

Conserving natural habitats

The M6 Toll motorway – the long-awaited alternative to our congested West Midlands road network.

It's important to us to minimise the impact of the new motorway on the environment. In 2000 we started researching the best ways to protect sites of ecological importance, before beginning construction work in Spring 2001.



Part of a 4km section of ancient hedgerow being translocated in Middle Hill and Coleshill

Using less land

To limit general disruption, we decided to use as little land as we could for construction and landscaping – around 600 hectares – and to follow existing roads wherever possible.

Consulting English Nature

Because there are four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) along the route – Chasewater Heath, Hatherton Clay Pit, the River Blythe and Middleton Fish Ponds – we discussed all our plans for these areas with English Nature before starting work.

Working with ecology specialists

Our surveys also identified other sites we needed to conserve – including heathlands, woodlands, grasslands, wetlands, streams, rivers and ponds. Here, we employed ecology specialists Cresswell Associates to advise on how to protect these sensitive areas, for example fencing them off during construction. We also worked alongside professional habitat rescue teams on a number of large-scale conservation projects along the route.

Here are some details of our work to help limit the effects of the new motorway on the surrounding environment.

Transplanting hedgerows

At Middle Hill and Coleshill, we discovered two lengths of valuable ancient hedgerow, measuring around four kilometres. After coppicing the hedge, we used specialist equipment to lift it out whole, and transported it, together with roots and soil, to a purpose-dug bedding trench at the new site.

The initial replanting went well and we're keeping an eye on the new hedgerow, and carefully maintaining it, to make sure it's a success in the long term.

Creating heathlands

We created a new wet acid heathland close to Chasewater Country Park, Brownhills, by cutting more than one hectare of heathland turf from the new motorway service area at Norton Canes, and introducing it to the new site.

First we compared the ecology, hydrogeology and soil-type of the existing heathland with the new area, to check the conditions were a good match. Then, using purpose-built equipment, we cut

fastfacts

- **4km ancient hedgerow transplanted**
- **9,000 square metres of ancient wet acid heathland translocated**
- **Heather seed harvested using 'vacuum' equipment**
- **1m trees planted compared to 12,000 removed for construction**

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Turves of valuable ancient wet heathland being lifted in their entirety at Norton Canes

large pieces of heathland (1 m x 2 m x 400 mm). We also took up the sub soil, as this would help the plants take successfully to their new environment. Finally, we transported the heathland turf, laying it carefully piece by piece at the new site.

Heather harvesting

Using special vacuum equipment, we collected seed from Chasewater Heath, ready to sow on motorway embankments in and around the area. This will help maintain the heathland habitat, and ensure the new landscape blends well with the existing countryside.

Promoting wildflower grasslands

After talking to county ecologists and Wildlife Trusts, we decided to increase the number of wildflower grasslands we'd planned to create next to new ponds or larger road junctions.

Introducing a wide variety of native flowering plants in these key areas will help support populations of insects and other small animals.

Conserving the landscape

As well as protecting specific sites, we're also keen to limit visual and physical changes to the landscape. To help with this, we're creating mounds and planting around one million trees – many more than the 12,000 or so we've had to remove. This will protect the appearance of the surrounding area and provide new woodland habitats.

Long term maintenance

Tree planting will continue until three years after the M6 Toll motorway opens, and we'll continue to monitor the new ecological sites for another twelve years after that. Then the landscape will be our responsibility as part of the general upkeep of the road.

About us

Midland Expressway Limited is a private company with the Government concession to design, build and operate the 27-mile M6 Toll motorway until 2054. Our partners in design and construction are CAMBBA, a joint venture of Carillion, Alfred McAlpine, Balfour Beatty and AMEC.

For more information, visit our website at www.M6Toll.co.uk