

SPECIAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 5th February, 2025

Present:	Councillor Bernard Dawson MBE (in the Chair), Councillors Zak Khan, Clare Pritchard (Vice Chair) and Mohammed Younis Co-optees: Andy Tatchell and Shahed Mohammed
In Attendance:	Councillor Noordad Aziz (Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Education and Skill Steve Riley, Executive Director (Environment)
Apologies	Councillors Heather Anderson, Clare McKenna and Clare Yates

197 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Clare McKenna, Heather Anderson and Clare Yates. There were no substitute representatives in attendance at the meeting.

198 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

There were no interests or dispensations declared at the meeting.

199 Minutes of the last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Special Overview & Scrutiny Committee, held on 14th October 2025, were submitted for approval as a correct record.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.

200 Town Centre Levelling Up Project Progress

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Education and Skills, Councillor Noordad Aziz, submitted a report to respond to the request from the Special Overview & Scrutiny Committee for a general update on the Council's Levelling Up Fund (LUF) funded town centre projects. The report gave details of the progress of the three main projects: Market Hall, Burtons Chambers and Market Chambers. In respect of Burtons Chambers and Market Hall, Councillor Aziz reported that significant progress had been made.

The Executive Director (Environment) referred to the Market Chambers project and informed the Committee that a sale by agreement had just been secured with the last freehold owner but that the compulsory purchase order would still continue to hopefully provide a full clean title. He explained that a public CPO enquiry had taken place in December 2024, following objections to the acquisition of the Market Chambers. The enquiry had been adjourned until after the Cabinet meeting on the 22 January 2025, to allow the Inspector time to understand the Council's commitment to supporting the operating costs, once Market Chambers was open. Both legal representatives had asked

the Inspector for a delay in making their final closing statements to progress the sale of agreement, which had been agreed.

Councillor Aziz reported that the Operator 2-Work had been secured for Burtons Chambers and that a preferred operator had been identified for the Market Hall and that these would drive footfall into Accrington town centre and restart further regeneration.

The Committee had submitted questions to Councillor Aziz in advance to the meeting, which were responded as follows:

1. How long will it take for both work phases to be completed?

Reference was made to 3.3.2 of the report which explained that the estimated completion date for phase 1 enabling works provided by Morgan Sindall was Q4 2024/25 although this could extend into Q1 2025/26. The programme timescale had been impacted by the initial 6 month delay in funding announcement/authorisation to start and additional works identified as the building was being stripped out.

Reference was also made to 3.3.3 of the report and the phase 2 fit-out works contract, again provided by Morgan Sindall, is Q3 2025/26. The Committee was informed that this could be extended into Q4 depending on the successful contractor(s) and their tender programme dates.

The Executive Director (Environment) informed the Committee that the Phase 2 fit-out works were being tendered in line with the new Procurement Act 2023 which would come into force on 24th February 2025. He reported that this aimed to improve and streamline the way procurement was undertaken by public bodies and should benefit prospective suppliers, particularly small businesses.

Councillor Khan pointed out that he had spoken to traders and customers who had expressed concern that they were not being kept informed of what was happening. He requested that greater efforts were made to ensure regular communications with all concerned, particularly with the market traders. He also confirmed delay in the funding announcement by 6 months had not helped the programme.

Councillor Aziz acknowledged Councillor Khan highlighting the initial 6-month delay in the funding announcement and pointed out that there had been no delays and that works were progressing. He also agreed that communication on the progress of the project was vital.

2. When are the market traders expected to move back into the Market Hall?

Reference was made to 3.3.1 of the report and the Committee was informed that the last programme provided by Morgan Sindall had estimated the Market Hall to re-open in Q3 2025/26 with a possibility of it extending in Q4. Paragraph 3.3.1 of the report referred to the tendering of phase 2 fit-out works and so a defined date could only be confirmed after this.

3. Both traders and customers have expressed concern about the continued works taking place in the town centre and a lack of information on what is happening and its timescales of completion. What actions are you taking to ensure that traders and customers are kept informed?

The Executive Director informed the meeting that a dedicated website 'Accrington Town Square' (<https://accringtontownsquare.com/>) had been set up to keep people

informed about the works taking place in Accrington Town Centre and informed the meeting that there were regular monthly updates from the contractors within the 'Town Centre Projects' section as well as the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section being updated when required. The website had been and continues to be promoted within the Council's town centre media updates and the site also provided a link to subscribe to the Council's own regular newsletter. Councillor Pritchard requested that the link to the website was circulated to Committee members.

Visual improvements to the town centre would be more obvious once the covered scaffolding, which was required to protect the public and site operatives (whilst all the façade works were being undertaken), was no longer needed and had been removed. The appointment of the new Market Hall operator had almost been completed and it was hoped that a report would be submitted to Cabinet in March to announce the appointment. Once appointed the new operator would then be able to reach out to any ex market hall traders, as well as looking to bring in new traders.

Members of the Committee raised the following issues:

- Market traders had endured a lot throughout the works.
- A previous Scrutiny report had indicated that footfall in Accrington Town Centre had increased.
- Due to the success of the outside market cabins, consideration was requested about retaining them and factoring their use into a future market strategy? However, the Committee members were informed that the vast majority were hired.
- The mechanics and delivery of phase 2 would be dependent on the appointment of contractors through the tender process. It was, therefore, suggested that separate updates were given on these items at a future meeting.
- The Committee pointed out the importance of ensuring that market traders were kept informed of works taking place and any timescales including the decanting from the market units.
- That it was important to ensure good publicity on completion of the works.
- The importance of awarding contracts to local contractors, where possible, even if this increased costs. They noted that this would also be more sustainable and that this strategy should also be adopted within planning policies.
- Consideration should be given to employing an operating strategy similar to those of supermarkets e.g. looking at gaps in the market and bringing in other offerings that could increase footfall.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder, Councillor Aziz, and Executive Director (Environment) responded to the issues set out about as follows:

- On the completion of the projects, the regenerated and modernised buildings should increase footfall and be a major asset to the businesses of Accrington.
- The outside stalls had increased business for some stall holders and it had been noted that this temporary format had created a better atmosphere. Three of the outside market cabins had been purchased by the Council so would be retained whilst the remainder had been hired, which would be returned. On the formal appointment of the Market Hall operator, conversations could take place about a future market strategy and use of any temporary market cabin, although it would be the new operator's decision on the type of market hall offerings. The preferred operator has already been provided with details of ex market hall offerings and market trader details.
- The Council had and continued to spend considerable time and effort in maintaining the dedicated Accrington Town Square website where all relevant information was

kept in a single place. Committee members were informed to let Councillor Aziz know if they had any further suggestions in how to publicise this.

- The list of local businesses/trades who responded to the call from Morgan Sindall to register their interest in the project, would be provided to any new contractor/s who were appointed for the Phase 2 fit-out works.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder, Councillor Aziz, acknowledged the strong cross party support for the projects and agreed that there had been an initial 6 month delay in the funding announcement but indicated that the success of the town centre regeneration would be measured by increased footfall into the town and how each of the interventions once open, supported and traded off each other.

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted;**
- (2) That Officers ensure that communications with market traders and customers are prioritised to ensure regular updates and information;**
- (3) That Officers ensure that the appointed contractors are informed of the Council's ethos to appoint local businesses/trades, where possibly, to promote economic and sustainable prosperity;**
- (4) That the link to the Accrington Town Square website be forwarded to Committee Members; and**
- (5) That Planning Officers give consideration to the inclusion of using local suppliers/companies, where practicable, when establishing planning policies.**

201 Hyndburn Towns Fund

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Education and Skills, Councillor Noordad Aziz, confirmed that the Government had yet to issue the updated guidance for the Long Term Plan for Towns Funding. He also informed the Committee that whilst there was an in-principal agreement to the allocation for the final year UKSPF funding from the new Combined County Authority, (2025/26), final guidance had yet to be provided to authorities as the CCA was the accountable authority. He indicated that it was likely that there could be further information available at the next meeting following the Spending Review in Spring 2025.

Signed:.....

Date:

Chair of the meeting
At which the minutes were confirmed