NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

5 DECEMBER 2006

A REVIEW OF THE CURRENT 20MPH SPEED LIMITS POLICY

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To advise Members of the outcome of a review of the County Council’s current policy regarding the introduction of 20mph speed limits.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 A review of the current 20mph speed limit policy has been carried out which takes into account the latest guidance published by the Department for Transport and best practice and addresses the feasibility of introducing variable speed limits outside schools. This review will be considered by the Transport and Telecommunications Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 November and their views will be reported at your meeting.

3.0 DISCUSSION

3.1 The Department for Transport published new guidelines on setting local speed limits in August 2006. This guidance states that “the aim should be to align the local speed limit so that the original mean speed driven on the road is at or below the new posted speed limit for that road.” The guidelines also suggest that 20mph speed limits are only suitable where mean vehicle speeds are 24mph or below, or where additional traffic calming measures are planned. This differs from the previous guidance given by the Department namely that if observed 85th percentile speeds are above 24mph, then it is unlikely a 20mph speed limit would be appropriate, unless traffic calming measures can be provided. The County Council’s current 20mph speed limit policy complies with the previous guidance.

3.2 It is considered that the County Council’s 20mph speed limit policy requires amending in order to make the guidance more specific and take account of the new national guidance and the new scheme prioritisation system contained in the second Local Transport Plan (LTP2). The policy has therefore been updated to reflect this and is attached as Appendix A. The changes from the previous policy are shown in italics in Appendix A. For purposes of comparison the current 20mph speed limit policy is attached as Appendix B.
3.3 North Yorkshire Police have been consulted on the updated policy and have indicated their support.

4.0 VARIABLE SPEED LIMITS OUTSIDE SCHOOLS

4.1 The County Council as a Highway Authority has the power to introduce variable speed limits under a Traffic Regulation Order.

4.2 Traffic Advisory Leaflet 9/99 states: “It is of doubtful benefit to have a short length of either a 20mph speed limit or a 20mph zone outside a school. Apart from the uncertainty of whether drivers will observe the limit, they may subsequently speed up significantly in an area where children, in relatively large numbers, will be approaching or leaving the school. Forming a self-enforcing 20mph zone in roads surrounding the school would be likely to reduce the frequency of accidents not only in the immediate vicinity of the school, but also on the routes that children take to school”.

4.3 Research in Scotland into the effectiveness of full time advisory 20mph speed limits in residential areas concluded that the majority of trial sites had not been successful in obtaining an average speed of 20mph although 60% of sites showed a reduction in speeds.

4.4 Traffic Advisory Leaflet 1/03: Vehicle Activated Signs advises that research on part time 20mph zones found that this measure as a speed reducing feature had little effect on vehicle speeds. Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) report 363 showed that the use of static signs only has a small effect on mean and 85th percentile speeds, and for 20mph zones this has been found to be about 1mph on average. Added to this, the cost of installation means that such measures offered poor value for money.

4.5 The cost of installing the variable message signs required for a variable 20 mph speed limit would be in the order of £50k per site. There would be a minimum of eight signs (two double faced terminal signs showing 20 and 30 at each end of the scheme) plus any repeater signs. The whole life cost is likely to be relatively high due to ongoing maintenance requirements. Permanent signs would require approval from the Secretary of State and GOYH have indicated that such approval is unlikely to be forthcoming.

4.6 In addition, a variable speed limit outside a school could be counter productive if speeds only reduced by about 1mph as parents and pupils may have a false sense of security due to the new speed limit which may lead to reduced awareness of traffic.
5.0 **CONCLUSION**

5.1 This review has considered the latest guidance and best practice with regard to 20mph speed limits and has concluded that an updated County Council policy is required to reflect the need to make the guidance more specific and to reflect developments due to the second LTP. The possibility of introducing variable speed limits outside schools has been considered but is not recommended due to the evidence suggesting that such limits would not have the desired speed reducing effect and would therefore not represent effective use of the limited funds available for highway schemes.

6.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

6.1 Members are asked to approve the updated policy for the introduction of 20mph speed limits attached in Appendix A to this report.

GORDON GRESTY  
Corporate Director, Business & Environmental Services
APPENDIX A

POLICY FOR 20 MPH SPEED LIMITS (changes from previous policy shown in italics)

1.0 APPLICATION IN NORTH YORKSHIRE

1.1 There are two different ways of implementing 20mph speed limits, which are:-

a) Use of speed limits, indicated by terminal and repeater signs generally without traffic calming measures, referred to as 20mph speed limits.

b) A zonal approach using terminal signs together with suitable traffic calming measures to provide a self enforcing element, referred to as 20mph zones.

1.2 20mph limits or zones shall only be introduced in particular circumstances, where specific criteria are met. A blanket 20mph approach should not be applied.

1.3 Part time 20 mph limits or zones should not be implemented.

2.0 CRITERIA

2.1 The basic criteria for a 20mph speed limit or zone to be introduced are:-

a) The proposal is appropriate to the area;

b) It would be beneficial following an assessment of the impact of the proposal in terms of accessibility, safety, environment and congestion (the four shared priorities) and added value; and

c) Would not be dependent on an unreasonable level of enforcement by the Police, which means that the Police should not then be expected to enforce them as a matter of course.

2.2 In addition, the following more detailed criteria will be followed:-

a) 20mph speed limits/zones should be restricted to residential areas, roads fronting schools, main shopping streets of town centres and “honeypot” locations where a high concentration of pedestrian traffic is generated. They might also be suitable for rural minor roads that have been designated as ‘quiet’ routes by virtue of their appropriateness and suitability for recreational use by large numbers of vulnerable road users such as cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders.

b) 20mph speed limits by signs alone should only be used where mean vehicle speeds are 24mph or lower.
c) Where mean vehicle speeds are in excess of 24mph traffic calming measures must be introduced to reduce mean vehicle speeds to 24mph or below for a 20mph limit or zone to be introduced.

d) For a 2 mph zone to be installed, the appropriate traffic calming features as defined in The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 must be introduced.

On strategic road corridors regard would need to be taken of the effect of 20mph limits on overall journey times and any resulting economic impact.

3.0 PRIORITIES

3.1 Criteria to be used in assessing the relative priority of individual proposals are required to determine the allocation of the funding necessary to implement them. This will ensure a consistent approach in dealing with proposals for the introduction of 20mph speed limits and zones.

All proposals or requests for 20mph speed limits or zones will be assessed, initially, against the guidelines set out in Section 2 above. Provided the requirements of the guidelines are met, then the specific proposal will be prioritised as follows:-

a) For 20mph speed limits by signs only where the observed mean vehicle speed at the mid-point of the length of road under consideration is 24mph or less.

Such locations will require only an appropriate traffic regulation order and the speed limit signs, and as such will be a relatively low cost to implement. Funding priority will be allocated to those locations with the highest level of personal injury accidents over the preceding 5 year period.

b) For traffic calmed 20mph zones and 20mph speed limits, where the observed mean vehicle speed is in excess of 24mph and which will therefore require traffic calming measures to bring speeds down to 20mph.

Such locations will involve significantly greater funding and will, therefore, be placed on the relevant traffic calming reserve list for priority rating based on the relevant scheme prioritisation system.
POLICY FOR 20 MPH SPEED LIMITS (01/00)

1.0 APPLICATION IN NORTH YORKSHIRE

1.1 There are two different ways of implementing 20 mph speed limits, which are:-

- Use of speed limits, indicated by terminal and repeater signs alone.
- A zonal approach using terminal signs together with suitable traffic calming measure to provide a self enforcing element.

1.2 20mph limits or zones shall only be introduced in particular circumstances, where specific criteria are met.

2.0 CRITERIA

2.1 a) The proposal is appropriate to the area;

b) It would be beneficial in road safety and environmental terms; and

c) Would not be dependent on an unreasonable level of enforcement by the Police, which means that the Police should not then be expected to enforce them as a matter of course.

2.2 In addition, the following more detailed criteria will be followed:-

- 20mph speed limits by signs alone would be most appropriate where 85 percentile speeds are already low and further traffic calming measures are not needed. If the 85 percentile speed is above 24mph, then it is unlikely a 20mph speed limit by signs alone would be appropriate.

- 20mph zones should be used where the site is suitable for a 20mph in respect of all other criteria yet vehicle speeds are in excess of 24mph and where traffic calming measures will be needed to ensure speeds are at, or below, 20mph.

- 20mph zones would be particularly appropriate where there is an existing record of accidents to children occurring over an area, or where concentrations of pedestrians and/or cyclists exist or are anticipated. They can help to protect children walking and cycling to and from school and may encourage other children to walk or cycle.

- In applying this advice, 20mph speed limits/zones might typically be expected to be introduced in residential areas, on roads fronting schools, in the main shopping streets of town centres and in “honeypot” locations where a high concentration of pedestrian traffic is generated. They might also be suitable for rural minor roads that have been designated as 'quiet' routes by virtue of their appropriateness and suitability for recreational use by large numbers of vulnerable road users such as cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders.
On strategic road corridors regard would need to be taken of the effect of 20mph limits on overall journey times and any resulting economic impact.

3.0 PRIORITIES

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All proposals or requests for 20mph speed limits or zones will be assessed, initially, against the guidelines set out in Section 2 above. Provided the requirements of the guidelines are met, then specific proposal will be priorities as follows:

a) For 20mph speed limits by signs only where the observed 85 percentile speed at the mid-point of the length of road under consideration is 24mph or less.

Such locations will require only an appropriate traffic regulation order and the speed limit signs, and as such will be a relatively low cost to implement. Funding priority will be allocated to those locations with the highest level of personal injury accidents over the preceding 3 year period.

b) For traffic calmed 20mph zones and 20mph speed limits, where the observed 85 percentile speed is in excess of 24mph and which will therefore require traffic calming measures to bring speeds down to 20mph

Such locations will involve significantly greater funding and will, therefore, be placed on the relevant traffic calming reserve list for priority rating in relation to the personal injury accident record and scheme cost.

Whilst priorities will normally be established in accordance with the personal accident criteria set out above, there may be instances of schemes promoted under integrated transport initiatives where expenditure on 20mph speed limits to achieve environmental objectives alone can be justified. Proposals in this category will not be included in the priority lists referred to in (a) and (b) above.