

Background

Birse Civils were commissioned by the Environment Agency to replace underground culverts as part of a £5.6m flood alleviation scheme to protect the town of Penrith.

Work on the scheme involved fixing and replacing more than 675m of culverts underneath the streets of Penrith and the construction of a 76,000m³ flood storage reservoir – the equivalent of 30 Olympic sized swimming pools.

The scheme has protected 260 homes and 115 businesses but disruption to daily life for residents was unavoidable due to the scale of the works and the nature of the town's narrow snickleways and streets.

Birse Civils is an associate member of the Considerate Constructors Scheme and as such made considerable efforts to minimise disruption to local people.

Part of this approach was to commission Swift Research, in conjunction with the Environment Agency, to assess residents feedback on how the scheme had been handled.

Swift Research Solution

Swift Research drew up a questionnaire in close consultation with the Environment Agency and Birse which would provide a strong indicator on how these major works had impacted on the daily life of businesses and residents.

In particular the research needed to examine general awareness of the project with residents; understanding of what was being done; what worked well and what didn't.

Swift dispatched a small team of experienced researchers to carry out face to face interviews with residents on the streets of Penrith. The interviews were held over a two day period and the views of 100 people were obtained.

Research was split broadly between business owners and residents in order to gain a comprehensive assessment on how the works had impacted on the life of the town.

Analysis of the survey showed that the majority of



people were happy with the way the scheme was handled. However, it also revealed that a third of people interviewed were not aware that work on this major project was starting.

The analysis also showed that there were greater levels of satisfaction from those people who had advance knowledge of the scheme and when it was due to start.

Benefits

As a result of the findings of the research the Environment Agency and Birse Civils have agreed to review their public information strategy for future schemes where disruption is likely.

In addition to press articles and newspaper advertising EA and Birse will also consider holding a public exhibition before the start of schemes to enable people to get first hand information.

They have also decided to carry out market research before work starts to capture people's expectations and then carry out a post completion survey to establish if the public's expectations had been met.

Birse also used the findings as part of their submission to the national Considerate Constructors Awards and received a bronze award for outstanding community engagement.