

Leather Lane Conservation Group



PRESS RELEASE, 17-JULY-23

The Leather Lane Conservation Group (formerly Save Leather Lane) has campaigned for the past three years to preserve the line of 100 oak trees, planted along the south side of Leather Lane by Arthur Liberty. HS2 initially planned to fell most of these but following legal interventions, only 12 have so far been felled.

Local residents were aware that the lane was used by bats, and the group has deployed bat monitoring equipment on 160 nights in 2021-22. This data was submitted to professional ecologists (at Bioscan Ltd), and the report has now been released. This concludes that our data

- *“confirms the local presence of, and regular use of Leather Lane by, the rare barbastelle bat”*
- *shows an “apparent trend ... towards a peak of activity in late summer/early autumn[which] could be interpreted as evidence for there being roosts in the relatively near vicinity. If that is the case, the Lane and its surrounds could be of elevated value if they fall within the juvenile sustenance zone”*
- *and demonstrates that “there is a clear risk of the substantive removal of the commuting and foraging corridor offered by Leather Lane having a **regionally significant impact** on bat populations that has not hitherto been recognised in environmental assessment processes”*

This shows that the site has a far greater value to wildlife than was recognised by the surveys carried out in preparation for the HS2 environmental statement.

Our campaign to date has centered around having the new HS2 overbridge constructed to the north side of the existing lane, since this could be done without removing any more trees. In the light of the bat survey results, we are now requesting that a green bridge be provided. Since the new overbridge designs are for two carriageways, while Leather Lane itself is single track with a few passing places, it is not unreasonable to ask that one

carriageway be planted on the overbridge. This would provide a link between the two (otherwise disconnected) sections of the wildlife corridor, and be a step towards addressing the lack of provision for wildlife crossings over HS2 in the AONB. This does represent a significant increase in our request for mitigation, and so we have approached Buckinghamshire Council, the Chiltern Society and Sarah Green MP to support the new direction of the campaign. We are also asking people and organisations seeking to preserve the ecology of the AONB to support us, in the first instance by writing to Maddelyn Sutton, Head of Community & Stakeholder Engagement for HS2, endorsing our proposals.

We are also soliciting donations to our crowdfunder, <https://gofund.me/386aafa8> , to continue to finance our campaign.

Further Information

Latest Bioscan bat report -

<http://leatherlane.org/leather-lane-new-bat-report>

Our Green bridge campaign -

<https://tinyurl.com/SLL-GB>

Barbastelle Bat status -

The Barbastelle bat is protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). It is also listed under Annexes II and IV of the European Habitats Directive making it a European Protected Species. https://cdn.bats.org.uk/uploads/pdf/About%20Bats/barbastelle_11.02.13.pdf?v=1541085170

It *does not* appear in the list of species covered by the HS2 license.

Quotes

“Is a bat corridor a habitat in itself?”

The answer is undoubtedly yes, a 'bat-corridor', that is a commuting route (or flight corridor) and/or a foraging site, is indeed vital bat habitat that must be protected alongside roosts. Bats of course need roosts, foraging sites and secure flight corridors between them to survive.

John Altringham

Emeritus Professor of Ecology and Conservation

University of Leeds

Leather Lane is clearly an important and significant bat corridor within the landscape, used by at least seven species, including by the very rare barbastelle bat *Barbastella barbastellus*. On the basis of the above, mitigation for the impact of the track crossing must include a green bridge over the track to replace the removed linkage and reinstate this important wildlife corridor

Sam Watson
Bioscan

I would strongly recommend that a substantial and appropriately designed green bridge is installed as a matter of urgency to re-establish this important habitat corridor over the proposed railway line.

Dr Anna Berthinussen
Conservation First