

Leather Lane design and road closure – Frequently Asked Questions

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High Speed Two (HS2) is the new high-speed railway for Britain. We have produced this document to answer frequently asked questions about the Leather Lane overbridge design and road closure in Great Missenden / The Lee, Buckinghamshire.

What are you building in this area?

We originally planned to realign Leather Lane as a standard railway bridge but are now building a single lane green overbridge. This change in design takes consideration of specific environmental impacts of the railway on the local bat populations and established trees near Leather Lane.

Why are you closing Leather Lane?

Introducing the green bridge meant the structural width of the bridge increased by 100% from 12.5m to 25m. The bridge has been situated as far from the original road as possible within HS2 land limits, but now that the structure is larger, the footprint of the bridge and its wingwalls impinge on the footprint of the road. This means that Leather Lane must be closed so that we can undertake the works in a safe environment.

What happens if Rocky Lane isn't re-opened on time?

We will not close Leather Lane until Rocky Lane has reopened. We continue to work with our neighbouring contractor, EKFB, regularly sharing our works programmes and will communicate our works updates as they develop.

What mitigation will you provide to residents?

Keeping the road open is not feasible but measures will be implemented to minimise the impact of the extended duration and associated diversion route as far as possible, including:

- advanced notice of closure
- clear diversion signs that are regularly inspected
- regular monitoring and adjustment of traffic management strategies as required
- reducing the closure length to as short as reasonably required, and
- regular updates on work progress at community meetings.

How will the emergency services navigate this area?

As with all our road closures / diversions, the emergency services are informed of our highways activities and our programme. Representatives from Align attend a Traffic Liaison Group (TLG) meeting together with Buckinghamshire Council (our consenting authority) where we present, discuss and explain our plans. We then submit our proposals for consultation and approval with Buckinghamshire Council, making amendments to plans if appropriate and possible. Buckinghamshire Council then update One.Network which is accessible to all including the Emergency services. HS2 also add closures to Resilience Direct, a system where information is shared directly with the emergency services. We are also accessible outside of the TLG meeting should the emergency services have any queries.

What consents do we have to undertake this work?

Our design for the green overbridge at Leather Lane was submitted to Buckinghamshire Council, in line with planning regulations and was approved at the end of July.

When will the footpaths in South Heath be opened?

We are committed to maintaining pedestrian access from east to west of the trace throughout our works with GMI/2 remaining open and accessible. We will update you further on our footpath plans as our site develops.

The green bridge been designed for a maximum speed of 20mph. Why?

Leather Lane is a single lane carriageway with minimum passing bays. A design speed above 20mph would lead to the need for an uncharacteristically straight alignment. Our design reflects the character of the original lane (i.e. Leather Lane is a holloway which is a unique historical feature of the Chilterns Hills) and has enabled us to preserve more of the oak trees found along the existing lane. Finally, the design speed took into account consultation feedback from Buckinghamshire Council.

Why are you building a single lane on Leather Lane green bridge when you are building a double lane on Bowood Lane bridge?

Bowood Lane is classified as a public road, albeit currently not suitable for motorised vehicles. However, we are required to design the bridge to meet the classification of the road, which is a standard bridge with two lanes.

Leather Lane is a green overbridge due to the environmental sensitivities identified in that location, which means the structure is larger and can accommodate a verge and planting. The additional width means that we are able to design a single carriageway and retain the existing character of Leather Lane. As noted above, Leather Lane is a historical holloway and feedback on the design from Buckinghamshire Council officers was taken into account. The works at Bowood Lane are being coordinated by the adjacent Main Works Contractor, EKFB.

Who will be responsible for completing the landscaping/planting?

HS2 have operations and maintenance requirements as part of the Environmental Minimum Requirements and Schedule 17 consent, these will be met by HS2 and their contractors. Align will continue to complete their scope of works through to 2027, this includes landscaping and earthworks. Any temporary areas that are retained for use by Rail Systems Contractors will be restored in line with the consented designs by the most appropriate contractor in the future.

What if you find protected species hibernating during construction?

Before works start and during our activities taking place, vegetation and trees will be thoroughly inspected by qualified ecologists. Any protected species found to be present will be recorded and site activities will stop until the species have left the site. This includes nesting birds.

Will the construction activities affect the flight path for bats?

We have installed leaf / camouflage netting to provide a more irregular acoustic mitigation while still providing shelter from wind and light. The mitigation design is based on those found in the Bat Mitigation Guidelines (2023). We will continue to conduct our bat monitoring throughout the construction period.

How much of Leather Lane will be realigned and how much of the original lane will remain?

A length of approximately 450 metres of the lane will be realigned. The sections of the original lane that are no longer required due to the realignment will have the surfacing removed and restored to grass to provide future landscape maintenance access.

A 14-month road closure seems a long time; can your site activities be completed in parallel to reduce the length of the closure?

The 14-month programme is realistic and includes risks, such as adverse weather conditions which could impact earthworks as this work is best undertaken in dry conditions. However, we will seek to re-open the road as soon as practicably possible.

Will the planting take place during the autumn or will there need to be further road closures?

Planting will be carried out at the correct times of the year and therefore will depend on the progress of the overall scheme.

How will you mitigate for the bats during construction?

During construction we will make use of woody copse, in addition we are using heras fencing and camouflage netting to maintain a flight path. These will be placed on top of earth bunds. We will also build ponds.

Who will maintain the planting on top of the green bridge?

The highway i.e. the carriageway, verge and footway will be maintained by the Local Highway Authority whereas the green aspects of the bridge ie hedgerows, trees etc will be maintained by HS2 or it's operating company. This will be clarified when the highway is adopted.

What is the carriageway width on Leather Lane and how do vehicles pass?

The proposed single lane carriageway is 3.5m to ensure proposals are contextually appropriate with the existing lane character. There will be five passing locations along the realigned section of the lane.

How will the grass in the cutting (on a slope) be maintained?

The railway cutting will be predominantly calcareous (chalk) grassland. This highly biodiverse type of grassland grows on low nutrient soil, and due to this, is low maintenance, requiring one cut per year once established. This will be undertaken by HS2's maintenance contractors with mowing equipment suitable for the slope, which could include remote controlled mowers and strimmers.

How will the planted hedge over the bridge be protected during drought conditions.

All planting at Leather Lane, including the hedgerow and tree planting, will have a five-year maintenance establishment period. During this time planting will be watered by the landscape contractor during periods of dry weather to maximise plant survival. All planting areas are accessible for maintenance activities and trees will be planted with perforated irrigation pipes to ensure water can be directed to the roots during watering visits.

The topsoil and subsoil for the hedgerow planting will be circa 2.8m wide and have a depth of between 1m across the bridge structure to prevent dehydration. In addition, planting, including the hedgerow, will be mulched after planting which will aid the retention of moisture in the soil below.

Native planting species have been selected and once roots have established, within three to five years, will no longer require watering.