

GREG SMITH MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Huw Merriman MP
Minister of State
Department of Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

Friday 26th May 2023

Dear Minister

Elm Tree Farm

I must bring to your attention the situation at Elm Tree Farm in my constituency, where HS2's contractors are threatening to remove a large area of ancient woodland belonging to the landowners without any intention of informing them, myself or any local elected representatives. These works would have a devastating impact both on Elm Tree Farm and on the surrounding land, and I am calling on you to urgently review these works compel the contractors to make contact with the Hodges who've so far heard nothing from the project on this.

I understand that EKFB intends to clear up to seven acres of ancient woodland, with two acres already having been lost to the project under similar circumstances, to accommodate a balancing pond. The landowners, Mr and Mrs Hodges, were not informed about these works; Mrs Hodges only found out the extent of these works after a chance encounter with two EKFB personnel whilst out walking. This demonstrates the project's severe and intrinsic lack of respect for my constituents and especially landowners and farmers. Despite project leaders knowing that works such as these are forthcoming and require detailed discussion with those affected, seemingly no one on the project is prepared to invest that time and they instead choose to plough on regardless.

This therefore raises the question – just how many forthcoming works do the project's leaders plan on pushing through without informing anyone who'll be affected, leaving farmers to simply stumble across site personnel and leave in tears at the thought of losing yet more of their land? This is utterly unacceptable on every level.

The fact that we have yet more ancient woodland being threatened with permanent extinction as a result of the project is also unacceptable. Not only would the ecological harm be severe and irreversible, the

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removal of any of these trees heightens the risk of flooding both Elm Tree Farm and the surrounding area. Wooded areas are a natural barrier against flooding; farms such as Elm Tree depend on this and other naturally-occurring elements to operate and any topographical change, especially on this scale, risks permanently impacting yields and thus the farm's future viability. Along with radio silence on the works themselves, no mention of mitigation or compensation has reached the Hodges.

This is yet another example of the project's utter disdain for rural communities and refusal to acknowledge how devastating and permanent the resulting changes really are. Until the directors fundamentally change their approach to matters of land and property and put communities first, the project will never be a good neighbour.

You'll be aware that as part of last week's Transport Select Committee visit to the area I and my fellow Committee Members held a discussion with the Hodges and several other landowners at Elm Tree Farm. The fact that just one week later I, local unitary and parish councillors and above all the Hodges learn about your works and the devastating risk and impact they present is frankly insulting, again demonstrating the projects utter lack of respect for us and those we represent.

A formal complaint has been made by my office to the HS2 Enquires line and I expect the project's teams on the ground to address this situation immediately. I also expect the senior leadership team to act on the concerns of my constituents and the local community as a whole; we need fundamental root-and-branch reform to the way the project and it's operatives conduct themselves, not just towards affected landowners and farmers but also towards local elected representatives, community leaders, local businesses, the local authority and everyone else affected.

I look forward to hearing from you, but more importantly seeing action taken to address both the situation at Elm Tree Farm and the project's severely flawed approach to rural communities.

Yours ever,


Greg Smith MP