

**DELIVERING A SUCCESSFUL LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT WEBSITE**

The image shows the exterior of the Blaby District Council building. The building is constructed of red brick and features a prominent entrance with a green metal canopy supported by four columns. The canopy has a glass roof. The entrance is flanked by windows with white frames and green shutters. A sign above the entrance reads "Blaby District Council". To the right of the entrance, there is a small tree with orange and red autumn foliage. A paved area in front of the building contains a circular flower bed and a small utility vehicle. The sky is bright, and there are shadows cast by the trees and building. A semi-transparent white box with a blue gradient at the bottom contains a quote.

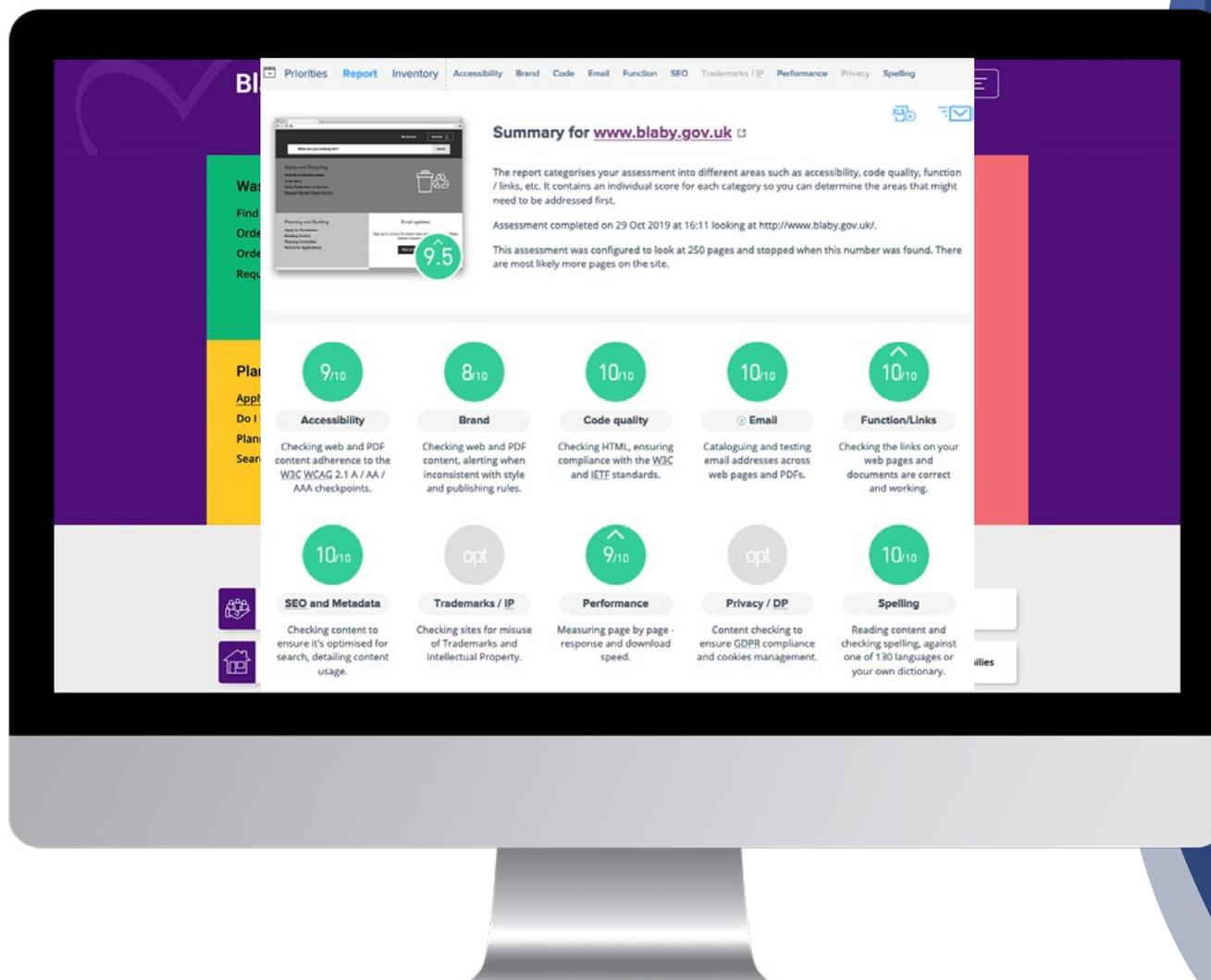
*“Using Sitemorse we can benchmark compliance and quality and we always tried to attain a score of 8 out of 10 on the old site. We wanted that to continue with the new site.”*

## INTRODUCTION

Websites in local government play a critical role in disseminating essential information about services to citizens and can also act as a channel for transactions such as requests for services, bookings and payments. Qualities such as accessibility, usability and findability are very important in ensuring that as many citizens as possible can find the information they need quickly and in a straightforward way.

At the same time the digital teams responsible for websites are also under pressure to reduce costs and face the challenge of producing an attractive, usable and compliant site with limited resources.

Blaby District Council, a local council in Leicestershire covering a population of 96,500 and an area of about 50 square miles, recently overhauled its website with an eye-catching new design that doesn't compromise on usability and accessibility. The team has also successfully reduced operating costs.



## THE WEBSITE REDESIGN PROJECT

The website project was led by the authority's Communications Manager who has worked for the authority a number of years and is responsible for communications, marketing, web services and digital transformation. The Communications Manager has been responsible for several iterations of the website including the last major overhaul in 2013.

The expiry of a service contract provided an opportunity to create a new website for Blaby District Council. Julie explains *"While the website had served our needs well, it needed a refresh. It was looking rather dated and we wanted something that was much more modern in terms of its design and really reflected Blaby's brand as an organisation."*

The initial project team was formed by Julie and consisted of just two other members of the Communications team – the part-time senior web developer and the web manager who works for the Council four days a week.

The initial research on the project focussed on what technologies other local authorities used to underpin their websites. The ultimate goal was to find a solution that would allow the authority to reduce its costs, but at the same time find a solution that would be flexible and easy to use. Quite a few authorities used paid suppliers, but research discovered that a number of Councils used an open source solution called Umbraco. The Umbraco content management system (CMS) received very positive reviews from those authorities contacted during the research.

The team used customer insight from their own website and also reviewed other local authority websites to understand what worked well in terms of the navigation and design.

Further research and discussions with suppliers led the team to settle on using the Umbraco CMS, for the new website.

## THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS

With a firm idea of the council's requirements a formal procurement process was started. This was in two phases; the first focused on the design, while the second was about configuring the technology and deploying the design onto the Umbraco CMS.

In the end the project team appointed Headland, a digital agency that worked both as the supplier for Phase 1 (the design) and Phase 2 (implementation of the Umbraco CMS).

Blaby's Communications Manager explains *"Headland went through a procurement process for Phase 1 and Phase 2 and were the successful supplier for both phases. They worked with us on the design. We'd already done quite a lot of research and pretty much knew what we wanted to achieve. They came up with several concepts to meet our vision in the design phase and they worked closely with us to come up with a final design. They then helped us to deploy the design and work on a number of bespoke elements that we wanted to achieve. We worked together really well, they understood our requirements, offered advice and produced some great designs. We were incredibly pleased with the work they produced and the working relationship between ourselves and Headland."*

*Communications Manager at  
Blaby District Council*



Client services director at Headland adds *"We worked closely with Julie and her team from the discovery phase of the project through design, build, testing and deployment. From the outset it was clear that the team had a clear vision for the website. Through working collaboratively during the discovery workshops, we fine-tuned the specification and the design brief providing a clear structure and prioritisation for messaging, services and content which informed the design and build process."*

*Client Services Director  
at Headland*



Headland's expertise in developing and deploying websites based on Umbraco was also important for the success of the project. Blaby comments: *"Their knowledge of Umbraco was exceptional, and they fully embraced what we wanted from a content management system. They provided us with solutions and carried out some bespoke development to help us achieve our goals"*

Headland adds: *"Our experience, not just of Umbraco but also of delivering Umbraco based for public sector organisations certainly contributed to the effective working relationship and the planning of the project. Building bespoke code with the benefit of Umbraco's open API is a Headland strength and we were able to address the full range of Julie's requirements."*

## STANDARDS AND TESTING

Strong usability, adherence to accessibility standards and good performance were all regarded as very important for the new website. Subsequently the procurement process stipulated the quality standards that the new website design and deployment had to meet, including complying to WCAG 2.1 standards.

The Sitemorse platform with its automated testing to ensure digital compliance and improvement had been used on the previous website, and the procurement documentation made it clear that compliance testing would continue for the new website.

Blaby's Communications Manager explains: *"We had a set of quality requirements for the design phase and of course in the deployment phase as well so that the supplier that we procured would know right at the outset what are important factors for us and what they needed to achieve. Using Sitemorse we can benchmark compliance and quality and we always tried to attain a score of 8 out of 10 on the old site. We wanted that to continue with the new site."*

The previous website had a number of limitations and it was becoming increasingly challenging as to what could be achieved in terms of compliance testing, functional code and overall performance.

To make sure this didn't happen on the new site and particularly that it was fully compliant with accessibility and branding standards at the outset, Sitemorse testing was applied at different stages of the project.

*"We used Sitemorse to test initially in Phase 1 that all the templates and the designs were compliant. Sitemorse gave us ten out of ten for accessibility in the initial design stages then once those templates were deployed on to the system to make sure that they were still compliant. We then started to populate the pages and we ran all of those through Sitemorse too."*

The digital team at Blaby have continued to use automated testing with a smaller manageable weekly that allows them to keep on top of SEO, accessibility and a whole range of other factors.

Sitemorse CEO and Founder Lawrence Shaw comments *"When local councils commit to using benchmarking to comply with standards and keep on improving the difference really is noticed by site visitors. They can find what they need, they don't encounter broken links, they can use assistive technologies. The team at Blaby District Council were forward-thinking in clearly stating the standards they wanted to achieve and then using benchmarking to ensure that happened."*

**Lawrence Shaw**  
Sitemorse CEO



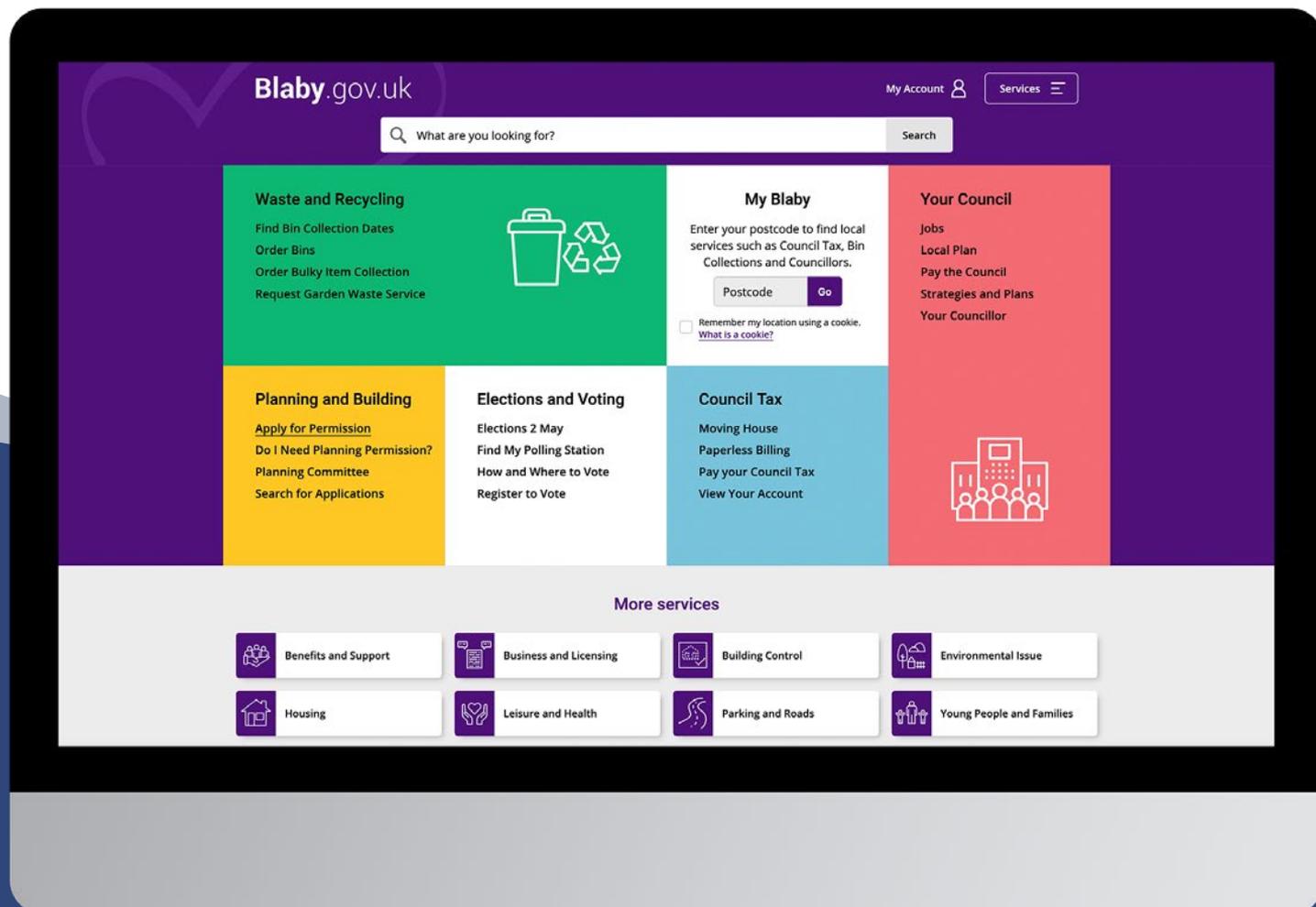
## CONTENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

With site design and development underway, the team worked to engage with staff across the council, including helping content owners to review and migrate their content to the new site. The project team enlisted the help of the Communications Officer. The Officer helped to co-ordinate, review and update content working in partnership with content owners across different departments.

GatherContent, a cloud-based content management tool that can be used to work with a community of publishers was used to facilitate the migration. GatherContent easily allowed the management and review of all the web page content. A plug in is also available for Umbraco so page content was easily and quickly imported into the new CMS .

The project plan included a communications plan that covered both keeping people informed as well as training over 40 staff on using the CMS, more than ten percent of the council's 330 staff members.

The new site <http://www.blaby.gov.uk/> was launched in March 2019 and the team continue to work with content owners to improve the quality of content, working with style guidelines and emphasising good practices and the importance of accessibility.



## A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME

The project has proved to be highly successful.

Unlike many other website projects, the new Blaby website was delivered on time and within budget.

The design is striking, attractive and on-brand, without compromising on findability. Part of this is down to a successful site navigation that was already in place and which the team were keen not to fundamentally change, preserving what worked well on the previous version of the site.

Blaby explain: "It's important that we deliver a seamless customer experience across the website and where possible we brand all 3rd party portals with the header and footer from our main site. One of the other things that we've developed and fully integrated into the new site is the ability for customers to see if they are logged in/out of their My Account (which is a 3rd party portal) from all pages of the website.

As well as a successful customer experience, the new site (also delivered with a small tourism microsite) has proved highly cost-effective especially with the choice of an open source CMS. We have saved on our revenue





*“We used Sitemorse to test initially in Phase 1 that all the templates and the designs were compliant. Sitemorse gave us ten out of ten for accessibility in the initial design stages then once those templates were deployed on to the system to make sure that they were still compliant. We then started to populate the pages and we ran all of those through Sitemorse too.”*

Q3 2019 Results

	Overall	Func.	Acc.	Brand	HTML	Perf.	Email	Meta.	PDFs
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b> NORTH DEVON COUNCIL	<b>10.0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b> BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL	<b>9.8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b> BLABY DISTRICT COUNCIL	<b>9.8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>



By continually assessing their site, Blaby District Council have ensured that their site remains compliant and maintains its high-quality standards, through the spotting of any issues which can be corrected immediately, as well as benchmarking against other local government websites. In fact, in the Q2 2019 Local Government INDEX, a benchmark based on Sitemorse automated testing, Blaby District Council's new website was the highest climber in the country, rising over 300 places in the rankings to 7th position with a score of 9.0/10.

As well as these approaches, the Communications Manager at Blaby attributes the website success down to the people involved. "I think one of the reasons this project has been so successful is because I'm very fortunate to have an excellent team, they are very skilled but also passionate about creating and delivering a website that works for our customers. Credit also needs to be given to Headland who made the process effortless. Between us we knew what we wanted to get from a website and were able to deliver this.

**"Congratulations to Blaby District Council, they have demonstrated you can launch a website that meets digital standards, and maintain it as we can see they have continued work on their site and were most recently joint second in the Q3 2019 INDEX, proving effective regular digital quality assessments are worth every penny.**

**Michelle Hay**  
Digital Manager



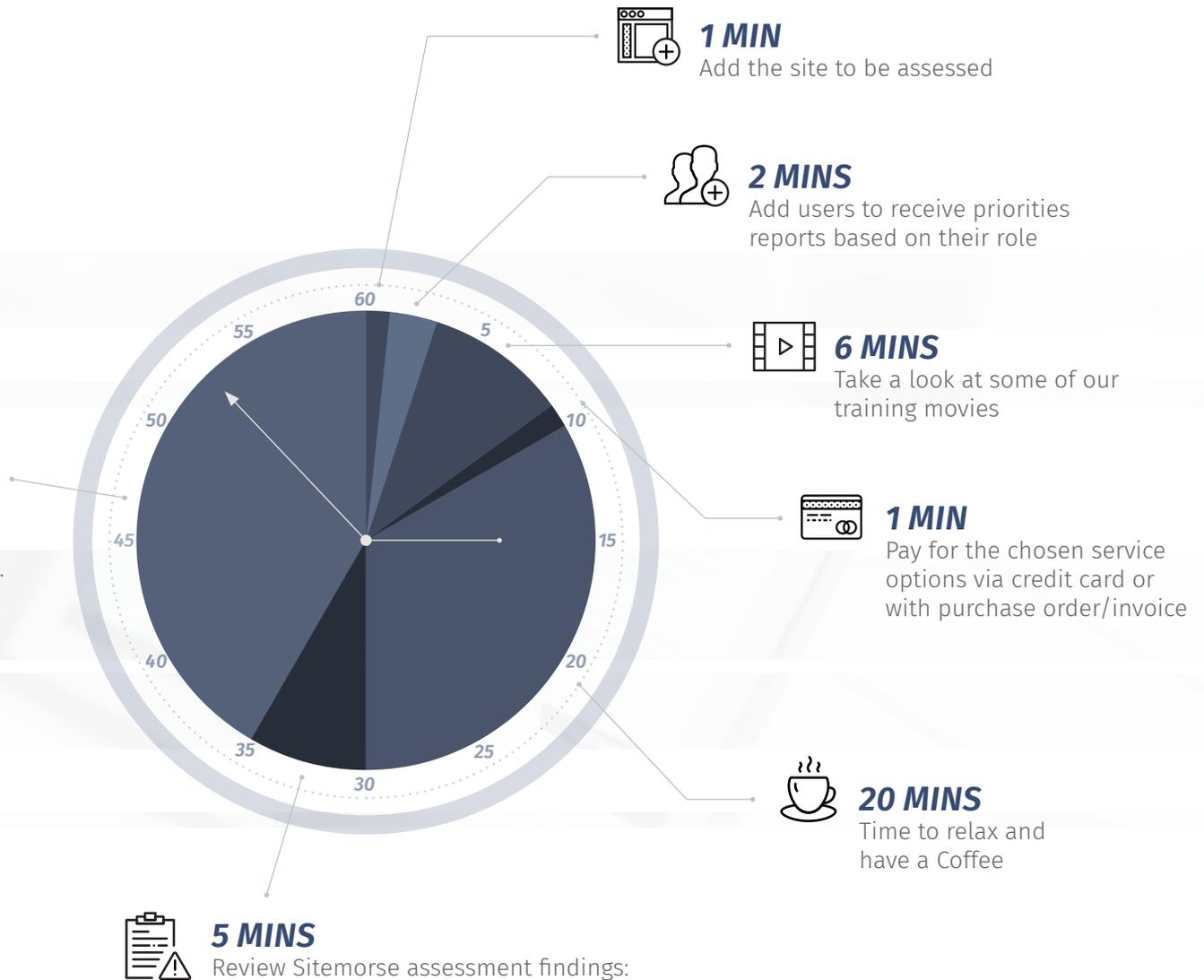
## HOW QUICKLY CAN YOU DEPLOY SITEMORSE?

Do you realise how quickly you can get up and running with Sitemorse and start making improvements? In just one hour your service can be set up, an assessment run with role based emails sent to the appropriate users using our unique prioritisation intelligence send and even have time for a coffee.



### 25 MINS

Remainder of the hour, actions from the report completed, resulting in an improved online experience and compliance risk reduced.



### 1 MIN

Add the site to be assessed



### 2 MINS

Add users to receive priorities reports based on their role



### 6 MINS

Take a look at some of our training movies



### 1 MIN

Pay for the chosen service options via credit card or with purchase order/invoice



### 20 MINS

Time to relax and have a Coffee



### 5 MINS

Review Sitemorse assessment findings:

- View the editors priorities and the Top 10 pages to action
- The developers received their actions

**Disclaimer**

This document is offered as an overview and a starting point only – it should not be used as a single, sole authoritative guide. You should not consider this as legal guidance. The services provided by Sitemorse is based on an audit of the available areas of a website at a point in time. Sections of the site that are not open to public access or are not being served (possibly be due to site errors or downtime) may not be covered by our reports. Where matters of legal compliance are concerned you should always take independent advice from appropriately qualified individuals or firms.

**Copyright**

This material is proprietary to Sitemorse and has been furnished on a confidential and restricted basis. Sitemorse hereby expressly reserves all rights, without waiver, election or other limitation to the full extent permitted by law, in and to this material and the information contained therein. Any reproduction, use or display or other disclosure or dissemination, by any method now known or later developed, of this material or the information contained herein, in whole or in part, without the prior written consent of Sitemorse is strictly prohibited.