

GUIDE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

INSPECT MORE OF YOUR NETWORK WITH THE BUDGET YOU ALREADY HAVE.

A practical guide for highways, structures, lighting and property teams on using drones for statutory inspections, asset records and claims evidence.

13,248	5.18×	0
LIGHTING COLUMNS SURVEYED	OUTPUT VS MEWP	LANE CLOSURES NEEDED



01

WHY COUNCILS ARE SWITCHING TO DRONES

Local authorities own large, ageing asset bases (bridges, lighting, buildings, trees and drainage) while inspection budgets shrink and obligations do not. In most inspection programmes the biggest cost is not the inspection itself but getting people to the asset: MEWPs, scaffold, traffic management and night working.

BUDGET PRESSURE

Every pound spent on access is a pound not spent on the asset. Removing access plant stretches the same budget across far more of the network.

DUTY OF CARE

Highways, structures and trees carry legal duties that demand evidenced, dated inspection records.

SMALL TEAMS, BIG ESTATES

A handful of engineers cover thousands of assets. Their time is better spent reviewing evidence than waiting on access.

CLAIMS EXPOSURE

Claims turn on what the authority knew and when. Consistent, located imagery is the defence.

01 / CONTINUED

WHAT A DRONE CAN INSPECT FOR A COUNCIL

- **Bridges and structures:** soffits, bearings, parapets, masonry and scour, without scaffold or an under-bridge unit.
- **Street lighting and high masts:** lantern, bracket and fixing condition column by column, without MEWPs or closures.
- **Street lighting PFI handback:** a full photo record and inventory of columns, lanterns and signs before the contract ends.
- **Trees and vegetation:** canopy condition and encroachment over highways and property.
- **Drainage, flooding and earthworks:** ponding, blockages, erosion and slope condition.
- **Roofs, buildings and depots:** condition surveys and 360° records for estates and inductions.
- **Capital schemes:** progress records and films for members, funders and residents.

02

HOW A DRONE PROGRAMME WORKS

STEP	WHAT HAPPENS
01 Desktop review	Scope, asset list, airspace and permissions reviewed. A fixed price is agreed before anyone mobilises.
02 Flight planning	Site-specific RAMS and a capture plan, aligned with your inductions, permits and protocols.
03 Capture	A two-person team captures the site, usually in one visit, from safe positions off the carriageway.
04 Engineering review	Data is processed, quality-checked and structured for your engineers.
05 Delivery	Deliverables issued with secure cloud access, typically within two weeks.



03

PROOF: BIRMINGHAM STREET LIGHTING

Working with Kier on the Birmingham Highways Maintenance Contract, HDS replaced MEWP-based lighting column surveys with a drone-led workflow flown from footways and verges, with no lane closures and no impact protection vehicle.

13,248	5.18×	93.5%	0
COLUMNS SURVEYED FOR KIER & BCC	OUTPUT: 75.1 COLUMNS A SHIFT VS 14.5	LESS SURVEY-PHASE CO_2	ACCIDENTS OR NEAR MISSES

Every column was captured as a geo-tagged, condition-scored record and loaded into the council's GIS: 3,574 OSID nodes, 900 telecell timers and 424 photocells logged, along with 520 missing or damaged stickers and 232 heritage lanterns. The project won the CECA Midlands Innovation Award 2026 and moved from a 10-day trial to business as usual.



04

WHAT IT COSTS

TIER	WHAT YOU RECEIVE	DAY RATE
Capture	Unedited photos and video, a quick visual record	from £900
Polished	Edited, client-ready photo and video	from £1,200
Survey	Basic mapping, measurements and a visual survey	from £1,600
Data	Full processed outputs: 3D models, maps, CAD-ready data	from £1,800

Prices exclude VAT and include a two-person team, Chapter 8 compliant vehicle, RAMS, flight planning and insurance. Because traffic management and access plant are usually removed, the total programme cost is often far lower than a traditional inspection, even before the faster programme is counted.

05

PROCUREMENT CHECKLIST

Use these questions when quoting or tendering drone work.

QUESTION TO ASK A DRONE SUPPLIER	WHY IT MATTERS	✓
Do you hold a CAA Operational Authorisation for the Specific category?	Most professional infrastructure work near people and roads needs it.	☐
Are your pilots GVC and A2 CofC qualified?	Recognised UK competence for commercial flying.	☐
What public and employers liability do you carry?	Ask for certificates, not just a figure.	☐
Will you provide site-specific RAMS and an airspace assessment?	Generic paperwork is a warning sign.	☐
Do you fly over live traffic?	The answer should be no. Good operators plan positions on verges and compounds.	☐
Are your operatives CSCS and traffic management trained?	They will be on your site and on the highway edge.	☐
What exactly will we receive, and in what formats?	Raw files are not a deliverable. Agree outputs up front.	☐
Can imagery be referenced to our asset list or GIS?	Makes the data usable by your engineers.	☐
How is our data stored, shared and protected?	Public-space imagery has GDPR implications.	☐
Can you show live-network references and case studies?	Highways experience is different from property filming.	☐



NEXT STEP

TALK TO US ABOUT YOUR NETWORK.

Every HDS job starts with a desktop review, an airspace check and a fixed price agreed before we mobilise. We fly under a CAA Operational Authorisation with GVC and A2 CofC qualified pilots who are CSCS and T1/T2 trained, and we never fly over live traffic.

REQUEST A CALL BACK →

CALL BACK	highwaysdroneservices.co.uk/contact
EMAIL	hello@highwaysdroneservices.co.uk
DAY RATES	From £900 for raw capture to £1,800 for fully processed, CAD-ready data
INCLUDED	Two-person team, Chapter 8 vehicle, RAMS, flight planning and insurance
COVER	£10m public and employers liability
COMPANY	Highways Drone Services Ltd · Company number 16621433