

Ref: JB/SB/4244

Ms Sinead Burrows
Saltash Town Council
By Email Only: sinead.burrows@saltash.gov.uk

12 April 2023

Dear Sinead

ISAMBARD HOUSE - FLOOR

Thank you for organising the meeting with representatives from Cormac, Bailey Partnership and the Town Council held at Isambard House on 11 April 2023.

You have asked for my thoughts on the discussion held which was in relation to cracking and discolouration of the floor screed.

Isambard house was refurbished around 2020 and was one of many projects that suffered a stand-down because of working decisions to deal with the Covid pandemic.

The refurbishment has introduced an unbonded floor screed laid on top of insulation and underfloor heating pipes.

I understand from the discussion that the floor screed was covered in protective sheeting which remained in place for an extended period as the site shutdown. The screed will have dried with the sheeting down and a pattern of discolouration can be seen on top of the floor screed which reflects sheet joints and edges.

I do not feel the discolouration is particularly obtrusive and has to be balanced with this being an industrial floor finish which will scuff and mark as it receives the heavy wear and trafficking that it is intended and designed to cope with.

The main issue with the floor are the cracks that have developed.

In the café area there are two very fine hairline cracks formed across the screed. It is not unusual for floor screeds to crack through shrinkage and thermal movement particularly those with underfloor heating within which will create significant temperature change across the floor. In this café area the cracks are very fine indeed but do need to be filled with a liquid joining compound so as not to attract dirt or allow water ingress when the floor is being mopped. Cormac propose to do exactly that and I agree with that proposal. The filling compound would need to be coloured as close as possible to the screed



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surface although inevitably there will still be a visible crack line when filled, even with close colour matching.

The larger crack extends between the pair of double doors.

My view on this crack is that, ideally, this section of flooring would have had another expansion joint across it where the crack has formed at the approximate mid-point between the expansion joints that are laid across the main hall floor. The crack line is also formed at a weaker part of the floor structure where the entrance door mat wells will cut into the screed finish.

The crack will be limited to the screed itself and will not be a structural issue extending to concrete slab or foundations.

There is a practical difficulty with repairing this crack. If a section of floor screed were to be cut out around the crack and a new section of screed introduced with additional expansion joints, then there would be a very high likelihood that the underfloor heating pipes would be damaged during the process. Also, the replacement section of screed would not be a matching colour to the existing screed and the patch would, arguably, stand out as much as the crack does.

Cormac's proposal is to fill the crack using a flexible jointing compound. That does need to be done as the minimum rectification so that the crack does not attract dust and debris, and the floor can be properly cleaned.

My concern with simply filling the crack is that, even with a close-matching colour jointing compound, the crack line will still be visible. Unfortunately, the crack has formed between the entrance doors and is very visible on entering the building.

Once Cormac had left the meeting, we discussed the option of overlaying this part of the floor with a thin Amtico style vinyl plank which Ian advised goes back to the original design brief for the refurbishment in the Railway Hall. Ian was going to ask Cormac if they would accept responsibility for repairing the crack across the floor **and** laying architect specified vinyl planks across between the doors to cover. If Cormac do accept to undertake that for the Council, my advice is that that would be a pragmatic resolution to the issue that stands.

I trust this is helpful, but please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned with any queries. In the meantime, I respectfully enclose my firm's account for the time spent at the meeting and letter of advice.

Kind regards,
Yours sincerely

James M Barron MRICS
Chartered Building Surveyor, Director