

A N T H O N Y D E L A R U E A S S O C I A T E S
• C H A R T E R E D A R C H I T E C T S •

AD/. 25 January 2017

COMMENTS UPON HIGH LEVEL REVIEW OF OUR LETTER TO SIR EDWARD
LEIGH OF OF 3 NOVEMBER 2016, DATED 13 JANUARY 2017

OVERVIEW

I have read the Review of our letter of the 3 November 2016, prepared as part of the Restoration and Renewal Programme.

I fully appreciate that the purpose of the Review is to analyse the proposals we put forward following our discussions with Sir Edward Leigh, and that any such review must, if it is to be useful, err on the side of caution. Nevertheless, I feel the Review fails to grasp certain aspects of the proposal, and while necessarily making many sensible assumptions to allow broad comment on what was by its nature a very sketchy overview, makes certain false and misrepresentative assertions. There are also some serious over-simplifications which distort the understanding of the options available.

I feel that much of this, which may be categorised as extreme caution, is due to the approach being taken from a property management rather than a constructional, or more properly, a mechanical or services viewpoint. I shall explain below.

INTERPRETATION OF THE SUGGESTIONS

The Review repeatedly (1.2 and 2.5) makes the assertion that the proposal (described as the ADA proposal) is essentially a hybrid between Option 2 Partial decant and Option E1A Rolling Programme. This is totally false. Both these scenarios involve a partial and piecemeal renewal of the mechanical, electrical and electronic services.

The proposal we suggested to Sir Edward Leigh is that the works would be undertaken as a total strip-out on day one, namely as Option 3. The difference between Option 3 in our initial report is that the temporary accommodation would be provided with the Palace, and not remotely.

The 'corridor' of temporary encampment is one materially free of service plant, being 'served' rather than 'service' spaces. This is expressed in my letter.

The Review clearly indicates, very well expressed in the plans in the Appendix, the selected locations of the temporary plant needed.

Thus to equate this with Options 2 and E1, both of which retain the existing services to serve the occupied accommodation, consequently requiring a phased renewal, with all the long-term drawbacks that involves (as I describe) is wholly false.

The proposal made involves a total strip-out as a single exercise (i.e. all the plugs will be pulled out on the same day) and the new plant will be installed as a single comprehensive exercise, exactly as Option 3.

TIMESCALE

In the light of the foregoing, I would regard the timescale suggested in the Report for the 'ADA proposal' as unduly cautious. Our proposal involves no separation or phasing within the M&E installations.

Para 2.2 divides the proposal into 7 phases, the latter ones seemingly unduly complex and prolonged. 'Phase 2' which covers the bulk of the Option E1A works is identified at 11 years. No justification is given at all for nearly doubling the E1A timetable; it seems wholly arbitrary. It is not clear at all why the accompanying plan in the Appendix states for the areas around Lords "Rate of Progress as Delivery Option E1A" and around the Commons chamber "Rate of Progress as Delivery Option 2." Why? These assertions make no sense at all.

The programme appears to take no note of the long parliamentary recesses, and implies continuous working under unchanging circumstances. In reality there is a whole year of recess working available every four years, and careful and creative project management would take account of, and make good use of this.

It is in the scheduling of certain works within these periods of recess that some lengthening of the programme may indeed occur, dependant really upon the skill of the project management. The contention that it would more that double the contract period is extremely hard to understand.

This circumstance, unique to Parliament, would most effectively allow much of the more intrusive work to be carried out to avoid major disruption to the workings of the two Houses.

DETAILED OBSERVATIONS

Without being unduly critical, and acknowledging, as I note above, the Report's purpose of providing cautious advice, I would nevertheless observe that it takes what one might call a somewhat 'Ministry of Works' negative approach. Five instance are worthy of note to illustrate this point:

Preparatory works.

A period of up to two years is given for the preparatory temporary works. No justification for this is provided. It is hard to see how temporary works need take so long. These works should be seen rather as the type of provision made for large exhibitions, which are usually installed to very tight schedules. A more commercial approach to this installation would be sensible. Similarly the internal temporary accommodation should be seen as 'exhibition' style works, or shopfitting, not as a short-term permanent installation, of a type and quality one would make within the Palace under normal circumstances. Such an approach would doubtless also bring economies.

Timescale.

As noted above, the timescale suggested in the Review for the 'ADA proposal' is a staggering "in excess of 15 years, it could be nearly 20..." (para 1.2) This despite my contention that correctly managed there is no reason why there should be any significant increase of timescale. No detailed justification is given. One can only conclude that the assumptions upon which this is based go beyond a worse-case scenario. I have made observations above about carefully factoring in the periods of parliamentary recess.

Disturbance.

Para 2.6 asserts that "the likelihood of construction works... causing an unacceptable degree of disturbance... is increased. This is because the area retained in use by Parliament would run for almost the entire length of the building..." Again, this is disingenuous, as the greater length of the retained part is effectively an access corridor, from the Elizabeth Tower to the Lords Corridor. The only truly occupied parts are the two Chambers, in the western third of the building, and in these areas, as previously stated, works may be scheduled for the recesses, and indeed other times when the Houses are not sitting, which provide at least two full years of empty working in an eight-year contract!

It is worth observing that not all mechanical and engineering work is extremely and continuously noisy. This work cannot be compared to major construction, foundations, steelwork etc.

I have previously stated, not wishing to belittle the seriousness of the activities of Parliament, that most workers in central London put up with considerable noise disruption

from adjacent building sites, often for years on end, with only minimal recourse to noisy working regulations. A small degree of compromise on the part of our legislators does not seem unreasonable when balanced against the advantages of remaining on site.

Completion in the occupied areas.

The accompanying plans show two years for the final fitting of the Lords Chamber and Westminster Hall. This is all effectively 'second fix' work, namely point-of-delivery services (lights fittings, grilles, speakers etc) not plant. While it would of course be possible to take so long, it is certainly not necessary.

Outcome Level C Works.

These are the changes and additions to the three courts. Some of this work, if it is to be done, could of course run concurrently with the services renewal, a point which is not made in the Review.

COSTS

Costs in construction are totally dependant upon timing. Such timing includes efficient scale of execution of works, so division into small phases inevitably costs more.

The Review claims that the 'ADA Proposal' will add considerable cost, based upon two assumptions: firstly the equating this proposal with Option 2, which by dividing all the installations into two parts clearly adds to cost, and secondly by the unsupported assumption of the timescale, as described above. No detailed evidence for this financial assertion is given.

CONCLUSION

As the Report correctly identifies, our suggestions were put forward as very outline principles, one's role being that of an 'ideas man', not a technical advisor, as I make clear in my first letter, and I stand by those suggestions.

Ideas are only useful if subjected to creative and positive scrutiny, constructive thought building upon their strengths, not simply dismissing their perceived weaknesses. I believe such a constructive technical scrutiny is yet to be done. It is up to members of both houses of Parliament to decide whether it is worth it.