

Agenda Item 5

For decision – Market Place Phase 2 project

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Summary

This report provides an update on the improvements that have been made to the Market Place and the costs associated with the project. The report explains that due to the complexity of the project, some costs emerged that were not planned for. An additional £36,250 is needed over and above the project estimate agreed by Council in March last year. Approval is sought for the balance to be funded out of the Saxonvale Legacy EMR.

What were the project objectives?

The overriding force behind this project came from the community to improve the way pedestrians move around the Market Place and to reduce congestion caused by the buses blocking the road.

This has been achieved with wider pavements in places including two pavement build out points, replacing the barriers with bollards and widening the bus bays. One thing that County Highways let us down on was the installation of three courtesy crossings that were designed to make it easier for pedestrians to cross the Market Place and the junction of Market Place and King Street. Despite approving the design and taking 18 months to do so, County Highways informed us three days before work began on site that Government Regulations had changed. We put as much pressure on them as we could to change their mind but we were unsuccessful. However, we did succeed in introducing a 20mph zone and made it easier to cross by installing pavement build outs and tactile paving in two points.

What improvements have been completed?

In October 2020, the following improvements to the Market Place were completed.

- Improvements to paving between: Market Cross Café and the zebra crossing in Cork Street; the zebra crossing in Cork Street and Boots. A combination of natural sandstone and concrete block paving was used to replace a mixture of tarmac and block paving which were all previously in poor condition
- Two new build outs, one outside the Coventry Building Society and the other outside The George to shorten the crossing distance between these points and the Boyle Cross
- The removal of railings between the zebra crossing on Cork Street and the junction with the Market Place that previously corralled pedestrians. They were replaced by bollards. Pedestrians are now freer to move but without compromising safety.
- The introduction of a new bay outside the George Hotel to improve the loading facilities for town centre businesses.

- Improvements to the disabled parking facilities in Cork Street including new dedicated parking bays, new regulations enabling disabled drivers to park in the evening and new dropped kerbs to enable wheelchair and buggy users to access the pavement once parked more easily
- New bus shelters to improve the experience for bus users
- Wider bus bays to get buses off the carriageway and reduce the congestion and attendant pollution in the Market Place (to be monitored over time)
- Median strips along the centreline to encourage lower speeds

Some before and after images will be shown at the meeting to illustrate the improvements that have been made.

What work still needs to be finished?

Whilst the work was substantially completed in October, there are a few minor works to be finished (they are accounted for in the reported costs – see below). They include:

- A new bench to be installed alongside the bus stop in front of Superdrug
- A slight realignment of the bus shelter in the same location
- Repainting of the railings in front of Fat Radish
- Minor kerb works on the corner of Cork Street and Market Place to reduce the chance of flooding outside Nat West Bank.
- Replacement of a bollard that was accidentally damaged on the corner of Cork Street and Market Place.

We are also putting pressure on County Highways to implement a complete resurfacing job on the Market Place.

What is the projected final cost?

At the Council meeting on 18 March 2020, councillors agreed to fund the project in the following way:

Sum	Source
£50,000	Small Improvement Scheme grant from SCC
£121,561	Balance of existing EMR
£158,155	Saxonvale Legacy (reserves)
£329,716	Total

The projected final cost of the project is £365,966 (please see [Appendix 1](#) for a breakdown of the costs). There is a balance of £36,250 to be financed.

How will we pay for this?

It is recommended that councillors agree to the use of the Saxonvale Legacy EMR for this purpose.

What were the reasons for the overspend?

The overspend is primarily accounted for by construction costs (payable to our contractor, Griffiths) which were unforeseen at the time that councillors approved expenditure. An account is provided below.

Additional traffic management costs

When the project was approved by councillors on 18 March 2020, it was expected that traffic would be managed by means of two-way lights. However, lockdown followed swiftly afterwards and following consultation with the contractor and councillors, a decision was taken to fully close the Market Place to traffic. The purposes were to enable both pedestrians and workforce to move around safely whilst the works were on and to keep the duration of works as short as possible. At the same time and following consultation with town centre residents and businesses, Palmer Street and King Street were made access only with the objective of making those streets more pedestrian friendly.

When the Market Place was first closed to traffic, we had hoped that the centre of the road could be opened up to pedestrians and cyclists but this proved impossible in the end. In the interests of both workforce and pedestrian safety with large plant and equipment being moved about, it proved necessary to route pedestrians around the works.

The increased costs related to diversion signage and supervision.

New and diverted services

It became clear once the ground was opened up that some of the cabling and pipes needed to be laid deeper and, in some cases, replaced. Unfortunately, for us, the liability is always on the client in these circumstances. The areas around the bus stops were particularly problematic and following consultation with County Highways and utilities, we had no choice other than to instruct Griffiths to undertake the work.

COVID related costs

Legislatively, there is a duty on the client to provide welfare facilities for the construction workforce. In an ideal world, the costs to protect against COVID transmission would have been buttoned down at the point we agreed the contract. However, Government guidelines changed during the life of the contract. We had no option other than to agree to the extra costs incurred. These costs will be included in our submission to MDC to secure grant towards the cost of COVID-related measures.

What was the outcome of final negotiations with the contractor?

When it came to the final bill, we negotiated hard with our main contractor, Griffiths, to secure a reduction in the cost. We managed to negotiate a reduction of £15,014. The costs that were negotiated down were the traffic management operation, gullies and manhole covers. Griffiths have also agreed to pay for the new bench that is planned to be located alongside the bus shelter close to Superdrug.

What are the lessons to be learned?

Contingency

When councillors approved expenditure last March, it was recommended that a higher contingency than the industry norm of 10% was put in place. For Phase 2, a contingency of £30,000 (13% of the contract sum) was established. This proved to be an underestimate of what was required. But working in such a location is unpredictable. Surveys are done but until ground is broken, you never really know what you will face. If we were working in the town centre in the future, my recommendation would be to go for a higher contingency.

Loss of control

Experience has shown that when road space is handed over to a highways contractor and work has started, the client (in this case, FTC) loses a degree of control. In particular, County Highways has the authority to instruct. If they consider it necessary for work to be done, they have the power to insist that it is done but the liability rests with the client. This was demonstrated in a number of instances through the Market Place Phase 2 project. The intention will be to put in place a partnership arrangement with County Highways when it comes to the implementation of the proposed School Street project which should provide greater control.

Working in public places

Working in the Market Place was like working in a goldfish bowl – we were subject to constant public scrutiny because of where we were working and this required a considerable communications effort. FAQs were put in place on our website and updates were provided through our various communication channels. We were assisted by the fact that Griffiths employed a Public Relations Officer who issued weekly bulletins. But there was still an expectation on our Comms team and me to respond to an endless stream of emails, social media posts and phone calls as the work unfolded. This was predicted and we did prepare but we need to be aware of the staff capacity that needs to be put in place when large projects in public places are delivered in the future.

Recommendation

Agree to the £36,250 overspend to be funded utilising the Saxonvale Legacy EMR