

COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE O&S MINUTES 14 JANUARY 2019

42. MARKET PLACE HIGHWAYS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 17 to 150, which provided an update on the Market Place highways improvement project.

Philip Mirfin, Executive Member for Regeneration (and town centre highways) stated that since taking over the Market Place Highways project (in May 2018), he had asked the Monitoring Officer to identify a suitable person/company to undertake an independent audit. He added that, at the time he took over the project, it was in need of focus and in September 2018 he was invited to a Balfour Beatty workshop. Philip stated that it was at this workshop that he met the person who would eventually undertake the “lessons learned” report.

Philip stated that he organised weekly meetings between all parties to assess and discuss all elements of the Market Place project. Philip stated that part of the delay to the Market Place highways project was due to having to redesign every shop front and drainage system. He added that the underground conditions were very poor and the majority of the underground issues had not been identified prior to the start of the works due to poor highways underground inspections. In addition, Philip stated that many of the underground utilities pipes were unknown or not recorded which added the delays. Philip stated that weekly round table meetings were organised, which included partners from Balfour Beatty, highways and project managers to agree upon weekly works to be achieved. Philip added that the highways team worked very hard to achieve results, with Balfour working hard from their senior levels.

Chris Easton, Lead Specialist - Transport, Drainage & Compliance, stated that the Market Place highways project was identified through Public Realm, and CP14 of the Core Strategy. He added that when the Market Place project was commissioned, a stage one safety audit was undertaken which identified several key issues which were fed through consultation processes throughout the project. Chris stated that an example of changes made through the consultation process was the reintroduction of raised kerbs.

Chris stated that there were several unforeseen issues throughout the project, including having to appoint a new project manager (after the previous WSP project manager left), the Balfour lead being taken ill and a series of works issues (see Member question for more detail).

Chris stated that a final road safety audit had been commissioned and would be delivered in February 2019. He added that disability groups had been invited to attend a feedback session after the completion of the project, whose feedback would be compiled along with the comments from the Scrutiny Committee to form a final works package.

Guy Grandison thanked all businesses, disability advocacy groups and members of the public who submitted questions and views to the Committee.

David Sleight queried whether there could be signage improvements made to the disabled parking and loading bays in the Market Place. Chris Easton stated that the Council’s Car Parking Team were aware of signage issues and were looking to address them at the formalised completion of the works. Philip Mirfin added that there had been some misuse of the parking at the Market Place which needed to be enforced.

Please note: amendments were made to these minutes at the meeting held on 11 March 2019

Clive Jones thanked Philip Mirfin and the Highways Team for organising the lessons learned report. Clive stated that the report showed that the Council was 'out of its depth', and asked what lessons could be learned from the Market Place project. Philip Mirfin stated that he was proud of Officers for wanting a lessons learned report to be undertaken, and this model would be used as a basis for how the Council managed such projects in the future. He added that the Market Place project was originally seen as a 'small highways project', and was subsequently found challenging. Philip stated that the project was delivered to a high quality standard. However, it was not without its difficulties. Sarah Hollamby, Director of Locality and Customer Services, stated that the points raised within the lessons learned report would be taken on board for future projects.

Clive Jones queried whether issues (such as delays and the reasons for them) would be reported to Members as they happened for future projects. Chris Easton stated that better systems would be in place with project managers for future projects. Philip Mirfin stated that the schemes were identified (midway through the project) that could have shortened the time the project took to complete. However, the final quality of the scheme would have suffered as a result and it was, therefore, decided to continue with the original scheme.

Guy Grandison queried whether the joint working board model was being used for current regeneration works. Philip Mirfin stated that joint working boards had been incorporated on regeneration projects for years. Chris Easton added that future major highways projects similar to Market Place would use independent consultants, project boards, better governance and a highways management board.

Dianne King stated that she had heard a lot of positive comments from people regarding the design of the Market Place, but queried what would be done to maintain the clean underfoot surfaces. Chris Easton stated that a sealant had been used on the surfaces, which would be deep cleaned four times per year to make sure that dirt would not get embedded in the surfaces.

Rachel Burgess thanked Officers for the detailed information provided in the reports pack. She queried whether the aesthetic of the paving colour was prioritised over the comments made by disability groups during workshops in 2015. Guy Grandison queried the usage of parallel disabled parking bays in the Market Place. Chris Easton stated that all of the material used in the Market Place were materials that were allowed to be used on public highways. He added that the Market Place had always had a similar contrast (with red bricks previously), and that the colour of the crossing points had already changed since their installation. Chris stated that a large part of the pavements would have been taken up if the disabled spaces were not parallel. He added that the Market Place now offered off-carriageway parking, and blue badge holders had the option of using the disabled spaces or parking on double yellow lined areas. Philip Mirfin stated that more disabled spaces were provided in the Market Place than before the improvement project.

Rachel Burgess queried why businesses were not offered more help during the improvement works. Philip Mirfin stated that all businesses within the town centre were offered the opportunity to engage with the Borough and Town Councils. He added that the business rate relief scheme did not have a particularly good take-up. Philip added that voucher schemes were offered over Christmas, marketing videos were published on social media and special events were organised to help encourage residents from all areas of the Borough and beyond to visit the town centre. Philip stated that the team had worked within their budget to provide as much support to businesses as was possible. However, some businesses chose not to take up the support that was on offer.

Rachel Burgess queried why it was difficult to procure the Lessons Learned Report, and what involvement Philip Mirfin had in selecting the person who carried out the review. Philip Mirfin stated that the Monitoring Officer had taken the lead on procuring the report, and he had experienced some difficulties in doing so. Philip stated that he had made a recommendation for somebody who could have been suitable to carry out the review, and that person was interviewed by four members of senior management from the Council.

Mike Haines queried the impact of changes in project management. Chris Easton stated that time was lost as a result of changes in project management, in addition to issues with unidentified utilities.

Mike Haines was of the opinion that the Council needed to be more proactive with engagement and communication with regards to issues surround disability access. Chris Easton stated that kerb heights were now more regulated across the Market Place and that disability groups had been identified and invited to workshops after the completion of the Market Place project. Chris added that more engagement with disability groups would be undertaken for future highways projects.

Shahid Younis stated that he was surprised many of the issues identified in the Lessons Learned Report were not accounted for earlier on in the project. Philip Mirfin stated that this was due to the project being initially seen as a 'small highways' scheme. He added that proper governance was subsequently put in place, and that all comments and findings had been taken on board to guide similar projects in the future.

Shahid Younis queried whether there was an increased cost to residents as the scheme was delayed. Chris Easton stated that all of the money used came from S106 agreements which had to be linked to the town centre project and could only be used for infrastructure projects.

Clive Jones queried how the Town and Borough Councils communicated aspects of the Market Place Project with the public. Philip Mirfin stated that a weekly joint Borough and Town newsletter was produced by the Town Council, which gave updates on the works and issues to do with the Market Place that week. He added that the Town Council Clerk did an excellent job in engaging with the residents, and that the Town Council took on the majority of exposure to the public as they were seen as the first point of contact and managed this very well.

Clive Jones queried whether a speed limit reduction to 20MPH could be an option in the Market Place. Chris Easton stated that Police were unlikely to be in the area to enforce a 20MPH speed limit restriction, and that aspects of the scheme such as raised courtesy crossings had helped to slow down traffic.

Clive Jones queried what improvements could be made to make a distinction between the road and the kerbs. Chris Easton stated that the colours had already changed after usage by road users. However, a staining process was an option that could be used in the future.

Rachel Burgess asked what could have been done differently to help manage the navigation around the Market Place during the works. Chris Easton stated that Balfour were given the entire Market Place area, which cost significantly less than giving them a section at a time. He added that each weekly newsletter had details of the current routes around the town centre. Philip Mirfin stated that some of the signage placed by Balfour

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was not always taken down, which led to some confusion. He added that there had been instances of anti-social behaviour, with signage and fences being moved overnight. Philip stated that there were phone numbers listed across the site to report issues with signage and fencing.

Rachel Burgess stated that there had also been issues with ramps and narrow pavements for wheelchair users. Philip Mirfin agreed that these had been issues, and stated that they had been identified and solved quickly. He added that the workers had to work under difficult conditions.

There were a number of Member queries with regards to aspects of the financing of the project, it was confirmed that these details would be covered in the final audit of the Market Place project and would be brought back to the Committee.

Guy Grandison queried what could be done in the future to further engage with disability groups and disabled residents. Chris Easton stated that wider engagement would be undertaken for future projects through engaging with a wide range of disability advocacy groups.

Shahid Younis asked whether the Lessons Learned Report model could be used across the Council. Philip Mirfin stated that the Monitoring Officer was looking in to this.

Clive Jones queried how junior Officers could be supported, to enable them to see major projects through from start to finish. Sarah Hollamby stated that junior Officers had career graded roles which allowed them to develop over time without having to change role, which enabled the Council to develop its staff from within. She added that this was a Council wide feature.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Philip Mirfin, Chris Easton and Sarah Hollamby be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) the final safety audit be submitted to Committee upon its completion ;
- 3) the financial audit be submitted to Committee upon its completion;
- 4) the Committee consider submitting recommendations on project governance to the Executive, upon receipt and review of the above aforementioned audit reports;
- 5) a comprehensive and up to date list of disability advocacy and awareness groups be created improve engagement for future projects.