



Chairman: Councillor John Ryder

Clerk: Denise French

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24 January 2022

TO: Mr Andrew Lewis

Chief Executive

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Dear Mr Lewis

We are writing collectively to seek your response to the growing concerns of Marbury Ward Parish Council Chairs and Ward Councillors about the Soot Hill closure and the plans for its repair. We have also copied this letter to our 2 local MPs Ms Esther McVey and Mr Mike Amesbury.

It is now more than 12 months since the collapse of Soot Hill, causing the closure of this well used route into and out of Northwich and within the wider area of the Marbury ward. The impact on the residents and businesses has been significant but CWAC's efforts to resolve the problem appear to lack the urgency, management grip and financial and project control necessary to match this level of disruption to the lives of local people and businesses.

The local tax payers have become increasingly frustrated by lack of progress, with no visible signs of work at the site, poor quality information on the CWAC website and no apparent recognition of the importance of a speedy resolution or accountability for a successful outcome.

Businesses are suffering through reduced footfall and the additional traffic being diverted onto the smaller local roads will inevitably increase the wear and tear on these roads.

The lack of transparency relating to the awarding of high value contracts is also concerning. The dates for the Balfour Beatty contract on The Chest portal do not appear to align with the dates on the CWAC website timeline, nor is it clear that the total contract values conform to the OJEU limits.

The Chest portal shows the Balfour Beatty contract has a value of £2.4m and yet the CWAC timeline suggests the Contractor was not expected to submit confirmed costings until November 2022 suggesting that the contract value could be subject to change.

Additionally the contract entry on the Chest portal shows a potential duration of 21 months (initial contract duration of 15 months plus an option to extend by 6 months) taking any completion date to end January 2024 rather than the promised Autumn 2023, a totally unacceptable timescale.

The CWAC website timeline suggests that the Utility company surveys to establish costings for the diversion of cables and pipes were completed in June 2022 and yet some 6 months later, BT has yet to complete this work, despite this supposedly being complete by November 2022.

The calculations and drawings, by the consultant engineers, for the repair works are shown on the CWAC timeline as 'in progress' in October and are still not shown as complete. Presumably this contributes to the delay in securing supply chain costings and the submission of the confirmed costings to the Council?

The promised start date on the timeline of 'early 2023' is vague and far from reassuring for an impatient community. This date is dependent on dates for actions which have already apparently been missed in November and December and raises doubts that the required project management skills and accountabilities are being deployed to ensure that the repairs are completed to time and within rigorous budget disciplines.

We have received informal advice from the son of a local Parish Councillor, who is a specialist engineer working for an eminent global consultancy, Mott MacDonald providing tunnelling and road related solutions. This suggests that the end to end timescale for such a project could be closer to 9 months if this was considered a priority repair. The projected 21 months your timeline offers indicates low prioritisation.

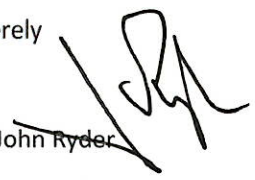
We therefore request your response to the following questions please:

- What was the tendering process (including criteria for tender evaluation) before the contract was awarded to Balfour Beatty?
- Did this process conform with the requirements of the Chest portal and the OJEU price cap?
- How many other contractors were considered for the work before appointing Balfour Beatty?
- What due diligence did CWAC undertake before awarding the contract?
- What measures of success, including outcomes, costings, payment schedules, timescales and penalties for non delivery have been written into the contract?
- What limits for overall costs and project milestones and end date are included in the contract?
- Who, within CWAC, is accountable for managing the delivery of the contract?
- What actions have been taken regarding the slippage of dates which have already occurred?
- What is the realistic completion date for the whole project?
- What is the value of the Balfour Beatty contract?
- What is the latest estimate of the total cost of the project?
- What provision has been made in the Highways budget to recognise the consequential additional costs of increased traffic along the diversion routes both official and unofficial?

- What reassurance can you give us that public funds are being cost effectively used?

Please respond by 3rd February with a full reply to all the above questions.

Yours sincerely


Councillor John Ryder

Chairman, Comberbach Parish Council

This letter has been endorsed by the following Parish Councils who discussed and approved the content at their January meetings and is submitted on their behalf –

Anderton with Marbury, Antrobus, Barnton, Comberbach, Great Budworth, Little Leigh, Marston, Whitley and Wincham.

The letter has also been endorsed by the Marbury Ward Councillors Lynn Gibbon, Phil Marshall and Norman Wright

cc Ms Esther McVey MP for Tatton and Mr Mike Amesbury MP for Weaver Vale