

Peers' Entrance Report: Review and Recommendations

Lord Morse KCB

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Introduction

This short report has been prepared at the request of the Lord Speaker. It is intended to provide clarity on the progress and problems of the Peers' Entrance Project and to identify improvements for future practice, for consideration by the Lord Speaker and the House of Lords Commission.

This report is only one in a series of reviews which are taking place or have been published, others include:

- Charlotte Moar's Organisational review, which addresses risks around the communication and governance of the works;
- the project team have completed a Lessons Learnt report;
- a design and requirements review and a technical review; and
- an audit of the Peers' Entrance Project undertaken by independent audit provider to the House of Lords, BDO, in September 2025.

In addition to this, a User group and an Operational Working group have been set up to consult on the functionality of the pods.

The Security Construction Programme was initiated in response to an independent report on the security of the Westminster estate by Sir Jon Murphy in 2017. Among the works undertaken as part of the programme was the Peers' Entrance project.

Whilst Security was the primary driver for starting the project, it must not be the only driver for delivery. Delivering on time, on cost, and functionality and protecting the reputation of Parliament, should all be shaping our priorities.

Perception of the Project

During the House of Lords debates on the Joint Parliamentary Commercial Department on 12 June and during the Oral Question to the Senior Deputy Speaker on 2 July 2025, members publicly expressed concerns about the Peers' Entrance project, highlighting a range of issues that contributed to a negative perception.

Concerns about cost increases were highlighted by Lord Forsyth of Drumlean, who stated, "it is simply not acceptable that public money should be spent in this way with such disastrous consequences" (Hansard, 12 June 2025).

Operational issues were also a key theme, particularly in the 2 July debate, where Baroness Smith of Basildon remarked, "It is completely unacceptable that we have a door that does not operate as it should" (Hansard, 12 June 2025).

Members also raised concerns about communication and consultation, with Baroness Goldie stating, "What communication structures does the Commission have in place to ensure that, within the limitations of confidentiality, Members have some idea of what it is doing

and what decisions it is making? I think the majority of this House is unclear about all of that." (Hansard, 12 June 2025).

There were questions of responsibility, trust, and ownership, Lord Harris of Haringey asked, "What are the lines of accountability?" (Hansard, 12 June 2025). The negative perception of the project has been exacerbated by previous issues with construction projects, such as the recent procurement issues associated with the Victoria Tower Project.

These statements, made on the public record in the Chamber, reflect a clear loss of confidence in the project's delivery and oversight. The reputational impact has extended beyond Parliament, with national media coverage reinforcing public scrutiny. It should be noted that the reputation of the House is shaped not only by individual projects but are accumulated over time; perceptions are rarely formed in isolation.

The cost of Peers' Entrance

Originally, on 24 February 2022, the project budget was approved at £6.1 million under the Full Business Case (FBC), covering construction, design, and associated fees and other aspects of West Front Perimeter project such as the design of the permanent Abingdon Street fence. The cost was computed assuming that works to the Entrance would proceed continuously from start to finish, with Peers' Entrance shut during that whole period, and with no significant sound restrictions affecting works timing. The invitation to tender with outside contractors had been issued on the basis of continuous working.

Since the works tender was accepted, the cost has increased by £3.6 million, driven primarily by over £2.4 million in compensation events, events which entitle the contractor to receive additional payments, as defined by the contract. These additional costs arose from the decision on 26 October 2022 to proceed on the basis that Peers' Entrance must be open at all times during sittings of the House of Lords, even whilst construction works are taking place. Other cost drivers not affected by the decision to keep the Entrance open throughout the works were: site discoveries, resulting design changes and rework, and access constraints such as passing of the late Queen Elizabeth II, the Coronation and State Opening. Additional cost increases came from extended consultant and project management fees as the programme duration extended.

The vast majority of the cost increases were covered by the FBC addendum, which was approved by the Investment Committee on 26 July 2023. In addition to the budget supplied through the FBC and FBC addendum, £129k funding was provided to cover the costs for works and fees associated with the passing of the late Queen Elizabeth and her lying in state.

It is clear that the original cost estimate, which was based on the assumption that it would be possible to do all the works on site for a continuous basis, would not have been sufficient to cover the additional costs of the project works stopping whilst the House was sitting and starting when it was not. This is stated in the Full Business Case Addendum, approved in August 2023.

It is worth noting, that had the original assumption at FBC been that the Peers' Entrance should remain open during the works, the budget would have been set higher to cover the required duration and logistics arrangements adequately. However, the House would have been in a stronger negotiation position had these discussions taken place before the contract had been signed.

The cost of the Peers' Entrance project was not made public until the debate on the Joint Commercial Department in the Chamber on 12 June 2025, when a figure of £9.6 million was cited in the Chamber. However, this figure includes a broader range of design and management costs associated with the wider West Front Perimeter project (of which the Peers' Entrance is one of the phases). The total actual cost of the Peers' Entrance element alone is £7.3 million as of 12 June 2025. The 'door' element, comprising the revolving door and accessible pod security portals itself, which has been made subject of public speculation, was less than 5 per cent of the full costs (£9.6m), excluding installation and labour.

A full breakdown of the cost of the project is outlined in Appendix 1.

Delays in completion of project

The project was originally due for completion in May 2023, but has experienced over two years of delays due to a combination of unforeseen events, design changes, and operational constraints. The initial disruption occurred in September 2022, following the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. During the national mourning period and the lying-in-state, the construction site was dismantled, and all works were paused for two weeks. In addition to this, ground surveys revealed unknown voids and buried services beneath the entrance, prompting a redesign of the foundations to protect the vaults. While these complications might reasonably have been anticipated by those overseeing the project, they are not directly attributable to the way in which the project was managed.

The decision to limit major construction to parliamentary recesses, led to a reprogramming of the project and had the largest impact on timescales. Because of this decision, between September 2022 and February 2023, works were effectively on hold, delaying progress by approximately 20 weeks. Further delays throughout 2023 and 2024 were caused by planning approvals, heritage requirements, and technical complications, particularly with the Meesons Ltd security pods and power supply. Although the entrance reopened in December 2024, it was immediately impacted by operational issues. This had partly been attributed to the fact that the originally planned 2 weeks of user testing could not take place due to concerns about delaying the project further. In early 2025, a workaround was introduced, involving manual operation of the accessible pod, and defect rectification was completed for Summer Recess 2025.

In total, the project has been delayed by more than 100 weeks in total compared to the original schedule of 39 weeks. Appendix 2 outlines a full breakdown of events.

Functionality breakdowns in pods leading to unplanned closures

Between 29 October 2024 and 30 April 2025, a total of 22 engineer callouts were recorded in the maintenance log, with both pods inoperable on three occasions; these resulted in switching over to a manual operation for a period of time. These incidents followed the reopening of the Peers' Entrance in December 2024. In addition to those logged, there were additional incidents reported anecdotally and logged by staff at the Entrance.

A paper submitted to the Lords Commission on 11 June 2025 summarised the technical and operational issues that had emerged. These included:

Physical infrastructure failures (5 incidents): These involved component malfunctions such as microswitch failures, power supply issues, and the need for replacement parts. Some faults required system resets or manual intervention to restore functionality.

Human error (10 incidents): These included tailgating, incorrect use of the operator console, and general unfamiliarity with the system. Several entries cited "lack of understanding" or "user error" as the root cause. In some instances, these human errors exacerbated instances of physical infrastructure and operational failure.

Accessibility and environmental issues (recorded through individual member feedback): Wheelchair users and those with accessibility needs reported concerns about kerb design and trip hazards around the entrance, which significantly contributed to the negative perception of the entrance.

Operational complexity (7 incidents): One breakdown was linked to the system's design, including the anti-trap safety feature and software-related commissioning delays. At certain stages, there was a need for "high-level access to pod roofs/electronics," meaning engineers required physical access to elevated or enclosed components within the pod housing to complete software configuration and diagnostics.

The remaining 3 incidents were categorised as 'Other', due to insufficient detail or lack of logs from the contractor.

The repeated issues with the entrance pods stemmed from an overambitious approach to security and access, which introduced a level of technical complexity the system could not reliably support. The pods were expected to manage multiple user types and incorporated a different combination of features which exceeded their proven capabilities and led to frequent breakdowns and operational delays. Safety and security features designed in to the system made access harder for those with mobility issues in particular, and undermined the user experience of those using the Entrance, adding to Member frustration at the project.

The project's leadership structure placed a strong emphasis on security, with both Senior Responsible Owners coming from Strategic Estates and the Executive Sponsor from Security. It is also important to note that security requirements were set by security professionals who have access to sensitive information that was not always shared with the wider project team or designers, which can limit opportunities for challenge or adjustment.

Since simplifying the pods' functionality, their reliability has improved significantly, and most of the original high-spec features are no longer in use.

Lack of clarity over member consultation

The Peers' Entrance project involved a broad programme of engagement, including 4 drop-in sessions, with one in February 2022, spanning 2 days and reaching over 100 Members. Members were kept informed through at least four ParliNet articles, two Members' Bulletins, direct emails (including one in September 2022 about entrance closures), and a Parliamentary Notice issued in January 2023. Communications were developed and coordinated across the embedded project Communications and Engagement teams within Strategic Estates, the House of Lords, and the Security Department.

Member feedback did lead to some operational changes. However, Members were not actively consulted on the project's overall approach. All committee papers were submitted for noting only, and crucially, wider engagement began at too late a stage, where the scope and budget had been decided. As a result, critical feedback came too late to influence strategic decisions but did lead to significant reprogramming. Keeping Members engaged throughout a project's lifecycle is essential at key moments where scope, cost, or delivery may shift. Difficult news should be shared early and clearly. Members are more likely to buy-in to a project or initiative when they feel informed throughout, rather than being presented with adverse outcomes.

Cost transparency was limited due to the project's classification as part of the Security Construction Programme. Despite high Member interest and several written questions to the Senior Deputy Speaker, the full cost was not shared publicly. The Finance Committee was never explicitly told the cost and when consulted expressed frustration that requests for this information were repeatedly declined due to it being a Security project. The Commission was told the project would cost £7 million in January 2023. The final figure of £9.6 million was only given to the Commission on 11 June 2025.

The Management Board, Commission, Clerk of the Parliaments, and the Lord Speaker need to work coherently to drive down errors in the conduct of major projects and enhance the reputation of the House. This requires greater clarity about these respective roles in the conduct of the strategic and practical management of the House of Lords. The experience of the Peers' Entrance project shows that members of the Commission received regular updates and noted key developments, including changes to scope, cost, and delivery approach. If we expect the Commission to engage in detail on issues of this sort, we need to redefine or clarify their role accordingly. To fulfil their role effectively, Commission members should represent the wider interests of the House and show collective responsibility for the actions being taken by the Commission and the Management Board.

Final Reflections and Recommendations

Taking all these factors into account; cost overruns, delays, technical failures, and reputational impact, it is clear that future projects of this nature should be approached differently. The following recommendations are offered for consideration by the Lord Speaker and the Commission.

Consider all core priorities proportionately

Security was the primary driver behind the Peers' Entrance project, and it deserves to be regarded as a key priority, but not the only one. Future projects must be governed by a clear framework that recognises the interdependence of security, health and safety, access, value for money, and reputation. These core priorities must be weighed from the outset, not traded off reactively. Decisions should be made to support effective project delivery, which would in turn reduce the reputational risk by instilling confidence with members and the public. Whilst there have been pockets of good project delivery in Parliament, a more integrated and disciplined approach to project governance led by a designated controlling mind would ensure that core priorities and impacts are actively managed.

Ensure there is a single “controlling-mind” to hold the balance

The project lacked an independent, empowered entity with the authority to balance competing priorities and make decisions in the best interests of Parliament as a whole. A designated controlling mind, either an individual or a small group, should be present for projects of this scale, someone with the independence and oversight to weigh security requirements (which are often based on information not shared with the wider team) against operational, reputational, and financial considerations. This role should identify key steps in the critical path, ensuring that decisions are made with a clear understanding of their potential impact on delivery and reputation. They can recommend to deprioritise or pause a project if it fails to meet key milestones. The role would need to be able to dedicate time to the project whilst being senior enough to challenge and ensure the project progresses at a reasonable pace.

This role should also carry responsibility for ensuring that contracts are not signed on the basis of assumptions that may later prove unreliable or unenforceable and that all stakeholders are satisfied before signing binding contracts. It is important to note that this oversight was absent during the contract signing phase of the Peers' Entrance project, where flawed assumptions led to significant cost increases and reputational damage. The controlling mind must ensure that all key assumptions are rigorously tested before contract signature, and that specialist contracts, particularly those involving security equipment, are scrutinised to confirm they deliver required functionality and are not over-designed. Independent review outside the specialist domain should be applied to provide assurance and confidence in the proposed solutions. The controlling mind would help ensure coherence, accountability, and better outcomes.

Secure early consultation and shared responsibility

Although members were kept informed, they were not actively consulted on the project's overall approach until after key assumptions had been made. Future projects should include early and structured consultation with members and the Lords Commission, before any binding contracts are signed. Once consultation has taken place, both the Commission and Members must take collective responsibility for the agreed way forward.

The Commission should act as a disciplined intermediary between the membership, the executive, and the Lord Speaker, ensuring that it represents the interests of the House. When the Commission becomes aware of a project, it should determine its stance to provide a clear basis for its future engagement. It may decide to support the project; to require that it be amended as a condition of support; or decline to support the project. In turn, it is essential that the Commission is provided with the appropriate level of information, at the right time, to enable it to fulfil this role effectively and transparently. Being consulted carries with it a duty to support delivery and to help maintain confidence in the outcome.

In October 2022, senior officials made the decision to keep Peers' Entrance open, because they felt a strong pressure from the members to do so. However, the consultation process and participation in decision making was not clear-cut, and some members have since expressed that had they known the full cost implications of continuous working they might have reconsidered. Sharing difficult information early, even when decisions are complex or constrained, helps maintain trust and ensures that members feel involved. This principle should underpin future consultation efforts, particularly where reputational risk is high.

While the administration facilitates member engagement through mechanisms such as surveys and drop-in sessions, these set out to get an overall opinion rather than commitment to a project or initiative. There remains a need for members themselves to actively engage and thus ensure that consultation reflects a broader range of views across the House. It should be noted that senior members already play a visible and influential role in consultation. Their contributions are an important part of the wider engagement landscape and should be acknowledged as such.

It is also important to note that most remaining projects within the Security Construction Programme will be bicameral in nature. As such, any future proposals should be developed with joint governance, consultation, and decision-making in mind, ensuring that both Houses are appropriately represented and engaged from the outset.

Overall approach

I was asked to carry out this review due to the difficulties encountered in the Peers' Entrance Project, the public criticism surrounding its execution, and the associated costs. The review comprises two parts: a) a straightforward business management assessment of what went wrong, and b) an exploration of the lessons that can be drawn from these circumstances. These insights are intended to support the Commission led by the Lord Speaker, and the Management Board, in pursuing their goals of enhancing the organisation's reputation and mitigate risks that could threaten it.

As the report shows, these costs were largely driven by the decision to sign the contract while significant risks remained unresolved, particularly the assumption that Members would consent to the closure of Peers' Entrance during sittings. That assumption proved incorrect and materially increased the cost of delivery. The consultation on this issue should have taken place well before contract signature.

If priorities had been considered proportionately from the outset, the project might have followed a very different trajectory. With stronger governance, clearer consultation, and a controlling mind in place, the House could have avoided the trade-offs that ultimately undermined confidence. Future projects must begin with a clear commitment to protecting the reputation of Parliament through disciplined decision-making and transparent delivery.

The absence of a single empowered individual or group to oversee priorities and challenge assumptions left the project without clear direction between priorities. A controlling mind could have tested key risks, scrutinised the contract, and ensured that delivery remained aligned with Parliament's interests.

A structured consultation process from the outset would have helped surface and manage the risks around access and closure. Strengthening collaboration between senior officials, the Commission, and members is essential to ensure that those involved feel genuinely consulted and supported in the decisions they are asked to make.

Appendix I: Peers' Entrance Cost breakdown

Last updated: 21.7.2025

Total final cost of the Peers' Entrance project, including design, construction, installation, consultancy, project management, and any associated security features.

Summary of Project Costs: note that final account has not yet been agreed, and this is an interim position that may decrease or increase.

Element	Cost including VAT	Increase from Tender Acceptance Stage
Main contractor - Contract Sum	£2,290,677	-
Main contractor - Changes in working pattern/methodology	£1,452,512	£1,452,512
Main contractor - Vault/slab works	£75,881	£75,881
Main contractor - General change (scope/discovery)	£580,714	£580,714
Main contractor - Access restrictions (unplanned state and other events)	£310,676	£310,676
Miscellaneous	£21,976	£21,976
Works Client Direct Contracts	£443,071	-
Works contractor sub-total	£5,175,507	£2,441,759
Peers' Entrance – Architectural – contract sum	£338,051	-
Additional Costs – Peers' Entrance – Architectural, additional scope and prolongation	£624,037	£624,037
Peers' Entrance - Project and Cost Management services – contract sum	£471,071	-

Additional Costs– Peers’ Entrance - Project and Cost Management services - additional scope and prolongation	£560,276	£560,276
Other consultants – contract sum	£125,725	–
Sub-total	£2,119,160	£1,184,313
Interim Total (Incl. VAT) – Peers’ Entrance Only Costs	£7,294,667	£3,626,072
Costs for all other phases excluding Peers’ Entrance	£2,292,287	–
Interim Total (Incl. VAT) - Full costs	£9,586,954	–

The full costs of **£9.6M** include sunk costs* for fees associated with the design and development of the original scope for the wider project, which includes designs for the Permanent Fenceline.

*Sunk cost – project costs already spent before FBC approval.

Appendix 2: Timeline of Key Events

Timeline of Events

2017

March 2017: Murphy report published. Joint Investment Board requested the establishment of a consolidated security programme.

2018

July 2018: Strategic Outline Programme Case (SOPC) for the Security Programme approved.

2020

October 2020: Outline Business Case (OBC) approved for 25% of requested investment.

2022

20 January 2022: Domestic committee Chairs were consulted on the plan to move the revolving door from West to North elevation and to delay submitting planning permission until further engagement with members had taken place.

February 2022: Two Royal Gallery Drop-ins took place, 135 members attended in total.

24 February 2022: FBC-I approval by Accounting Officers and Investment Committee.

Original works programme:

- Start on site: **30 August 2022**
- Works complete: **11 May 2023**
- Contract complete: **15 May 2023**

June 2022: Direct order placed with Meesons Ltd to initiate long lead-in time (Direct award to Parliament, not a sub-contractor to the works contractor).

1 August 2022: Main works Contract award to DBR Ltd.

September 2022: Direct emails sent to members about closure of Peers' Entrance for groundwork surveys.

August/September 2022: Ground penetrating radar surveys identified unknown buried voids and services under/around Peers' Entrance.

8 September 2022: The death of Queen Elizabeth II.

9–10 September 2022: Site hoarding removed.

11–19 September 2022: Lying in state.

September 2022 – February 2023: Work stopped to allow Project Team to re-negotiate DBR's works contract value and programme to create free access for Peers during sitting times.

Revised programme:

- Start on site: **10 February 2023**
- Works complete: **5 September 2024**
- Contract complete: **4 October 2024**

2023

26 October 2022: Officials decided to reprogram works into recess-only periods, extending the timeline. The entrance was reopened.

18 January 2023: Commission met to discuss the Security Programme. It was the only item. The discussion focused on member engagement.

January 2023: The Clerk of the Parliaments issued a Parliamentary Notice to all Lords explaining the works, feedback incorporation, and inviting drop-ins. Intranet article and FAQs published.

23–24 January 2023: Royal Gallery drop-in for members. First Question for Written Answer on the project submitted.

February 2023: Construction began on site.

10 February 2023: New 3-part site hoarding installed (with Peers' access corridor through middle of site).

Spring Recess 2023:

- Re-designed storm water drainage layout.
- Gas intake room allocated in basement below Peers' Entrance.
- Revised structural floor slab.
- Re-submission of second Listed Building Application.

12 May 2023: Revised foundation design completed and new planning applications submitted.

August 2023: FBC Addendum approved. It proposed the following changes:

- Works restricted to recess periods, nights, and weekends.
- Project completion extended to **September 2024**.
- New surveys, foundation redesign, revised consents, fence moved, and some Phase 2 surveys advanced.

Summer Recess 2023:

- Second Listed Building consent granted.
- Slab pour deferred to Conference Recess to ensure unhindered access for Peers.

September 2023: Commission received oral update that Peers' Entrance works were on track.

2024

Conference Recess 2023: Slab installed under Peers' Entrance.

January 2024: Southern arch installed and power supply allocated to project.

Spring 2024: Project Team advised gas intake room could not be used. New location offered for basement distribution boards, requiring new holes and collaboration with Heritage England.

Easter Recess 2024:

- Southern accessible Meesons Ltd pod installed.
- Peers' access route redirected to south of Peers' Entrance.
- Northern arch installed.

April 2024: Doorkeepers taken through the process of opening and locking the pods for interim use between Easter and Summer recess.

July 2024: Construction projects on the Parliamentary Estate, House of Lords drop-in (Royal Gallery). Event advertised in the members' bulletin and on ParliNet.

General Election prorogation period: General Election called and project took advantage of House not sitting to:

- Remove old revolving door.
- Survey stone aperture for new oak doors.
- Lay new encaustic tiles — removing some scope from Summer Recess

Summer Recess 2024:

- Doorkeeper/Security officer training started.
- Allocated power supply found to be dead at supply end. Temporary State Opening supply used until reconnection.
- Western arch glass installed but found twisted during factory curing — condemned and re-manufactured.
- Peers' Entrance lantern refurbishment de-scoped due to missing power source and isolation switch.
- Meesons Ltd pod commissioning began but encountered software issues.
- York stone floor and commissioning delayed due to Meesons. Ltd needing high-level access to pod roofs/electronics.
- Restricted access led to temporary ply arch edge baffle plates being installed (to protect against winter wind); final baffle plate templating deferred.

December 2024: Entrance reopened. Immediate operational issues emerged:

- Frequent mechanical failures of the pods. (22 callouts) 'teething issues' due to immediate operation, no live user testing.
- Feedback regarding accessibility concerns (e.g., poor kerb design, trip hazards).
- Overly complex operation requiring staff intervention.
- Human error due to unclear instructions and inconsistent user experience.

Conference Recess 2024:

- Western arch glass re-installed.
- Final power supply provided, enabling final commissioning.

2025**January 2025:**

- Final baffle plates fitted.
- Peers' Entrance User Group created to address feedback.
- Contract works defects rectification planning started — most targeted for Summer Recess 2025.

January 2025: Update on Peers' Entrance and Abingdon Street fence presented to the Lords Commission.

2 May 2025: Clerk of the Parliaments issued a formal apology to Members. Temporary workaround implemented a Security Officer manually operating the accessible pod.

May 2025: Construction projects House of Lords drop-in (Royal Gallery).

June 2025: Commission paper outlined issues and next steps to improve user experience.

2 July 2025: Oral question to the Senior Deputy Speaker resulted in the £9.6m figure becoming public, following Commission's decision on 11 June.