



Directorate/Division: Corporate Support
Team:
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DELAYED COMPLETION TO STONE COTTAGE PROJECT, FOWNHOPE

I am extremely annoyed and disappointed about the further delay to the re-opening date of the Fownhope Road and I apologise sincerely to the residents of Fownhope and the surrounding areas.

John Hardwick, your ward Cllr, has formally raised a complaint with me about the continued delay and expressed his own and his resident's frustration and dissatisfaction. The parish councils of Fownhope and Woolhope have also raised complaints and requested that this issue is considered by the General Scrutiny committee as soon as possible - which I am supportive of and will ensure full cooperation with.

Aside from General Scrutiny, I have ordered an independent examination of the process by another major civils company, to examine why problems and delays have hampered progress at this site. I am very concerned that the delays in the completion of these works and BBLP's management of this process have caused Herefordshire Council reputational damage and more crucially, left the residents of Fownhope and surrounds considerably disadvantaged.

This was always a complex and potentially protracted repair, with work needing to take place in a very confined site, on a slope and with serious utility infrastructure repositioning needing to take place first. This was further hampered by the need to keep access open for residents, so we could not do the works on the two sites together. It also meant we could not work 24/7. Progress was further compromised with the news that the government was by refusing to pay for any repairs, despite the reassurances of Bill Wiggin MP and which meant we had to go to an extraordinary Full Council meeting to borrow the money needed to complete these and other repairs. The failure of Central Government to adequately fund its local authorities fairly and adequately, especially rural counties like Herefordshire, is a continuing source of frustration and a disgraceful situation.

The soil nailing solution designed by WSP, BBLP's subcontractor, meant only a small specialised workforce was available to do the initial works and so the workforce could not simply be doubled to reduce delay. The parapet design work produced by WSP for BBLP has also had to be reviewed as the initial design could not be delivered to time within the constraints of this site - issues I feel should have been picked up by BBLP during the 8 week plus design process.

We expect our contractor partners to manage schemes like this to make sure the risk of delays is reduced to a minimum. I do not feel that Balfour Beatty and WSP have provided us with the level of service we should and do expect of them and in turn I do not feel we, Herefordshire Council, have provided residents with the standard of service and care they deserve in our supervision of this project, for which I apologise sincerely.

My focus will be on ensuring this road is open as soon as possible, I have been told that this will be before the end of March but rest assured I will get to the bottom of the issues that have caused all avoidable delay and there will be consequences.

Cllr J Harrington
Cabinet Member Infrastructure & Transport