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**REPORT TO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 3 FEBRUARY 2009**

**SUBJECT: ELGIN TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT - REPORT 2**

**BY: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 This report expands upon the related report "Elgin Traffic Management – Report 1" and in particular the issues surrounding Elgin Western Distributor Road.
- 1.2 Work on this project is far from concluded, and the report outlines the current position on the evaluation of a Western Link Distributor Road, including the various issues arising from the two alternative proposals under examination, and identifies a way forward.
- 1.3 In addition, this report outlines some of the wider issues relating to road improvements elsewhere in Elgin.
- 1.4 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to the Council as Roads Authority including design and construction and to traffic management functions including the preparation and implementation of traffic management schemes.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **The Committee is asked to note the information provided in this report and to approve the continued investigation of both Options A and B.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Reference should be made to the Elgin Traffic Management - Report 1, also submitted to this meeting of the Committee. Report 1 generally outlines the wider road infrastructure needs in Elgin as a whole, whilst this report mainly addresses the two options currently under examination for a new road crossing over the railway in West Elgin.
- 3.2 Reference is made to the minutes of the Environmental Services (Special) Committee meeting of 30 August 2007. (Para 5 of the minute refers). This Committee approved further design work be carried out to investigate Option A (amended) and Option B of the Elgin STAG Part 2 report.

3.3 Reference is also made to the minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting of 27 May 2008 (Para 5 of the minute refers) where the Committee agreed to form the Elgin South West Developments Working Group. The reason for this was to consider jointly the needs of the road network and the provision of other Council development aspirations in the same area.

3.4 The Elgin South West Developments Working Group met on 4 August 2008 and discussed issues surrounding the three projects:

- Sports facilities and High School improvements
- Affordable housing
- Western link distributor road

In addition to the meeting a useful site visit was held which helped provide an explanation of the problems and opportunities relating to a Western Distributor Road.

3.5 **Elgin Western Distributor Road - Option A A96 West Road – Wittet Drive – Edgar Road Link**

Considering this option in more detail, north to south, each section of the route has been examined and issues surrounding delivery of a viable scheme are identified below. The routes are shown in outline on plan in **Appendix 1**.

3.6 A96 junction

A range of options and junction types have been considered. Traffic signals and a right-turn ghost island were rejected as a roundabout was found to be the only method of junction control which would provide sufficient traffic capacity for connecting a future distributor road to the main A96 Trunk route.

Any alteration to this junction requires the approval of Transport Scotland as Trunk Road Authority, so the two fundamental requirements of any junction design at this location is that it has enough capacity to handle the future traffic volumes, and that the design is in accordance with Transport Scotland's standards. The purpose of these standards is to ensure that the junction can operate safely.

Various sizes and designs of roundabout were investigated in detail. Some of the designs would require the demolition of property whilst others required only the acquisition of land or outbuildings. Unfortunately none of those which avoided property acquisition could meet Transport Scotland's design standards.

The "best" roundabout option which did not require demolition of residential property and was closest to the required design standards, but still some way

short of them, was submitted to Transport Scotland for comment and was rejected by them as being unacceptable.

Previously it was hoped that there might be an acceptable option involving no demolition, but this rejection by Transport Scotland has eliminated that possibility.

Although no work has been carried out since the last meeting on this option, from information already available it must be reported that investigations to date indicate that the “dog-leg” option, with an A96 junction located to the west of Wittet Drive, may provide a technically feasible solution that would require fewer properties than the option considered above. The “dog-leg” option is indicated by a dashed line on the appended plan.

Other features of the dog-leg option are that the existing bend on Wittet Drive, immediately south of the A96, has a poor alignment and this would be removed, whilst the north end of Wittet Drive would form a cul-de-sac, to the benefit of a number of property owners.

**It is clear that any effective improvement at this junction, that would be acceptable to Transport Scotland, will require some property demolition.**

### 3.7 Pluscarden Road junction

Visibility is poor on all approaches to the existing mini roundabout and is sub-standard on the approaches from the west and south.

Garden ground and property together with significant accommodation works may be required in order to provide any improvement to visibility.

### 3.8 Wittet Drive Rail Crossing

In order to obtain the minimum clearance over the railway line, the road has to be raised considerably and requires vehicle restraint barriers on the approaches.

Even with relaxations in the design standards, it is impossible to raise the road level of Wittet Drive to meet a bridge over the railway without creating a significant visual impact on some properties at the southern end of Wittet Drive. Vehicle access to the adjacent properties can still be maintained but some would require to be reconfigured.

### 3.9 Railway Line to Edgar Road

Various options were considered for the alignment and it is clear there will be a requirement for access to housing developments. The junction with Edgar Road will probably be required to incorporate access to High School and sports facilities due to the poor existing access to the school through a housing estate.

Poor ground conditions are likely to be encountered and any impact on flooding has to be considered.

3.10 **Elgin Western Distributor Road - Option B A96 at Morriston Road – via Peripheral Route - Edgar Road**

A possible peripheral road, following part of the indicative route of an Elgin Southern Bypass has been examined. At the south end, two possible options for the route have been examined. The main issues surrounding delivery of viable schemes are identified below:

3.11 **A96 to Pluscarden Road**

A large roundabout on the A96 near the Eight Acres Hotel would be required to cater for traffic on both legs of the A96, Morriston Road and the proposed distributor road. In addition there is a Moray Development Plan requirement to provide access off the distributor road into a business park and other side roads. Any work at this location will involve significant public utility diversions.

This section of the route would require two wide river crossings and a rail crossing, and due to flood requirements in this area the river crossings require to be relatively large structures incorporating central and flood spans. Clearly this has a significant impact on scheme costs.

3.12 **Pluscarden Road to Edgar Road**

Two alternative routes are being considered:

3.13 **B1 : via Bilbohall Farm**

A new roundabout formed on Pluscarden Road and a new junction off the distributor road towards Palmerscross. This option follows the terrain and allows for easy access to housing developments. It retains maximum flexibility for developments at the High School but provides limited further development potential.

This section requires one river crossing which would be a large structure incorporating central and flood spans.

3.14 **B2 : via Mayne Farm**

This route follows the indicative southern bypass line until it meets an extension of Edgar Road.

It is the most direct route with the preferred road alignment, but, depending on the detailed proposals for sports facilities and their exact location here, it may compromise development at the High School by splitting facilities to either side of the road. It is may also be less suitable to support all housing access needs and provides limited further development potential.

As with Option A, poor ground conditions are likely to be encountered and any impact on flooding has to be considered. Ground investigation at critical locations on the line of both options will be required to be carried out soon.

### 3.15 Moray Development Plan Considerations for Option B

It has been suggested previously that an outer route, such as Option B, could attract development and that this could significantly contribute to the extra costs associated with the more expensive infrastructure option. Officers in Transportation and in Development Services have reviewed the provision of the current Local Plan, and examined the potential to use the proposed distributor road to open up further land for future development. A number of significant issues emerge, and these need to be considered further in terms of the combination of proposed Council projects.

The main issues are:

- Additional development off this route would require a departure from National Planning Policies for NPP and Moray Development Plan
- The recently Adopted Moray Local Plan 2008 identifies an established housing land supply of just under 3000 houses for Elgin, which equates to a 21 year supply, based on development rates between 2002-2006. Adding to this the housing supply of approximately 20 years or hereby, which may be required to address the 'funding gap', would result in a housing land supply equivalent to 40 years, or thereby.

This level of housing land supply would be contrary to the strategic housing land requirement set out in the approved Moray Structure Plan. (This already includes a 50% 'flexibility element', and additional flexibility has been added by the identification of 'long term' sites in the Local Plan).

In other words, The Council has already identified a significant supply of housing land, and there is no justification for the release of additional land at this time.

If this was to be the case, there would be implications for the Council's consideration of the development land already identified as 'Long', in the north of Elgin in the Adopted Local Plan, and for its consideration of the private sector initiative to fund a southern 'By-pass', by the release of further long term development land.

It is therefore advised that the 'funding gap' strategy in relation to Option B would inhibit The Council's ability to take fully informed decisions in the future, in the context of statutory Development Plan Review procedures.

- Any south west outer alignment creates relatively small parcels of development land due to topography constraints (i.e. river crossings, rail crossing, flood areas, and existing road and buildings). This results in the need for a significant number of separate access roads off the distributor road, resulting in additional costs.

### 3.16 Affordability and Land Acquisition

Information on broad costs for the alternative road schemes have been provided previously under the reports for the Elgin Traffic Management STAG reports. These have been updated, but with design work at early stages, there are still high risks and uncertainties attached to both options. In the present economic climate, determining cost estimates for such work with any degree of surety is difficult. The estimates currently are in the order of

Option A	A96 West Road – Wittet Drive – Edgar Road	: £13-18m
Option B (B1)	A96 Morriston Road – Bilbohall – Edgar Road	: £34m
Option B(B2)	A96 Morriston Road - Mayne Farm - Edgar Road	: £34m

The delivery of any road project of this scale, close to or in an urban area, will often require Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) for acquiring land and in many cases property, to ensure, not just that the best technical option is chosen, but that the community as a whole is assured that the most sustainable solution has been brought forward. Similarly, at the Public Inquiry stage of this project, a robust case will have to show that more than just one option has been considered, and that in addition to the obvious social reasons, the arguments for options being rejected at any stage are based on sound technical and economic reasoning.

### 3.17 Wider Issues in Elgin

There are a number of junctions and road links within Elgin that currently exceed or are close to their maximum capacity for handling traffic. This has the effect of causing varying levels of congestion. Many of the junctions, which generally require to be enlarged, do not have land or property in Council ownership adjacent to them to facilitate improvements without the use of third party land, or in some cases, property also. An example of this is the junction of A941 Lossiemouth Road and Morriston Road where investigations carried out so far indicate that simple solutions such as the installation of traffic lights would result in very long traffic queues and would not provide the necessary capacity. A conventional roundabout would be required and this would require the demolition of a number of nearby properties. The successful development of at least one of the Council's major residential designations in the Moray Development Plan is dependent on this particular improvement.

- 3.18 Both current and future development proposals in and around Elgin will put more pressure on the road network and in order to progress with an effective

Traffic Management Plan for Elgin, some of these difficult issues require to be addressed.

### 3.19 Short-term Proposals

In order to progress both a western distributor road option and investigations elsewhere in Elgin, a Project Management Plan has to be prepared. It should be noted that work carried out on this project from now on must be sufficiently detailed and exhaustive to stand up to scrutiny at Public Inquiry. It is for this reason, coupled with the fact that the Council has neither the expertise for some of the very specialised functions, nor the staff resources to devote solely to the volume of work in this project, that a framework agreement to acquire consultants' input is necessary. Environmental, economic and detailed traffic modelling assessments will be required to name but a few. This external assistance is considered essential to the delivery of this project.

Development and approval of the project management strategy will have to be reviewed when the outcome from this meeting is known, and also the site of Elgin High School sports facilities, and access to them, will require to be determined soon.

## 4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

### (a) **Corporate Development Plan/Community Plan/Service Improvement Plan**

**This report contributes to:**

- **Corporate Development Plan: Environmental Programme 4 Transport (Provide suitable transport and other infrastructure to help the local economy)**
- **Service Improvement Plan: Improving Transport Infrastructure**

### (b) **Policy and Legal**

**This report takes account of:**

- **Moray Local Plan (2008)**
- **Regional Transport Strategy**
- **SPP17 Planning for Transport**
- **Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG)**

- **Elgin Traffic Management projects will be required to comply with statutory procedures.**

**(c) Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)**

**There is limited Capital Funding for 'Elgin Traffic Management & Car Parking'. Economic evaluation of Elgin Traffic Management projects will be required.**

**Most of the developer contributions already secured must be spent by specified deadlines.**

**The need to acquire external assistance and expertise by means of a framework agreement is outlined in the report and the cost of employing consultants would be met from the capital budget allocated for Elgin traffic management and car parking within the Capital Plan 2008/09 – 2012/13 and that the risk to the Council associated with this is that if no affordable solution for a Western Distributor route can be found then the scheme development costs may have to be reallocated from the capital to the roads revenue budget.**

**To achieve the Elgin STAG key objective will require land acquisition and may also require property to be acquired.**

**(d) Consultations**

**Lorraine Paisey, Principal Accountant has been consulted on this report and is in agreement with the financial implications.**

**Aileen Scott, Principal Solicitor (Commercial and Conveyancing) has been consulted and agrees with the legal implications of this report.**

**Donald Lunan, Planning and Development Manager has been consulted and is in agreement with this report.**

**David Duncan, Principal Planning Officer has been consulted and is in agreement with this report.**

**5. CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 An Elgin Western Distributor road forms an important part of the overall Elgin Traffic Management project. It is important that progress on the detailed investigation of both options A & B continues.**

ITEM:

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Background Papers:

Ref:

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Date: 28 January 2009

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