

Agenda Item 8.

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| TITLE | Market Place Highways Improvement Project |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee |
| WARD | Wescott |
| STRATEGIC DIRECTOR | Sarah Hollamby |
| LEAD MEMBER | Pauline Jorgensen, Executive Member for Highways |

OUTCOME

To inform Members following the January 2019 meeting of the Stage 3 Road Safety Audit (final) and the Finance Audit associated with the Market Place Improvement Project.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to consider;

a) the Final Road Safety Audit document submitted in relation to the Market Place Improvement Project;

b) the financial audit report submitted in relation to the Market Place improvement Project.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

At the meeting on 14th January 2019, officers provided the members with responses to the published 'Call for Questions' which was released via print and social media in December 2018. The Committee also received an update on the Market Place highways improvement project, the 'Lessons Learnt' report and the (interim) Stage 3 Road Safety Audit, as well as discussions on the questions received following the 'call for questions' put out to residents and business owners.

The meeting was concluded with a requirement to return to a later meeting with the findings from a Stage 3 Road Safety Audit (Final), and a finance audit of the scheme.

The report sets out information on the Road Safety Audit, which demonstrates that the scheme is safe and requires no physical changes, and information related to a Risk Assessment review carried out following the disability workshop held in November 2018 post opening of the scheme. The safety audit and risk assessment have enabled a set of tasks and actions to be created, which when carried out, will enable the project to be concluded.

The report also provides information on the projects finances, reporting a 5% overspend on the budget.

Background

As part of the Committee's 2018/19 work programme, the Market Place Highways Improvement Project was identified as a key item by Committee Members to scrutinise during the 2018/19 municipal year. The project is now in the very final stages and additional supporting information related to the road safety audit and the finances are available as required.

Road Safety Audit

A copy of the Road Safety Audit has been included within Appendix A of this report.

The design of the scheme has undergone independent Road safety audits and design checks at each key stage of the project; these are normal practice for any highway improvement scheme and follow the guidance set out with Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB).

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 that may help to eliminate or mitigate any concerns. Road Safety Audits are undertaken by teams of specialists trained in road safety engineering and accident prevention. They are completely independent of the council and its contractors.

In September 2018 a Road Safety Audit (interim) was carried out on the scheme. It was not possible to undertake a final audit at that time due to adjacent Town Centre Regeneration works that were affecting the operation of the signal crossing located adjacent to Costa Coffee. The report identified two areas to be monitored:

- the brass tactile paving studs are not currently particularly conspicuous against the background of the new Yorkstone paving, and
- Lack of conspicuity of the kerb upstand

The independent auditor stated that these items should be monitored whilst the scheme settles in and did not recommend immediate changes be made.

Post opening of the scheme and during a settling in period the paving and edging blocks have been sealed to prevent staining and to assist with future cleaning and maintenance, the sealing has altered the colour of paving slightly but the natural environment during the months after construction and opening has provided some change also. The carriageway channel has darkened over time with motor vehicle use and although swept, this natural change has provided further contrast from that at opening and that observed by the audit team in September 2018. This is also the case for the contrast in the paving against the tactile studs.

In addition to this the Council has engaged with relevant groups and representatives about these issues and has included them within a risk assessment to determine if amendments are possible, suitable and/or practical.

The Stage 3 Road Safety Audit (final) – The audit was undertaken by an independent audit team during March and May 2019, with a visit to the site being carried out on the 18th March 2019, which took place during both daylight and hours of darkness. Members of the project team attended the site visit, as did a representative from Police.

Within the audit report the auditor states, *'All of the issues raised in the September 2018 Interim Stage 3 Road Safety Audit undertaken by Acorns Projects Limited have been resolved'*. These previous issues have been removed by the auditor as they are satisfied that the monitoring, sealing and general settling in have reduced initial perceived safety concerns. Further to this, one safety problem, associated with an inoperative light fitting to a no entry sign on the north side of Market Place, was identified and highlighted within the audit report. This matter is being addressed.

Whilst this highlights that there are no significant safety problems with the Market Place scheme, the RSA audit team have referenced, within the audit report (section 1.12) and within a covering letter, some observations that they would like to draw to the Council's attention, which were identified during the site visit. The auditors covering letter (located within Appendix B) identifies three items which are considered by the auditor to be, 'maintenance items and operational issues'. The three items are related to;

- Continued monitoring of skid resistance of the tactile paving studs,
- Colour contrast of the tactile paving studs against the background of the Yorkstone paving has improved with weathering, though further measured could be considered to improve this contrast, and
- The extent of the tactile studs on the 'L' shaped arrangement could helpfully be extended to the nearest building.

These items are not new and have previously been identified through the RSA3 (interim) report, and through discussions at the workshop held on the 16th November 2018 with disability groups. As such, these have been included and reviewed as part of a Risk Assessment for the Market Place scheme (located within Appendix C).

The risk assessment undertaken for the Market Place considered 17 identified potential risks, and scored them against 'Probability' and 'Severity'. The team then considered potential mitigation measures, before then evaluating the mitigation against the same 'Probability' and 'Severity' scoring to determine the benefits against a number of factors. This enabled any potential impacts to be identified along with a recommendation against each of the items. In line with the recommendation within the Risk Assessment, the identified risk will either be, accepted, investigated further, or addressed.

Next steps

Following a final inspection of the Market Place works, the completion of the RSA3 (final), and the Risk Assessment, the project team are currently preparing a list of

remedial and snagging works that when carried out will conclude the Market Place project. The works will be commissioned during the summer and will be implemented to a high standard, in line with the wider projects delivery.

Lessons Learned and feedback received in association with the Market Place project will be used when moving forward with future phases of Public Realm and Regeneration within the Town and wider Borough.

Finance & Programme

The Adopted Wokingham Town Centre SPD (and Masterplan) 2010 set out the background and the public engagement for works to the Town Centre to both schemes. The masterplan explains the public aspirations for Market Place: - *“Market Place will remain the primary focus for the town centre and its most significant formal public square. In respect of the town centre’s historic pattern the form of the space itself will remain unaltered. A united materials palette will be used across Market Place and Denmark Street to unify street and square, strengthen pedestrian footfall through the town centre’s extended retail core and provide a higher quality setting for markets and other events.”* It is a sensitive public assembly and shopping location used for events, market and sitting out. The paving scheme is a high quality York stone and granite finish which seeks to increase and enhance the pedestrian user environment whilst taming the traffic and comprise a key element in the regeneration of the Town as a multi visit longer stay centre supporting wider growth of the town/Borough.

The Market Place construction works were a jointly funded project between Wokingham Borough and Wokingham Town Councils. A member board operated to apply governance to progress reflecting its importance at the heart of Wokingham. The project has also been closely managed on site and monitored financially by a Project Manager.

The original cost assessment for the construction of this project in September 2016 was £4.6m; in October 2016 there were discussions with the contractor about holding further risk and value engineering to reduce the budget down subsequently to £4.2m. In April 2017 following discussions about those changes and further value engineering and the transfer of greater project risk to the Council, the final budget was agreed at £3.8m with £400k contingency, £4.2m in total.

The cost for 2018/19 have now been reconciled but further financial transactions are still to be resolved with the utility companies. These are in the final stages of discussions and will potentially see a return of approximately £40k. This will go toward reducing the final project outturn and is not reflected in the figures below.

Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration Environmental Improvements

| Scheme breakdown | Total Budget | Total Actuals | Variance | Actuals | | | | | | |
|---|----------------|---------------|--------------|----------|----------|----------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| | | | | 2012-13 | 2013-14 | 2014-15 | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 |
| Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration Environmental Improvements | (1,475) | 451 | (1,024) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 451 |
| Market Place | (4,200) | 4,420 | 220 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 | 266 | 2,746 | 1,308 |
| Total | (5,650) | 4,873 | (802) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 100 | 266 | 2,746 | 1,759 |

The reported figure includes cost items undertaken during works which relate to maintenance, asset renewal and repairs which are business as usual costs; however for completeness these have been left these in and equate to around £140k.

The Market Place as it stands today, which has also been used to host many public events such as the winter carnival, show that the objectives of the masterplan have been met; however, it is clear that there was an uncomfortable 5 month overrun largely due to the ground conditions under the square and the state of utilities. The programme comparison is shown below.

| PROGRAMME | Planned | | Actual | | Variance |
|----------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| | Access Date | Completion | Access Date | Completion | Total Days |
| Concept, Design & Contract | 14/05/2015 | 09/02/2017 ^{*1} | 14/05/2015 | 31/05/2017 ^{*2} | |
| Construction | 12/06/2017 | 23/03/2018 | 26/06/2017 | 14/09/2018 | +161 ^{*3} |

^{*1} Based on programme 14/12/15
^{*2} Completion of contract process
^{*3} Indicates today days including non contractual working days & weather impacted days

As indicated here and previously a large proportion of the overrun was caused by challenging ground conditions. This included the plethora of old and new utility apparatus, old building foundations and the removal of contaminated and hard materials. All these risks sat with the Council and account for around 77% of additional spend. Other items included scope and specification changes, weather events, amended drainage and traffic management.

The final road safety audit has recently been issued to the Council and following this, and the additional risk assessment, some additional works may be carried out. These are not included within the overall budget costs as additional works but it is likely they can be accommodated from existing budgets for developing the future phases of the town centre environmental improvements. The lesson 'learned report' undertaken in 2018/19 for Market Place will assist this future work greatly.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

| | How much will it Cost/ (Save) | Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall | Revenue or Capital? |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Current Financial Year (Year 1) | None | Yes | Capital |
| Next Financial Year (Year 2) | None | N/A | N/A |
| Following Financial Year (Year 3) | None | N/A | N/A |

List of Background Papers

Wokingham Town Centre masterplan 2010

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| Date 28 th May 2019 | Version No. |

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A

Final Stage 3 Road Safety Audit

Appendix B

RSA3 Auditors Covering Letter

Appendix C

Risk Assessment