

# 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.

## **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.