

# Elms Lane Mtg

15<sup>th</sup> December, 2025

## Retaining Wall Project Costs and Timeline

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### Keywords

Retaining Wall, WSP, Project Costs, Project Funding, Project Management, Timeline Concerns

### Meeting Information

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2025

Location: Elms Lane

Participants: John Nicholson – Somerset Council (Speaker 1), Craig Foley – ELR (Speaker 2), Ray Ellis – ELR (Speaker 3), Fiona Houlton - |APC (Speaker 4), Jeremy Asher – ELR (Speaker 5), Henry Hobhouse – SC (Speaker 6), Janet Flanagan – ELR (Speaker 7)

ELR – Elms Lane Resident

### Meeting Notes

#### Project Design and Approval Status

- The consultant, WSP, has provided an "agreement in principle" for the retaining wall works, including a general design drawing. This has been sent to the Somerset Council structures team for a technical audit, with a response expected by the first week of January.
- The audit will verify the design and suggest alterations. No major changes are anticipated due to prior ground investigation data.
- Following the audit, the agreement in principle is expected to be approved by the council by the end of January. The project will then move to the detailed design phase, estimated for completion by spring.

#### Remedial Works for the Opposite Wall

- WSP conducted a visual inspection of the retaining wall on the opposite side of the road to support the design of remedial works.
- A separate team at WSP is handling this design, which is expected by the end of March, to avoid delays.
- The plan is to issue the works for both walls as a single tender package to one contractor so that each project does not rely on each other starting.

## Project Cost Escalation and Funding Concerns

- The project cost has escalated significantly from an initial estimate of £1.2 million. The new agreement in principle from WSP presents a much higher cost:
  - **Construction:** £1.8 million
  - **Management fees:** £900,000
  - **Contingency/risk (25%):** £700,000
- The increase is attributed to new ground investigation data showing the design must go eight meters below ground with a 4.5-meter retaining height.
- The £900,000 management fee and £700,000 contingency were questioned as being disproportionately high.
- Additional costs include utility diversion works (est. £130,000 each for four companies) and future drainage and resurfacing works (200K and 300K respectively est. £500,000 total), which are to be covered by separate highway maintenance budgets.
- There is a major concern that further delays will lead to significant cost inflation, with a potential increase of £400,000 cited.

## Project Management, Delays, and Escalation

- Participants expressed significant frustration and anger over the lack of progress in the past two years, viewing the situation as dangerous.
- Due to the increased cost and scale, the project is likely to be transferred from the Structures department to the "Majors" team within Somerset Council. A decision on this handover is expected by the end of January.
- There is a strong preference for the project to be managed by the Majors team, which is believed to have more resources and access to framework contractors like Volkers or Octavius.
- A major uncertainty is the source of funding for the escalated cost. Options include a separate bid to the government or reallocating funds from the capital asset program. The project is now ranked second on the risk register another in project in Minehead has taken 1<sup>st</sup> place.

- To escalate the issue, the group plans to write a formal letter to Matthew Scriven (a new but aware contact), Richard Wilkins and Chris Hall, Director of Risk Strategies and Neil Gould, Asset Services to push for the project to be moved directly to the Majors department. Sarah Dyke will also be contacted by Henry to explore potential government funding.
- Speaker 2 will remain the point of contact until a formal handover is confirmed.

## **Embankment Monitoring and Communication**

- A new monitoring process has been established, with four-weekly inspections of the embankment to record its condition (vegetation, slips, water, movement). Additional inspections will occur after severe weather. To be handled by Tracy Harris.
- This record will help assess risk and provide evidence to support the project's urgency.
- It was agreed that the area manager (Tracy) would provide written updates to residents after each four-week inspection.

## **Next Arrangements**

JN to await the technical audit approval response, expected by the first week of January.

JN to seek council approval for the agreement in principle by the end of January.

JN to continue investigating the funding source and which department will manage the project, aiming for clarity by the end of January. To provide the name of the contact who will be in charge

JN to identify and communicate the new point of contact for the project once it is formally handed over.

JF will write, on behalf of Elms Lane residents a formal letter to Matthew Scriven, Richard Wilkins, Neil Gould, Chris Hall to express concerns about project delays.

JN to arrange a meeting with Richard Wilkins and Chris Hall to push for the project to be managed by the Majors department.

JF to work with John in January to arrange for a representative from Majors to meet with the group.

HH to request that Tracy (area manager) emails residents with an update after each four-weekly inspection.

HH will email Sarah Doke (and copy others) to seek government funding.

JF to email JN to request a copy of the "agreement in principle" document, likely available near the end of January.

## AI Suggestions

The following are AI suggestions and having read them I think these should be included in this report as they make sense to me.

AI has identified the following issues that were not concluded in the meeting or lack clear action items; please pay attention:

1. **Funding Gap:** The primary issue is the significant funding gap. The project cost has escalated to nearly three times the initial estimate, and there is no clear plan or designated person responsible for securing the necessary funds.
2. **Uncertain Project Lead:** The final decision on whether the project will be managed by the "Structures" or "Majors" department is pending. This is a critical path for project execution, and the responsibility for driving the project forward is unclear.
3. **Uncertain Timeline:** The project's timeline is highly uncertain. It is dependent on securing funding and the formal handover to the "Majors" team, but no definitive dates or milestones for these critical steps were established.
4. **Disproportionate Fees:** The management fees (£900,000) from WSP were identified as "ridiculous," but there is no formal plan to challenge or renegotiate these fees beyond "questioning them" in January.