

<p style="text-align: center;">Grants Determination Sub-Committee</p> <p style="text-align: center;">27th September 2018</p>	
<p>Report of: Ann Sutcliffe Corporate Director of Place</p>	<p>Classification: Unrestricted</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">A12 Acoustic Barrier</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Part of the A12 Green Mile Initiative</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Response to Grants Scrutiny Sub Committee Questions</p>	

A12 Acoustic Barrier – part of the A12 Green Mile initiative

Whilst the committee understood that this project is part of a much larger programme of noise reduction and air quality improvement works along the A12 that the council will be seeking funding from TfL for, the committee nevertheless, expressed fundamental concerns with this project:

- **The report emphasises the benefit of improving air quality, and the committee felt that this was misleading, particularly as the design and materials are unproven for that purpose.**

A specific purpose of the project is to test the potential impact/effect of the proposed Acoustic Barrier on air quality, as well as noise reduction and environmental perception/quality. For this purpose, the Project Steering Group includes the University of East London and their Sustainability Research Institute (SRI), who have designed a two-part study involving the local community in ‘before and after’ on-site investigations, as well as technical assessments of both air quality and noise levels in the vicinity of the new barrier.

- **It is unclear to the committee how a barrier, in the proposed format, could improve air quality and asked whether alternative options to reduce air quality were being looked at – for example green walls.**

A series of green walls are proposed at a number of locations along the A12 Road as part of the overall A12 Green Mile initiative. The Acoustic Barrier is one of the projects included within the Green Mile. The initiative has been prepared by LBTH and Poplar HARCA in liaison with TfL and is included as a separate section within TfL’s A12 Study (May 2015). A funding bid amounting to approximately £1.5m is being prepared for submission to the Mayor’s Air Quality Fund (MAQF) and also to the Liveable Neighbourhoods programme for the suite of projects within the A12 Green Mile. The implementation of the A12 Acoustic Barrier shows an early commitment by the Borough to work in partnership with TfL to progress a comprehensive initiative. This will maintain a focus and momentum along this route to tackling poor air quality, high noise levels and poor environmental quality. The Council’s Healthy Environments Team is supporting these bid submissions.

In this location a green wall is not suitable as it would take up more pavement space and prove to be more challenging in terms of maintenance requirements including infrastructure to water them.

- **The ugly design of the acoustic barrier.**

The Steering Group have engaged architects specialised in both public art and product design to produce a unique solution that exploits the range of possibilities of using a noise absorbent metal in a road-side setting. The brief to the architects is that they produce an arts based solution that responds to this location, but with a set of reproducible design principles that will enable variations of the Acoustic Barrier to be introduced into other locations and settings.

- **The committee were concerned about the value for money of this project, especially considering the cost per length.**

An important part of the project is to test the qualities of a new, light-weight, resilient material to construct the Acoustic Barrier. The barrier will be the first of its kind to be constructed of 'silk metal' in a roadside setting and has had to be designed from first principles. Through this process, it has had to achieve sign-off against a range of performance and safety considerations. This is the reason that this length of Acoustic Barrier is more expensive. The A12 Green Mile proposes to introduce sections of this Acoustic Barrier in other key locations (primarily locations where people dwell) along the A12. With the lessons learned and the design refined, these sections of Acoustic Barrier will be considerably less expensive.

A disagreement from some committee members about the council's use of section 106 funding for projects that is not in the immediate area of the development – in this case, London City Island.

The funding is coming from the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation section 106 pot for infrastructure projects, whilst London City Island is a large contributor to this pot of section 106 funding the proposed project is within the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation area and this particular project was identified in one of their previous studies.

- **A query about whether the proposed siting of the acoustic barrier was appropriate, considering the density of housing in the locality and therefore a relatively small number of residents will benefit. The committee felt that there are other sites where noise reduction solutions may benefit more residents.**

The siting of the Acoustic Barrier was carefully selected by the Steering Group specifically because the environment of the adjacent small open space (Jefferson Plaza) which has the potential to be enhanced through a reduction in traffic noise. The open space, with its adjacent community building (currently unused) and a small food-store, supports a development of some 2,200 residents. It is also a busy walking route used by people accessing the Bromley-by-Bow LUL Station.

- **Finally, the committee were concerned that using Poplar HARCA to manage the project may not be as cost effective as an in-house solution. The committee wanted assurance that a value for money exercise for project management had been undertaken.**

While the day-to-day administration of the project is currently being performed by Poplar HARCA, decision taking is shared between the members of the Steering Group (including LBTH, TfL, and UEL, as well as Poplar HARCA). The matter of which body should manage the project was discussed between Poplar HARCA and the Council before it commenced. At that time, however, there were no Tower Hamlets staff available and so it was decided that Poplar HARCA perform this role. The total project management fee proposed by Poplar HARCA is £7,000 (7%) which is well below the market rate of approximately 10%. In addition, Poplar HARCA is, as is LBTH, committing time to the project in kind.

- **The committee felt that they could not endorse this project for the reasons outlined above. They asked that the project was halted unless funding was already committed.**

Funding has already been committed by TfL and significant progress has been made in research and design, this project could also be the catalyst to attract other funding and deliver future projects, the council has the opportunity to lead on an innovative piece of design and technology and halting the project will lose this opportunity and much of the work done by the partnership would be wasted.