

### **Update on issues relating to Wokingham Town Market Place Improvement Project:**

As the Wokingham Town Market Place Improvement Project comes to completion, members of the public are regularly raising a number of common, key issues.

#### **General safety issues:**

The new road layout and the 'open-plan' look of Market Place were designed following consultation with a wide range of groups including : Guide Dogs for the Blind, learning disabilities group (CLASP), Wokingham Healthwatch and the Alzheimer's Society. During the design development phase disability group workshops were held and a number of key issues were raised, including confusing signage, poor kerbs, poor paving (red tiles too slippery and cobbles that caused problems for many people).

The design of the scheme has undergone Road safety audits; these are normal practice for any highway improvement scheme.

A Road Safety Audit aims to identify potential road safety hazards arising from possible changes to the existing road layout; it is not a technical check against design standards or any amended traffic regulations but is an evaluation of any changes made during design, upon opening the road to traffic and, post-construction during everyday use.. Its purpose is to identify any potential road safety problems and to suggest measures which may help to eliminate or mitigate any concerns.

Road Safety Audits are undertaken by teams of specialists trained in the road safety engineering and accident prevention.

#### **Vehicle Behaviour**

There have been a number of incidences of cars and other vehicles driving on to or parking on the pedestrian area of Market Place. This is obviously extremely dangerous as well as being illegal and we are calling on drivers to respect the new road layout and not put people's safety at risk. There are clear no entry signs on Denmark Street but we will have to consider further measures if drivers continue to act irresponsibly.

#### **Trip hazards**

We are aware that some people have tripped on the new kerb layout and have a great deal of sympathy for anybody who has been injured. Safety for all pedestrians is of paramount importance, which is why the project was designed with the input of representatives from accessibility and disability groups. Despite this pre-consultation, we are however not complacent on this issue; if changes are necessary to ensure all people can safely access the town centre, we will make them.

Although the new kerb height is in the main as the original, there have been negative comments and questions about not only this but also its appearance and these are being looked at as part of the safety audit.

We do understand that it naturally takes a little while for people to become accustomed to any new road layout and so we need to allow some time for this and not make spontaneous knee-jerk reactions.

No design can please everybody and change takes a while to get used to but the feedback we received during the design stage was generally a dislike for the old red brick and support for use of more natural material that would provide a neutral backdrop for the town hall and other historic buildings. There was support for a high quality, natural product befitting the local historic buildings.

Another reason for choosing the York Stone is that is not slippery even when wet, unlike the old red brick that had a polished finish and could be treacherous under foot during inclement weather.

### **Costs and Project over-run**

WBC has apologised, and continues to apologise for the delays to the project. It has taken longer than anybody could have foreseen and has caused more disruption than was originally envisaged.

The delays to completion are largely resultant from the magnitude of the problems found beneath the pavement surface. Notwithstanding the normal pre-commencement ground surveys, the sheer volume of works affected by uncharted old carriageway, building foundations and shallow utilities apparatus could simply not have been reasonably anticipated.

Although we believe the underground conditions were a significant cause of delay, we have commissioned an independent enquiry into the project in order to fully understand the issues.

The original budget for the project was 3.8million plus contingency. We are now in discussion with costs and charges with Balfour Beatty and a final budget will be settled after these discussions.

### **Cycle tracks**

There are no cycle tracks in the new Market Place. One of the key objectives, as was supported during the consultation phase, was to declutter the space and make it more useable for events and maximise pedestrian circulation space. Separate cycle lanes would take up a significant proportion of the space and with a low through-traffic speed (a slow steady flow rather than stop start) these were not considered necessary. Further, with no cycle paths tying into in the local road network the routes would be discontinuous and only serve very short lengths of highway.

We have increased the number of cycle stands in the market place, These are strategically placed such that people can stop and conveniently walk to a chosen local destination. Additional cycle stands will be placed within the adjacent Peach Place and Elms Fields developments.

### **Blue Badge spaces**

There are seven disabled parking bays in the new Market Place; three are in Broad Street outside Boots and four in Denmark Street. They will be clearly signed.

### **Cleaning and sealing**

Irresponsible drivers continue to leave after-hours tyre marks on the York Stone; these will be removed and the whole area cleaned and sealed before Balfour Beatty hand the site over the WBC. Thereafter the areas will be regularly cleaned by WBC.

### **Trees**

Four new trees have been planted in Market Place as part of the project. These have been planted in tree pits that will allow them to grow healthily without their roots causing damage to the paving or roads.

It had been hoped to plant two more trees to the east of the town hall, however when the ground was excavated there were this was numerous utility pipes in the ground that were not picked up from the original survey.

Many of the utilities were quite near the surface and so caused additional problems regarding preparing the sub-base for the paving. Alternative locations were investigated but it did not prove possible to find a workable location.

Hornbeams were selected for the Market Place because they are large trees that grow well in town centres: they are tolerant of pollution and have good resistance to disease. Hornbeams are deciduous but have small leaves so will not cause as much disruption, through leaf-fall, in the autumn.

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