4461187.pdf

³ Please refer to EKFB’s Tree Survey attached to this email

will be aware, newly planted trees are unlikely to ever attain the proportions of existing veteran trees, due to the activities of the grey squirrel population, making the retention of the existing trees even more vital to maintain the ecology of the AONB.

In your letter dated 10th August 2022 you state:

1. *"We have explored options that would allow us to save the tree, including forming a bund around it, however these options have not been workable".*

As previously requested in our letter of 25 August we would like to know what options you have explored, why they are unworkable, and the cost implications of each one.

As the top of the bund is less than 15m above the track, some 3m below the train pantograph height, it will only be effective in obstructing the rolling stock noise in any case. A short length of noise barrier could be substituted for the bund in the immediate vicinity of the tree.

We are also aware that bunds can vary in height and size so surely this can be adapted for Ilona? For example, there is a gap of a hundred metres south of the Oak, for the GMI/2-Havenfield overbridge. Your present plans for a bund are not acceptable in the Chilterns AONB, and we remind you of your commitments made at Committee stage and the Design Principles which you are expected to adhere to.⁴ Again, we question the rationale behind removing a veteran oak tree with 18 metre canopy for a pile of earth with some feeble saplings stuck in.

The photos attached as Appendix 1 refer to Ilona's sister Oak at Harvil Road. She is situated some 56.69 metres from the centre of the track and is therefore nearer to the track than Ilona and has escaped the axe, quite rightly! Please, therefore, can you explain the discrepancy in approach for these two indispensable veteran oak trees?

2. *"The tree will need to be removed to allow us to provide wider, long-term, mitigation."*

I am sure we do not need to reiterate the point that we have made time and time again – that there is no point destroying an established, veteran oak tree in order to plant fragile saplings that may or may not grow. Your record on planting is thus far very poor. Please refer to Appendix Two as an illustration of failed "mitigation" at Bowood Lane where an ancient woodland known as Jones Hill Wood was partially destroyed, including a barbastelle bat maternity roost. Are you able to tell us how many of the 22,000 reported plants (in actual fact less than half that amount) you introduced there are still alive? Is this an example of "strong" woodland?

We are in a time of climate crisis, as the recent weather is reminding us, and we simply do not have time for this Greenwash. Locals have informed us that Oak saplings are unlikely to attain maturity, as the bark gets ringed by grey squirrels. Ilona and the Oaks on Leather Lane, along with countless Oaks that have been destroyed by HS2 (including the Kings Lane Oak which was unnecessarily and "mistakenly" felled) were all planted before the introduction of grey squirrels which is why we can appreciate their magnificence now.

3. *"I know the loss of the tree will be felt immediately by the community but we are putting in significant measures to help mitigate this loss through the planting of a strong woodland belt,*

⁴ [https://www.chilternsaonb.org/uploads/6974-Chilterns AONB HS2 CEIP Part 1 Detailed Design Principles_low res.pdf](https://www.chilternsaonb.org/uploads/6974-Chilterns_AONB_HS2_CEIP_Part_1_Detailed_Design_Principles_low_res.pdf)

increasing the existing area of planting significantly, and providing an overall improvement in the biodiversity of the area.”

There is no need to mitigate for the loss of Ilona if you AVOID felling her in the first place, which is your duty under the Mitigation Hierarchy - we have been pointing out your obligations time and time again.

How, exactly, do you plan to improve Biodiversity in the area? You are felling veteran trees, destroying ancient woodland, pulling up hedgerows and disrupting connectivity and destroying habitats. We really cannot see how you are going to improve biodiversity – you are actually destroying it and contributing to a huge decline in the UK which is already ranked in the bottom 10% in the world and the worst among G7 nations.⁵

In the Chilterns alone, HS2 has destroyed irreplaceable Biodiversity, often without surveys, licence or need. We can list several cases we have personally been involved in, including the Barbastelle Maternity Roost at JHW, the Hazel Coppice with Dormice and Mediaeval Spinney with ancient oak trees and bat roosts at Small Dean, 60 badger setts nearby with one accorded "main sett" status, a Red Kite nest and other active nests, 250 hedgerows in the Chilterns alone, the Kings Lane Oak which was felled unnecessarily and Grimms Ditch, an area of Ecological and Archaeological importance along with areas of woodland not included in the Environmental Statement. The list goes on. Please explain how you are going to put this right?

4. *“We are also exploring ways to re-use the felled timber to return it to the community.”*

If Ilona were to be felled, it is really up to the community, including this campaign group, to have a say in what happens to the timber. Your approach is another example of poor community engagement.

Please can you respond to these points in full. We look forward to receiving your response by Friday 30th September.

Yours Sincerely

Lindsey Spinks

LLB (Hons)

The Campaign to Save Leather Lane Oaks

Plus supporting groups:

The Chiltern Society

Great Missenden Parish Council

Prestwood Nature

Wycombe Friends of the Earth

⁵ [UK Biodiversity Loss Nearly at 50%, At Risk of “Ecological Meltdown” | Earth.Org](#)

Cc Ella Davies, HS2

Patricia Thompson, HS2

Kat Stanhope, HS2

Mark Thurston, HS2

Sarah Green MP

Jane MacBean, Buckinghamshire Council

Peter Martin, Buckinghamshire Council

Martin Tett, Buckinghamshire Council

Gareth Williams, Buckinghamshire Council

Great Missenden Parish Council

The Lee Parish Council

The Chiltern Society

Chiltern Conservation Board

Woodland Trust

Prestwood Nature

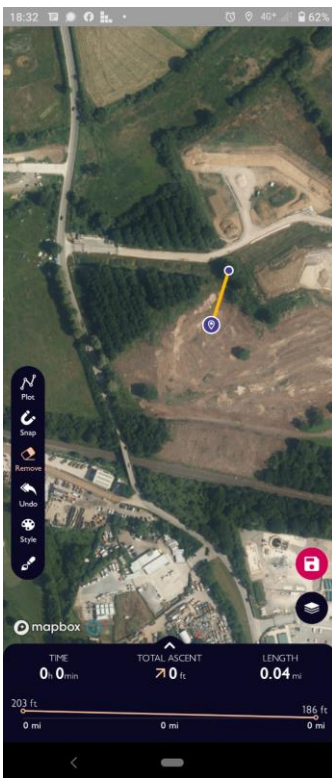
Wycombe Environment Centre

Great Missenden Voluntary Association

Prestwood Voluntary Association

APPENDIX ONE

Sister Oak Tree at Harvil Road



APPENDIX TWO

Bowood Receptor Site for Jones Hill Wood - a poor example of translocation and “mitigation” for loss of an ancient woodland

