

## **Dr Emma Tristram – Written evidence (RSK0003)**

Secretary, Arundel Bypass Neighbourhood Committee

I am Secretary of a small neighbourhood group that campaigns to protect the beautiful countryside and historic villages south-west of Arundel from a new bypass. The current 'Preferred Route' (announced 15 October 2020) passes through and essentially ruins two villages and has very serious impacts on another larger village. It also bisects and damages an area which according to Natural England is 'extraordinary' for its wildlife. See [www.arundelbypass.co.uk](http://www.arundelbypass.co.uk) and [www.binsted.org](http://www.binsted.org) for more about the damage it would do and [www.arundelalternative.org](http://www.arundelalternative.org) for a much less damaging scheme put forward by local people, with the aim of improving traffic flow without increasing 'capacity' and causing increased traffic.

I have concentrated on the Committee's questions on which I have relevant comments.

By Climate Emergency I always mean Climate and Environment Emergency (also known as CEE).

### **What are the most extreme risks that the UK faces? Are they connected? What do you understand by extreme risk?**

1. The most extreme risks that the UK faces are another pandemic (with a more lethal virus) and the Climate Emergency. These risks are systemic, i.e. they are linked. I understand 'extreme risk' to mean events that cause the deaths of large numbers of people.
2. These are threats to the whole planet. Therefore they are also threats to the UK. The parameters of this House of Lords committee, which focus entirely on the UK, show how little is understood about the interconnectedness of the pandemic and climate change threats, and about the need to look at threats to humanity, not just the UK.
3. The Climate Emergency is not just about melting icebergs and rising seas. Natural destruction is fuelling climate change, biodiversity loss, food shortages - and pandemics, by the spillover of viruses from animals into humans. COVID-19, SARS, MERS, Ebola, swine flu, Lyme disease, West Nile fever, HIV/AIDS, and many other viruses, all originated in wildlife before jumping to humans.
4. The trade in wildlife (especially rare wildlife) and the cutting down of tropical forests for farming (especially for palm oil and soya beans) make another pandemic more likely. Air pollution weakens our defences: for Covid-19 sufferers, a small increase in a patient's exposure to air pollution was associated with an 8% higher death rate.
5. The climate crisis is causing the permafrost to thaw. Many people expect pathogens trapped within the previously frozen ground - responsible for such diseases as polio, anthrax, smallpox and the Spanish flu - to eventually be released.

“If the world wants to avoid pandemics like Covid-19 in future, it has a lot to learn. This coronavirus outbreak is likely to cost the world somewhere between \$8 trillion and \$15 trillion. It might have been 500 times cheaper, say US scientists, simply to have done what conservationists have sought for years: control trade in wildlife and stop destroying tropical forests.”

(Climate News Network, 5 Aug 2020: <https://climatenewsnetwork.net/save-wildlife-save-forests-and-avoid-pandemics/>)

**Are there types of risks to which the UK is particularly vulnerable or for which it is poorly prepared? What are the reasons for this?**

6. The UK is particularly vulnerable to the risks caused by pandemics and climate change because its government does not accept the need to take fast or wide-ranging enough action in response to the Climate Emergency. For instance, it still regards it as acceptable to exploit fossil fuels, expand airports and build major new roads, although all these increase carbon emissions. It has not realised that new economic thinking is needed so that continuous growth is replaced as the main aim of policy, by a new overall paradigm such as well-being, regenerative economics or ‘doughnut economics’.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/04/the-new-economic-model-that-could-end-inequality-doughnut/>

**How can the Government ensure that it identifies and considers as wide a range of risks as possible? What risks does the inclusion criteria for the National Security Risk Assessment exclude and what effect does this have on long-term resilience?**

7. The National Security Risk Assessment does now include ‘overseas events’. But it does not include the Climate Emergency. This should be rectified, and the essential connectedness of the Climate Emergency with other threats and hazards should be acknowledged.

**How effectively do Departments mitigate risks? Does the Risk Assessment process and the Civil Contingencies Secretariat adequately support Government departments to address risks within their remits? Is further oversight or accountability required, and if so, what form should that take?**

8. The Department of Transport and Highways England use a completely different definition of ‘risk’ in preparing new road schemes – i.e. the risk that any proposed scheme may not comply with government policy and may fail to be passed by the planning process. The ‘risk’ is entirely to Highways England and its budget, and to the profits of construction companies.
9. For instance, a ‘National Policy Statement for National Networks risk table’ (undated, unpublished – seen through FOI) was compiled for the Arundel Bypass scheme options, with Red, Orange and Green entries. Red indicated **‘There is certainty that this option conflicts with the Policy and there is a high risk of it not complying through detailed design and / or**

**mitigation**'; Orange indicated 'There is a risk that this option will conflict with the Policy, however there is possibility of it complying'; Green indicated that an option complied with the Policy. The use of this terminology should be ended.

10. Far more important, the road building programme should be stopped. Highways England currently has 27 Development Control Order applications in progress.
11. The real risk from the road building programme, i.e. the risk to people, is through damage to the environment (through the destructive effects of roads schemes), worsening of the Climate Emergency (through increased carbon emissions from increased traffic and the construction process) and increased air pollution, especially from small particles from tyre wear.
12. Further oversight and accountability of Highways England is needed. The present system is corrupt in that the consultants and environmental surveyors employed are part of the business empire of construction companies. In the past, e.g. the 1990s, impartial environmental surveyors such as University departments were used. The same cronyism affects the roads programme process, with e.g. the construction equipment company JCB being the biggest donor to the Conservative party (£10m).
13. The attached table (on 'Optimism bias') from the Treasury Green Book is relevant to this corrupt process. See particularly the last category. All of Highways England's 'consultations' contain distortions of fact and omissions which favour the most expensive and destructive projects going ahead.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-book-supplementary-guidance-transport>

**Table 7 - Categorises of causes of optimism bias**

<b>Causes of optimism bias</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Technical causes	Imperfect information such as unavailability of data, new or unproven technology  Scope changes such as changes in relation to speed, road width, routing, safety and environmental norms  Management issues such as inappropriate calculation approach, procurement issues and risk sharing
Psychological causes	Tendency for humans and organisations to favour optimism Appraisal optimism
Economic causes	Construction companies and consultants have interests in advancing projects
Political-institutional causes	Interests, power, and institutions Actors may deliberately lie in order to see their projects/interest realised

14. The above points show that far from 'mitigating risks' to people and the planet, the Department of Transport and its satellite body Highways England act to increase the risks to people and the planet through the carbon emissions stemming from road construction and the resultant increase in traffic. For more evidence on this subject see [www.arundelbypass.co.uk/case-against-big-bypass](http://www.arundelbypass.co.uk/case-against-big-bypass). See also the important

paper by Friends of the Earth on the Climate Emergency and transport: <https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/getting-department-transport-right-track>.

15. NGOs such as Friends of the Earth are calling for Highways England to be abolished. It should be replaced by a new department called 'Transport England' which would aim to cut car use, increase bicycling and walking, improve public transport, and link house building to existing or new transport hubs so that no-one is dependent on a car to access what they need.

**What lessons have been learnt or should have been learnt about the approach taken to risk assessment and risk planning in this country from the COVID-19 pandemic?**

16. Many lessons should have been learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic and risk planning in this country. I suggest:
  - The Climate Emergency (and its causal relationship with pandemics) should be moved up the agenda and be the mainspring of government policy. See above.
  - The BBC should be asked to have a tab on its main menu titled 'Climate Emergency' or 'Global Warming' rather than having stories about this hidden away under 'Science', as at present. This would increase public awareness of the risks.
  - The 'VIP route' for handing out contracts for necessary medical equipment, which gave contracts to friends and relations of those in government, should be abolished. The risk is that the contractors will be incompetent, and the money wasted, leading to increased risk of death from disease.
  - The Roads Programme (Roads Investment Strategy 2) should be paused, and Highways England should be abolished.
  - The UK should apply to rejoin the European Union, because closer collaboration with countries nearest to us is all the more needed considering the risks we and the whole planet are facing.

*24 December 2020*