

HSE Campaign Targets Construction Industry in Birmingham

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Birmingham City Council's legacy plan for the games, "Delivering a Bold Legacy for Birmingham", includes plans for numerous construction projects to deliver new housing, better transport links, improved open spaces, new leisure facilities and upgraded infrastructure, as set out in the Perry Barr 2040: A Vision for Legacy masterplan.

The construction firms delivering these projects were under pressure from the start after Birmingham was awarded the games with only four years rather than the usual seven to prepare for the event, after replacing Durban in South Africa as the host city. This was before Covid-19 hit, further affecting preparations for the games.

The HSE has commented:

"With a high volume of construction sites in the busy city centre, there is inevitably more potential for incidents which can result in life-changing injuries or worse and working environments which can pose respiratory risks and are hazardous to workers' health and well-being."

With construction workers facing a truncated delivery schedule and the hard deadline of the opening day of the games, the potential for health and safety corners to be cut is high.

The HSE's campaign in response to the increased construction works and increased risks in Birmingham reflects the risk-based approach to regulatory services that is increasingly being adopted by health and safety regulators across the UK.

For the HSE, Local Authorities and other regulatory teams a key motivation for adopting a risk-based approach is the challenge of getting on top of significant backlogs caused by COVID-related work. Effectively de-prioritising low-risk areas of work frees up resource to address these backlogs. The reality of a dwindling and aging regulatory service across local government further adds to the pressure on resources.

What the HSE's campaign press release does not address is which other areas of activity have been de-prioritised to allow resource to be devoted to this campaign. For construction workers and construction companies inside Birmingham and outside the risk based approach is likely to cause uncertainty about where, and how, the HSE and other regulators are likely to intervene.

For advice on compliance with building safety and other health and safety regulatory requirements please contact us.

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