

Contents

Summary	3
Recommendations	5
The Review Process	6
Findings	9
Conclusions	17
Annex 1: List of witnesses	19
Annex 2: Map	20
Annex 3: Scoping document	21
Annex 4: Communications Protocol for Major Road Schemes	23

Report of the Environment Scrutiny Committee

October 2003

Section 1 Summary

1. The aim of the review was to see what lessons could be learnt from the implementation of the road improvement scheme at Didcot, and to assess what could have been done differently. Problems surrounding the implementation of Didcot Milton Heights II (DMHII) had been raised at several meetings of the Didcot Area Forum, and the Environment Committee decided to investigate this subject of considerable community concern.
2. This review was proposed by the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 18th December 2002. The Committee endorsed the project brief, in the form of a scoping document, on 19th March 2003.
3. This review was carried out under the Local Government Act 2000, Section 21(2)(e) which sets out the power for local authority scrutiny committees to "make reports or recommendations to the authority or the Executive on matters which affect the authority's area or the inhabitants of that area". It also corresponds to the County Council's key priorities, especially:
 - Protecting and enhancing the urban environment
 - Supporting sustainable and inclusive economic growth
 - Improving travelling conditions
4. The Committee decided not to task a smaller group with this review, but instead agreed that the whole Committee would examine the matter, in accordance with the scoping document. The Committee held a public meeting with members of the Didcot community that had been affected by the DMHII road scheme, and followed this up with a special Committee session at County Hall. This was an innovative approach, which the Committee was happy to pursue, and which was considered to be a success.
5. The Committee recognise that there were conflicting accounts and perceptions of how the road scheme was implemented. But it is important to remember, that whatever 'the facts' of events, how local people experience the workings of the County Council and its contractors is of great importance to how effectively the Council is able to work for the community.
6. The findings reported here cover five main areas: 1) Consultation; 2) Communication and Information; 3) Contract management and how the work was undertaken; 4) Signage and road safety; and 5) Finishing the project. These issues emerged clearly from the witness interviews. In addition, what witnesses saw as the achievements of the project are reported. The report also takes note of the recommendations of the Best Value reviews of Construction and Transport Capital Programme Procurement, and refers to them as necessary.

7. The Committee found that there was considerable frustration in the local population about the limited consultation that was undertaken at the outset of the implementation of the DMHII project. There was a general desire to have a more structured and formal process of consultation, which would engage the community and interest groups. The wider dissatisfaction surrounding communication and information were at the centre of the review findings. One witness called the project "a PR disaster". When asked what one lesson Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) had learnt, the immediate answer came: "Communicate". Although efforts were made as the project progressed to keep local people informed, communication failings had already damaged relations with the community. The Committee have evidence that the communication strategy of the directorate has improved since the DMHII scheme, but has made several recommendations to strengthen this.
8. The problems of site and project management, and contract definition, were considerable. The lines of accountability were not transparent to local people, and many witnesses did not think that they knew whom to contact regarding problems or comments. As OCC ultimately has responsibility for running any major project, it is vital that they address this management failing. The Committee was very pleased to find that all the witnesses from OCC/Babtie were willing to take on board constructive criticisms, and to work actively for improvements.
9. The Committee acknowledges, and the witnesses agreed that some disruption was inevitable with such a large road project. The Committee does not underestimate the complexity of the DMHII project, which involved major traffic diversion, considerable delay due to unforeseen underground workings, and changes to the timetable. As this is unlikely to be the last of such major projects, it is essential that people affected are consulted, kept informed, and listened to, right from the drawing board, until the last landscaping is finished.
10. The report presents our recommendations on the review as well as some of the steps that we suggest should be taken to implement them. We hope that these are to be welcomed not just by the Executive but also by the service itself in the spirit of self-challenge and the search for continuous improvement that scrutiny represents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1) The Committee **RECOMMEND** the Executive to instruct officers that major projects should carry out consultation, to include a road show, with all affected users, on practical implementation options, prior to the scheme being implemented.
- R2) The Committee **RECOMMEND** the Executive to instruct officers to strengthen and revise the Communication Protocol to include the following points a)- f). The protocol should be made available to the public, and updated as needed.
- a) There should be sufficient *publicity* for the single point of contact for a project - and that people know what this person's job actually is (i.e. site manager, or project manager). The contact should be specified in the project contract.
 - b) Local partners, including district councils and parish councils should be involved early and kept informed. This mechanism should be publicly advertised so that the community knows who is being informed.
 - c) Other local points of information should be used, for example a One Stop Shop and the local newspaper.
 - d) All affected frontages should be written to four weeks before work is due to commence.
 - e) Any revisions or delays to the contract should be publicised within a suitable period, on site as well as through other channels.
 - f) A record should be kept of comments, suggestions and complaints received before, during and after the project, and this record should be publicly available.
- R3) The Committee **RECOMMEND** the Executive to ask officers to write a report outlining how the Directorate is implementing the new Engineering Construction Contracts, why the dispute resolution element is not working well, and what is being done to improve this.
- R4) The Committee **RECOMMEND** the Executive to ensure that officers use the legislation concerning local authority relations with the utility companies to further improve partnership working in this area.
- R5) The Committee **RECOMMEND** the Executive to ensure that contracts include a section on who has responsibility to engage with the community and interest groups.
- R6) The Committee **RECOMMEND** the Executive to ensure that temporary signage should be of the best quality, with suitable content, and good visibility. Temporary signage should be addressed during consultation with interested parties and should remain the responsibility of OCC through the course of the project.
- R7) The Committee **RECOMMEND** the Executive to ensure that information about project aftercare and landscaping is still publicised until any project is completely finished. Every project should have a post implementation review to address snags and learn lessons.

Section 2

The Review Process

AIMS OF THE REVIEW

11. At several meetings of the Didcot Area Forum problems surrounding the implementation of the Didcot Milton Heights II (DMHII) were raised. It was suggested at the Forum meeting on 22nd October 2002 that the issue could be examined by Scrutiny, and Patrick Greene, local member for Moreton division brought it to the attention of the Environment Scrutiny Committee. It was clearly an issue of considerable local concern, and on that basis the Committee decided that it was of sufficient importance to warrant further investigation.
12. The Committee as a whole decided to undertake to investigate the issue, and was supported by Deborah Mitchell, Principal Committee Officer, Julian Hehir, Matt Bramall, and Myfanwy Lloyd, Scrutiny Review Officers.
13. The overall aim of the review was to see what lessons could be learnt from the implementation of the road improvement scheme, and to assess what could have been done differently. The full scoping document is attached at **Annex 3**. The main objectives were:
 - To review the implementation of the current systems for managing contracts to see if they can be improved.
 - To find out if there are ways to make changes that would minimise disruption and improve signage.
 - To explore the interfaces between the Council and the public, and the Council and the contractor.

- To review the criteria used for the awarding of contracts and means of setting specification and monitoring compliance.
- To make recommendations to improve the service.

14. The review did not address the question of why the road was considered necessary in the first place, and why the particular implementation scheme was chosen. There was general agreement by all review witnesses that the road itself was welcomed. In addition, the Committee's investigation of the scheme's implementation is not in any way meant to act as implicit criticism of the *quality* of the road construction. The Committee also did not start with the unrealistic expectation that any road construction could take place without any disruption to road users, or to the local community.

DMHII EXPLAINED IN BRIEF

15. On November 5th 2001 work began on the new Didcot Milton Heights link road, as proposed in the Local Transport Plan 2001-2006. The contract was due to finish in August 2002, but this date was revised to 15 December 2002. The road was opened to traffic on 6 November 2002. After November 2002 bad weather conditions hampered the remaining earthworks needed to complete the scheme. The contractor requested permission to leave the site and return in early 2003 to complete the works. The final contract finish date was 9 June 2003.
16. The Contractor was Edmund Nuttall and the Designer/Supervisor was the Babbie Group. The Client manager was Mike Collins at Oxfordshire County Council (OCC). The cost of the

scheme (current project appraisal for the scheme, 2001) = £5.3 million (including land and fees).

17. The road was designed to remove traffic from the Broadway and Station Road and to provide an access to the new Didcot town centre redevelopment. During the work, new junctions were constructed at Cow Lane and at Broadway, with work undertaken simultaneously at both ends of the road. Cow Lane south of the underpass was closed for the duration of the programme, with traffic re-routed around the perimeter of Didcot. The Map at **Annex 2** shows the road alignment and central Didcot.

HOW THE REVIEW WAS CONDUCTED

18. Community concerns had been the initial motivation for the review, so the Committee decided that it was important to hear what local people wanted to say about DMHII. This would give all sections of the community the opportunity to talk directly to Councillors about what they thought the difficulties had been.
19. A public meeting was arranged for Wednesday 30th July 2003, in Didcot Civic Hall. There was widespread publicity for the event that included radio interviews with Cllr Patrick Greene, a series of newspaper advertisements, press releases, and 500 advertising flyers were delivered to local housing and businesses. Individual invitations to attend the meeting were extended to Didcot Chamber of Commerce, South Oxford District Council, Didcot Town Centre Manager, Didcot Town Council, Didcot Railway Centre, the Didcot Development Agency, the Police, and local bus and taxi firms. The Police did not attend the meeting, nor did any representative of local taxi or bus firms. **Annex 1** contains a full list of Councillors who attended the meeting, and of witnesses. The Councillors made it clear at the public meeting that they were there primarily to listen to local concerns, and to gather evidence from the people affected by the DMHII scheme.
20. Invited witnesses were asked to prepare a brief statement on 'Lessons to be learnt from the implementation of Didcot Milton Heights Stage Two'. These statements were submitted to the committee and form part of the collected evidence. These statements are available in the Members' Resource Centre, and can be copied on request for members of the public. Other people who attended the public meeting on the day were allowed five minutes to make a statement to the Committee, which was recorded. In addition, the address of the Chief Executive's Office was given out to other people who attended, so that they could send further comments. Four letters were received commending the Committee for allowing members of the community the opportunity to share their experience and voice their concerns face to face.
21. A special session of the Environment Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 17th September 2003 was attended by Richard Dix (the Assistant Director of Highway Management), Brian Fell (at the time, seconded from Babbie to OCC Road Traffic and Safety department), David Thomas (Babbie's highway section), Steven Fox (Area Manager for Nuttall), John Ely (site manager for Nuttall), and Mike Collins, (Senior Engineer for OCC).

22. In questioning the witnesses from the Council and contractors, the Members were particularly concerned to reflect what they had learnt at the public meeting at Didcot, and to find out in detail about the nature of contracts between the Council and building contractors.

23. In formulating the recommendations above, all of the information and views

that the Members heard were considered and evaluated. We are very grateful to the members of the public and partner organisations who gave an account of their experiences of the road building, and to the officers and contractors who were co-operative and candid in their answers to many probing questions.

Section 3

Findings

FOREWORD

24. Several key issues emerged from the witness interviews, and these issues were broadly the same between the members of the public, partners, and the County Council employees. Points of view did of course differ, as did the access to detailed information. **It is important to note that the perception of events was important to how people thought the project had been managed, and that although some views might not be borne out by a close examination of 'the facts', how local people experience the workings of the County Council and its contractors is of great importance to how effectively the Council is able to work for the community.**

25. For clarity, the comments received have been grouped into several sections to reflect the issues that dominated the witness interviews. These covered the three main time periods: what happened before the project began; how the project itself worked; what happened after the road was completed.

1: CONSULTATION

26. The project to build the Didcot to Milton Heights link road had been long anticipated and was widely considered to be necessary and beneficial to the town. This review did not therefore think it was relevant to go into why the road itself had been planned. But having decided that a road was

needed, there were two further stages before the road building began. First, the choice of the road scheme itself, and secondly, how the chosen road scheme was to be implemented. This review is primarily concerned with this final stage.

27. Views differed between the groups of witnesses over what consultation had taken place and when. Witnesses from the community expressed their frustration at what they saw as a lack of consultation about *how* the implementation would be carried out, and *when*. A minority thought that other options for the scheme could have come out through consultation, and generally there was a desire to have a more formal mechanism for consulting local people, which would have best been focused through a single point of contact. This could have helped the community to have greater input into decisions taken on the project and their consequences.

28. Witnesses from OCC/Babtie stated that consultation had taken place on the form of the scheme, but once this was decided further *meaningful* consultation could not be undertaken, as there were no implementation options to decide upon. Because of the complexity of working in the centre of Didcot, the possible ways in which the road scheme could be carried out were very limited. However, it was agreed that a 'road show' at the outset of the scheme, as has been used on subsequent projects, would have been useful.

29. Everybody agreed that some disruption to the normal functioning of the centre of Didcot was inevitable given the size of the road project being undertaken.

R1) The Committee RECOMMEND the Executive to instruct officers that major projects should carry out consultation, to include a road show, with all affected users, on practical implementation options, prior to the scheme being implemented.

2: COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

30. The issues of communication and information were at the centre of the findings of the review. Every person who the Committee spoke to agreed that communication had not been good enough from the inception of the project through to the time of the review itself. In the words of one witness, this element alone made the project "a PR disaster". When asked what one lesson had been learnt by OCC, the immediate answer came: "Communicate".
31. The chief complaints were that there had not been sufficient communication between OCC, South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC), interested parties, community representatives, businesses and contractors. This meant that local people and business representatives felt that they did not have proper access to information about the start of the scheme, or as the scheme progressed. 'Partnership working' had not worked in this case.
32. As well as the various local government tiers, some other particular groups should have been more fully involved by OCC from the outset. In particular, it would have been useful if OCC had provided the bus companies and taxi firms with details of the road diversion plans, so that they could have spoken with the County with regard to solutions for public transport (such as phasing temporary traffic lights to allow bus services to operate more effectively).
33. The communication and information strategy of the OCC project was inadequate at the outset, but improved over the course of the project. To begin with the Babbie representative on the site was supposed to be the single point of contact, and a board was erected with a contact number on. However, there was clearly some confusion about whether the number was correct or not, and who could be reached. Many people thought that the number was incorrect, and were frustrated that there was no way of contacting a project manager, or anyone to deal with comments or complaints. Frustration was also expressed that staff who appeared to be responsible for the scheme left during the project, which added to confusion about points of contact. As the project went on, more information was put up on the site, and updates on progress were put on the SODC website. However, local people felt that this information did not reach them, and was not always sufficiently detailed.
34. Although it emerged that information had been disseminated to some organisations, such as the Development Agency and Chamber of Commerce, it was commented that this was often too late for these bodies to distribute this information to the wider community and appropriate local contact points, such as the Town Council and the Chamber of Commerce, before measures were implemented. This meant that important information, not just about

the site itself, but also concerning traffic management and the timing of phased works, was not adequately circulated.

35. As a result of the difficulties on this project, OCC/Babtie have already instituted a new protocol on communication (see Annex 4). This follows the findings of the Best Value review of Construction Services that lines of communication between end-users, OCC and the contractor were not clear. The protocol should mean that local people and partners will be well informed at the start of any project,

and will be kept informed as long as the project runs. The lessons learnt at Didcot have already been applied to road works, for example on the Abingdon Road in Oxford, and in Banbury.

36. It must be acknowledged that it may not always be possible to keep every interested party as informed as they would like all the time. But it is vital that more information is made available, and through the channels that will reach more people. This is an essential element of retaining a customer focus throughout the life of a project.

R2) The Committee RECOMMEND the Executive to instruct officers to strengthen and revise the Communication Protocol to include the following points a)- f). The protocol should be made available to the public, and updated as needed.

- a) There should be sufficient *publicity* for the single point of contact for a project - and that people know what this person's job actually is (i.e. site manager, or project manager). The contact should be specified in the project contract.**
- b) Local partners, including district councils and parish councils should be involved early and kept informed. This mechanism should be publicly advertised so that the community knows who is being informed.**
- c) Other local points of information should be used, for example a One Stop Shop and the local newspaper.**
- d) All affected frontages should be written to four weeks before work is due to commence.**
- e) Any revisions or delays to the contract should be publicised within a suitable period, on site as well as through other channels.**
- f) A record should be kept of comments, suggestions and complaints received before, during and after the project, and this record should be publicly available.**

3: CONTRACT MANAGEMENT AND HOW THE WORK WAS UNDERTAKEN ON SITE

37. There was not a transparent line of accountability in managing the project, with local people unclear of the different roles of a site manager, an area manager and the project manager. This lack of a visible chain of command fed the criticism of how the work was undertaken. Ultimately, the running of the contract was the responsibility of OCC, and the accusation of poor management needs to be shouldered by them. This is the first step in 'learning lessons', and restoring public trust in the County Council's ability to deliver.
38. The Best Value Reviews of Transport Capital Programme Procurement (TCPP) and Construction Services were completed in February 2001 and March 2002 respectively. The TCPP review had already highlighted better project management as a key service improvement, and the implementation report in February 2003 stated that six new project managers had joined the department. This is welcome. However, it is not evident that the wider recommendation that project management skills should be applied across the departments, in part to ensure the early involvement of interested parties in the process, had been implemented by the time of the DMHII project.
39. Although Babbie/Nuttall retained much of the core project work, there were also thirty-one sub-contractors employed by Nuttall throughout the course of the project. Most had reached the high quality expected by the contractors, although Nuttall stated that some were not satisfactory, and had to re-do work. This also added to the complexity of the on-site chain of command, from the view of local people. OCC have a list of approved contractors, but do not maintain a list of approved sub-contractors. The Committee is very concerned that both OCC and the contractors make it a priority to ensure that the work of sub-contractors is of the highest quality.
40. OCC confirmed that the contract for the DMHII project had been let on the basis of price, from a short list of contractors who were all considered to have the necessary experience to carry out the contract. The details of the contract were not widely known, and this contributed to the frustration of local people who felt that although some alterations to the contract may have been necessary during the life of the project, the contractors were allowed "carte blanche" to make changes to the proposed work activity without informing the community.
41. OCC has agreed that other considerations, apart from cost, should take higher priority when letting contracts, particularly when there are difficult problems to address, such as the complex traffic management needed at Didcot. This point was also made in the Best Value review of Construction Services, in reference to the "Rethinking Construction" Government report. The Committee would very much endorse this, and hope that this guidance is now being followed.
42. OCC agreed that early contractor involvement in the development of schemes is vital for their success. This would increase the accountability of the contractor, as well as conforming to the aspirations in "Rethinking Construction" of team working and continuous improvement.

43. New engineering contracts are being used by OCC and these are designed for the early resolution of problems arising with contractors. However, witnesses relayed that these are not working as well as they should do, in part because there are not sufficient resources to resolve conflicts within the designated time frame.
44. Two key points of concern that emerged in witness interviews were the closure of the Cow Lane tunnel, and the simultaneous working at both ends of the scheme. In terms of relations with the community, these were perhaps the most damaging aspects of the whole project, as has been acknowledged by OCC/Babtie.
45. Although simultaneous working at both ends of the road had been specified right from the tendering stage as a cost and timesaving option, this was not widely known, and this method of working caused considerable disruption and frustration to local people and to visitors to the town. The long period of disruption and the signage all deterred visitors from coming into Didcot. Local business representatives related that this had an immediate and severe effect on their trade.
46. OCC have acknowledged that the traffic assessment did not anticipate the long duration of the closure of the Cow Lane tunnel, and that this was a failing. Limited warning was given for the closure, and initially provision was not clear regarding an alternative safe route to St Birinus School. The closure caused severe disruption to the residents of Ladygrove, and resulted in increased traffic flows to other parts of the town, such as the perimeter road. It was also noted that emergency vehicles were also badly disrupted by this closure.
47. The road closures and traffic diversions meant that temporary traffic lights were needed. A sub-contractor to Nuttall managed these. There were concerns that these lights were not always in the right place, and were not always well run, as the equipment was not as sophisticated as was needed for such a complex job. A witness who was working on the site at the time stated that often the lights were manned by insufficiently trained staff.
48. However, OCC have stated that they felt that the operation of the temporary traffic lights were one of the elements of the project that went well. The traffic flow would have been much more disrupted had the operation not been as well managed. This was despite the lights being subjected to frequent vandalism.
49. It was agreed that the underground services, and the role of the utility companies (statutory undertakers) added to the difficulty of the project, and contributed greatly to the delay in its completion. Didcot was particularly blighted by the number of underground workings that were encountered. Each fresh discovery led to a further hiatus, and to considerable frustration for local people witnessing the delays extending. The same problem is now occurring on Cornmarket Street in the centre of Oxford. As recognised in the Quality of Highway Repairs and Drainage Scrutiny Review, the behaviour of utility companies often has damaging effects on the County Council's ability to programme and deliver quality work on time. However, the utility companies provide vital services to the community and despite

government proposals to improve the coordination of street works, the Council has limited power over them.

50. The complexity of the site certainly added to the need for good site maintenance and security. However, witnesses complained about the poor state of the site, and one local businessman brought a bag of rubble to the Didcot public meeting as

evidence. Witnesses also expressed frustration that they were unable to identify who was responsible for removing rubble from the site once works had finished, and had been told by both OCC and Nuttall that it was the responsibility of the other party. The claims that lax site security had led to vandalism and disruption to local firms were serious, and were being looked into by OCC.

R3) The Committee RECOMMEND the Executive to ask officers to write a report outlining how the Directorate is implementing the new Engineering Construction Contracts, why the dispute resolution element is not working well, and what is being done to improve this.

R4) The Committee RECOMMEND the Executive to ensure that officers use the legislation concerning local authority relations with the utility companies to further improve partnership working in this area.

R5) The Committee RECOMMEND the Executive to ensure that contracts include a section on who has responsibility to engage with the community and interest groups.

4: SIGNAGE AND ROAD SAFETY

51. Poor and misleading temporary signage was a serious complaint during the DMHII project. Local people felt that the signage was at best inadequate, and in some cases erroneous. Specific problems included signs that effectively directed potential visitors away from the town, and inadequate direction to the A34.

52. Witnesses strongly believed that poor signage was directly linked to the loss of trade of local businesses. There was decreased parking in the centre of town, and many people felt that the signs effectively told potential shoppers that Didcot was closed.

53. In addition, poor temporary signage was not just a matter of inconvenience, but given the volume of diverted traffic,

and traffic unclear of what roads to follow, there was a considerable road safety concern, with the disappearance of pavements in Didcot, and vehicles parked on footways. These problems had not been adequately predicted or managed by the contractors. Witnesses felt that their requests for information and solutions had been ignored by OCC.

54. The contractors stated that they were following the schedule of signs approved by OCC and that they erected the signs as directed. Improvements have since been made to ensure that the disruption of a road does not again have such a dramatic impact, and for example, the signage on the Abingdon Road project was considered to be a great improvement.

R6) The Committee RECOMMEND the Executive to ensure that temporary signage should be of the best quality, with suitable content, and good visibility. Temporary signage should be addressed during consultation with interested parties and should remain the responsibility of OCC through the course of the project.

5: FINISHING THE PROJECT, & WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARDS

55. All of the witnesses agreed that the opening of the new road did not mark the end of the project, and that there was still work to do. Complaints were made about the Jubilee Road roundabout and the pedestrian crossings, but more generally, there was local concern about the lack of landscaping around the site, and general clearing up. Frustration was also expressed that there was no timetable for the work to be completed.
56. The Contractors agreed that the failure to issue a timetable for completing the landscaping and general site finishing showed poor communication with the public. They were contractually obliged to undertake the landscaping work, and this was scheduled for completion within 12 months of the end of the project itself. They told the review group that they intended to speed up the finishing of the project to be well within the 12 month period.
57. Witnesses brought up the question of compensation, and there was

confusion about eligibility and awards. This has caused bad feeling amongst some local people and there were some calls for businesses to be compensated for lost trade. Information about compensation should have been made clearer.

58. OCC has stated that only properties that lost land as a result of the project were offered compensation. Some people were challenging the rateable value for their houses for the period of disruption, and their cases were still being considered by the District Council and the Valuation Office during this review.
59. There was uncertainty amongst witnesses from the community as to who was responsible for dealing with comments and complaints after the actual road works had finished, and the contractors had moved off site. OCC stated that their project manager was still the point of contact, but it was clear that this was not known by local people, and it should have been better advertised, for example in the Didcot One Stop Shop, with a direct 'hot line' number.

R7) The Committee RECOMMEND the Executive to ensure that information about project aftercare and landscaping is still publicised until any project is completely finished. Every project should have a post implementation review to address snags and learn lessons.

6: ACHIEVEMENTS

60. As well as looking at what could have been done better, the review was keen to hear from all the witnesses about what they thought had gone well. Witnesses from the community acknowledged that as the project progressed, communication and information had improved, and this was an indication of a willingness by OCC and the contractors to respond to local concerns.
61. OCC thought that it was a significant achievement to have met the revised completion dates. As a result of this effort the new road was opened in time for the Didcot Christmas Fair, and was ready for the start of the planned town centre development. In addition, given the proximity to a very busy rail line, the contractors were very pleased to report that there had been no problems with the railway during the road works.

Section 4

Conclusions

62. When considering the review as a whole, it was widely acknowledged that the finished scheme was of a high standard, but that the problems surrounding the implementation of the scheme were damaging to the image of OCC. However, evidence shows that officers recognised this, and have already put procedures and protocols into place to address this.
63. Both witnesses from the community and officers agreed that better project supervision, consultation and provision of information were key to success of the implementation of a contract. This had already been highlighted in the Best Value review of Construction and TCPP, but needs to be reaffirmed by OCC.
64. It would appear that a great deal of work towards better contract management has already been undertaken in the directorate, although it is not clear whether all suggested improvements from the Best Value review of Construction and TCPP have been implemented. One key action recommended by the Best Value review of Construction was the employment of project managers to oversee all major projects. The Committee is pleased to know that they are in place. However, the Committee would like more information on how these roles have developed, as these officers should have far reaching responsibilities in the areas of PR, communication and information, which it believes are currently not covered in the project manager job specifications.
65. The Committee was very pleased with the willingness in OCC to listen to community concerns and to put things right. It is very much hoped that the lessons learnt from DMHII will have a positive effect on future relationships between OCC and local people affected by a major project.
66. The Committee was pleased to have the opportunity to respond rapidly to a pressing issue of local concern and to pioneer a new approach to Scrutiny Reviews in OCC by actively seeking out the community view in a public forum. The Committee/Review Group believes that it is incumbent upon it to make an assessment of how well it has met each of these objectives. The following paragraphs give that assessment.
67. The first objective was:
- To review the implementation of the current systems for managing contract to see if they can be improved.
- The Committee has made recommendations on how contracts can be better managed.
68. The second objective was:
- To find out if there are ways to make changes that would minimise disruption and improve signage.
- The Committee has made recommendations on how disruption can be avoided by good planning and information, and how to make sure that signage is adequate.
69. The third objective was:
- To explore the interfaces between the Council and the public, and the Council and the contractor.
- The Committee has investigated this area, and listened to considerable

criticism of this aspect of OCC work. It has made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the communication and relationship between the Council, the public, local partners and contractors.

70. The fourth objective was:

- To review the criteria used for the awarding of contracts and means of setting specification and monitoring compliance.

The Committee has heard evidence that using cost as the prime basis for awarding contracts is not always appropriate, and it has endorsed this position. It has made further recommendations regarding contract specification, and monitoring.

The Committee will be keen to learn how the Executive intends to address the recommendations. They wish to evaluate the ultimate effectiveness of the entire review in 12 months time.

Annex 1: List of Witnesses

Oral evidence was obtained from the following 'witnesses' during the review public hearings:

- Mike Collins, (Senior Engineer for OCC)
- Margaret Davies (Didcot Town Council)
- Colin Dawkes (Ladygrove ward Town and SODC Councillor)
- Richard Dix (the Assistant Director of Highway Management)
- Mr E. Elias (Didcot resident)
- John Ely (site manager for Nuttall)
- Brian Fell (seconded from Babbie to OCC Road Traffic and Safety department)
- Steven Fox (Area Manager for Nuttall)
- Chris Knotman (President, Didcot Chamber Of Commerce)
- Monica Lawson (East Hagbourne Parish Council)
- Christopher Nash (The Foam Company)
- John Stimson (Thirteen Parishes)
- David Thomas (Babbie's highway section)
- Richard Warwick (Landowner)
- Roger Woodley (Didcot resident)

Environment Scrutiny Committee Councillors who attended the meetings

- Les Sibley (Bicester North), Chair of the Environment Scrutiny Committee
- Jean Fooks (Oxford Cherwell), Deputy Chair of the Environment Scrutiny Committee
- Dee Bulley (Carterton)
- Alan Bryden (Abingdon North)
- Andrew Crawford (Marcham)
- Dickie Dawes (Hanborough)
- Patrick Greene (Moreton)
- Biddy Hudson (Temple Cowley)
- Terry Joslin (Didcot Manor)
- Neville Harris (Didcot Mereland) (in place of Councillor Chris Robins)

Annex 2: Map of Didcot Milton Heights II project



Annex 3: Scoping Document

Review Topic (name of review)	DMH2 contract arrangements~ lessons to be learnt
Study Group Members (Cllr's involved)	All members of Environment Scrutiny Committee and Cllr Neville Harris
Officer Support (Scrutiny Review Officer lead)	Myfanwy Lloyd, Deborah Mitchell, Matt Bramall, Julian Hehir
Rationale (key issues and/ or reason for doing the review)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is considerable awareness of public concern over the systems currently used for overseeing contracts, as evidenced by a range of consultative dialogues such as Area Forum, letters to Councillors, it being a previous topic for BV Review etc. Contracting more generally has been an issue of long standing interest to local Members representing their communities. It will improve relations with a District partner as it satisfies a desire of South Oxon District Council for this to be looked at The Chamber of Commerce claim they lost business, and other stakeholders would welcome the opportunity to tell us their views
Purpose of Review/Objective (specify exactly what the review should achieve)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To review the implementation of the current systems for managing contract to see if they can be improved. To find out if there are ways to make changes that would minimise disruption and improve signage. To explore the interfaces between the Council and the public, and the Council and the contractor. To review the criteria used for the awarding of contracts and means of setting specification and monitoring compliance.
Indicators of Success (what factors would tell you what a good review should look like)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The exercise will enable Scrutiny to offer guidance (as a 'critical friend') to the Executive and E.S. so that contracting processes are improved; The standing of O.C.C. in the community is raised by demonstrating that it is visible, democratic and transparent; An additional way of working will be pioneered for scrutiny.
Methodology/ Approach (what types of enquiry will be used to gather evidence and why)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A 1-day special Scrutiny Committee meeting to be held in a Didcot venue to which witness will be invited in order that they may be questioned by the Scrutiny Committee in order to provide them with evidence when writing a report. 1 pre-event meeting to agree witnesses and set questioning framework Written submissions to be accepted from those parties responding to the invitation to participate that are not selected for oral interview. 1 post event meeting at County Hall in which officers and contractors can be questioned 1 post event meeting for Members to sift evidence and develop their report

The Road Forward - Better Contract Management

Specify Witnesses/Experts (who to see and when)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Didcot Town Council rep. • South Oxon Town Council rep. • Police representative. • Chamber of Commerce rep. • Local shop keepers • Local schools representative • Bus and taxi firm rep. • Local residents rep. • Representatives from Parish Councils adjacent to Didcot, (e.g. East & West Hagbourne, North & South Moreton, Long & Little Wittenham PCs, and possibly Brightwell & the Astons) 	
Specify Evidence Sources for Documents (which to look at)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correspondence from people with views on the project kept on file by officers and councillors 	
Specify Site Visits (where and when)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None needed 	
Specify Evidence Sources for Views of Stakeholders (consultation/workshops/focus groups/public meetings)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written submissions from those people not invited to give oral evidence during the Didcot special meeting 	
Resource requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person-days • Expenditure 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny staff needed to advertise meeting, arrange the event and minute contributions, and process written submissions. • Scrutiny staff needed to arrange a pre-event planning meeting for the Scrutiny Committee and the post-event meetings- £300 for expenses (room hire, refreshments, travel, publicity, etc). 	
Barriers/dangers/risks (identify any weaknesses and potential pitfalls)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for misunderstanding what is being scrutinised (i.e. the LAs contract process lessons NOT DMH2 itself) • Being lobbied by pressure groups and activists • Staying focussed enough to be manageable whilst being deep enough to add value 	
Projected start date	Didcot event to be held ???day ??th May 2003	Draft Report Deadline	Wed 2nd July
Meeting Frequency	Weekly	Projected completion date	17th Sept 2003

Annex 4: Communications Protocol for Major Road Schemes

Procedure Note

P-21

Communications Protocol for Major Road Schemes Rev: Dec 2002

1. Introduction

For the purposes of this protocol a "Major" road scheme is any scheme, or collection of schemes (e.g., ITS), which is likely to have a significant impact on either the local community or the travelling public during its construction or on its completion.

2. Actions

- **Raise awareness of the scheme** as soon as a commitment is made to construct. Use local forums (TAC, District, Parish meetings etc.) to report progress and to forewarn of any potential issues relating to the implementation of the scheme.
- **Establish the likely effects of the scheme**, (temporary during construction and also permanent) on the general public and local businesses and publicise well in advance of the start of construction. Consider issuing press releases one month and then two weeks prior to the start date and also at the start. Hold a local meeting/exhibition in conjunction with the contractor and the supervising consultant a week before the start.
- **Press releases should stress the purpose of the work and the benefits** before explaining that there will be delays and should list any key points such as single way working, temporary traffic lights etc. Where the works are in response to public demand, this should be stressed. Where they are the result of a worn out road, this should be stated. If appropriate the opportunity should be used to get across Travelwise or other related messages. Developer funding should be acknowledged. Additional detail such as the value of the contract and the name of the contractor are of interest to some members of the public but should not be given prominence in the press release. A contact name and number should be included.
- **Write directly to all affected "frontagers"** - business and residential - with precisely the same information, again at least a week before and preferably more. Add a contact name and number. Text should be cleared by Jane Young.
- **Always ensure that the local County Councillor** and local councils are fully informed well in advance, again leaving a contact name and number. District and City Councillors should be informed as well.

The Road Forward - Better Contract Management

- **Ensure that the project manager keeps in personal contact** with these people and organisations throughout, and informs them early of unforeseen problems or delays. The personal approach is essential where the works directly affect access to premises and access arrangements change as the work progresses.
- **Invite comment or feedback on any particular problems** that people affected by the work may be facing. Appreciate sometimes that they will just be cross, but quite often a sympathetic word can placate.
- **Those affected by the disruption will not all have seen or heard the local media reports or may be casual visitors to the area**, so have large helpful signs that will preferably last for the duration of the scheme and avoid the need to update them. It is vital that these contain i) an explanation of what is going on (nothing too technical but Plain English explanations like "Repairs to worn out road", "Road safety scheme", "Junction improvement", "Town centre enhancement") ii) the start date and approximate duration of the work iii) an apology for any delay iv) the County Council logo and those of any partners we need to include v) a contact number. A visible acknowledgement of the contractor is an important factor in improving performance through ownership and also provides relevant contact details in relation to possible third party claims.
- **Put the signs where people can see and read them.** The best place is usually in advance of the scheme where vehicles are likely to queue rather than at the point where they've got through at last and are rushing past.
- **Have enough signs** and remember pedestrians often won't see the signs facing a busy carriageway.
- **Issue a weekly works bulletin** which provides information on overall scheme progress and outlines the forthcoming week's activities. Weekly bulletins can be posted on web sites (the County Council's and also the District and Town Council's), posted on local notice boards and delivered by hand to local premises affected by the works. The honest early warning of potential problems and delays can defuse situations before they have a chance to develop.
- **Always publicise the completion of a scheme, thank people for their patience and celebrate success.**