



Miss K J Gomersal
HM Senior Coroner- Cumbria
HM Coroner's Courts
Allerdale House
Workington
Cumbria
CA14 3JY

2 June 2026

Dear HM Senior Coroner Gomersal

**Inquest concerning the death of Mr Alexander Samuel Birnie
Incident at A683 Middleton**

Thank you for your correspondence following the Inquest of Mr Alexander Samuel Birnie. We would like to extend sincere condolences to Mr Birnie's family and friends.

We write following the concerns raised for the Council to consider a formal assessment of whether a warning sign at this location would be advantageous.

We confirm that the Council has subsequently undertaken a thorough review of the location, including a site inspection and an assessment of available information and collision data. This was carried out between Tuesday 5th May and Wednesday 20th May 2026 dates by the Traffic Management Manager and Traffic Management Team Leader for Road Safety and Projects.

The A683 between Casterton and Sedbergh, including Middleton, is subject to the national speed limit and is a typical characteristic of a rural route. The alignment is generally narrow and undulating, with bends of varying severity and changes in vertical profile throughout its length.

At the location in question (northbound approach), it is noted that there is a bend in combination with a downward gradient, which limits forward visibility. However, such features are typical of rural roads of this nature, and are not, in isolation, considered exceptional or unusual.

The site inspection confirmed that:

- Warning signage is present along the route, including advance warning of side roads and junctions;

- Bend warning signs are installed at locations where the geometry or combination of hazards is considered to warrant additional driver information, such as at the Barbon junction where a bend, junction, and carriageway narrowing to one lane over a bridge occur in close proximity;
- The carriageway surface at the location is in good condition, having been surface dressed in 2022 using a high Polished Stone Value (PSV) aggregate, thereby providing appropriate skid resistance.

As part of the assessment the local authority undertook a review of personal injury collision data for the most recent five-year period for this section of the A683. This showed that there is no identifiable pattern or cluster of collisions at this location that would indicate an underlying highway-related issue or deficiency in the existing layout or signing. Furthermore, the investigation into this collision did not identify the road layout as a contributory factor.

Additionally, the Council has also reviewed available traffic speed data for this section of the A683. Average vehicle speeds between Sedbergh and Casterton are between 30-40mph, which is notably below the national speed limit applicable to this road and suggests that drivers are, in general, moderating their speed in response to the road environment.

The Council has considered whether additional warning signage at this specific location would be advantageous. In addition to the above assessment, we have considered also national guidance which advises that signing should be applied selectively to locations where there is a clearly evidenced need. Guidance indicates that overuse of warning signs can reduce their effectiveness and diminish driver compliance.

Based on the evidence available, including collision history, observed road condition, existing signage provision, and traffic speed data, there is no indication that the provision of additional warning signage would be advantageous at this location.

We would like to assure however that the site will continue to be monitored as part of the Council's routine network management and collision review processes, and any future evidence indicating a change in risk profile will be reviewed and escalated accordingly.

Yours sincerely,

Phil Greenup
Assistant Director Sustainable Transport and Highways
Westmorland and Furness Council