

Highland wide Local Development Plan - Main Issues Report Consultation Summary and Actions Sheet

Reference Number:	HWLDP-MIR-73
Organisation/Individual:	Paul and Helen Jenkins

Action:

Immediate Response Required	
Meeting required with Respondent	
Issue for Area Local Development Plan	
Further Information Required	x
Other (<i>Please Specify</i>)	

If no box ticked - issues raised will be dealt with in preparation of the Proposed Plan.

Issues Raised in Response:

Purpose of Main Issues Report	
NPF2 for Scotland	ALL
Vision for the Highlands	
Inverness and A96	
The A96 Corridor	
Phasing of Development	
Developer Contributions	ALL
East Inverness	ALL
Nairn	
Tornagrain	
Smaller Settlements in A96	
Caithness and North Sutherland	
Easter Ross and Nigg	
Development of Local Centres	
Wider Countryside and Fragile Areas	
Population and Housing	x
Housing in the Countryside	
Affordable Housing	
Planning for an Ageing Population	ALL
Gypsies/Travellers	
Retailing	
Developer Contributions	
Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage	

Previously used Land	
Wild Land	
Water Environment	
Renewable Energy	
Flooding	
Waste Management	
Air Quality	
Sustainable Design	
Business and Industrial Land	
Accessibility and Transport	ALL
Agricultural Land	
Subdivision of Existing Crofts	
Allocation of Inbye Land	
New Crofting Township	
Small Scale New Crofts	
Coastal Development	
Forestry and Woodland	
Minerals	
Open Space and Physical Activity	
Access to the Outdoors	
Comments on Consultation Process (+ve)	
Comments on Consultation Process (-ve)	

Key:

Background	Spatial Strategy	Policy Options	Consultation
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Notes:

<p>Comments that time allocated to process representation is far shorter than the 26 weeks recommended by Scottish Government in Circular 1/09</p> <p>Recommends: Population projections reviewed (independently) – Further info required? Less focus on the A96 corridor at the expense of remote communities</p> <p>Also provides comments on all questionnaire questions</p>

Action Sheet Completed by:	GW
Date:	8/12/09

**Paul & Helen Jenkins
Meikle Kildrummie
By Nairn
IV12 5NY**



H.C. PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICE		
09 NOV 2009		
PASS TO	INITIALS	DATE
FILE REF:		

The Director of Planning and Development
The Highland Council
Freepost SCO5568
Inverness
IV3 5BR

6 November 2009

Dear Director,

COMMENTS ON THE HIGHLAND-WIDE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN MAIN ISSUES REPORT

1. We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on this Main Issues Report (MIR). Although we have concatenated our comments into one document, please count this as two submissions, coming from two responders.

The Consultation Process

2. It is to be hoped that citizens from across the whole Highland Council region will choose to respond, because they are all affected. However, it must be said that their ability to do so will be constrained by the limited consultation time of just 10 weeks, and the short time allocated by Council officers for analysis of the consultation responses. Under Scottish Executive planning guidance, the following consultation times are suggested:

Scottish Planning Series, Planning Circular 1 2009, Development Planning

Normal Strategic Development Plan Process - Typical Timings

Timescale (weeks)	Stage
6	Consultation.
26	Consider representations and prepare proposed plan and action programme.
10	Committee and printing.
42	Cumulative Total

The fact that Highland Council have allocated 10 weeks to consultation is acknowledged. However, the period planned for analysis (supposedly to be complete by early 2010) appears to be much shorter than the 26 weeks recommended above.

Recommendation 1: Our first recommendation is that the Highland Council extends the planned analysis time to at least the 26 weeks suggested in the above guidance.

3. In addition, it is critically important that responders are fully informed of what note has been

taken of their responses by the Council as it moves forward to the production of the Highland-Wide Local Development Plan. It is axiomatic that consultation is not true unless a reasoned reaction results, so we shall all be anxious to know what note has been taken of our observations.

4. One format that has worked quite well in earlier consultations has been to tabulate all of the inputs in Column 1, with Column 2 being the analysis by the Council, and Column 3 the resulting action that has been taken in respect of amendment to the Local Development Plan. You have stated that this is the approach that you intend to take (resources being available), and that you intend to post all responses on your website, once all personal details have been taken out.

Recommendation 2: That if resource is limited, then the Highland Council allows a longer time period to achieve this objective of posting the responses.

Recommendation 3: That the Highland Council includes all three columns in this website posting.

5. It is legitimate to question why the Council is in such a rush to press forward with its consultation and the preparation of its development plans. Yes, it is important to make progress, but these are weighty matters requiring a great deal of consideration and consultation. Are there other background matters that are causing the press forward? If so, the Highland citizens should be told what these are.

The Drivers for Planning Ahead

6. It makes eminent sense for the Highland Council and other statutory agencies to plan ahead over a 30-year time period, and they are guided to do so by the Scottish Executive.

7. However, for such development plans as will be generated to be credible, they have to be based on realistic forecasts of the demographics: population increase, or decrease; in-migration and out-migration; trends in population age balance; work opportunities for heads of households, and so forth.

8. These are the principal drivers that are truly relevant as far as planning ahead are concerned. We can expect and hope that the Highland Council and the statutory agencies will take an expert lead in such planning ahead, and will base their projections and plans on realistic, auditable, projections that are made fully public and are fully consulted upon. We make detailed comment below on the figures published in the MIR, but suffice to say at this point that they are not in the credible league. From this it follows that the forward plans that are being mooted through this MIR are fundamentally and fatally flawed.

Recommendation 4: That the population projections upon which the Highland Council are basing their development plans are independently and expertly reviewed, and that the outcomes of this review are published.

9. What is absolutely not a driver for planning ahead is "developer pressure". It is utterly naive, arguably even disingenuous, to advance that landowners who are pressing to be allowed to build new communities are doing so in response to forthcoming population increases. They are doing so because they see an opportunity to make money. There is no philanthropic or altruistic rationale, simply an understandable wish to better themselves. The Highland Council must distance itself from such opportunism, and base the Council's decisions and plans strictly on credible evidence of need.

Recommendation 5: That the Highland Council only makes its development plans on the basis of demonstrated need, and that it publishes and consults on the rationale of this demonstrated need.

The Best Basis for Planning Ahead

10. The detailed support of our comments is given below. In summary, the MIR is based on two fallacious precepts:

10.1. That population growth is both good, and necessary.

10.2. That the projections for population growth support a considerable expansion of communities in the Highlands.

11. In practice, neither of these precepts are true, nor are they supportable by publicly available information. Instead, what the MIR encapsulates is a conglomeration of selective statistics and projections, chosen for the advantage that they give to the pre-conceived ideas of the Council planners, and aimed at answering "developer pressures" – all masquerading under the generic and unsupported euphemism of "aspirational".

12. The Highland Council must plan ahead. It should plan ahead on the basis of the following:

12.1. A population that will, at best, increase by only a modest amount over the next 30 years.

12.2. A long-term net out-migration of population as the overall population of Europe decreases over that period.

12.3. A population that will age significantly over the next 30 years, placing increasing pressure on medical and nursing resources.

12.4. A population that toward the end of the period will reduce nationally as the post-war bulge passes through.

13. These four factors in themselves must necessarily lead to a radical and deep-seated review of the development plans that the Highland Council have been advocating.

14. To adopt these four factors as the basis for development planning is not a counsel of despair. It is a counsel of realism, and pragmatism.

Recommendation 6: That the Highland Council bases its development plans on the above four criteria.

15. The Highland Council also needs to re-examine how it will support all of the communities in the Highlands. The present, bizarre, focus on the A96 corridor does exactly the opposite, and will just exacerbate the present trend for communities outwith the Inner Moray Firth to be denuded of their population. These other communities already have the infrastructure necessary to support modest population growth, and such organic growth will support and sustain essential social services in those communities.

Recommendation 7: That the Highland Council explains in detail and consults on how its present development plans will support remote communities.

Recommendation 8: That the Highland Council adopts a policy that dispersed growth based on enlarging existing communities will form the foundation of its development plans.

16. A question left open by the MIR is where the jobs are to come from to support the families making up the envisaged population growth. The Highlands have significant disadvantages in terms of transport infrastructure and sheer remoteness, and there are no coherent arguments why industry or commerce should set up here rather than the Central Belt, where both of these factors are less of a constraint. Rather than seeking to develop new communities, the emphasis of the Highland Council should be on job creation. Housing development can then be driven by demonstrable need.

Recommendation 9: That the Highland Council should focus its energies on growing the economy of the region, and let the population grow as a direct result of inward investment.

Detailed Comments on the Main Issues Report

17. We enclose with this cover letter our detailed comments on the Main Issues report, and our responses to the questions therein.

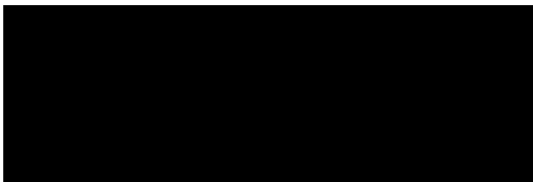
18. On reading our comments, there will be an element of repetition evident. This is because we have been unclear whether you would record and report comments throughout the body of the MIR (where they can be more directly related to the text of the MIR), or just those framed within the questions that you have asked. We have therefore taken the opportunity to repeat relevant information so that either way our comments will be noted and reported.

Conclusion

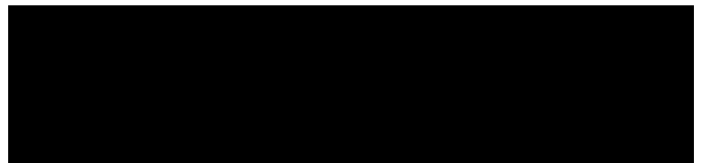
19. It is right and proper that the Highland Council should consult on its ideas for a Highland-Wide Local Development Plan, and this MIR consultation is a start to that process.

20. However, the thought processes that have gone into the production of the MIR, and concepts such as the A96 corridor, are deeply and irremediably flawed. The Highland Council needs to go back to scratch, to begin again with a realistic and supportable projection of population growth, and draw up their development plans on that basis. Any other approach risks damaging our economy and our environment, for little or no gain for anyone other than the developers, and also risks changing the very character of the Highlands.

Yours Sincerely,



Paul Jenkins



Helen Jenkins

Enclosure:

1. Detailed comments on the MIR.

Dawn Sutherland

From: Paul Jenkins [REDACTED]
Sent: 06 November 2009 12:13
To: devplans
Cc: Alistair Dodds
Subject: Comments on Highland-wide Local Development Plan Main Issues Report

Dear Sirs,

Please find attached our contribution to the HWLDP Main Issues Report consultation. A hard copy is coming by post.

As our response will be given a wide distribution under the aegis of Action for Planning Transparency, a courtesy copy is also sent to the Chief Executive for his early information.

Regards,

Paul and Helen Jenkins

This email has been scanned by Netintelligence
<http://www.netintelligence.com/email>

1. Purpose of the Main Issues Report

We have no comment to make on this section.

2. National Planning Framework 2 for Scotland and the Highlands

Plan Preparation Stages

We have to take account of the new National Planning Framework 2 for Scotland in our Local Development Plans.

We have no comment to make on these sections.

3. The Vision for the Highlands

The vision for the area is part of the Council's overarching objectives and is set out in our Corporate Plan:

By 2030, the Highlands will be one of Europe's leading regions. We will have created sustainable communities balancing population growth and economic development across the area, and have built a fairer and healthier Highlands.

To deliver this vision, we have suggested a number of plan objectives. These objectives are based around the five local outcomes from the Highland Single Outcome Agreement. The possible options for delivering these objectives form part of this Main Issues Report.

Sustainable Highland Communities

- ◆ To increase the population of the Highlands to achieve a balanced age range by providing opportunities for market housing and affordable housing both within settlements and within the Highland countryside;

Comment: This does not imply a need for new towns.

- ◆ To provide for developments which cater for Highland's ageing population;
- ◆ To make sure that new development meets the needs of the whole community, both now and in the future, and makes the area a more attractive place for residents and businesses to move to;

Comment: This area is already an attractive place to live. Overdevelopment will spoil it. If the MIR is focussing to such a high degree on the Inner Moray Firth, it is not meeting the needs of the "whole" community.

- ◆ and; To ensure the effective delivery of the plan strategy through efficient and transparent use of developer contributions and the linking in to Council and partner agency development programmes.

Safeguarding our Environment

- ◆ To ensure that development of renewable energy resources are managed effectively with clear guidance on where renewable energy developments should be located;
- ◆ To make sure the quality of the natural, built and cultural environment in Highland is protected and where possible enhanced;

Comment: As a Reporter said recently, it is as important to specify and delineate areas that are to be screened from future development, as it is to delineate those that are zoned for development. There is no provision for this action in the MIR.

- ◆ To help Highland take the lead in reducing the amount of carbon dioxide released into the air, adapt to the effects of climate change and limit the amount of non-renewable resources development uses; and
- ◆ To put in place the planning framework for the delivery of sustainable waste management proposals set out in the Council's waste strategy and brought forward by the private sector.

Comment: This is an admirable objective. However, adding substantially to the population will just exacerbate the existing waste management problems.

A Competitive, Sustainable and Adaptable Highland Economy

- ◆ To provide opportunities which encourage economic development and create new employment across the area, whilst at the same time improving the strategic infrastructure necessary to allow the economy to grow over the long term;

Comment: This is the crux. Economic development must be driven by job creation, not by population growth. If the work is there the people will come to the region, and they will create a demand for housing. It is a back-to-front approach to allow the development of new communities in the hope that the work will follow.

It is also essential that if growth is necessary, then infrastructure provision must precede development, whether that be physical infrastructure, social infrastructure and/or community infrastructure.

- ◆ To help deliver transport infrastructure improvements across the area in line with the Council's transport strategy and the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review;

Comment: again this is an admirable sentiment, but no-one behind this report is prepared to say where the money for transport infrastructure is to come from. Once

again, transport infrastructure must precede development, but we are well aware that the Scottish Executive's priorities for transport expenditure lie elsewhere.

- ◆ To ensure that new developments contribute towards reducing the need to travel and encourage people to walk, cycle or use public transport; and
- ◆ To ensure that the planning guidance for mineral development, coastal developments, forestry, agriculture and croft land is clear and consistent and that key resources are protected where appropriate.

A Healthier Highlands

- ◆ To provide for the development of places that contribute to increasing healthy lifestyles, opportunities for quality open space provision and access to enjoy the outdoors.

Better opportunities for all / A fairer Highland

- ◆ To provide for investment in services and infrastructure, and opportunities for investment and diversification in the economy, in our deprived areas and areas at risk of long term unemployment as a result of changes in the wider economy (this objective is related to all of those set out above, and to our spatial strategy, so does not have a specific chapter in this Main Issues Report).

Comment: As money is going to be in very short supply, should we not be concentrating those resources that are available on supporting and improving the deprived areas, not supporting the building of new towns?

***No, is this the right vision for the area
If not, please tell us why.***

The MIR is based on two fallacious precepts:

1. That population growth is both good, and necessary.
2. That the projections for population growth support a considerable expansion of communities in the Highlands.

In practice, neither of these precepts is true, nor are they supportable by publicly available information.

For such development plans as will be generated to be credible, they have to be based on realistic forecasts of the demographics: population increase, or decrease; in-migration and out-migration; trends in population age balance; work opportunities for heads of households, and so forth. These are the principal drivers that are truly relevant as far as planning ahead are concerned.

A question left open by the MIR is where the jobs are to come from to support the families making up the envisaged population growth (see below).

Are there any alternatives that you would like to see?

The thought processes that have gone into the production of this MIR, and concepts such as the A96 corridor, are deeply and irremediably flawed. The Highland Council needs to go back to scratch, to begin again with a realistic and supportable projection of population growth, and draw up their development plans on that basis. Any other approach risks damaging our economy and our environment, for little or no gain for anyone other than the developers, and also risks changing the very character of the Highlands.

The Highland Council also needs to address how it will support all of the communities in the Highlands. The present, bizarre, focus on the A96 corridor does exactly the opposite, and will just exacerbate the present trend for communities outwith the Inner Moray Firth to be denuded of their population. These other communities already have the infrastructure necessary to support modest population growth, and such organic growth will support and sustain essential social services in those communities.

4. Where should growth go and how can we deliver it? (The Spatial Strategy)

Comment: As a general comment, every effort should be made to encourage the development of brown field sites in preference to green field sites. There are lots of brown field sites available.

It is also necessary to concentrate significant effort on supporting areas outwith the Inner Moray Firth.

Inverness and the A96 Corridor

The continued growth and development of Inverness and the surrounding area is essential so that the Highlands can continue to prosper.

Comment: The precept that growth is "essential" is fundamentally erroneous. Growth of an area as expressed by growth in population leads to corresponding growth in the pressures on social and physical resources that are already stretched. Examples are: water supplies; transport infrastructure; energy supplies; hospital capacity; local health support; education provision; care for older people; waste water treatment – the list goes on and on.

The MIR does not address adequately where the funding to develop this additional infrastructure is to come from. Only a small fraction of the infrastructure development necessary to support growth can be realised through developer contributions. The rest must come from public funds, and we do not have enough of these. (We are, of course, at the start of what is going to be a long and painful recession).

Parts of the current Local Plans for the Inverness and Nairnshire areas will need to be altered by the Highland wide Local Development Plan, particularly in order to help the long term growth anticipated for this part of Highland.

Inverness

This Main Issues Report is being published partly to help the debate about how the city of Inverness can grow over the next twenty years and beyond. The city of Inverness has seen a lot of development over the last ten years. In particular the number of houses built around the city has led to substantial change and supported economic growth.

Comment: It is necessary now for the report's authors to illustrate where the jobs are to come from to support any further growth.

The map shows the rates of housing development around the city over the last five to ten years. It shows that the main areas identified for the expansion of the city are being completed and that we need to identify a long term supply of land for housing and other uses.

Some of the sites identified in the current Local Plan for Inverness remain available for development, and are capable of providing for the housing need in the next three to five years. In that respect it may be important that the existing plans for the growth of the city to 2011 are completed before there is major expansion in other areas.

Comment: This being recognised, there is no need for the development of any new towns over this time period. Indeed, such further population growth beyond this period can be readily accommodated by identifying further areas within and on the border of Inverness city, given that the city already has the basic infrastructure in place.

Because of the changes in the city, there are other issues that need to be addressed, particularly in terms of improving accessibility and transport, supporting the city centre and increasing the amount of building on land which has been formerly used (brownfield development).

Comment: It seems clear that the city centre will be supported preferentially by siting the UHI campus on the Longman. Our understanding is that the Beechwood option is still being examined, and has not yet been decided upon. (The question arises about how appropriate it is to collocate a university campus and a prison!)

We are working with Architecture and Design Scotland on preparing an updated City Vision for the city of Inverness. During the consultation period on this Main Issues Report we will be seeking views from people as to how that city vision is shaped, so that it will inform our Proposed Plan, and the Local Development Plans that will follow in the future.

Some of the main areas for discussion in identifying how the city of Inverness will develop over the next twenty years are:

- ◆ the need to enable housing development sites at Ness-side and Charleston to the south and west of the city which are held up by the lack of a new car and pedestrian river and canal crossing;
- ◆ the potential that key locations offer for regeneration, including the Muirtown basin, the city centre and surrounding areas at the Longman Industrial area, the former Longman landfill site, Raigmore/Inshes and the Inverness Harbour area;

- ◆ the role of the proposed Beechwood campus and A96-A9 link road in opening up development opportunities to the east of the city;
- ◆ the priorities that there are for transport improvements which will help alleviate some of the current “bottle-necks”, for example at the Inshes roundabout;
- ◆ how the city can further benefit from integrating new development with some of our natural assets like the river, canal, sea-front and landscape;
- ◆ how community facilities can be improved across the city as part of development proposals that come forward; and
- ◆ how the design of new development will complement the historic growth of the city in a way that is sustainable and makes best use of the land available.

What is our Preferred Option for dealing with these Issues?

We think we should:

- prepare an updated city vision to inform where the key development and infrastructure priorities are for the city (such as those detailed above) and include this work in the Proposed Plan;
- highlight the major development sites still to be developed in Inverness in the Proposed Plan (listed above) and prioritise how and when these sites should be developed;
- prepare masterplans to highlight opportunities and provide guidance on how the development of these sites will affect the phasing of development in the A96 Corridor (or alternative);
- link our planning work closely with the work being done on the Local Transport Strategy to ensure that priorities for transport improvements to roads, public transport, cycling or pedestrian facilities are supported.

What is an alternative to this Preferred Option?

Another strategy would be to focus our efforts on opening up opportunities in the A96 Corridor (or alternative) as opposed to seeking the early consolidation and development of the existing areas identified within the city. Whilst this would ensure a long term supply of land for the whole area, it would not guarantee that some of the large sites currently allocated for expansion or regeneration are promoted as early priorities. We would also miss the opportunity to provide an up to date city vision that reflects our current thinking.

Comment: This statement appears to undermine the justification advanced elsewhere in the report for the A96 corridor development plan.

Do you agree with our Preferred Option?

Q.1

No

If not, please tell us why.

We are in favour of further developing Inverness, if further growth has to be accommodated. There are existing green and brown field areas that are already designated, or can be brought into use. As stated above, Inverness has the basic infrastructure to support such growth.

Where we disagree is the influence of the Inverness developments on the phasing of the A96 corridor developments. We do not believe that the A96 development proposals are either necessary or justifiable.

Do you prefer the stated alternative?

No, for the reasons given above.

Are there any other alternatives that should be considered?

It is most important in our view to support the communities throughout the Highlands, and not just to focus on Inverness and the A96 corridor. These communities are shrinking through depopulation, yet they have the basic infrastructure to support modest, organic, growth. Without the necessary support the communities outwith the Inner Moray Firth area will lose essential services as they dip below capitation trigger levels, health services being a prime example. The Highland Council is neglecting its duty to the region by focussing its development plans on Inverness and the A96 corridor.

The A96 Corridor

A lot of work has been carried out over the last few years on identifying where the long term growth areas for the city of Inverness and the surrounding area should be located. Inverness has a number of constraints to growth, largely based on physical factors. Development opportunities to the west of the city are limited by the canal and river crossings and by the landscape. Land to the south of the city is constrained by the steep slopes.

Comment: the above analysis is facile and will not withstand the most elementary of challenges. There is plenty of relatively-flat undeveloped land on the West side of Inverness toward Lochend, and also to the North-West of Inverness toward Kirkhill. The hills to the South-West of Inverness are gentle in slope, as illustrated by the present housing developments, and there is an abundance of suitable land in the Dores direction.

Opportunities to the north are limited by the Moray Firth and the capacity of its crossing by the Kessock Bridge.

Comment: Let us once and for all put an end to blaming the Kessock Bridge for constraining road capacity. The bridge is just another stretch of dual carriageway. It is the roundabout at the South end of the bridge that causes the blockages. Focussed expenditure on improving this junction would clear the constraint on development on the Tore side of Inverness. An example of useful expenditure would be to erect an elevated North-South carriageway over the roundabout so that southbound and northbound traffic can pass the junction without being held up. These fly-overs are commonplace in England – do we lack the imagination to use them here?

Similarly, the Clachnaharry bridge constraint is easily resolved. The railway bridge is held to one lane with traffic lights because its weight capacity is limited by its age. Build a new bridge, and scrap the traffic lights, and you will remove the traffic constraint. What is the Highland Council doing to promote this solution?

As a result development to the east of the city has been identified as the most deliverable long term growth opportunity.

Comment: See the above, which renders this statement incorrect.

This land is also comparatively flatter, better drained, better connected to transport links and offers equivalent or better outlook and climate than the alternatives.

Comment: Again this statement is facile and readily open to challenge. How is the land to the East of Inverness flatter than the land toward Dores, or in the Kirkhill area? How is it better drained than these two areas? How does it have better outlook and climate - where are the climate statistics from the Met Office to justify this last statement?

One is left with the impression that the authors of the report are making this up to suit their predilection for their A96 corridor proposals.

The maps in this section of the report identify the main strategic sites identified for development in the A96 Corridor. The A96 Corridor has been identified in the National Planning Framework as an "area for co-ordinated action", and is the main focus of growth in the Inner Moray Firth.

Comment: It is worth noting that the only reason that the A96 corridor framework is included in NPF2 is because the Highland Council promoted its inclusion. It is disingenuous to intimate that the NPF2 authors thought it out for themselves.

Since the A96 Corridor Framework was prepared, there have been a number of important questions raised that will affect whether and how the land identified for development can be taken forward in the Highland wide Local Development Plan and future plans that will follow on afterwards.

Comment: What are these important questions, and who raised them? For completeness of the consultation process the communities need to be informed of what the questions were, who has raised them, and what note is being taken of them.

Some of these issues are corridor-wide and some are specific to the individual areas involved (East Inverness, Nairn, Tornagrain and the smaller settlements in the Corridor).

Corridor wide issues

Our view is that the development principles behind the A96 Corridor Framework, particularly in terms of providing a wide choice of development land to meet future housing requirements remain valid.

Comment: In the view of many commentators, the development principles behind the A96 corridor framework have never been valid (see below).

This view is supported by the National Planning Framework 2 prepared by Scottish Government.

Comment: It is worth noting again that the only reason that the A96 corridor framework is included in NPF2 is because the Highland Council promoted its inclusion.

Our Monitoring Statement and Housing Need and Demand Assessment illustrate the need for more housing in this area.

Comment: Nobody argues that the Housing Need and Demand Assessment illustrates a need for more houses. Where these houses should be located is entirely another question, and there is no presumption that they need to be in the A96 corridor.

It is not made clear whether in assessing future housing need the HNDA uses the same population growth projections as the "aspirational" ones used in the MIR. The authors must make clear whether this is the case. If it is not, the important question of which growth rate is correct needs to be answered.

There has however been some opposition to these plans for growth, and this consultation allows people the opportunity to set out or restate their views on where development for the future should go.

Phasing of development (what can happen where, when)

The full development of the A96 Corridor Framework depends upon a number of improvements to the infrastructure between Inverness and Nairn.

These improvements include dualling of the A96, a new bypass for Nairn, a new road link between the A96 and the A9, improvements to wastewater treatment around Nairn and a new water supply for the Inverness and Nairn area as a whole. It will also include the building of new primary and secondary schools and improvements to the community facilities in the area. These needs were demonstrated by a series of studies prepared for the Council when the Framework was being drawn up.

A lot of discussion has been held with agencies responsible for this infrastructure and it remains important that the improvements are put in place as development progresses.

Comment: The authors of the report have frequently stated in public consultation meetings that the necessary infrastructure development must take place before any development takes place. Why has this publicly-stated precondition not been enshrined in this report as a fundamental principle?

Why has this A96 corridor framework not been properly informed by the inclusion of costed feasibility studies, such as a study into the practicality, environmental effects and cost of piping drinking water to the A96 corridor from Loch Ness?

Just where is the money to come from to fund these infrastructure developments?

The Council is working with Transport Scotland on the phasing of development in the A96 Corridor as it relates to the need for significant improvements to the road network. The Strategic Transport Projects Review which was issued by Scottish Government did identify the improvements to the A96 and the Nairn bypass as priorities, albeit that the delivery dates of these improvements are not known at this time.

In order to ensure that development of the A96 Corridor can take place in a managed way, further work is being undertaken to confirm at what point these improvements to the A96 Corridor are required. This work includes an update to a transport model, so that the results can be included in the Proposed Plan. This will help determine what parts of the developments identified in the Framework can progress before the big improvements such as the A96-A9 link, the upgrade of the A96 and the Nairn by-pass are put in place.

Comment: Is it not time for the authors to admit that whereas the desired improvements are indeed identified by Transport Scotland, there is no money to implement them, and nor is there likely to be until the Firth of Forth crossing and other major central-belt projects are completed? (As a representative from Transport Scotland said at a public meeting the other day, not before 2016 at the earliest). It is pie-in-the-sky to imagine that these improvements will be funded in the foreseeable future, and extremely important to recognise that no development should be contemplated in the A96 corridor until they are.

As stated above, the MIR does not address adequately where the funding to develop this additional infrastructure is to come from. Only a small fraction of the infrastructure development necessary to support growth can be realised through developer contributions. The rest must come from public funds, and we do not have enough of these. (We are, of course, at the start of what is going to be a long and painful recession).

It is also worth noting that the full Tornagrain proposal involves substantial realignment of the A96. Just who do the developers imagine is going to pay for this realignment?

An important role for the Local Development Plan is therefore to set out the phasing of development in the A96 Corridor to indicate what development can progress initially within the period between 2011 and 2016 and the period between 2016 and 2021.

Comment: Transport infrastructure is just one element of the necessary infrastructure. The HWLDP will need to incorporate consideration of all infrastructure, both physical and social.

What is our Preferred Option for dealing with these Issues?

We think we should:

- identify the development sites set out within the A96 Corridor Framework in the Proposed Plan;
- support early (2011-2016) phases of development across the corridor before major infrastructure is completed but subject to commitments in principle from the development industry and agencies like Transport Scotland and Scottish Water to ensure that all types of infrastructure (whether that be roads, public transport, schools or community facilities) are in place when they are needed;
- set out in the Proposed Plan the amount of development which will be allowed to proceed within the 2011-2016 and 2016-2021 periods across the corridor; and
- link the phasing of development to the outcomes of our work on the existing sites in Inverness (as set out in the previous section).

Any other options to this Preferred Option?

1. Another approach would be to allow no further development in the A96 Corridor until major infrastructure improvements are put in place. With the delivery of major transport improvements being subject to future spending reviews and funding allocations, the risk of adopting this approach is that the medium to long term housing land supply in Inverness and Nairn is restricted for a substantial period, with the knock on implications this will have on economic growth in the area.

Comment: Again, there is a false association between housing supply and economic growth that is being used casually and without substantiation by the authors. The only sustainable driver for growth is the generation of employment. If the jobs are there, the employees will come, and housing development can quickly respond to their needs. Just building houses and new towns will not generate sustainable communities supported by working families.

Housing land supply in Inverness and Nairn may be restricted for a period, but as demonstrated there is plenty of land available now for short to medium term development needs.

A second implication is that development will proceed on an incremental basis and that we lose the strategic overview that the A96 Framework gives us. There would also be increased pressure for development on greenspace in and around Inverness.

Comment: This statement is at odds with the statements in the third paragraph of the Inverness section of this report, which talks of brown and green field sites that are already identified for development.

Furthermore, development will only proceed on an incremental basis outwith a strategic overview if the Highland Council allows it to do so. The authors seem to forget that the Council have the ability to set the strategy that will be followed by developers. It has the power – it should use it rather than submit to the demands of the developers.

As stated above, the Highland Council also needs to re-examine how it will support all of the communities in the Highlands. Their present, bizarre, focus on the A96 corridor does exactly the opposite, and will just exacerbate the present trend for communities outwith the Inner Moray Firth to be denuded of their population. These other communities already have the infrastructure necessary to support modest population growth, and such organic growth will support and sustain essential social services in those communities.

Whilst there would be some environmental benefits in that areas currently earmarked for development could not progress, an incremental approach to development might take place. This may increase some of the environmental effects of the development.

Comment: If there are environmental benefits from non-development, there must logically be disbenefits from allowing development. These disbenefits need to be laid out by the authors, both in this report and in the A96 corridor framework.

2. A further option to developing the A96 Corridor would be to widen the search for long term expansion sites to the rest of the Inner Moray Firth. This could include steering additional development towards other communities in Inverness-shire and in Easter Ross. Whilst existing local plans for these towns and villages do show that enough land is available for the projected growth in housing demand arising locally, the local development plan could look to accommodate a much higher level of growth in these locations, along with a site search for a new settlement. The

Council's Inner Moray Firth Ports and Sites Strategy which was approved in 2006, highlighted the potential for long term candidate locations at Fearn-Kildary, Tore, Brahan and Kirkhill.

Comment: Bravo!

This approach would involve a major site search and infrastructure study to determine what improvements would be required. This would need to take into account the capacity of these communities to accommodate further significant growth and the capacity of the transport networks, including the Clachnaharry and Kessock Bridge crossings.

Comment: We have been told frequently that the A96 corridor framework is the preferred option. For an option to be "preferred", there have to have been other options that have been discarded. We have never been told what these were, or why they were discarded. We have not even been told whether the baseline option to "do nothing" has been discarded. This lack of information entirely discredits the "preferred" status of the A96 corridor framework.

The capacities of the Clachnaharry and the Kessock Bridge crossings have been dealt with above. Both are solvable with modest expenditure by transport standards, and should not be regarded as a bar to development in the areas mentioned.

A major site search and infrastructure study is exactly what is needed to give any semblance of credibility to the development plans that have been proposed. Yes the studies will take time and cost money, but as said earlier in this report there is room for expansion in Inverness to accommodate any growth that occurs whilst these essential studies are carried out. It is hard to imagine in any case that they would take more than 2 years to conduct. It would greatly enhance the credibility of the study conclusion if it was carried out by contractors independent of the Highland Council (saving the study brief), and independent of any developers.

Q.2

Do you agree with our Preferred Option?

No.

If not, please tell us why.

The thought processes that have gone into the production of the MIR, and concepts such as the A96 corridor, are deeply and irremediably flawed. The Highland Council needs to go back to scratch, to begin again with a realistic and supportable projection of population growth (*see below*), and draw up their development plans on that basis. Any other approach risks damaging our economy and our environment, for little or no gain for anyone other than the developers, and also risks changing the very character of the Highlands.

The Highland Council also needs to re-examine how it will support all of the communities in the Highlands. Their present, bizarre, focus on the A96 corridor does exactly the opposite, and will just exacerbate the present trend for communities outwith the Inner Moray Firth to be denuded of their population. These other communities already have the infrastructure necessary to support modest population growth, and such organic

growth will support and sustain essential social services in those communities. Without the necessary support the communities outwith the Inner Moray Firth area will lose essential services as they dip below capitation trigger levels, health services being a prime example. Dispersed growth will sustain the communities and character of the Highlands into the future.

It is not made clear whether in assessing future housing need the HNDA uses the same population growth projections as the "aspirational" ones used in the MIR. The authors must make clear whether this is the case. If it is not, the important question of which growth rate is correct needs to be answered.

Do you prefer either of the stated alternatives?

We strongly recommend that a major site search and infrastructure study into alternatives to the A96 corridor is conducted, and that development plans for the A96 corridor are put on hold until these studies are completed. These studies will take time and cost money, but as said earlier in this report there is room for expansion in Inverness to accommodate any growth that occurs whilst these essential studies are carried out. It is hard to imagine in any case that they would take more than 2 years to conduct. It would greatly enhance the credibility of the study conclusion if it was carried out by contractors independent of the Highland Council (saving the study brief), and independent of any developers.

Are there any other alternatives that should be considered?

It is necessary to examine the "Do nothing" option, and if it is to be ruled out, to publish coherent reasons why it should be ruled out.

Developer Contributions in the A96 Corridor

An important part of the A96 Corridor Framework is the developer contributions protocol. This identifies how the infrastructure improvements we require (including the improvements to the A96, the provision of schools and other facilities and the environmental improvements) will be funded by the private and the public sector. We remain committed to ensuring that a developer contributions protocol exists for the A96 Corridor, and this will be an essential part of any policy set out within the Proposed Plan when it is prepared.

Comment: In principle we are against all developer contributions, as they allow the developers to wield unacceptable power. Our view is that developers should pay for the entire infrastructure, environmental and social consequences of their developments. In the example given above, the developers of Tornagrain should bear the full cost of realigning the A96. If they are not prepared to do so, the development should not be approved. However, recognising that the present regulatory environment allows and indeed encourages such contributions, the question is how much should developers contribute?

The new concept that is being advanced by the Highland Council planners that incremental development should be allowed in the A96 corridor with necessary infrastructure being phased in, is highly dangerous. To give example, if water is to be pumped from Loch Ness to sustain a new community in Tornagrain, are we to believe

that a small-bore pipe would be installed for Phase 1, only for it to be replaced by a larger-bore pipe when the later stages of the development are constructed? Similarly, would a small bore pipe to the waste-water treatment works be installed, to be replaced later by a larger pipe? Such manoeuvres are clearly a nonsense – infrastructure sized for the completed development would have to be installed in one go. Furthermore, it would all have to be installed at the beginning of the development. If the developer is unwilling to contribute to the full infrastructure provision at the beginning of the development, their planning application must be refused.

To work through agreeing "commitments in principle" from developers and other agencies is not credible. Even if "planning agreements" of a contractual nature are agreed, they can be too easily wriggled out of by the developers. Only planning permission based on full infrastructure at Stage 1 of a development will be effective in reducing risk, and no other arrangement should be contemplated.

There are a number of issues with the levels of these developer contributions however, not least the changed economic conditions and the need to more fully engage with our partner agencies like Transport Scotland. We are reviewing the developer contributions protocols to ensure that the delivery of infrastructure remains key to all development, and this work will inform the preparation of the proposed plan.

Comment: Once again, the MIR does not address adequately where the funding to develop this additional infrastructure is to come from. Only a small fraction of the infrastructure development necessary to support growth can be realised through developer contributions. The rest must come from public funds, and we do not have enough of these. (We are, of course, at the start of what is going to be a long and painful recession).

What is our Preferred Option for dealing with these Issues?

We think we should:

- prepare a policy in our Proposed Plan which states that all of the development proposed in the expansion areas across the corridor will contribute to a revised developer contributions protocol. The A96 Corridor Developer Contributions protocol will be an essential requirement for the development proposals in the A96 Corridor; and
- ensure that these developer contribution requirements are reflected in the investment plans of the Council and other infrastructure providers.

What is an alternative to this Preferred Option?

An alternative approach could be to deal with developer contributions on a case by case basis. This would mean that before any large planning applications were agreed by the Council, we would undertake a full assessment of the facilities and infrastructure improvements required. Whilst this could still lead to improvements to infrastructure it could lead to us not being consistent and missing out on opportunities for investment.

Comment: The Highland Council will only be inconsistent and will miss out on investment opportunities if it allows itself to do so. It has the power and duty to set the strategic context for developments. It must exercise that power.

Do you agree with our Preferred Option?

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No.

If not, please tell us why.

Our view is that developers should pay for the entire infrastructure, environmental and social consequences of their developments. In the example given above, the developers of Tornagrain should bear the full cost of realigning the A96. If they are not prepared to do so, the development should not be approved.

The new concept that is being advanced by the Highland Council planners that incremental development should be allowed in the A96 corridor with necessary infrastructure being phased in, is highly dangerous. To give example, if water is to be pumped from Loch Ness to sustain a new community in Tornagrain, are we to believe that a small-bore pipe would be installed for Phase 1, only for it to be replaced by a larger-bore pipe when the later stages of the development are constructed? Similarly, would a small bore pipe to the waste-water treatment works be installed, to be replaced later by a larger pipe? Such manoeuvres are clearly a nonsense – infrastructure sized for the completed development would have to be installed in one go. Furthermore, it would all have to be installed at the beginning of the development. If the developer is unwilling to contribute to the full infrastructure provision at the beginning of the development, their planning application must be refused.

To work through agreeing "commitments in principle" from developers and other agencies is not credible. Even if "planning agreements" of a contractual nature are agreed, they can be too easily wriggled out of by the developers. Only planning permission based on full infrastructure at Stage 1 of a development will be effective in reducing risk, and no other arrangement should be contemplated.

Do you prefer the stated alternative?

Yes.

Are there any other alternatives that should be considered?

Forego all developer contributions, as they allow the developers to wield unacceptable power. The taxpayer will then have to foot the bills for infrastructure in full (rather than partially as they do now), and the people who buy the new houses will find them more affordable because the developer contributions will not be added to the cost of their houses. This will lead to a more forensic and beneficial examination of the worth of proposed developments. It will also mean that those developments that are approved will provide more-affordable houses in accordance with Highland Council policy.

Area Specific Issues

East Inverness

East Inverness is the most important area for the future expansion of the City in the short term.

Comment: The authors need to explain why this is so, compared with development opportunities to the West and the North.

Along with the significant delivery of housing, business and commercial opportunities for the period after 2011, the delivery of the A96-A9 link and the campus site at Beechwood are immediate priorities supported by the Framework.

Comment: This statement is tautological. These proposals are only supported by the framework because the Highland Council wrote them into the framework.

There is a distressing tendency in the A96 framework and in other important Planning Service publications to quote earlier documents as some sort of absolute authority because they have been "approved". This conveniently glosses over the fact that those self-same planners also wrote the earlier documents, and that it is therefore not entirely surprising that they support the views now being advanced. Furthermore, although they may have been "approved", the earlier documents contain dubious statistics and facile conclusions that do not stand up to critical examination. A prime example of this is the use of "aspirational" population growth figures (*see below*).

The map and table below show the detailed proposals for East Inverness. A number of large planning applications are already submitted in this area, and it is important that our Proposed Plan provides guidance as to what can be allowed to be built, particularly in the short term.

Some of the key issues for the East Inverness area are:

- ◆ the development of the Beechwood campus and the provision of access improvements which will allow the development of Inverness College and related activities to progress;

Comment: The future site for the UHI campus has not been determined to be at Beechwood, despite the best efforts of HIE. Furthermore, the proposed UHI has not been granted full university status, and there is at present no sign of this happening.

- ◆ for further work to be carried out with Transport Scotland on the proposals for the A96 – A9 link and other public transport improvements such as Park and Ride, which will improve access to the east of Inverness and help in opening up the A96 Corridor for long term development;

Comment: As above, where exactly is the money to come from for the envisaged developments?

- ◆ the need to work with developers and the community to identify improvements to improve the traffic interchange at Inshes, and to provide certainty to all those who might be affected;

Comment: What is meant by "provide certainty" to all those who might be affected? Why is this beneficial? This must be explained better.

- ◆ And, to identify what level of development might be acceptable in the east Inverness area (including at the Inverness Retail and Business Park) before major improvements are required.

Comment: No! The new concept that is being advanced by the Highland Council planners that incremental development should be allowed with necessary infrastructure being phased in, is highly dangerous. Infrastructure sized for the completed development would have to be installed in one go. Furthermore, it would all have to be installed at the beginning of the development. If the developer is unwilling to contribute to the full gamut infrastructure provision at the beginning of the development, their planning application must be refused.

What is our Preferred Option for dealing with these Issues?

We think we should:

- support early (2011-2016) phases of development at East Inverness before major infrastructure is completed but subject to commitments in principle from the development industry and agencies like Transport Scotland and Scottish Water to ensure that all types of infrastructure (whether that be roads, public transport, schools or community facilities) are in place when they are needed;

Comment: Commitments in principle are dangerous, as they can be reneged upon and the taxpayer has then to pick up the bill. No development must be allowed without contractual obligations, planning agreements, signed by the developers and other agencies.

Infrastructure sized for the completed development would have to be installed in one go. Furthermore, it would all have to be installed at the beginning of the development. If the developer is unwilling to contribute to the full gamut of infrastructure provision at the beginning of the development, their planning application must be refused.

- seek early gains on infrastructure provision associated with the first phase:
- set out the priorities for development in the area in the period from 2016 to 2021; and
- identify how these development priorities can assist in delivering improvements to open space provision, transport improvements (for example the A96-A9 link, park and ride facilities or better provision of walking and cycling networks in the area.

FRAMEWORK OUTCOMES	
Residential Units	3,471 @1,500 high, 1,872 medium, 99 low density
Population	7,250 people
Business	55,000m ²

Employment	3,750 jobs
Retail	22,000m ²
Centre	Centre of 8,000m ²
Education	55,000m ² Campus and 24,000m ² Schools
Leisure	100 bed Hotel & 6,000m ² sports provision
Open Space	13 ha

Comment: The above table requires more substantiation.

For example, the rationale for the ratios of high, medium and low density residential units is not explained. Is there some sort of social policy behind these ratios, or are they simply a reflection of the limited land available? If so, can that land be expanded?

Similarly, the ratio of the (business + retail) square meter area and the number of jobs created seems to generate too many jobs. What is the rationale and evidence behind the ratio? It should be explained in full.

It is particularly noteworthy that the population outcome of 7,250 people, taken with the Nairn figure given below, absorbs most of the population increase for the area forecast by the General Register of Scotland (GROS) (*see below*). This being the case, there is **no need** for a new town at Tornagrain.

What is an alternative to this Preferred Option?

An alternative approach we could adopt would be to only identify the sites in East Inverness area that would be developed in the period up to 2016. Whilst this would have some environmental benefits, it would not reflect the levels of growth needed for the long term, and could result in a more incremental approach to development in the area and increased pressure for development on inappropriate greenspace in and around Inverness.

Comment: If there are environmental benefits from non-development, there must logically be **disbenefits** from allowing development. These disbenefits need to be laid out by the authors, both in this report and in the A96 corridor framework.

The envisaged population outcome of 7,250 people, taken with the Nairn figure given below, absorbs most of the population increase for the area forecast by the General Register of Scotland (GROS) (*see below*). This being the case, there is **no need** for a new town at Tornagrain.

Development will only proceed on an incremental basis, outwith a strategic overview, if the Highland Council allows it to do so. The authors seem to forget that the Council have the ability to set the strategy that will be followed by developers. It has the power – it should use it rather than submit to the demands of the developers.

Furthermore, the Highland Council will only be inconsistent and will miss out on investment opportunities if it allows itself to do so. Again, it has the power and duty to set the strategic context for developments. It must exercise that power.

Do you agree with our Preferred Option?

01

No.

If not, please tell us why.

The authors need to explain why East Inverness is the "most important" area for the future expansion of the City in the short term, compared with development opportunities to the West and the North.

Infrastructure sized for the completed development would have to be installed in one go. Furthermore, it would all have to be installed at the beginning of the development.

Commitments in principle for future infrastructure provision are dangerous, as they can be reneged upon and the taxpayer has then to pick up the bill. No development must be allowed without contractual obligations, planning agreements, signed by the developers and other agencies. If the developer is unwilling to contribute to the full gamut of infrastructure provision at the beginning of the development, their planning application must be refused.

The future site for the UHI campus has not been determined to be at Beechwood, despite the best efforts of HIE. Furthermore, the proposed UHI has not been granted full university status, and there is at present no sign of this happening.

Do you prefer the stated alternative?

We would give it partial support. We believe it is essential to look elsewhere than East Inverness, to unlink the development there from the A96 corridor, and to provide reasoned arguments why alternate sites should not be preferred.

Are there any other alternatives that should be considered?

The Council should consider development in the other nearby areas: as pointed out earlier, there is plenty of relatively-flat undeveloped land on the West side of Inverness toward Lochend, and also to the North-West of Inverness toward Kirkhill. The hills to the South-West of Inverness are gentle in slope, as illustrated by the present housing developments, and there is an abundance of suitable land in the Dores direction.

We strongly recommend that a major site search and infrastructure study into alternatives to the A96 corridor (and the associated East Inverness proposals) is conducted, and that development plans for the A96 corridor and for East Inverness are put on hold until these studies are completed. These studies will take time and cost money, but as said earlier in this report there is room for expansion in Inverness to accommodate any growth that occurs whilst these essential studies are carried out. It is hard to imagine in any case that they would take more than 2 years to conduct. It would greatly enhance the credibility of the study conclusion if it was carried out by contractors

independent of the Highland Council (saving the study brief), and independent of any developers.

Nairn

The expansion of Nairn is an important element of the A96 Corridor Framework.

Comment: This only the case because the authors wrote it into the corridor framework. If the basic thesis behind the corridor framework is unsound, as argued herein, then the expansion of Nairn is neither required nor desirable.

The map and table below shows the areas of land that are identified within the A96 Corridor Framework. The development of these growth areas are closely tied in to the provision of a much needed bypass of the town. The phasing of development in Nairn will be important. Some land is identified in the current Nairnshire Local Plan for housing development at Lochloy and Sandown, and these are still considered to be the priority areas for development. The land identified for future growth to the west and south of Nairn can however also contribute to meeting housing demand in the area, and this will have to happen in a way which delivers the community facilities and services that Nairn will need in the future.

Comment: There is not the housing demand (*see below*) to justify further development of Nairn. It follows that if Nairn is not expanded further, further community facilities and services will not be required.

We are working with Transport Scotland on the delivery of the Nairn by-pass, although its delivery is likely to be some years away.

Comment: As stated above, the MIR does not address adequately where the funding to develop this additional infrastructure is to come from. Only a small fraction of the infrastructure development necessary to support growth can be realised through developer contributions. The rest must come from public funds, and we do not have enough of these. (We are, of course, at the start of what is going to be a long and painful recession).

Is it not time for the authors to admit that whereas the desired bypass is indeed identified as necessary by Transport Scotland, there is no money to implement it, and nor is there likely to be until the Firth of Forth crossing and other major central-belt projects are completed? (As a representative from Transport Scotland said at a public meeting the other day, not before 2016 at the earliest). It is pie-in-the-sky to imagine that the bypass will be funded in the foreseeable future, and extremely important to recognise that no further development should be contemplated in Nairn until it is.

It is important that the future development sites in Nairn contribute towards the ultimate delivery of the by-pass.

Comment: One of the most important factors is to determine the line of the bypass now, and hold to it, not allowing any development that would compromise it. Sadly this was not done when the Firhall development was allowed, and the mistake must not be

repeated. We are told by the Convenor that the present "engineering" line is not a material consideration for future developments. This engineering line could therefore be built over, and has no practical use in securing a line.

Some of the key issues for Nairn are:

- ◆ the need to confirm in the Local Development Plan the proposal for the town bypass and the requirement for longer term development proposals to contribute to its provision;

Comment: The bypass is needed now. It follows that shorter-term developments must also contribute to its provision, including Sandown and Delnies.

That said, developer contributions will only scratch the surface of the multi-million pound (reportedly £18M) cost of building a bypass. Just how do the authors propose that this cost should be funded? If they cannot do this, they had better be honest with the Nairn community and make clear that it is not going to happen for a long time, perhaps 20 years or more.

If it is indeed the case that the bypass cannot be afforded, then we had better stop developing Nairn now, because the traffic hold-ups are already intolerable at peak times.

- ◆ to ensure that longer term proposals around Nairn enhance the distinctive role and historical development of the town;

Comment: Nairn depends on tourism for its viability as an independent community. How can it aid tourism for Nairn to be surrounded by housing estates? A viable option that must be considered is to leave Nairn the size that it is. This is also consistent with academic studies that reveal that community spirit is greatest in towns the size that Nairn has already reached.

- ◆ for new development to complement efforts to regenerate the town centre; and
- ◆ to work with the community and developers in the area on a realistic and deliverable phasing of development, with community facilities, education and open space improvements being central to delivery.

Comment: The infrastructure developments must be central, and must be delivered before any further expansion of housing.

Why is this principle of infrastructure provision being central to delivery not applied more rigorously to the proposals for the other parts of the A96 corridor framework?

FRAMEWORK OUTCOMES

Residential Units	4,629 @ 1,542 high, 2,873 medium, 99 low density
Population	9,700 people
Business	78,000m ²
Industry	50,000 m ²

Employment	5,000 jobs
Retail	7,000m ²
Centres	2 District Centres of 11,000m ² & 4,000m ²
Education	18,000m ² of Schools
Leisure	2 x 50 bed Hotel and 1 x 100 bed Hotel
Open Space	Circa 165 ha (including Country Park)

Comment: The above table requires more substantiation.

For example, the rationale for the ratios of high, medium and low density residential units is not explained. Is there some sort of social policy behind these ratios, or are they simply a reflection of the limited land available?

Similarly, the ratio of the (business + retail) square meter area and the number of jobs created seems to generate too many jobs. What is the rationale and evidence behind the ratio? It should be explained in full.

It is particularly noteworthy that the population outcome of 9,700 people absorbs a large part of the population increase for the area forecast by the General Register of Scotland (GROS) (*see below*). Taken with the Inverness East figure (*see above*) this shows that there is **no need** for a new town at Tornagrain.

Moreover, Nairn is in danger of becoming just a dormitory town for Inverness if the proposed housing development goes ahead without increasing employment opportunities in the town. The resulting commuters will place additional traffic loading on an already challenged A96. These proposed housing developments are not, therefore, sustainable.

What is our Preferred Option for dealing with these Issues?

We think we should:

- reflect the existing Local Plan sites within the updated strategy for the town including a broad corridor where the bypass can be delivered;

Comment: The line of the bypass must be identified now and sealed from any development that would compromise it. We are told by the Convenor that the present "engineering" line is not a material consideration for future developments. This engineering line could therefore be built over, and has no practical use in securing a line.

- identify the expansion sites at Delnies and Nairn South in the Proposed Plan;

Comment: Why is it necessary to include these areas when those already identified for development (together with East Inverness) are quite sufficient to accommodate GROS population growth projections?

- seek views from people on the type and mix of development identified in these areas;
- identify where development should be allowed to take place in the 2011-2021 period on all of the expansion sites; and
- identify where infrastructure improvements are required both before and after the by-pass is physically delivered and how these development sites fit with the long term proposals for the by-pass itself.

What is an alternative to this Preferred Option?

The alternative to this approach is to restrict development in Nairn to those sites already identified in the existing Local Plan, until such time as they are completed.

Comment: In our view this is the only logical path to take. There will be sufficient housing provision to accommodate the population increase forecast by GROS without including Delnies and South Nairn.

Only then would development on the sites at Delnies or Nairn South or other small scale extensions to the town be appropriate. Whilst this approach would allow control of development, it might lead to a restriction in choice for new housing in Nairn, and reduce the opportunity there is to deliver the Nairn bypass.

Comment: The authors need to explain why the opportunity to deliver the Nairn bypass will be reduced. Developers are at best only going to contribute a very small fraction of the £18M cost of the bypass, so their small contributions will be neither here or there in terms of the "opportunity".

It is worth emphasising that developers do not contribute in any real sense to infrastructure provision. They pass the additional cost that has been agreed with the Highland Council straight on to the purchasers of the new houses. To therefore argue that the developer is somehow out of pocket, has made a contribution, is naive. In this particular case these purchasers could justifiably argue that since a bypass is required now, before they come to the town, it is entirely unreasonable that they alone should be taxed to contribute to the cost.

It might also lead to an incremental approach to development.

Development will only proceed on an incremental basis, outwith a strategic overview, if the Highland Council allows it to do so. The authors seem to forget that the Council have the ability to set the strategy that will be followed by developers. It has the power – it should use it rather than submit to the demands of the developers.

Furthermore, the Highland Council will only be inconsistent and will miss out on investment opportunities if it allows itself to do so. Again, it has the power and duty to set the strategic context for developments. It must exercise that power.

Do you agree with our Preferred Option?

05

No.

If not, please tell us why.

We have been told frequently that the A96 corridor framework is the preferred option. For an option to be "preferred", there have to have been other options that have been discarded. We have never been told what these were, or why they were discarded. We have not even been told whether the baseline option to "do nothing" has been discarded. This lack of information entirely discredits the "preferred" status of the A96 corridor framework, including how it pertains to the town of Nairn.

The Nairn bypass is needed now. It follows that shorter-term developments must also contribute to its provision, including Sandown and Delnies.

That said, developer contributions will only scratch the surface of the multi-million pound (reportedly £18M) cost of building a bypass. Just how do the authors propose that this cost should be funded? If they cannot do this, they had better be honest with the Nairn community and make clear that it is not going to happen for a long time, perhaps 20 years or more.

If it is indeed the case that the bypass cannot be afforded, then we had better stop developing Nairn now, because the traffic hold-ups are already intolerable at peak times. The authors need to explain why the opportunity to deliver the Nairn bypass will be reduced by constraining development.

Moreover, Nairn is in danger of becoming just a dormitory town for Inverness if the proposed housing development goes ahead without increasing employment opportunities in the town. The resulting commuters will place additional traffic loading on an already challenged A96. These proposed housing developments are not, therefore, sustainable.

Do you prefer the stated alternative?

Yes.

Are there any other alternatives that should be considered?

It is necessary to examine the "Do nothing" option, and if it is to be ruled out, to publish coherent reasons why it should be ruled out.

Tornagrain

Tornagrain is a new settlement proposal in the centre of the Corridor, capable of providing almost 5000 houses over the next 30-40 years. It has been selected as one of the Scottish Government's Sustainable Community Initiative proposals.

Comment: Tornagrain was only selected by the Scottish Executive because the Highland Council promoted strongly the case for its inclusion. The Scottish Executive did not work out this solution for itself. The fact that it has been included in the Initiative does not confer upon it any particular credibility, which, as will be shown below, is non-existent.

The potential for a new settlement in the Inner Moray Firth was identified in the Highland Structure Plan. Tornagrain was specifically identified as a potential location for a new settlement as part of the A96 Corridor Framework work.

Comment: Both the Highland Structure Plan and the A96 corridor framework were written by the same department that has produced this MIR. It is therefore hardly surprising that Tornagrain continues to be promoted in this report.

As stated above, there is a distressing tendency in the A96 framework and in other important Planning Service publications to quote earlier documents as some sort of absolute authority because they have been "approved". This conveniently glosses over the fact that those self-same planners also wrote the earlier documents, and that it is therefore not entirely surprising that they support the views now being advanced. Furthermore, although they may have been "approved", the earlier documents contain dubious statistics and facile conclusions that do not stand up to critical examination. A prime example of this is the use of "aspirational" population growth figures (*see below*).

A planning application has now been submitted for the new settlement.

Comment: As we understand it, the application that has been made is for outline planning permission only. It has yet to be determined, and there is good reason to believe that it will be refused.

The principle of a new settlement at Tornagrain is supported as part of the long term development strategy for this area.

Comment: By whom is it supported? Are those who support it fully aware of the questionable nature of the arguments and statistics used to justify it?

The design principles are based around the delivery of new homes, jobs and services within a compact and sustainable town. This will increase the choice of locations within the A96 Corridor and support the case for transport and access improvements.

Comment: What is the relevance of there being more location choices? The authors should explain this. Also, this MIR fails to address who is going to fund the transport and access improvements. Once again, the MIR does not address adequately where the funding to develop this additional infrastructure is to come from. Only a small fraction of the infrastructure development necessary to support growth can be realised through developer contributions. The rest must come from public funds, and we do not have enough of these. (We are, of course, at the start of what is going to be a long and painful recession).

It will also divert development pressure from more inappropriate locations and therefore allow for the retention and creation of green space and green networks.

Comment: What could be more inappropriate than building Tornagrain on prime agricultural land that is an essential part of the green belt between Inverness and Nairn?

Some of the key issues that need to be addressed in relation to Tornagrain are:

- ◆ the detailed phasing of development to ensure that infrastructure is provided and that the design principles are delivered in the forms that are currently envisaged;

Comment: As explained at length above, the infrastructure to support the whole of the development must be provided first.

- ◆ the linkages between the potential dualling of the A96 and the design and delivery of Tornagrain.

Comment: As stated above, the MIR does not address adequately where the funding to develop this additional infrastructure is to come from. Only a small fraction of the infrastructure development necessary to support growth can be realised through developer contributions. The rest must come from public funds, and we do not have enough of these. (We are, of course, at the start of what is going to be a long and painful recession). The full Tornagrain proposal involves substantial realignment of the A96. Just who do the developers imagine is going to pay for this realignment?

What is our Preferred Option for dealing with these Issues?

We think we should:

- support the role of Tornagrain as a means of meeting the long term housing needs of the area;

Comment: It is clear that Tornagrain is not needed, because the long-term housing needs of the area have been significantly overstated. As illustrated above, the development of East Inverness and other areas surrounding Inverness, together with modest growth at Nairn, has the potential to more than accommodate the population increases forecast by GROS. This is without population growth elsewhere in the region.

It is utterly naive to advance that landowners who are pressing to be allowed to build new communities are doing so in response to forthcoming population increases. They are doing so because they see an opportunity to make money. There is no philanthropic or altruistic rationale, simply an understandable wish to better themselves. The Highland Council must distance itself from such opportunism, and base the Council's decisions and plans strictly on credible evidence of need. At the moment there is no credible evidence of need for a new settlement at Tornagrain.

Moreover, Tornagrain will become just a dormitory town for Inverness if the proposed housing development goes ahead without increasing employment opportunities. The resulting commuters will place additional traffic loading on an already challenged A96. This proposed new town is not, therefore, sustainable.

- identify the safeguards that must be put in place to deliver the services and facilities that a new settlement such as this will require;
- and, support early (2011-2016) phases of development at Tornagrain before major infrastructure is completed but subject to commitments in principle from the development industry and agencies like Transport Scotland and Scottish Water to ensure that all types of infrastructure (whether that be roads, public transport, schools or community facilities) are in place when they are needed. This phasing strategy will be an important part of our Proposed Plan.

Comment: Commitments in principle for future infrastructure provision are dangerous, as they can be reneged upon and the taxpayer has then to pick up the bill. No development must be allowed without contractual obligations, planning agreements, signed by the developers and other agencies. If the developer is unwilling to contribute to the full gamut of infrastructure provision at the beginning of the development, their application for outline planning permission must be refused. To work through agreeing "commitments in principle" from developers and other agencies is not credible. Only planning permission based on full infrastructure at Stage 1 of a development will be effective in reducing risk, and no other arrangement should be contemplated.

Our view is that developers should pay for the entire infrastructure, environmental and social consequences of their developments. In this example, the developers of Tornagrain should bear the full cost of realigning the A96. If they are not prepared to do so, the development should not be approved, even in principle.

The new concept that is being advanced by the Highland Council planners that incremental development should be allowed in the A96 corridor with necessary infrastructure being phased in is highly dangerous. To give example, if water is to be pumped from Loch Ness to sustain the new community in Tornagrain, are we to believe that a small-bore pipe would be installed for Phase 1, only for it to be replaced by a larger-bore pipe when the later stages of the development are constructed? Similarly, would a small bore pipe to the waste-water treatment works be installed, to be replaced later by a larger pipe? Such manoeuvres are clearly a nonsense – infrastructure sized for the completed development would have to be installed in one go. Furthermore, it would all have to be installed at the beginning of the development. If the developer is unwilling to contribute to the full infrastructure provision at the beginning of the development, their planning application must be refused.

The Council has not identified any reasonable alternatives to the Preferred Option on this issue.

Comment: Why not? See the answer to Question 6, immediately below.

Do you agree with our Preferred Option?

0.6

No.

If not, please tell us why.

Fundamentally, the need for Tornagrain, or for a similar settlement elsewhere, is not supported by the population growth forecasts published by GROS. By adopting "aspirational" population growth figures the Highland Council has artificially inflated the need for new housing and new settlements. This is insupportable, and it is clear that Tornagrain is not needed because the long-term housing needs of the area have been significantly overstated. As illustrated above, the development of East Inverness and other areas surrounding Inverness, together with modest growth at Nairn, has the potential to

more than accommodate the population increases forecast by GROS. This is without population growth elsewhere in the region.

It is utterly naive to advance that landowners who are pressing to be allowed to build new communities are doing so in response to forthcoming population increases. They are doing so because they see an opportunity to make money. There is no philanthropic or altruistic rationale, simply an understandable wish to better themselves. The Highland Council must distance itself from such opportunism, and base the Council's decisions and plans strictly on credible evidence of need. At the moment there is no credible evidence of need for a new settlement at Tornagrain.

Furthermore, we have been told frequently that the A96 corridor framework is the preferred option. For an option to be "preferred", there have to have been other options that have been discarded. We have never been told what these were, or why they were discarded. We have not even been told whether the baseline option to "do nothing" has been discarded. This lack of information entirely discredits the "preferred" status of the A96 corridor framework, and also the whole concept of a new settlement at Tornagrain.

As stated above, the MIR does not address adequately where the funding to develop the additional infrastructure required for Tornagrain is to come from. Only a small fraction of the infrastructure development necessary to support growth can be realised through developer contributions. The rest must come from public funds, and we do not have enough of these. (We are, of course, at the start of what is going to be a long and painful recession). The full Tornagrain proposal involves substantial realignment of the A96. Just who do the developers imagine is going to pay for this realignment?

Commitments in principle for future infrastructure provision are dangerous, as they can be reneged upon and the taxpayer has then to pick up the bill. No development must be allowed without contractual obligations, planning agreements, signed by the developers and other agencies. If the developer is unwilling to contribute to the full gamut of infrastructure provision at the beginning of the development, their application for outline planning permission must be refused. To work through agreeing "commitments in principle" from developers and other agencies is not credible. Only planning permission based on full infrastructure at Stage 1 of a development will be effective in reducing risk, and no other arrangement should be contemplated.

Moreover, Tornagrain will become just a dormitory town for Inverness if the proposed housing development goes ahead without increasing employment opportunities. The resulting commuters will place additional traffic loading on an already challenged A96. This proposed new town is not, therefore, sustainable.

Are there any other alternatives that should be considered?

It must also be said again that a major site search and infrastructure study of alternatives is what is needed to give any semblance of credibility to the development plans that have been proposed. Yes the studies will take time and cost money, but as said earlier in this report there is room for expansion in Inverness to accommodate any growth that occurs whilst these essential studies are carried out. It is hard to imagine in any case that they would take more than 2 years to conduct. It would greatly enhance the credibility of the study conclusion if it was carried out by contractors independent of the Highland Council (saving the study brief), and independent of any developers.