

17 September 2020

Highways England raising the benchmark with gift to local community

Three beautifully carved benches created from an old oak tree and decorated in woodland creatures have been presented to the local community.

Highways England lifted the wraps to reveal the finished artworks as they were placed in their new home on scenic green space to be enjoyed by all.

The oak tree had to be taken down for safety reasons as part of a £24 million improvement scheme at the A45/A6 Chowns Mill roundabout in Northamptonshire which will tackle congestion and improve journeys.

When all efforts to save the tree – known as Three Oaks – proved fruitless, the project team recruited woodcarver Carrie Yuen who has transformed the three trunks into unique artworks.

The benches were officially handed over to Mayor Councillor Tina Reavey at Castle Fields, Higham Ferrers, where they will complement a Timber Trim Trail being created by the town council.



Caption: Mayor Councillor Tina Reavey lifts the covers off one bench watched by Dave Marlow from Highways England; Carrie Yuen, Phil Keane, Group Operations Manager (East) for contractor Carnells, local resident Justina Bryan and Jeremy Willis, Construction Manager for contractor Ground Control. For hi-res image [click here](#)

After lifting the covers from the benches, Mayor Councillor Reavey said:

“I am truly honoured to be unveiling these benches that have been so skilfully carved by Carrie to depict the wildlife in and around the environment of the Three Oaks tree. It was a shame the much-loved tree had to be removed but the use of the wood to create the benches is a fitting tribute.

“On behalf of Higham Ferrers Town Council I cannot thank enough all of those involved in the project to bring the Three Oaks back to life and to the Castle Fields - Ground Control, Highways England, Carnell and local resident, Justina Bryan who was instrumental in the campaign.

“I encourage you to come and view the true beauty and artwork of the benches for yourselves; I have no doubt you will be as thrilled and impressed with them as I am.”



Caption: Creepy crawlies adorn the back of this bench which is now in position at Castle Fields. For hi-res image [click here](#)

Highways England Construction Assurance Manager Dave Marlow said:

“It is fantastic to see these wonderful artworks in place for all to enjoy. Carrie has done some incredible work in creating the benches and I’m sure they will be admired by local people for many generations to come.

“We were very disappointed that we could not retain the Three Oaks despite all of our efforts so we are delighted to have been able to play our part in ensuring its unique legacy continues.

“Thanks to the town council for helping us find the perfect home for the artworks and giving the tree a second life.”



Caption: Wood carver Carrie Yuen with some of the creatures she carved into this bench. For hi-res image [click here](#)

There are three themes to the bench. One has animals that lived around the tree such as the fox, badger, rabbit, squirrel, owl, mole and mouse. A second bench features creatures that fly around the branches such as butterflies, moth, dragonfly and bat. A third bench depicts the bugs of the oak habitat such as the caterpillar, spider, beetle, ladybird, worm and millipede.

As well as the benches, some of the smaller pieces of wood are being used to create carved owls and mushrooms which will help raise money for the Mayor's charities. While some of the branches have also been donated to Stanwick Lakes to create some natural habitat for the wildlife there.



Caption: Highways England Construction Assurance Manager Dave Marlow tries out one of the three benches which have been created for the local community. For hi-res image [click here](#)

Contractor Ground Control, appointed by Highways England to carry out environmental and landscaping works for the Chowns Mill scheme, have met the costs of transportation, woodcarving and delivery of the benches.

The much-needed improvements at Chowns Mill would have left the tree unstable and at risk of falling down. 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 are being widened to provide extra lanes and capacity

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



Caption: Creatures found flying around the branches is the theme for this bench. For hi-res image [click here](#)

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NOTES TO EDITORS

For video footage of the mayor unveiling the artworks click here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1i40kWjpl0&feature=youtu.be>