

Context

In July 2006 *Interim Report – Phase 1: Options for Development and Green Frameworks* for the A96 Corridor Masterplan: Stage 2 was published (www.highland.gov.uk/businessinformation/economicdevelopment/regeneration/A96+Corridor.htm). This presented stakeholder options for accommodating growth at Nairn and East Inverness. A draft Green Framework for the Corridor as a whole was also offered.

As the next step the options for growth at Nairn and East Inverness were to be assessed through considerations related to technical aspects (these were in respect of deliverability, marketability, planning, traffic and urban form) applying Collaboration for Success 2 (CfS2), Framework Planning Group views and public/agency comment. The Green Framework was to be developed collaboratively with key stakeholders.

These considerations are summarised below

Nairn

Technical

Consultant considerations established common themes for the growth of Nairn. These suggest a balanced mix of housing densities, clear integration with existing communities (to assist the regeneration of the town centre), a balance between population and employment growth and the selection of a by-pass route that integrates expansion into the existing town.

Key features for growth that were technically attractive included:

- A by-pass route from Drumdivan in the east crossing at Howford and rejoining the A96 at Auchnacloch
- A compact southern extension to the east of the River Nairn with a district centre toward its northern end.
- A compact place to the west incorporating modest regional retail to be developed in the long term.
- Business/Industrial uses focused in the east.
- Integrated green space and environmental assets to the west of the River Nairn (incl. the river) and building on the golf course allocation and landscape quality to the west.

CfS2

Key observations that emerged from CfS2 sessions held in September included:

- Low density development to the west was inappropriate.
- A by-pass commencing at Drumdivan was most appropriate.
- Significant environmental assets were recognised to the east of the River Nairn and the western golf course proposal.
- Floodplain development was inappropriate.
- Development should support the vitality and viability of the town centre.
- Any supplementing long term retail development should be focused to the west.

Framework Planning Group

Key conclusions emerging from FPG's submissions were that the growth of Nairn should respond to:

- Its river based market town tradition serving a rural hinterland – a landward tradition.
- The coastal tradition of Nairn and the asset that is the Moray Firth.
- The need to bring wider benefit to Nairn; particularly supporting the viability of the town centre.
- The by-pass route should seek to support growth across the town whilst ensuring integration with it.
- Employment provision should meet population growth.
- The opportunity to develop a unique woodland/river based environmental and recreational asset that could support tourism should be investigated.

Public/Agency Views

General comments were extensive with regards to opportunities at Nairn. There was clear support for a by-pass. Although differing views emerged on the appropriate alignment. Other views emphasised:

- Accessibility from the south to the town centre.
- Town centre regeneration as a priority.
- Equitable distribution of development opportunities.
- Concern over low density extension to the west.
- Respect for the historic environment.

In seeking public views the options were disaggregated into key components relating to best layout, housing provision, district centre solution, business location, open space provision and relief road options. In expressing preferences for these Option B consistently emerged as the community's preference. This suggests that the following characteristics would be supported by the community:

- A by-pass route to the south of the rail line commencing at Gollanfield.
- Growth focused at an extension to the south of Nairn.
- Business and employment land use located and integrated with the extension to the south.
- Open space provision that takes advantage of and integrates the opportunities afforded by the River Nairn and its floodplain.

Nairn Issues and Conclusions

The commencement of the by-pass at Gollanfield or Drumdivan is critical. Arguments supporting Gollanfield relate to ease of implementation and cost savings. Further, supporters have argued that this will help facilitate access to Whiteness. However, supporters of the Drumdivan option would argue that:

1. The Gollanfield option creates an elongated by-pass that encourages traffic away from Nairn.
2. If Nairn West progresses (see below), this will require an access to the by-pass over the rail line in order to facilitate efficient traffic (including bus) movement. Consequently, the saving on bridging is reduced.

3. The Drumdivan option provides the opportunity to effectively link Nairn South, Nairn West (subject to discussion below) and Nairn centre to bring an integrated movement solution for the town as a whole that makes buses attractive.
4. The potential detrunking of the *old* A96 would create development pressure further west toward Tornagrain in the long term.

The accommodation of growth west of Sandown as a low density proposal is not generally supported. However, a higher density solution may be supportable provided the following criteria can be met:

- Growth of Nairn is in the order of 8-9,000 people that will necessitate two additional places. Nairn West flows from this as a longer term proposal.
- It can respond to and take advantage of the golf course proposal for Nairn.
- Nairn West can be integrated into the town through appropriate by-pass routing and public transport provision (see above).
- Appropriate structural landscaping that responds to context and sets a western boundary for the town.

The desire by the community for integration of employment land and other solutions to focus business/industrial employment allocations to the east is compatible. Service sector employment will be focused into the new district centres. However, business/industrial employment requires good access to the trunk road network. An allocation at east Nairn meets this requirement. It also offers the opportunity to introduce an appropriate landscape entrance to Nairn.

A clear view has emerged for accommodating growth at Nairn in the context of the A96 Corridor as a whole.

Key characteristics are:

- Growth at Nairn South and West.
- A by-pass commencing at Drumdivan, crossing at Howford and rejoining the A96 at Auchnacloch.
- Integrated environmental assets focused on the River Nairn (and its floodplain) and the golf course/landscape to the west.
- Accessible business/industrial allocations to the east.
- Support regeneration of Nairn town centre.
- A major environmental/recreational resource associated with the River Nairn that links the town with its rural hinterland. This provides for a unique resource providing facilities for existing communities, new communities and visitors.

The plan over draws this together.

These matters were considered and approved for development by The Highland Council's Planning, Development, Europe and Tourism Committee on 15 November.

East Inverness

Technical

Consultant considerations established common

themes for the growth at East Inverness. These suggest a balanced mix of housing densities within a compact place, clear integration with existing communities, a balance between population and employment growth, the selection of a by-pass route that facilitates the area's accessibility and clusters education, research and related business.

Key features that are technically attractive included:

- A by-pass route that should commence at or near the Smithton Roundabout joining an enhanced Inshes junction. This should include one access to the north of the railway to facilitate access.
- Beechwood as a focus for an educational campus, research and related business uses with a transport interchange.
- A compact place with a range of densities should be created with its centre toward to southern end of an upgraded Smithton Road in order to facilitate integration with existing communities. This should maximise environmental assets incorporating a park. A supermarket would be appropriate to serve existing and new communities.
- Regional retail (e.g. bulky goods) adjacent to the Retail Park.
- A business park to the south-east of the retail park (north-west of the new by-pass road).
- A park and ride facility.

CfS2

Key observations that emerged from the CfS2 session held in September were:

- Low density development to the east was unattractive.
- A town centre and associated retailing should be located so as to bring benefits to established communities.
- Promoting the Beechwood area for a university campus made sense.
- A by-pass route should be close to the retail park so as to minimise the adverse impacts of intersecting East Inverness.
- A park proposal should be developed to bring benefits to new and existing communities.
- Bulky goods provision should be associated with the retail park.

Framework Planning Group

Key conclusions emerging from submissions made by the FPG were that the growth at East Inverness should respond to:

- The opportunity afforded through research and academic growth/potential.
- The need to bring wider benefit to the established communities; particularly in providing a supermarket and parkland.
- The by-pass route should balance accessibility, environmental integration and urban form.

Public/Agency Views

Concerns about the proposals were expressed by Balloch Community Council and Balloch Village Trust.

Their views sought to ensure that proposals for East Inverness retained Balloch's unique identity and rural setting. It was felt that the options promoted ribbon development to the far east and that this was inappropriate.

Agency views came from:

- Network Rail who raised concern as to the viability of a Beechwood rail halt and that extensive rail proposals would require developer contribution.
- GreenInverness who sought to ensure the green wedge requirements of the local plan were adequately addressed.
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise/Inverness College who presented a coherent argument for a university campus at Beechwood.
- RSPB Scotland who object to the development in East Inverness.
- Historic Scotland who sought to ensure respect for the historic environment.

General public comments emphasised:

- Support for an integrated traffic and movement solution.
- A co-ordinated approach for infrastructural support.
- Retention of Balloch as a free standing settlement within a rural context.

In seeking public views the options were disaggregated into key components relating to best layout, housing provision, district centre solution, business location, open space provision and relief road options. This did not generate a clear preference suggesting that a hybrid solution was appropriate.

East Inverness Issues and Conclusions

There was general consensus emerging as to the appropriate approach for growth at East Inverness. This indicated a scale of growth to accommodate around 7,000 people. Key characteristics for this, in the context of the A96 Corridor as a whole, are:

- A by-pass route that should commence at the Smithton Roundabout joining an enhanced Inshes junction.
- Campus, research and related business uses should be focused at Beechwood.
- In support of the above an innovation park should be created to the south-west of the retail park.
- A compact place with a range of densities should be created at the centre of east Inverness with its district centre toward to southern end in order to facilitate integration. A supermarket would be appropriate to serve existing and new communities. This should maximise environmental assets incorporating a formal park.
- A medium to low density community should be created to the east of Stratton Lodge which would have good access to the District Centre.
- An integrated and linked green space framework should support development which would include:
 - Regional sporting facilities at Beechwood (south-east).
 - A formal park to serve existing communities at Culloden/ Smithton.

- Formal and informal provision running through East Inverness providing attractive amenity and linkages into the countryside and Firth coast.
- Definition and amenity for new and existing communities.

- Regional retail (e.g. bulky goods) should be focused adjacent to the Retail Park.
- A public transport interchange to serve Beechwood.
- A park and ride facility at the entrance to East Inverness on the A96.

The plan over draws this together.

These matters were considered and approved for development by The Highland Council's Planning, Development, Europe and Tourism Committee on 15 November.

Green Framework

Working closely with key stakeholders, including GreenInverness, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, Historic Scotland, local landowners and others, has allowed the draft Green Framework to be developed so as to provide wider context for accommodating growth in the Corridor.

The Framework provides for:

- Environmental assets across the Corridor that make for unique and valuable recreational assets.
- Particular attention at Nairn and East Inverness to provide for integrated green space.
- Access and connectivity across the Corridor for walkers, cyclists and other hinterland users that follows the coast and landward areas with particular regard to key places such as Culloden, Fort George, Cawdor Castle, Kildrummie Kames, etc.
- Supporting good landscape management and interpretation.
- Clear safeguards to ensure settlements in the Corridor are definable and protected.
- Facilitating key infrastructure investment.
- Identifies settlements where long term growth could accommodate 1-2000 people.

Through the Green Framework a range of green infrastructure proposals have been presented that will allow the urban growth in the Corridor to be integrated with the wider landscape.

The plan over presents the Green Framework.




Final Notes

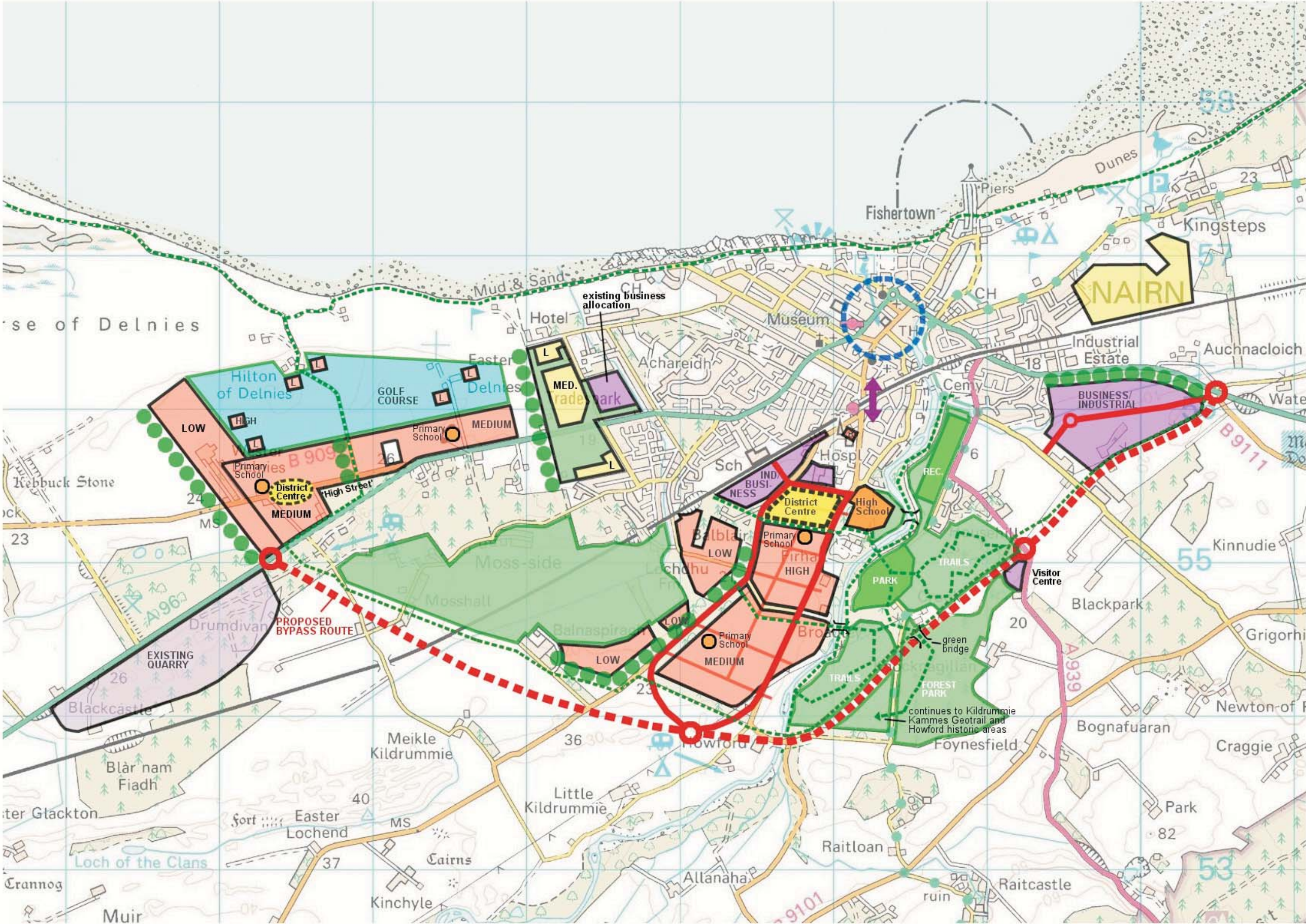
A full report on the options assessment is available on www.highland.gov.uk/businessinformation/economicdevelopment/regeneration/A96+Corridor.htm.

The project will develop by examining the phasing and implementation of the frameworks. Public consultation will be undertaken in the new year with reports back to the PDET Committee in January and March 2007.

NAIRN FRAMEWORK PLAN

8 November 2006

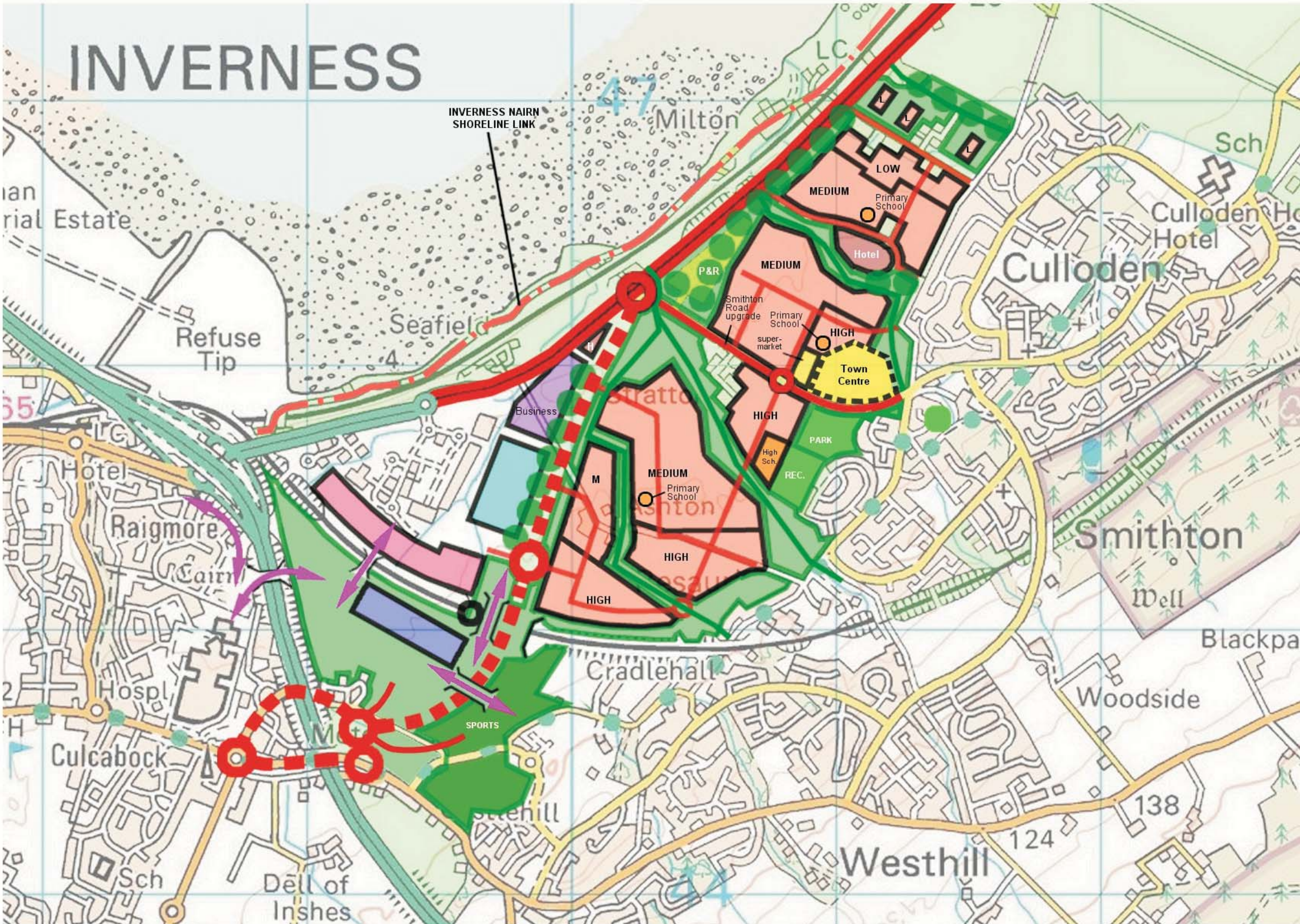
-  HOUSING
-  HOUSING ALLOCATION
-  COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT
-  EXISTING QUARRY
-  DISTRICT CENTRE (INCL. HOUSING)
-  GOLF COURSE
-  GREEN SPACE
-  PREFERRED BYPASS ROUTE
-  PEDESTRIAN/ CYCLE ROUTES
-  STRUCTURE LANDSCAPE
-  ENHANCED PEDESTRIAN ACCESSIBILITY
-  TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION
-  SCHOOL



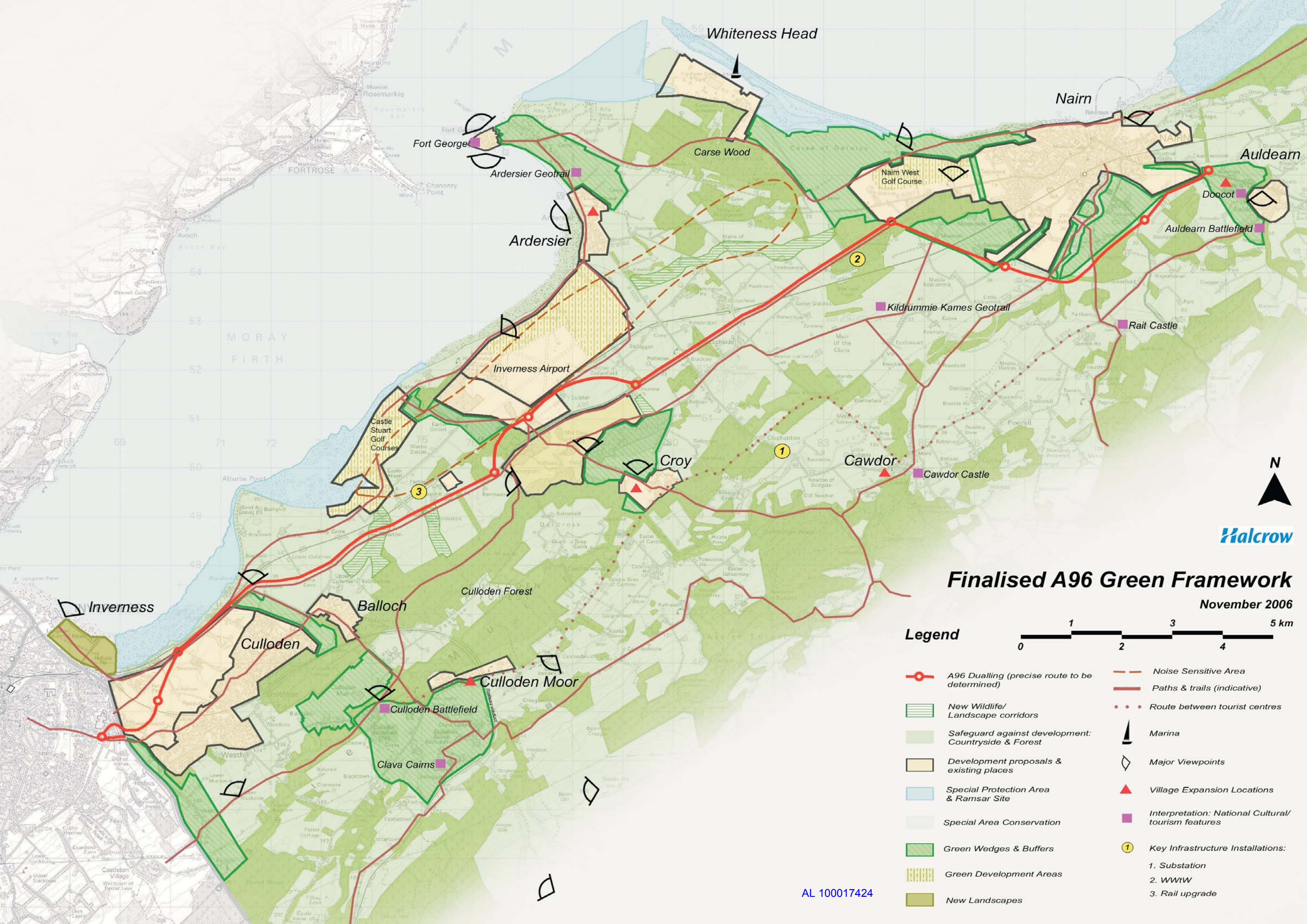
Notes:

1. A residential expansion is indicated approximately double the existing residential population.
2. The Timber Merchant at Balblair Road is proposed to be retained, with the opportunity for associated uses to be developed to the immediate south.

-  HOUSING
-  SCHOOL
-  BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
-  BULKY GOODS
-  TOWN CENTRE (INCL. HOUSING)
-  CAMPUS
-  GREEN SPACE
-  INNOVATION PARK
-  PREFERRED BYPASS ROUTE
-  PEDESTRIAN / CYCLE BRIDGE
-  STRUCTURE LANDSCAPE
-  REGIONAL SPORTS COMPLEX
-  PUBLIC TRANSPORT INTERCHANGE
-  PARK AND RIDE
-  LANDMARK BUILDING / HOTEL
-  PEDESTRIAN / CYCLE ROUTE
-  DUALLED A96



- Notes:**
1. Food retail opportunity indicated adjacent to mixed use Town Centre which has access to green routes, housing and open space.
 2. Raigmore bypass passes east of existing road crossing on shared 'green' bridge which provides a landscaped link over the railway.
 3. An integrated green complex of formal and informal spaces is to provide a range of interests, which will have specific functions and make positive contributions to the overall community.
 4. Campus is set in open space landscape with access to recreation to the immediate east and a pedestrian link over the A9 to central Inverness and on towards Life Scan.



Whiteness Head

Nairn

Auldearn

Fort George

Carse Wood

Nairn West Golf Course

Doocot

Auldearn Battlefield

Ardersier Geotrail

Ardersier

Kildrummie Kames Geotrail

Rait Castle

Inverness Airport

Castle Stuart Golf Courses

Croy

Cawdor

Cawdor Castle

N

Halcrow

Finalised A96 Green Framework

November 2006

Legend



- A96 Dualling (precise route to be determined)
- New Wildlife/Landscape corridors
- Safeguard against development: Countryside & Forest
- Development proposals & existing places
- Special Protection Area & Ramsar Site
- Special Area Conservation
- Green Wedges & Buffers
- Green Development Areas
- New Landscapes
- Noise Sensitive Area
- Paths & trails (indicative)
- Route between tourist centres
- Marina
- Major Viewpoints
- Village Expansion Locations
- Interpretation: National Cultural/tourism features
- Key Infrastructure Installations:
 1. Substation
 2. WWTW
 3. Rail upgrade