

£12 million improvements for Manchester to Wales motorway

Press release

The motorway which links Manchester to North Wales is getting £12 million worth of improvements to provide better journeys for drivers.



Highways England is carrying out a series of maintenance schemes along a 28-mile-stretch of the M56 during the next 12 months, including replacing the central reservation barrier near Warrington, revitalising a viaduct near Helsby, and resurfacing the motorway near Ellesmere Port.

Work is also due to take place next month to improve drainage on the section of the M56 near Manchester Airport (junctions 6 to 8) ahead of the main construction work on a major upgrade starting this autumn to reduce congestion and increase the motorway's capacity.

Reduced speed limits and lane closures will be in place on parts of the M56 for the safety of drivers, and road workers are following strict Public Health England safeguarding measures.

Gary Knowles, Highways England's head of scheme delivery in the north west, said:

The M56 provides an important link between Manchester and Wales, and we need to carry out a series of maintenance improvements to keep drivers safe and support essential journeys across the region.

The smoother road surface, better drainage and new central reservation barrier will improve safety for drivers, whether they're travelling to and from work, getting food to supermarkets or delivering medical supplies to hospitals.

We're doing everything we can to keep workers safe and would urge drivers to do their bit too by sticking to the speed limit for their own and our road workers' safety.

A bridge maintenance scheme is also due to start this weekend at a junction on the A55, along the route from the M56 which links Chester to Wrexham in North Wales.

Get more details and roadworks information on the [M56 maintenance schemes](#).

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Published 1 May 2020

Changes to identity verification and signing deeds

News story

We're making it easier to verify a person's identity and sign deeds for land registration purposes.



From Monday 4 May, we have introduced temporary changes when verifying a person's identity and for signing deeds. In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak HM Land Registry is regularly reviewing its practice, policy and procedures, taking guidance from customer feedback.

Identity verification

In addition to conveyancers and chartered legal executives, verification can now be undertaken by people who work, or have worked, in certain professions including:

- retired conveyancers, chartered legal executives, solicitors and barristers
- bank officials and regulated financial advisers
- medical doctors, dentists and veterinary surgeons
- chartered and certified accountants
- police officers and officers in the UK armed forces
- teachers and college and university teaching staff
- Members of Parliament and Welsh Assembly members
- UK civil servants of senior executive officer (SEO) grade or above
- magistrates

The verification can also be done by way of a video call.

Further details on these changes are available in our new [practice guide 67A: temporary changes to HM Land Registry's evidence of identity requirements](#).

Signing deeds

HM Land Registry will accept deeds that have been signed using the 'Mercury signing approach'.

This means that, for land registration purposes, a signature page will need to be signed in pen and witnessed in person (not by a video call). The signature will then need to be captured, with a scanner or a camera, to produce a PDF, JPEG or other suitable copy of the signed signature page. Each party sends a single email to their conveyancer to which is attached the final agreed copy of the document and the copy of the signed signature page.

This is effective from Monday 4 May. [Practice guide 8: execution of deeds](#) has been updated with more information.

Published 1 May 2020

Last updated 4 May 2020 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 4 May 2020

We have added a link to new practice guide 67A: temporary changes to HM Land Registry's evidence of identity requirements.

2. 1 May 2020

First published.

Specialists complete hi-tech testing on Chowns Mill oak tree

A number of options have been explored but specialists have concluded that the tree is likely to be a danger if not removed as part of the £24 million upgrade of the busy A45/A6 Chowns Mill junction in Northamptonshire.

The investigation works included ground penetrating radar to help map the roots of the tree – known locally as the Three Oaks – which is on the A5028 at Higham Ferrers.

Discussions are now under way to ensure the tree can still be enjoyed by the community with the wood being used as carved park furniture/equipment or put to similar good use.

In addition, Highways England is looking to plant up to 1,500 trees and to create wildflower meadow areas as part of the scheme.

Highways England Project Manager Dean Holloway said:

We understand how local people feel about the Three Oaks and have explored many different options looking for ways to safely retain it whilst enabling the vital improvements at this bottleneck junction to go ahead.

Unfortunately, after extensive investigations, the experts found that the road works would leave the tree unstable and in danger of falling down. Safety has to be the priority for Highways England so it is with heavy hearts we have decided to remove the Three Oaks.

Highways England only cuts back or fells trees when it is absolutely necessary to keep people safe or to allow us to improve journeys. Sadly that is the situation here.

At Chowns Mill roundabout the A45 is crossed by the A6 and provides access into Higham Ferrers and Rushden. Drivers often experience severe congestion at the island due to the volume of traffic combined with a lack of space on the roundabout.

The junction is being redesigned as a half hamburger layout with a new link road connecting the A6 South and A5028 with the existing roundabout. All approaches will be widened to provide extra lanes and capacity. Together this will mean a better flow of traffic and less congestion.

The new road layout will fall within 1.5m of the oak tree and the road will be lowered, to a construction depth of 2m from the existing ground level.

As well as the ground penetrating radar – essentially an x-ray of the existing ground – the investigations involved digging trial holes to examine root spread and see whether the road construction would damage the tree.

Arboricultural specialists concluded that all of the roots encountered would need to be removed which would impact on the tree's overall health, potentially leading to tree mortality. Meanwhile severing major roots would make it less stable and a safety hazard.

The project team also explored changing the road design to protect the tree but due to the root spread, and the size and quantity of roots, it was apparent that the tree would still be destabilised and put public safety at risk.

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[Inquiry opened into Barry Green Memorial Fund following governance and financial management concerns](#)

Press release

Investigation of charity's accounts prompts further inquiry by charity watchdog



The Charity Commission has opened an inquiry into the [Barry Green Memorial Fund](#) (1000492), due to concerns that there has been misconduct and/or mismanagement at the grant-making charity.

The charity's purposes include rescuing and supporting animals that have been cruelly treated.

The Commission previously opened a double defaulters' class inquiry case into the charity on 9 December 2019, to examine its failure to file its accounts on time twice. During this work the Commission found several other regulatory concerns about the charity's governance, including potential unmanaged conflicts of interest, and concerns over the charity's financial management.

This new inquiry will examine the concerns identified at the charity, including:

- the extent to which the trustees are complying with their legal duties in respect of the administration, governance and management of the charity, and particularly their financial accounting responsibilities
- the extent to which any failing or weaknesses identified in the administration of the charity during the inquiry were the result of misconduct and/or mismanagement by the trustees
- the extent to which the trustees responsibly managed the charity's resources and financial affairs, and particularly how they have managed conflicts of interest

The Commission may extend the scope of the inquiry if additional regulatory issues are identified.

It is the Commission's policy, after it has concluded an inquiry, to publish a report detailing what issues the inquiry looked at, what actions were undertaken as part of the inquiry and what the outcomes were. Reports of previous inquiries by the Commission are available on [GOV.UK](#).

Ends

Published 1 May 2020

[Testing available for council workers](#)

Press release

Local Government Secretary thanks councils in England for their support during the pandemic and outlines how staff can get tested.



- All essential workers with symptoms of coronavirus can now be tested thanks to increased capacity – enabling them return to work if results are negative
- This includes council workers such as those working in social care, benefits payments or with vulnerable people
- Local Government Secretary has written to all councils thanking their staff and setting out how they and their households can get tested

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP has today (1 May 2020) written to all councils in England thanking them for their efforts in the battle against coronavirus and reminding them of their eligibility for testing.

With substantially increased testing capacity, the government has extended testing to a wider group of essential workers and members of their households.

This means that council workers with symptoms of coronavirus are now able to be tested for the virus, and can return to work if the results are negative.

Those eligible in the local government sector include:

- Social care staff such as social and care workers – with social care workers in care homes able to get tested with or without symptoms
- Those delivering essential public services, such as benefits payments
- Those working with vulnerable children and adults, victims of domestic abuse, homeless people and rough sleepers

Local Government Secretary, Robert Jenrick MP said:

The unsung heroes in local government are supporting communities across the country during the pandemic, from helping vulnerable people to ensuring our bins are collected.

We've expanded the national testing programme to prioritise essential workers such as council staff who are keeping the country

going.

Booking the test has been made easier through a new [online system](#).

Essential workers can book a test if they are experiencing symptoms – a high temperature or new continuous cough – at one of the more than 42 drive-through testing centres across the country, or receive a home testing kit.

Test results from the drive-through sites will be sent out by text within 48 hours and within 72 hours of collection of the home delivery tests.

- Read the [letter](#) from the Local Government Secretary.
- The aim is that most people should not have to drive for more than 45 minutes to get to a regional testing site. However, additional testing methods are being rolled-out to support testing accessibility:
 - A network of new mobile testing units is being rapidly established to travel the country to reach care homes, police stations, prisons and other sites where there is demand for testing. The units have been designed to clinical requirements by Army engineers and can be easily set up in under 20 minutes.
 - A delivery service for home testing kits has been designed with key industry partners, including Royal Mail and Amazon. The availability of home testing kits will initially be limited, but more will become available soon. This will ensure those not able to travel to a test centre can still take the test, find out their results and return to work if possible.
 - The response to coronavirus is a national effort. The government is working collaboratively across the four nations to ensure the take up of testing among essential workers. Each of the devolved administrations will have their own eligibility criteria and testing priorities, however the government is working closely to align approaches.
 - We are testing social care workers and residents in care homes (with or without symptoms) both to investigate outbreaks and, following successful pilots, as part of a rolling programme to test all care homes.

Published 1 May 2020

Last updated 1 May 2020 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 1 May 2020

First published.