

Mackley and COVID-19

The global pandemic created by the coronavirus (COVID-19) has impacted every industry, including construction and civil engineering, as well as our personal lives and we have each found ourselves having to adjust to new ways of working efficiently. Mackley is not unique in facing up to the challenges that the pandemic has brought, whether on-site or in our office workplaces.

The effect on construction projects

Key to our continued performance on sites has been the need to address quickly two key elements which have been identified by the Government and included in its guidance - social distancing and adequate hygiene practices. Both give rise to particular challenges, for example site work requires two or more people to work closely together. In addition, site welfare facilities had to be increased to provide sufficient welfare in the working areas.

Initially there was some confusion in the industry about whether sites should remain open or not. Major construction companies made quick decisions to shut down all or some of their sites to ensure the safety of their workers. These included major infrastructure projects of TfL, Crossrail, HS2, Hinkley Point C and London Tideway. Decisions and plans had to be put together quickly, with little or no knowledge at the time as to how long the shutdowns would last.

Of course the impact of the pandemic extends beyond major infrastructure projects. With so many construction projects shutting down, it was inevitable that all businesses had to review their cash flow and working capital, and to continue to closely monitor both clients and suppliers and subcontractors to give the confidence that the business can sustain its working relationships. Generally the effects of isolation absences, social distancing, reduced availability of supplies and materials, payment issues, delays and increased costs are being felt but the ultimate impact of the virus remains to be seen.

The effect on Mackley

At Mackley we have opted to keep our sites and offices open, and have implemented and followed the **Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)** issued by the Construction Leadership Council (including its updates) to ensure the continued health, safety and wellbeing of our staff and contractors. The SOP and the Government's construction-specific guidance (the **Construction Workplace Safety Guidance**) outline the following additional measures that employers should take:

1. Introducing one-way flow-through areas and floor markings to maintain social distancing (where possible). Minimising the number of unnecessary visits to the worksite. Where site visits are required, making sure customers, visitors and contractors understand how to maintain coronavirus safety for all parties.
2. Maintaining social distancing and avoid surface transmission when goods enter and leave the site.
3. Sharing the results of risk assessments with the workforce.
4. Ensuring workers who have symptoms or who live with others who have symptoms stay at home and are tested under the Government's test and trace service.

The above measures have been applied in both our site and office environments.

Mackley is fortunate that the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing economic shutdown has not had a significant impact on the company's operations. Most of the projects undertaken during the pandemic are classified as key construction projects for Government and water supply industry clients and we have been able to continue to trade. Only one project was stopped by a client at the start of the lockdown period and this has recently restarted.

One of our key clients is the Environment Agency, for whom we carry out flood defence projects. The Environment Agency make the following commitment in respect of flood defence works:

“Our flood defence work continues in line with PHE guidance and where it is safe. We are ready to respond to flooding. During coronavirus we continue to maintain and operate our flood and coastal defences to ensure they protect people and property from flooding. We're also maintaining our assets that support public water supply, industry, infrastructure, food production and the environment.

Where work continues, we have ensured that everyone involved has been trained on social distancing and will not put anyone at risk. If the work cannot be done safely, the work will stop.

We are also still carrying out inspections and repairs to flood defences damaged by spring storms. We are prioritising our work that has the most impact in terms of protecting lives and livelihoods, including prioritising the most at-risk communities so they can remain resilient. If repairs to major infrastructure assets are disrupted by the impact of coronavirus, we will where possible put in place temporary mitigation for the risk, pending a full repair.

All our work is impacted by the controls we and government have put in place. This is likely to mean that completion dates for new projects will slip and other key activities may take place at less regular intervals. We are keeping communities informed of any delays and the action that we are taking to minimise them.”

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-environment-agency-update>

There is no doubt that the virus will be present for some time. Nobody really knows the long-term impacts of the coronavirus in the construction sector and wider society. We have all had to follow the Government rules and stay home as much as possible.

Coronavirus Risk Assessment Statement

Mackley has conducted coronavirus risk assessments for all of its offices and site activities. The results confirm that Mackley is compliant with the guidance set out in the UK Government's Working Safely During COVID-19 document issued on 11 May 2020. We continue to closely monitor the guidance and we continue to inform and our employees, our customers and our supply chain and carry out training where appropriate.