

Proposed Residential Property, Artarman Road, Rhu – Ref 22/0001/LRB

Argyll & Bute Council Roads Department (A&BCRD) has been asked by the Council's Local Review Body (LRB) to provide further information on the following question:

"Can you demonstrate how, using design guidance, the sight visibility figures for this application have been arrived at, and whether it is possible for the figure of 25 to be reduced to 17 and still be within the guidance."

The A&BCRD provided a response which indicates the following:

"The visibility splay cannot be reduced to 17 meters, this is the minimum visibility splay for a speed limit of 10mph, Argyll & Bute Council cannot set a speed limit of less than 20mph therefore we cannot accept visibility splay for a speed limit that cannot be set. To set a speed limit of 10mph Consent from Scottish Ministers would need to be applied for."

The above response is extremely disappointing and, at best, misleading. There is no requirement to change the speed limit of Artarman Road from the current 30mph when accepting the 17m visibility splay as indicated by A&BCRD in their response.

All roads design guidance, including Argyll & Bute Council, the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and Designing Street, identifies that best practice for determining the visibility splay is by considering the 85thile speed of vehicles on the route. The application of the speed limit is only adopted if actual speed data isn't available to allow a worst-case approach to be determined.

As all drivers are aware, some routes with a 30mph speed limit are straight, have wide carriageways, limited pedestrians etc which can encourage higher vehicle speeds. Other routes with a 30mph limit are narrow, constrained and naturally enforce a much reduced vehicle speed. This is exactly why it is best practice to measure the vehicle speeds over a week long period to obtain actual speed data for the specific route.

The 85thile speed of Artarman Road was found to be 15mph from an independent speed survey which, based on best practice guidance, allows the visibility splay to be reduced to an appropriate distance. The Scottish Government policy document, Designing Streets, identifies the visibility requirements which are to be adopted by all Local Authorities without exception. The need for this to be undertaken is detailed in the extract of the document provided below:

"Many local authorities in Scotland have developed their own street design guidance and there is still an important role for local guidance to ensure that street design responds to local context. These existing documents may contain information on construction details and local palettes of materials which is still relevant, however information on principles, layout and street geometry which is not consistent with Designing Streets should be revised."

As per best practice, a 7 day speed survey was undertaken by Transurveys Ltd at the proposed access location between 4th and 11th May 2021. The associated speed survey report is included in Appendix A for consideration. The survey identified that the 85thile speed of the route is 13.4mph northbound and 15.4 southbound. The total flow on the route is 18 two-way vehicles during the full 24hrs period which is considered to be a very low flow route.

The visibility requirements for the measured speed of the route are identified within the table contained on page 33 of Designing Streets. For an 85%ile speed of 15mph the visibility splay should be 17m from the centre of the access which is known as the Y distance. The Y distance represents the distance that a driver who is about to exit from the minor arm can see to his left and right along the main alignment.

For the avoidance of doubt, A&BCRD's application of visibility standards in excess of those detailed in Designing Streets is contrary to the Scottish Government policy document. When considering the hierarchy of policy / guidance it is evident that Government policy carries a far higher status than roads guidance.

To further demonstrate the above point, A&BCRD did not require the applicant to change the speed limit of Artarman Road to 20mph despite them being willing to accept the visibility splay for a 20mph route. This demonstrates no consistency of approach or understanding of best practice and relevant policy / guidance in their latest response.

Based on the requirements of Scottish Government policy and the application of roads guidance, there is no requirement to change the speed limit to support a visibility splay of 17m which is wholly appropriate in this location based on the measured speed of vehicle on the route. 17m is the appropriate visibility splay for the speed of vehicles on the route and there is no liability to Argyll & Bute Council for being consistent with the Scottish Government document Designing Streets.

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