

Highland Council

A96 Corridor Masterplan
Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Non-Technical Summary

January 2007

Halcrow Group Limited

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1. Introduction

In accordance with the Scottish National Planning Framework, the Highland Structure Plan and the Inverness and Nairnshire Local Plans, the Highland Council commissioned Halcrow Group Ltd to produce a Masterplan for the long-term development of the A96 Corridor from Inverness to Nairn; identified as the key economic development zone in the Highlands region. The development of the Masterplan has undergone extensive consultations and is accompanied by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), for which this document provides the Non-Technical Summary (NTS).

It is envisaged that the A96 Corridor Masterplan will provide a framework for the redevelopment of the A96 Corridor between Inverness and Nairn. The Masterplan will not provide the precise details of developments to come forward; this will be for individual planning applications to provide. The Masterplan is to be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), and subsequently integrated within the Local Development Plan, at which stage, it will become a material consideration in the determination of any planning application for the area.

The SEA of the Masterplan provides information as to the likely environmental effects of development coming forward as envisaged by the Masterplan. However, the exact detail of any potential effects will depend on the detail of the proposals. On this basis, there is likely to be a requirement for separate environmental assessments for individual planning applications, potentially including full EIA as required under the environmental Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 1999.

The SEA of the Masterplan identifies those environmental issues which are most likely to be affected by redevelopment proposals and should assist in determining an appropriate scope for any EIA, or other environmental issue-specific assessments, which may be required as part of future planning applications coming forward under the Masterplan.

2. Objectives of the Masterplan

The A96 Corridor Masterplan is designed to accommodate future expected population growth of up to 30,000 people by the year 2041 and, at their Planning, Development, Europe and Tourism (PDET) Committee in August 2005, the Highland Council established clear policy outcomes for the Corridor comprising:

- Population growth of 20-30,000 people over the next 30-50 years,
- Preferred locations for settlements, to be developed post-2011,
 - a) Polar growth – East Inverness and Nairn expansion (approx. 16,000 population)
 - b) Village consolidation – 1-2,000 population
 - c) New settlements – Whiteness and Tornagrain (approx. 14,000 population)
- A new community/ resort at Whiteness (Ardersier Fabrication Yard) for around 3,000 people,
- Growth of existing smaller settlements in the Corridor as allocated in the relevant development plan accommodating up to 3,000 people,
- Review the scope for long term development at Nairn South and Inverness East incorporating transport improvements that include dualling the A96 and a strategy to enhance landscape/ heritage features supplemented by recreational facilities, including a network of cycle and walkways,
- Growth should respect the high quality environmental aspects of the A96 Corridor, which include significant natural, built and historic assets, with presumptions against development that will negatively impact upon the integrity of the many designated and protected sites within the area.

The primary objective of the A96 Corridor Masterplan is therefore to accommodate expected population growth of around 30,000 people over a period of 30 – 50 years, in a sustainable manner, whilst maintaining distinctive natural, built and historic features and the green character of the area. The Masterplan provides a high level strategic framework that directs development to meet the desired outcomes listed above.

Halcrow Group was commissioned to take forward the development of the Masterplan and the approach developed is, so far, the most rigorous and advanced process undertaken in Scotland. As such, the A96 Corridor Masterplan has sought to avoid negative environmental impacts wherever possible and to minimise effects associated with population growth.

3. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is required by European Directive (2001/42/EC), which was transposed into current Scottish legislation under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 (the SEA Act), which came into force in February 2006. Through the Act, SEA processes are intended to improve the contribution that the strategy being appraised makes to the achievement of sustainable development, in conjunction with other relevant policies and strategies, whilst at the same time minimising adverse and maximising positive environmental effects.

Implementation of the A96 Corridor Masterplan, to accommodate expected population growth, is likely to have significant environmental effects and the need for SEA to accompany the Draft Masterplan, was identified directly by the Highland Council. Halcrow are responsible for the management of the SEA, which is used to ensure that environmental impacts are fully appraised and taken into account during the planning and decision making process. The application of SEA processes to the Draft Masterplan highlights those features that stand up to detailed scrutiny and leads to the improvement of those that do not. In this way, implementation of the Masterplan is improved and the SEA proves useful in developing guidance, realistic indicators and monitoring methods, as well as demonstrating positive action for future reviews.

The SEA Act requires the production of an Environmental Report (ER) documenting the process, as a means to aid transparency in decision making by public bodies. The ER should contain the following:

- Information on the strategic context for the plan/ policy in question and a summary of the environmental objectives of the plan,
- A description of the baseline environment for the area concerned,
- Information on the potential environmental impacts expected as a result of the plan and the benefits that the plan can provide,
- A record of the environmental appraisal processes used to assess impacts and benefits,
- An outline of mitigation or enhancement measures identified,
- Proposals for indicators and monitoring, and
- A Non-Technical Summary.

In conjunction with the Draft Masterplan, the Environmental Report must be circulated for consultation comment; after which comments and opinions expressed through consultation should be taken into account in the preparation of the final Masterplan. The 'responsible authority', in this case the Highland Council, are then required to produce a

post adoption statement outlining how the Environmental Report and consultation comments were taken into account in the finalisation of the Masterplan.

4. A96 Corridor Masterplan SEA Processes

The scope of the A96 Corridor Masterplan SEA is limited to direct consideration of Urban Frameworks developed for Inverness and Nairn, and the Green Framework for the Corridor as a whole. The SEA does not consider proposals for future development around Inverness Airport, Whiteness and Tornagrain, as these private developments are subject to further and separate detailed assessment and planning consent, outwith the scope of the A96 Corridor masterplanners' remit. Similarly, proposals for village growth are not given specific consideration. Cumulative effects of these developments are acknowledged.

In the A96 Corridor Masterplan SEA, the potential effects assessed relate principally to the overall development proposals within the A96 Corridor. The key aims of the SEA process were:

- To assess related strategies, develop a coherent background for assessment identifying synergies, potential conflicts, and environmental obligations.
- To analyse the Masterplan Vision and Design Principles to identify potential conflicts and environmental implications.
- To document the outcomes of Masterplan option appraisals conducted through extensive consultation processes.
- To analyse the provisions of proposed Urban and Green Frameworks and review headline features of the preferred options against SEA objectives.
- To develop recommendations for mitigating negative and enhancing positive impacts associated with the Masterplan.
- Propose relevant SEA indicators that can be used to monitor environmental performance against baseline conditions.
- Production of an Environmental Report documenting assessment methodologies and recommendations for the implementation phase of the Masterplan.

A series of assessments were undertaken that considered scoping responses from the statutory consultees (SEPA, SNH and Historic Scotland) and assessed the environmental objectives of related plans and programmes, which could impact upon the development of the A96 Corridor Masterplan. Following these initial assessments, an objective baseline was compiled to identify existing environmental conditions, pressures and problems within the Corridor study area. These considerations then informed the refinement of SEA objectives used in appraisal processes.

SEA objectives form the basis for the appraisal of the Urban and Green Frameworks within the Masterplan. SEA objectives were designed to focus on matters that the Masterplan could influence (either directly or indirectly). They provide the starting point for ensuring that SEA issues are at the heart of, and are fully integrated into, the A96 Corridor Masterplan.

5. Public Consultation/ Option Development

During the Masterplanning and SEA process, framework options for Inverness East and Nairn were produced through a stakeholder consultation process, Collaboration for Success (CfS). This process allowed governmental agencies, community groups and private stakeholders the opportunity to participate in the development of five options (alternatives) for each Urban Framework, which reflected the range of issues, concerns and opportunities represented by the varied groups.

The framework options/ alternatives were sanitised and digitised by technical staff to allow ease of comparison across a range of indicators. Updated options were then subject to a second round of CfS workshop events, where each alternative framework was assessed in the context of:

- **Accessibility** – Examining the range of transport options available including new road and rail infrastructure, public transportation links and improved pedestrian and cycle connectivity.
- **Economy** – Promoting a strong local economy based on local job creation, education & lifelong learning opportunities and set within realistic market ambitions.
- **Community** – Assessing the options with regards to social justice, crime prevention planning, health and safety and the opportunity to create distinct and attractive places.
- **Environment** – Looking at the opportunities to create quality urban design and the sustainable integration of land use, as well as how the development options would influence waste disposal and energy use, pollution reduction and mitigate for landscape and ecological impacts.

In addition to the above, the Highland Council organised and ran various public consultations on the Masterplan development options, as well as conducting review meetings of the Highland Council Planning, Development, Europe and Tourism (PDET) Committee to assess the progression and suitability of the preferred options.

This process resulted in a detailed 'Preferred Option' for each of the East Inverness and Nairn development frameworks. An outline of a suggested Green Framework was assessed throughout the public consultations, highlighting features and concerns that were taken into consideration in the refinement of the finalised Green Framework option.

6. Summary of Environmental Context

Assuming a worst case scenario, identified significant environmental impacts likely to be associated with population increase in the area would include:

- Unmanaged population growth of up to 30,000 people exacerbates various environmental problems associated with urban air pollution, wastewater treatment and water demand, unrestricted land use change, unsuitable development and associated impacts upon climatic factors, landscape quality, local biodiversity and health infrastructures.
- Piecemeal development leads to increased habitat fragmentation and deterioration of green wedges and wildlife corridors, without planned provision to maintain and enhance wildlife routes, leading to increased species loss from the area and potential damage to protected sites and species in the area.
- Population growth leads to undue pressures on water supply and wastewater facilities in the absence of strategic planning, exacerbating existing biodiversity and water quality concerns with associated negative impacts on Bathing Waters, Shellfish and riverine and marine biodiversity.
- Similarly problematic for waste infrastructure and recycling facilities, leading to continued reliance on landfill and incineration with associated impacts upon climate emissions.
- Potential development within floodplains leads to continued reliance on expensive and environmentally damaging flood defences.
- Deterioration of the extensive, rich historic environment, with unmanaged development and unsuitable re-use of buildings potentially leading to increased rates of damage, destruction and loss.
- Increased levels of traffic on key routes could produce overspill onto peripheral routes at peak times.
- Increased congestion at identified bottlenecks on the A96 trunk route will significantly increase levels of local urban air pollution in Nairn and Inverness.
- Marginalisation of Nairn town centre as people travel to Inverness and other regional centres for work, shopping and entertainment.
- Encroachment of unmanaged and unsuitable development impacts upon local landscapes, townscapes and seascapes.
- Local populations move on as amenity levels drop, services become oversubscribed and the current good quality of life deteriorates.

Therefore, the negative environmental impacts associated with large population increase represent the major significant effects facing the A96 Corridor, and the Masterplan is a key mitigation tool in addressing associated problems, to minimise and control negative effects. Following a review of scoping responses by the statutory consultees, coupled with an assessment of the environmental objectives of relevant policies and guidance and the completion of a baseline study, the A96 Corridor Masterplan environmental objectives can be defined as:

- Producing strategic frameworks for the future development (post 2011) of Inverness, Nairn and the A96 Corridor between the urban areas, to sustainably accommodate population increases of up to 30,000 people.
- To manage and mitigate negative impacts that such population increases can present, with respect to water, climate, air quality, human health and biodiversity.
- Introducing a strategic approach to development for the period to 2041 that safeguards the environmental qualities of the area, including protected sites and important natural, built and historic features.
- Maintaining the overall landscape quality of the area, safeguarding critical views, and providing connections between places accessible by non-motorised means and local wildlife.
- The A96 Corridor Masterplan must manage urban development, such that it is compatible with the natural heritage setting, retaining green spaces, wildlife corridors and access links to the surrounding countryside.
- Equally important is provision within developments for implementing the Highland Waste Strategy, establishing Core Path Networks, including footpaths around settlements and increased facilities for wider countryside access.
- Maintaining the historic environment (with enhancement, where possible), by presuming against development that would negatively affect historic sites.

7. Mitigation

It must be acknowledged that the key benefit of the A96 Corridor Masterplan, as a whole, is the long-term, strategic mitigation of potentially significant effects associated with population growth. The Masterplan and the SEA have taken account of the negative implications of growth and employed a hierarchical approach to mitigation:

Avoid – Minimise – Remedy – Compensate – Direct – Enhance

Where impacts were identified, and unavoidable, means to mitigate, remedy or compensate by, for example, designing in wildlife and landscape corridors, or compensating for increased urbanisation by developing a Green Framework, which safeguards considerable areas of countryside and woodland from development. The Masterplan also addresses identified impacts by directing development to the most appropriate locations (in conjunction with consultations, as discussed), providing capacity assessments and recommendations for phased development of utilities infrastructure and roads.

8. SEA Assessments

The use of matrices provides a systematic and transparent method of demonstrating which features and details have been considered and the use of colour coding allows readers to easily identify and compare effects across assessments, to ensure consistency of approach. Colour coding is used in all matrices to help clearly identify which features are positive and which have potentially negative effects. Assessments were carried out using matrices in three stages:

1. The first considers the compatibility of selected SEA Objectives with the stated A96 Corridor Masterplan Vision and 'Smart Growth' Development Principles. These matrices provide a high level assessment of the Masterplan Objectives against SEA Objectives and are provided in Appendix C.
2. The second considers the Urban and Green Frameworks by analysing potential effects on each of the required SEA topics and assessing how the Masterplan addresses or accounts for effects, in accordance with the selected SEA objectives.

Full assessment matrices are provided in Appendix D. These matrices consider potential significant effects (positive and negative), temporal effects (long/ short term/ permanent/ temporary/ ongoing), as well secondary/ indirect and cumulative effects, as required by SEA regulations.

3. A final set of matrices considers the headline features of the Preferred Options for both East Inverness and Nairn. These matrices are provided in Appendix E.

9. Overview of Assessment Results

Testing the compatibility of the selected SEA objectives with the stated Vision and Development Principles for the Masterplan suggests that the Masterplan Vision accords with all the SEA objectives. However, there is potential for conflict when considering biodiversity, habitats, soil and water effects associated with population increase, land take and built development.

Potential conflicts are also evident when considering the wider impacts of population increase, job creation and road development on air quality and climate emissions. The assessment highlights that population growth in the area is a given, and that these potential conflicts cannot be directly resolved through the provisions of the Masterplan. However, the Masterplan is a key tool in managing and mitigating the negative effects.

Overall, the SEA objectives and the Masterplan Vision and Development Principles reflect and support each other in achieving the aim of sustainably managing the effects of growth.

Summary of Urban Frameworks Assessment

Potential Significant Effects	Mitigation Measures	Residual Effect
<p>Biodiversity, Flora & Fauna</p> <p>Loss of greenfield sites to development and associated impacts on local biodiversity, habitat connectivity and protected sites</p>	<p>The Masterplan works to accommodate growth and to effectively manage associated negative impacts upon local biodiversity concerns by providing ample green spaces, buffer zones (green wedges), safeguarding protected areas, woodland and countryside</p> <p>All detailed development proposals with the potential to affect European protected sites are required to be subject to Appropriate Assessments under the provisions of the EU Habitats Directive, which requires consideration of effects on the management and integrity of the site in question</p>	<p>Some permanent loss of local greenfield space compensated by urban development of greenspace and the quid-pro-quo protection and enhancement of extensive areas throughout the A96 Corridor</p>
<p>Human Health & Population</p> <p>Rapidly increasing local populations and in-migration can lead to displacement and social exclusion for resident populations without sufficient provision for affordable housing and accessible health and social care</p>	<p>The Masterplan affords opportunities for local healthcare provision, education (life-long learning incorporated in provision for primary schools, high schools and further education facilities), social and community services (in response to demand), improved public transport infrastructure, community access and employment options as well as the protection of cultural heritage and the historic environment</p>	<p>The Masterplan outlines proposals that direct development to the most suitable locations (after considerable consultation processes) that are expected to lead to the realisation of viable neighbourhoods and sustainable patterns of phased development</p> <p>Viable neighbourhoods includes the provision of affordable housing to meet the Highland Council's target of 25% provision in areas of housing stress</p>
<p>Soils</p> <p>Soil resources include archaeological soils containing remains and a record of past human activity, development could lead to the loss of some of these areas/ features</p> <p>Some land take is necessary to accommodate expected population growth leading to concerns over the potential effects of land use change</p>	<p>Following consultations with Historic Scotland, the Masterplan highlights identified historic features and affords protection from development, in association with Highland Council policies that presume against development that negatively affects historic features</p> <p>Rural land take has been minimised throughout the Masterplanning process with key development areas now concentrated around the urban fringes of Nairn and Inverness</p>	<p>Minor negative impact of development overall, however the Masterplan works to minimise negative effects by assigning multiple urban areas for greenspace, as well as identifying much of the A96 Corridor hinterland as of value and worth protecting</p>
<p>Water</p> <p>Risk of pollution affecting watercourses that leads to negative impacts upon high quality protected marine, coastal and inland standing waters</p> <p>Risk of increased populations overloading current wastewater treatment works leading to increased incidences of sewage contamination/ overflow</p> <p>Increased populations will lead to increased water demand that could outweigh current capacity levels</p>	<p>The Masterplan directs the framework for development proposals and provides fully assessed capacity studies for local water supply and treatment, an assessment of SUDS methodologies, as well as directing future development away from flood plain areas, as part of the fundamental planning approach</p> <p>The Masterplan provides a strategic approach with effective phasing of development with water supply infrastructure and waste water treatment that replaces existing small sites to improve the local water environment</p>	<p>Minor negative impact of development, as increased construction and population can be expected to impact upon water quality at some point, however the Masterplan limits these effects through consideration of floodplains and increased planting, which can help reduce pollution impacts</p> <p>Overall long term effect is expected to be neutral with some potential for short term impacts if development is not properly phased with water supply and treatment infrastructure</p> <p>The Masterplan recommends effective co-ordination and delivery mechanisms based on joint ventures across the A96 Corridor</p>

Potential Significant Effects	Mitigation Measures	Residual Effect
<p>Air</p> <p>Increasing populations will lead to increased transport emissions – either by increasing private car use or through increased demand for public transport</p> <p>Significant negative effect on overall urban air quality to be expected from increased population</p>	<p>The Masterplan addresses these issues by providing for improved public transport infrastructure (bus lanes and rail upgrades, park and ride facilities, accessible high density housing making routes more viable for transport operators and more attractive for residents)</p> <p>The Masterplan provides for the fundamental design principle of creating walking and cycle friendly places as well as improving public transport infrastructure</p> <p>Proposals for A96 dualling will help improve traffic flow, dispersing emissions and allowing the provision of dedicated bus lanes to improve public transport infrastructure</p> <p>Suitable provisions for a bypass at Nairn will significantly improve local air quality in the town</p>	<p>The Masterplan will have a positive effect on managing transport emissions</p> <p>The Masterplan cannot reduce expected increases but does provide means to mitigate and promote alternative forms of transport in a strategic manner</p> <p>Ongoing negative effect due to expected increases in transport levels</p> <p>The Masterplan provides means to mitigate these pressures but must be combined with other proposals and technologies to determine a suitable long-term sustainable solution</p>
<p>Climatic Factors</p> <p>Overall negative impacts on climate due to pressures of accommodating up to 30,000 more people in any area</p> <p>All development will present issues with respect to energy use and transportation effects</p>	<p>The Masterplan is not responsible for these impacts but addresses the issues of how to accommodate such growth in a sustainable manner</p> <p>The Masterplan mitigates and manages climatic impacts through the strategic direction of growth to make accommodation of 30,000 people less damaging</p> <p>Extensive planting regimes will go some way to mitigating GHG local production</p>	<p>The Masterplan addresses the issues of sustainably managing population growth, however the overall impact of development will be negative as GHG production will increase in line with population levels</p> <p>The Masterplan does leave scope for future renewable energy considerations, but does not include any specific recommendations</p> <p>The Masterplan directs the framework for future development but cannot control methods used by developers</p> <p>Negative impacts are therefore expected</p>
<p>Material Assets</p> <p>Potential for new development to detract from existing character of Nairn's seaside holiday setting</p> <p>Potential that new development and in-migration increases property prices and leads to exclusion of local residents</p> <p>Development pressure could reduce greenspace and urban amenity</p> <p>Increasing rates of local consumption and waste production increases pressure on local facilities</p>	<p>Key development principle is to respect the Highland vernacular design and create effective places that respect local character and distinctiveness</p> <p>The Masterplan secures green spaces within the Urban Frameworks</p> <p>Smart Growth principles are proven to deliver more effective places that add to urban amenity for residents</p> <p>The Masterplan outlines appropriate mixed use and housing density development that respects local distinctiveness, providing for local historic features and settings</p> <p>The Highland Council have indicated that housing developments will have sufficient space for waste segregation at source, allowing more effective management and recycling</p>	<p>Overall positive impact as the Masterplan provides a strategic framework for the development of the A96 Corridor over the coming 40 years with key objectives to deliver places that work well for residents, within the local urban setting and wider countryside environment</p> <p>The Masterplan does not address waste issues directly but does provide a strategic framework for development proposals to provide more detailed assessment at local levels</p> <p>Proposals for waste management facilities are not included within the remit of the A96 Corridor Masterplan</p>

Potential Significant Effects	Mitigation Measures	Residual Effect
<p>Historic Environment</p> <p>Potential for urban development to lead to damage to, or in extreme cases, loss of local historic features</p> <p>Potential for unsuitable development to affect the wider historic or landscape setting of features and affect the townscapes of Conservation Areas</p> <p>Potential loss or damage to historic/ natural history features associated with road developments</p>	<p>Consultations with Historic Scotland have helped direct the Masterplanning process</p> <p>The Masterplan identifies the many historic features within the area as priority assets and presumes against development that will negatively impact protected features</p> <p>The Highland Council has similar policies within the Inverness and Nairnshire Local Plans</p> <p>Road routings are indicative only and are not to scale, historic features will be taken into account in more detailed appraisals and EIA at lower levels of plan development, with the presumption that specific routes that impact historic sites will be re-routed to avoid damage</p>	<p>Overall neutral impact is expected for the Urban Frameworks as the Masterplan recognises historic sites and lists them as constrained development areas</p> <p>Planting proposals could affect some features, requiring further consultation with Historic Scotland on suitable planting regimes/ exclusion zones</p> <p>The historic environment is recognised as adding value to new developments as it encourages/ aids the establishment of an area</p>
<p>Landscape</p> <p>Developments have the potential to negatively affect the local landscape through unrestricted and unsympathetic construction that does not respect landscape features or important views</p>	<p>The Masterplan is developed to address the issue of suitable locations for development that is going to happen along the Corridor</p> <p>The Masterplanning process includes the use of Landscape Character Assessments and Landscape Capacity Appraisals to determine areas capable of absorbing new/ increased urban development</p> <p>The Masterplan maintains open aspects, introduces green wedges and environmental buffer zones at critical places to ensure there are no encroachments/ coalescence of urban expansions</p>	<p>Overall positive effects are expected for the Urban Frameworks</p> <p>Urban Frameworks recognise local features, important views and the landscape qualities of the approaches to Nairn and Inverness</p> <p>The Masterplan aims to deliver urban expansion to accommodate population increases whilst maintaining the local 'countryside' feel to the area</p>

Summary of Green Framework Assessment

Potential Significant Effects	Mitigation Measures	Residual Effect
<p>Biodiversity, Flora & Fauna</p> <p>Development proposals could affect the integrity of the many high quality European and nationally designated protected sites found across the Corridor</p> <p>Developments could lead to increased habitat fragmentation</p> <p>Unregulated development could lead to loss of important wildlife networks leading to increased pressure on biodiversity levels</p>	<p>Appropriate Assessments will be required for any detailed development proposal that could impact upon European protected (Natura 2000) sites</p> <p>Coastal paths will require consultation with SNH to determine the most effective routes that minimise disturbance to sensitive protected areas</p> <p>Newly identified wildlife corridors are a direct result of the Masterplan process</p> <p>Other developments within the Corridor can be considered 'green' developments including golf courses</p>	<p>Significant overall positive effect through protection of extensive countryside and woodland areas, development of additional wildlife corridors and the identification and safeguarding of protected European and national sites of importance</p> <p>Extensive planting and urban greenspace proposals will help create habitat connections through urban areas</p>
<p>Human Health & Population</p> <p>Potential for numerous development proposals to negatively affect the overall environmental quality of the A96 Corridor</p> <p>Positive effects are to be expected through the development of the Green Framework proposals with the inclusion of extensive walking paths and trails along and across the Corridor</p>	<p>The Masterplan provides Urban Frameworks guiding sustainable development for the accommodation of expected population increases of up to 30,000 people</p> <p>Green Framework proposals increase the environmental aspects for the sustainable development of the Corridor area as a whole</p>	<p>The Masterplan has an overall significant positive effect in developing the A96 Corridor with respect to sustainable patterns of location and type of development by minimising and mitigating negative effects associated with large population increases</p> <p>The Masterplan provides the framework for improved path networks, access to local environmental assets and important viewpoints across the Corridor</p> <p>The Masterplan also presumes against development in unsuitable or protected areas</p>
<p>Soils</p> <p>Positive overall effects identified by minimal land take for urban development and the protection of countryside and woodland areas</p> <p>Positive effects to be realised by securing green wedges and buffer zones between urban areas</p>	<p>Loss of greenfield land is minimised by the Masterplan and the Green Framework provides quid-pro-quo protection of other greenfield areas</p>	<p>The Masterplan provides an effective framework for managing growth and minimising rural land take</p> <p>The Masterplan works to safeguard countryside, woodland, environmental and historic assets</p>
<p>Water</p> <p>Positive effects associated with green corridors along identified floodplains mitigating flooding effects</p> <p>Positive effects associated with protection of countryside and woodland areas</p> <p>Proposals for extensive tree planting can have positive effects on protecting surface waters and reducing pollution levels</p>	<p>The Masterplan provides capacity assessments for water supply infrastructure, recommends SUDS inclusion in new developments and avoids inappropriate development within identified floodplains</p> <p>The Masterplan identifies the need for additional waste water treatment facilities and provides a strategic approach to replace existing small sites and improve the local water environment</p>	<p>Population growth could have a detrimental effect on water quality, however the Masterplan manages growth to mitigate and minimise negative effects</p> <p>Positive effects will be evident after phased provision of improved utilities infrastructure</p> <p>Overall, the Masterplan presents positive effects on protecting water quality</p>

Potential Significant Effects	Mitigation Measures	Residual Effect
<p>Air</p> <p>The Green Framework promotes improved access to environmental and historic features at various points across the A96 Corridor leading to improved access by public transport</p> <p>The Green Framework will help address local urban air quality by developing integrated green wedges and buffer zones between urban centres</p>	<p>The Masterplan provides an integrated approach to access by public transport between urban centres and the numerous environmental and historic features within the A96 Corridor</p> <p>The Masterplan provides an integrated approach to addressing urban air quality by re-routing the A96 Corridor around Nairn and improvements to the Raigmore Interchange</p> <p>Green Framework provisions include planting and landscaping for screening which will also help reduce impacts</p>	<p>The Masterplan presents significant benefits for local populations and tourists by providing for improved public transport infrastructure</p> <p>The Masterplan should produce minor positive benefits for local urban air quality, however these could be negated by overall increases in traffic levels associated with population increases</p>
<p>Climatic Factors</p> <p>The protection of countryside and woodland assets and tree planting proposals will help offset and mitigate local increases in GHG production by providing enhanced carbon sinks</p> <p>The Green Framework provides walking and cycle routes to help reduce the need for motorised transport between urban centres and along the Corridor as a whole</p>	<p>The Masterplan addresses increased emissions by improving carbon sinks and protecting large areas of countryside and woodland from land use change</p> <p>Detailed development proposals will be required to demonstrate consideration of energy conservation in line with the Highland Council's Development Plan Guidance, 'Designing for Sustainability in the Highlands'</p>	<p>Population increases will increase overall GHG emissions, leading to a negative assessment of effects, however the Masterplan directs growth and provides Green Framework proposals to mitigate climate effects</p> <p>Overall positive effect for the Masterplan as it sets the framework for sustainable growth along the A96 Corridor, promoting energy conservation and reducing the need to travel by designing urban environments with mixed use and mixed density housing close to urban centres, as well as improved greenspaces and extensive walking and cycle routes across the Corridor</p>
<p>Material Assets</p> <p>Enhanced green wedges, buffer zones and protection of local environmental areas, countryside and woodland will improve amenity levels for local populations</p> <p>Potential for increased rural and coastal littering as trails and paths become more frequented</p>	<p>Improving the quality of the built environment includes providing adequate greenspace for local amenity and recreation as well as protecting valuable local environmental assets as provided throughout the Masterplan</p> <p>Enhancement possible with provisions for waste management along Green Framework paths and trails, including segregated bins, effective collection and appropriate signage</p>	<p>Significant positive effects anticipated through the realisation of Masterplan proposals</p> <p>The protection of critical views also adds to local distinctiveness</p> <p>Potential for litter and waste along sensitive coastal areas and countryside paths can be minimised through effective facilities and collection</p>
<p>Historic Environment</p> <p>Significant positive effects associated with Green Framework proposals for protection and enhancement of critical environmental and built assets</p>	<p>The Masterplan outlines plans for improved access to, interpretation of, and links between critical sites</p>	<p>Built and natural historic features are treated as assets to be secured for the long term enjoyment of local population and visitors</p>
<p>Landscape</p> <p>Loss of key landscape features and views can lead to public concern and in extreme cases, outrage at new development</p> <p>Positive effects associated with the recognition and protection of numerous critical views</p> <p>Positive effects associated with protection of large areas of countryside and woodland</p>	<p>The Masterplan is designed to accommodate significant population increase in a sustainable manner without detracting from the local character, important views and local natural and built heritage features</p> <p>The Masterplan recognises and maintains key views/ outlooks and safeguards large areas of countryside and woodland from development</p>	<p>The Masterplan is expected to have an overall significant positive effect in accommodating population and urban growth sympathetically within local landscapes and outlooks</p>

An appraisal of the headline features of the **Inverness Preferred Option** against the SEA Objectives highlights the following environmental considerations:

- Positive effects are associated with respect to provisions for improving human health and amenity levels for local populations, with the inclusion of connected path and cycle networks, community sports facilities and quality urban greenspaces.
- Positive effects are also to be realised with respect to education and life-long learning by the improved provision of primary and high schools, as well as tertiary education facilities.
- Public transport provisions including park and ride and improved interchange facilities will result in benefits with respect to air and climate factors, however, these benefits could be tempered by the general growth in transport to be expected.
- A transport interchange next to campus, business, housing and sporting areas will be convenient for local populations but may not be of much benefit to local health when considered in conjunction with the dual carriageway route.
- An iconic entrance building could cause concern and should be sympathetic to the surrounding environment and setting.
- Significant positives are likely by linking urban walking and cycling routes to those outlined in the Green Framework.
- Features which carry potential negative aspects are those associated with roads in general, and routes adjacent to high density housing and schools. However, some of the negative effects associated with transport pollution and road safety may be mitigated by the close proximity of greenspaces, parkland and appropriate calming measures.
- A dualled route in Inverness will help reduce congestion levels; however as the route passes directly by the regional sports complex, campus greenspaces and high density housing, anticipated health benefits from improving traffic flow may not actually be realised.
- Advantages lie in the choice of location for retail outlets, being next to existing retail space, which supports objectives to respect urban form, minimise energy use (e.g. in waste handling from multiple distinct sites) and protecting greenspace in other areas.
- Extensive greenspace and walkable access between housing and the campus and sports facilities will present long term benefits for local residents.

An appraisal of the headline features of the **Nairn Preferred Option** against the SEA Objectives highlights the following environmental considerations:

- Introducing a bypass will have significant benefits in reducing local urban air pollution in the centre of Nairn, improving road safety for local residents and enabling the desired regeneration of the town centre.
- Concerns over exact routing and potential impacts upon local historic features (particularly around Howford Bridge) should be resolved through further consultation. The Masterplan provides an indicative framework for strategic development and the exact route should accommodate historic environment concerns in conjunction with Highland Council policies to protect historic features.
- The junction at the A939 provides benefits through access to proposed recreational areas and environmental assets/ visitor centre, and could increase access by public transport.
- Good access to main roads will make developments appealing to public transport providers; quality landscaping will increase the appeal to new residents and the proximity to business, retail, education and district centre facilities will help bring a good mix of residents promoting vibrant neighbourhoods.
- Close proximity to open spaces and recreational areas will add to the appeal of the area, especially as the urban development avoids identified floodplains (developed as parkland and recreational areas).
- Avoiding hard development on floodplain minimises the likelihood of extensive material damage, helps maintain water quality and aquatic diversity, as well as local townscapes.
- Proposals to link this area with geo-trails will increase opportunities for access, interpretation and appreciation of local natural history and environmental features.
- Any potential for negative effects on sensitive European protected sites along the coast associated with disturbance, littering and short-term impacts from construction – will require close consultation with SNH to determine most appropriate routes, signage and waste management provisions.

10. Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative effects are difficult to predict as development considerations are subject to further consultation and assessment, however it is expected that the effects of other development options within the A96 Corridor will be similar to those identified for the Urban Frameworks. Concerns are raised when considering the redevelopment of the Ardersier former fabrication works at Whiteness, with respect to contaminated soils and associated impacts that any disturbance may have on sensitive and protected coastal zones in the immediate vicinity. These potentially significant impacts will require careful consideration, Appropriate Assessments and the utilisation of suitable remediation or containment strategies.

It is acknowledged that the development of a marina and holiday accommodation is in keeping with the traditional nature of Nairn as a resort location, and will bring benefits in terms of revenue and employment. However, the integrity of the European protected/designated sites and bathing waters should be protected as a priority. Similarly, coastal golf course developments will have positive effects on local amenity, employment and recreation; however careful consideration of impacts upon designated sites will require Appropriate Assessments and the utilisation of effective management and containment strategies, to prevent any disturbance or pollution impacts. These considerations are also relevant for the upgrading or introduction of coastal trails and any path networks along/across other designated sites (for example the proposed geo-trail will require careful routing) to prevent any degradation in quality. Short term, reversible impacts may be considered acceptable, but will require appropriate consents from SNH and other relevant bodies, including Historic Scotland, SEPA and the National Trust for Scotland.

Airport expansion and hotel developments have the potential to impact greatly upon water demand and wastewater treatment capacities, as well as having long term negative impacts upon air quality and climate releases. There should be stringent guidelines in place to ensure water reduction and energy efficiency technologies are utilised, to offset the damaging impacts of increased transportation emissions, especially those associated with increasing levels aircraft emissions.

In all cases, development should be in response to demand, effectively phased and co-ordinated throughout the Corridor to minimise the cumulative impacts of multiple development projects. The use of other environmental assessment techniques will be required, including future SEA at lower levels of planning and development, EIA on specific projects as required by the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Regulations (1999) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) as required by the EU Habitats Directive, for any projects or plans that may have significant impacts upon the integrity or management of protected European sites.

Following a balanced appraisal of Urban and Green Frameworks, and the fact that the Masterplan is designed to deal with expected growth, rather than to attract new residents, the overall long-term impact of the Masterplan is determined to be positive. However, there is a continuing need for review and for development to be adequately phased in line with demand, to ensure that infrastructure services have sufficient capacity to limit the likelihood of negative impacts.

11. Indicators and Monitoring

A key result of the SEA process is in presenting which environmental effects (positive and negative) are most attributable to the plan/ policy/ strategy (PPS) in question and identifying means to monitor the impact of the PPS on those environmental conditions, or receptors. Indicators have been chosen to enable the monitoring and review of the Masterplan, post adoption, and to assess whether progress is being made towards greater sustainability in the A96 Corridor. The indicators selected are intended to measure the success, or otherwise, of the A96 Corridor Masterplan in meeting its environmental objectives and associated effects on the environment.

The ER lists a series of proposed indicators and potential data sources, however it must be stressed that the onus for monitoring and review lies with the Highland Council. It is up to the Highland Council planning groups to identify which indicators are most suitable, how often monitoring and reviews should take place and from there, which measures should be implemented on identification of either problems that should be addressed, or potential benefits that could be enhanced.

The Highland Council will conduct monitoring, in their capacity as the Responsible Authority for this SEA. It is proposed that a Monitoring Register be maintained by the Highland Council, detailing the relevant information to meet the requirements outlined within the proposed monitoring framework. The Monitoring Register will be available to the public and a short annual Monitoring Report will be produced by the Council, summarising the findings of the monitoring conducted during the previous year. The Monitoring reports will be forwarded to the SEA Gateway and published on the Council website.

12. Next Steps

The Interim A96 Corridor Masterplan is to be considered by Highland Council at the Planning, Development, Europe and Tourism Committee (PDET) on the 31 January 2007 with a recommendation to consult on the Masterplan and accompanying ER (this document).

Consultation is due to run for a period of 4 weeks between 6 February 2007 and 5 March 2007. The ER (including the Interim A96 Corridor Masterplan) will be submitted through the SEA Gateway to enable the Consulting Authorities (CAs) to consider and comment upon the ER. Any comments from the CAs will be captured by the SEA Gateway and forwarded to the Responsible Authority (i.e. Highland Council) and copied to Halcrow.

This document can be viewed at the Council's offices at Glenurquhart Road, Inverness as well as on the Council's website at

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/businessinformation/economicdevelopment/regeneration/a96-corridor-masterplan.htm>

The Non-Technical Summary of this ER can also be viewed separately. The Council will organise consultation with the public on the Interim Masterplan and ER during this period. If you would like to attend the public consultation events please forward your contact details to Mike Greaves at Highland Council (Mike.Greaves@highland.gov.uk).

After, and during, the consultation period there will be a review of the comments received and these will be considered in the process of finalising the Masterplan, before it is put to the Council's PDET Committee on the 14 March 2007 for approval and adoption as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). The finalised Masterplan, when adopted, will be accompanied by an SEA Statement which will detail the results of the consultation on this ER and show how comments have been addressed in finalising the Masterplan.

On adoption of the A96 Corridor Masterplan, the SEA process will move into the monitoring phases. This will involve undertaking the monitoring as described in Section 8 of this ER.

Highland Council will progress the preparation of Local Development Plans (LDPs) early in 2008. The LDP applicable to the Inverness & Nairn area will be prepared in the context of the A96 Corridor Masterplan SPG. The intention is that the LDP, following LDP inquiry in 2010 will be adopted in 2011, incorporating the A96 Corridor Masterplan. Following the adoption of the LDP Action Plans, Development Briefs and Masterplans will be prepared for specific development areas within the A96 Corridor.

In summary, the indicative programme is outlined below:

31 January 2007	Interim A96 Corridor Masterplan considered at PDET Committee and recommended for formal consultation
6 February to 5 March 2007	Consultation period on Interim A96 Corridor Masterplan (including SEA)
14 March 2007	Final A96 Corridor Masterplan (including SEA) considered at PDET Committee and recommended for adoption as SPG
Early 2008	Progress LDP
2010	LDP Inquiry
2011	Adoption of LDP
2012 onwards	Progress Action Plans, Development Briefs and Masterplans