

Report To: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 27th October 2016

Lead Member / Officer: Cllr David Smith / Graham Boase

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Title: Process, methodology and criteria for undertaking Road Safety Audits relating to planning applications

1. What is the report about?

To explain the process, methodology and criteria for undertaking Road Safety Audits that relate to planning applications.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To look at the process, methodology and criteria used for Road Safety Audits and whether this is being applied properly and consistently in relation to planning applications received in Denbighshire.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Committee considers and comments on the content of the report.

4. Report details

Background

- 4.1 Certain types of planning applications submitted to the Council for determination will have potential impacts on the highway network. Planning officers in determining such applications will require specialist input from highway officers within the Traffic, Parking & Road Safety Section. The responses from highway officers will be taken into consideration when determining a planning application, and relevant highway officers will attend Planning Committee as necessary.
- 4.2 In assessing the highway implications of a proposed planning application, highway officers will use a range of methods, depending on the scale and nature of what is being proposed, one such method is a "Road Safety Audit" (RSA).

What is a Road Safety Audit?

- 4.3 An RSA is a specialist Audit designed to assess the safety of proposed alterations to the highway, not to assess the impact of the development proposal on highway safety. Details regarding RSAs are contained in the document "Highway Design 19/15" which forms part of central government's "*Design Manual for Roads & Bridges*". A copy of HD 19/15 is provided in Appendix A to this report. The manual is

a technical document and makes RSAs mandatory for highway improvements on the Trunk Road and Motorway network. Whilst not mandatory on the rest of the road network, the Council in common with most other highway authorities, use RSAs to assess the safety of highway improvement works.

- 4.4 The purpose of an RSA is to provide an independent “safety check” of proposed highway improvement works during design and at the end of construction. When undertaken during the design phase, they can highlight potential safety problems at an early stage. They are used routinely for most highway improvement schemes i.e. not just those associated with planning applications. In the context of planning applications, the RSA will assist the highway officer in responding to “planning” on the highway impact of the development (i.e. if highway improvement works are proposed as part of the development then these highway works will be one of the highway considerations.)
- 4.5 The RSA is not the only check of highway safety in relation to a planning application. When assessing planning applications, Highway officers will use their own experience and judgement to consider the safety implications of a proposed development and any associated alterations to the highway network. Similarly, all but the smallest developments will require a Transport Statement or Transport Assessment which will normally contain an analysis of the accident history on the local highway network to help inform the highway officer to develop a response.
- 4.6 There are normally three stages of RSA;
- i) Stage 1 RSA; on completion of the preliminary design of the proposal
 - ii) Stage 2 RSA; on completion of the detailed design of the proposal
 - iii) Stage 3 RSA; on completion of the physical alterations to the highway
- 4.7 An RSA is not connected to the work of the Council’s “Audit” Team or the Welsh “Audit” Office (WAO), nor is it linked to the Council’s Health & Safety Team or the Health & Safety Executive. It is a technical “highway” design issue.
- 4.8 In the context of planning applications, RSAs only assess the safety of proposed alterations to the highway i.e. their purpose is not to assess whether the general principle of a proposed development is acceptable in highway terms.

When are Road Safety Audits undertaken in association with Planning Applications?

- 4.9 Certain planning applications will require alterations to the highway (e.g. a new vehicular access into the development site or new traffic lights at a nearby crossroads). Such highway works will, of course, require consent from the Council as “Highway Authority”, which is a separate process to the planning process.
- 4.10 Depending on the highway works proposed as part of any planning application, the Council may require the applicant to carry out an RSA. The criteria for undertaking an RSA for highway works associated with a development is detailed in Appendix B.
- 4.11 A planning application that proposes no physical works to the highway will not require an RSA, as RSA’s only apply to physical alterations to the highway.

- 4.12 When Highway Officers consider that an RSA is required to support a planning application, the applicant will be required to submit the RSA as part of the background information submitted with the planning application.
- 4.13 Depending on the level of detail shown in the planning application in relation to the proposed works to the highway, a Stage 2 RSA could also be required. If the proposed highway works are only at the “preliminary design stage” then a Stage 1 RSA will be required with the Stage 2 RSA only required later in the process (assuming planning permission is granted and there is a need for the works to the highway) e.g. not all planning applications show the “detailed design” of the proposed highway works as they could be submitted sometime after planning permission is granted. This is a logical process as the final “detailed design” of the highway works are very much “technical issues” for the highway officers and they will in any event require formal consent from the Council as “Highway Authority” before any works can be carried out to the highway, even if planning permission has already been granted.
- 4.14 A Stage 3 RSA is a matter between the developer/applicant and the Council as “Highway Authority” and would not normally be part of the planning process.
- 4.15 If a planning application is submitted that involves proposed works to a Trunk Road then an RSA will be required to be submitted by the applicant and “planning” will consult the Welsh Government on the implications of the proposal, including the RSA.

Who carries out Road Safety Audits?

- 4.16 The RSA will be carried out at the applicant’s expense. RSAs must be carried out by at least two qualified Road Safety Auditors, who will be specialists trained in collision investigation. The Auditors must be totally independent from the design of the proposed highway works.
- 4.17 The fact that the applicant commissions the qualified auditors to carry out the RSA is normal practice as the Auditors are professionally qualified and independent from the design process.

How Road Safety Audits are carried out

- 4.18 The process and methodology of undertaking an RSA is laid down in the “Design Manual for Roads and Bridges” document HD19/15, (i.e. Government guidance).
- 4.19 The RSA should be of sufficient quality to enable the highway officer to understand the impact the proposed highway works will have on the safety of all road users. If this is not the case then the highway officer will request that further work on the RSA is carried out before sending their comments to planning.
- 4.20 The brief given to the assessors will come from the applicant/developer, but clearly it must address the safety of the proposed highway improvement works, having regard to Highway Design 19/15 and must satisfy the requirements of the highway officer.

Conclusion

- 4.21 RSAs are fundamentally a highway safety issue relating to physical works to the highway. An RSA is often required as part of the planning process yet it doesn't assess the overall highway safety impact of the development itself, instead it provides comment on any proposed highway works associated with the development.
- 4.22 If planning permission is granted under such circumstances the works to the highway will still require consent from the Council as the "Highway Authority". The RSA therefore helps inform the planning application, but its main purpose is to support the necessary consent from the Council as the "Highway Authority".

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Improving our roads - RSAs contribute to improving the safety of the road network.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

RSAs associated with developments are funded by the developer. Similarly, any changes to the design or to the completed scheme that result from the development will be funded by the developer.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment? The completed Well-being Impact Assessment report can be downloaded from the website and should be attached as an appendix to the report.

2 Stars. Actual score 14 out of 24. Please refer to Appendix C.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

A paper was submitted to SCVCG in July 2016 which led to this report being requested.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

There are no direct financial implications of this report for the Council as all costs associated with both carrying out the RSAs and any costs relating to changes to the design or to the completed scheme that result from the RSAs are funded by the developer.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

The most obvious risk would be if a serious or fatal road traffic collision occurred at a location that had been recently improved as part of a development. One of the first questions that would be asked by the Police, or at an Inquest, would be whether an RSA had been undertaken. Whilst not mandatory on non-Trunk Roads, they are now widely carried out on all roads, in what is seen as good practice across the highways industry. It is thus important that if a decision is taken not to conduct an RSA, that this has been an objective decision based on the application of a robust and clear criteria, rather than a subjective decision in the absence of a clear process.

11. Power to make the Decision

Highways Act 1980

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Section 7.4.2 of the Council's Constitution outlines Scrutiny's powers with respect to examining the impact of decisions and the application of policies.