

LABSS INFORMATION PAPER INFOP35/2022 - Version 1 – February 2022**SER Certification - Building Warrant Stages – Procedures and Certification****Information for verifiers****Background**

Representatives from the LABSS Executive, the BSD and SER recently met to discuss and reinforce the principles of certification of design as related to the staged warrant application process.

As part of these discussions LABSS agreed to remind verifiers of the principles of SER certification with regards to staged building warrant applications and other areas of the certification of design process where some inconsistency in approach is evident.

Scope of certification at each stage of submission

Section 3.5 of the Building Standards Procedural Handbook outlines the intent of the legislation with regards to staged applications, the principle being that the warrant for the whole project is granted with a condition that work on the identified stages does not start until the necessary information has been submitted and an amendment of warrant for the next stage(s) granted.

The certification of design process reflects this, with certificates for subsequent stages confirming the amendment to the design, this includes all work covered by the stages up to and including that under consideration, effectively making any previously issued certificates redundant.

Furthermore, a certificate issued for a further stage of the submission may also cover changes to previously certified work. For example, a certificate which accompanies stage 3 of the submission may also cover an amendment to the work that was initially certified as part of the stage 1 submission. The application form and the drawings that accompany the submission should make this clear.

Descriptions of stages on certificates

Section 2.1 of the SER Procedural Guidance document on Certification states that “For the avoidance of doubt, it is important that the description provided on the certificate of design is accurate and consistent with the description on the application for building warrant, or application for amendment to warrant.”

Stage descriptions that are entered on the application, by the applicant or their agent, are rarely detailed enough to adequately describe the structural work that is included in that stage of the submission.

Verifiers should understand that it is not always appropriate for the certificate of design to replicate only the stage description noted by the applicant or agent and that it is reasonable to expand such a description to include more detailed wording as to the structural works included in that stage of the submission.

While an expanded description of work is appropriate, it is not necessary for every aspect covered by the certificate of design to be noted in the description. This equally applies to non-staged applications.

Requests from verifiers for a Form Q for each stage

SER noted that some verifiers are requesting a Form Q to cover the Schedule 1 items that were listed at that stage of the submission. This is linked to the principles of certification of design for staged applications as outlined previously.

The SER Procedural Guidance on Certification document states “When an Approved Certifier of Design has used Schedule 1, the verifier must ensure that a valid Form Q is submitted before they accept the completion certificate. The ‘final’ Form Q covers all Schedule 1 elements on the certificate of design.” In this regard the certificate of design being referred to is that submitted with the last stage which includes structural aspects, and as such it is NOT necessary to submit a form Q to cover the schedule 1 items on certificates of design for previous stages as these previously issued certificates are redundant.

Flexibility by verifiers to allow multiple stages on some projects

Over the last 25-30 years there has been a shift to ‘design and build’ being the preferred procurement method for many projects, particularly those in the public sector. This inevitably means that finalised designs and details are not available until the relevant sub-contractors are appointed. This approach results in the need for applications to be staged.

Where a staged application is required, a programme for the provision of design information must be prepared and agreed at an early stage of a project, by the applicant/agent, to allow for planning of the building warrant submission and the certification process.

It is also considered that, while the sequence of staged submissions will generally mirror the sequence of construction, there needs to be flexibility in the sequence of submission to allow for the approval of work which requires long periods for off-site manufacture.

Level of information to be shown on the drawings submitted with an application

It is the experience of SER Certifiers that verifiers sometimes have a difference of approach in respect of the level of information to be submitted with a staged warrant application.

A common example would be a submission where Stage 1 is for Piling work only.

Some verifiers for this submission would accept drawings which might typically show pile locations and ground beam layouts, together with ground floor and superstructure information. This information helps the Verifier to put the Stage 1 submission into context.

Other Verifiers insist that the only drawings they will accept are those related to the stage under consideration, i.e. a pile layout with specification notes. This drawing would typically show a series of small circles on a drawing, with no context.

The benefit of contextual information is noted by LABSS, as is the need to clearly show what work is covered by any staged application.

Therefore, it was agreed that a reasonable approach by the verifier would be to agree that drawings that are to be approved show the work that is part of that stage, but with work in subsequent stages shown greyed-out or clearly annotated to show that it will be part of a subsequent stage. Thereby retaining relevant contextual information but also clearly showing work covered within an application.

Generally, in respect of the level of information required in support of a building warrant application, verifiers should note that for an amendment to warrant, which is not a staged application, which includes structural changes, the Certifier is certifying the whole design, not just the amended aspect, and will therefore issue full design drawings in support of that amendment. As noted above, it was agreed that for clarity, the area of the design which has been amended would be specifically highlighted.

SER Certification and service installations

Following discussion at the meeting, it was agreed to provide some general information on what elements of building services should be covered by certification of design for Section 1.

This is limited to items such as supports and fixings. (SER are currently finalising guidance in this respect which will be referenced in this paper in due course.)

Certification of design to areas not covered within the building warrant

Again, following discussion at the meeting, it was agreed to provide some information in respect of areas of a development which do not fall under building regulation requirements and are not included within the building warrant, and therefore do not need to be covered by certification of design.

Examples of such work may include, barriers used only to direct vehicles, i.e. adjacent to a drive through or work solely related to roads or associated infrastructure.

Limitations of SER Scheme to Standards 1.1 and 1.2

The approved certifier schemes require that “*approved certifiers must have due regard to compliance with all relevant building standards requirements, which may impact on the work undertaken, not just those of immediate relevance to the particular scheme*”, and consequently, structural designers frequently contribute to the design of matters such as structural fire protection, basement waterproofing and underground drainage, which are covered by Mandatory Standards in Sections 2 and 3 of the Handbooks.

However, it should be noted that the Approved Certifier of Design, who is certifying the structural design, is not reviewing for compliance the measures needed to meet Mandatory Standards in these sections, such as 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.6 and 3.7.

The scope of the SER Scheme is limited to Mandatory Standards 1.1 and 1.2. It is important that all involved in the project, client, designers, and verifiers are aware of who is responsible for demonstrating compliance with Standards other than 1.1 and 1.2, where an SER certificate of design is being provided.

End.