

Leighton Buzzard HSIS update 3rd May 2018

1) Why the delay in implementing this scheme? The scheme is massively delayed, for a number of reasons. These include:

- The finalising of the whole programme has been far more onerous than was originally expected. Each application has involved considerable discussion and negotiation with the business, regarding design, the need for planning and other relevant permissions.
- Whilst for some businesses this has been relatively straight forward, and they are the ones who have paid and left waiting longer than what is acceptable for work to begin, there are others who have been extremely demanding with regards to revisions and changes (and are still being so). There are some who we have held the programme up for only for them to withdraw from the scheme at the last minute when payment is required.
- To move forward we needed enough participants to be finalised and ready to go in each locality for BRAC to get the economies of scale needed.
- We were in a position to start before Easter but were advised by some of the businesses, such as Touch of Class that the Easter holidays were a peak time for them, so to avoid impact on their business the schedule was pushed back.

2) Half the participants in Leighton Buzzard have dropped out because of the delays.

- This actually isn't the case. The four businesses that pulled out of HSIS did so for the following reasons –
 - o Two were purely because they weren't in a financial position to cover the 40% contribution.
 - o One pulled out because they believed that they could do the improvements cheaper themselves without the 60% grant funding.
 - o One pulled out due to uncertainty regarding the medium to long term future of their current premises.

3) Why Dunstable first? Work has started in Dunstable first simply because the bulk of the participants that are ready to go are in Dunstable. For Leighton Buzzard we were still dealing a few final design changes for two of the four participants (and the implications of these e.g. revised costing, ordering of materials, planning etc) when BRAC were mobilised. In reality Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard will effectively overlap to form the first phase of works. I understand that BRAC and their sub-contractors are in Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard today measuring up so that canopies, windows etc can be ordered so work is progressing, it's just not visible yet. In terms of work happening on the ground in Leighton Buzzard then barring any unforeseen issues and from the preliminary programme work should be starting on the ground in Leighton Buzzard within the next fortnight.

4) Lack of information from the Council to participants.

- The focus has been on getting the programme finalised which has meant that those who paid early and have been consistent in terms of what they want, have had to wait and previously the level of communication hasn't been what I would expect.

- We have however had Sally Williams from Retail Revival on the project team from the start and she has been regularly speaking to all participants. I have also spoken to several of the participants when I took on the scheme to explain the delays.
- Moving forward we are working with the contractor to make sure that their communication with the participants is regular and that clarity regarding dates is given. There are a few teething problems in ensure this is done as I would like but I believe we are getting there.

As you will possibly be aware, in February a number of issues were raised about HSIS and the delays to get to implementation. To get this back on track, my manager, Kate McFarlane took over directing delivery of the programme with myself as Head of Service, prioritising my time to focus on supporting this programme move to delivery phase. Caroline Hooper brought in as Programme Manager, and is supported by Carol Watts, who had been involved in programme since Dec 17. Vince Jenner, Senior Quantity Surveyor in Assets brought in to provide technical support on costs, contract negotiations and Quality Assurance role of works undertaken by BRAC.