

The Highland Council

A96 Corridor Masterplan

Development Option Planning Assessment

September 2006

Halcrow Group Limited

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1 Introduction

1.1 *Introduction*

This document provides a planning assessment of the ten options for development at Inverness East and Nairn South which were conceived at the Collaboration for Success Meetings in June 2006, and set out in the A96 Corridor Masterplan Stage 2 Interim Report.

Each option has been assessed for their contribution to four key themes:

- Viable and Vital Places; the potential of the new development to create sustainable places, neighbourhoods and communities
- The Environment ; the potential of the development to protect and enhance the local environment
- Land use; the potential and for interaction and integration between different land use types
- Landscape; the potential of the development to enhance the landscape setting of the local area

After each option has been assessed, a preferred option is given. In both cases, the preferred option has been caveated

1.2 *Development Plan*

The two development areas are currently covered by 2 local plans; the Inverness Local Plan (adopted March 2006) and the Nairn Local Plan (adopted December 2000).

Most of the Inverness East development area is currently designated as green land on which development is restricted. The Inverness Local Plan strategy also states that there should be no development along the A96 corridor until at least 2011, but does designate small parts of land at Beechwood and Culloden for development potential before then.

Of particular note are

- West Seafield/Stoneyfield

Land designations which state that a number of compatible uses such as retail, business land and mixed use would be appropriate. The Plan also states a desire to incorporate a park and ride system from this area.

- Stratton

Approximately 18Ha of land available for business and industrial use.

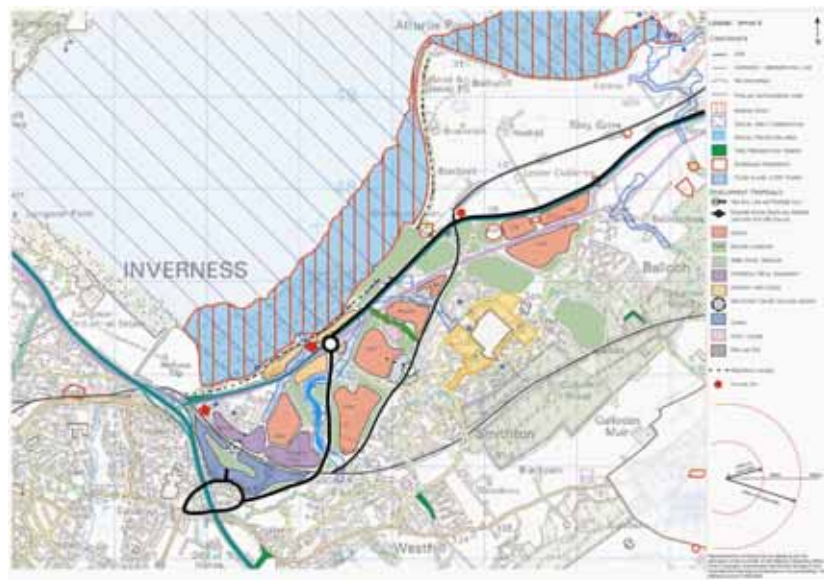
The Nairn Local Plan designates most of the land surrounding Nairn as green land on which development is restricted, but does show two areas of land release for housing to the east and west of the town.

2 Inverness East Options

2.1

Option A

Option A shows a short Raigmore by-pass route between the Inshes and the A96, and concentrates the majority of the development to the western end of the development area. The new local centre is proposed at the edge of Culloden and a golf course, low density housing and designated parks are proposed for the eastern section of the development area.



2.1.1

Viable and Vital Places

Option A will provide a mixed use district centre at the core of the planned populated area. Housing is focused in high density areas close to the planned centre and adjacent to Culloden, with smaller packages of lower density housing proposed along the A96 corridor. Community facilities will be provided within the district centre but the business park and campus areas are isolated from other uses.

The mixed use centre and high density housing at the core of the proposal will provide a focus, which will contribute to and be supported by the existing and increased populations of Culloden, Smithston and Balloch. This core is detached from Culloden which may exclude some of the population.

2.1.2

The Environment

Option A protects the 1 in 200 year flood plain area from development and attempts to integrate it within the green space network of the scheme. The amount of passive green and open space (500+ Ha) being proposed will provide opportunities to provide excellent public spaces, develop SUDS schemes throughout and enhance existing landscape and water features.

2.1.3

Land Use

The isolation of the proposed district centre from the core of the population base and the lack of integration between the business Park, campus and the complimentary medical land use means that this option fails to fully address the land use issues and opportunities of the development area.

2.1.4

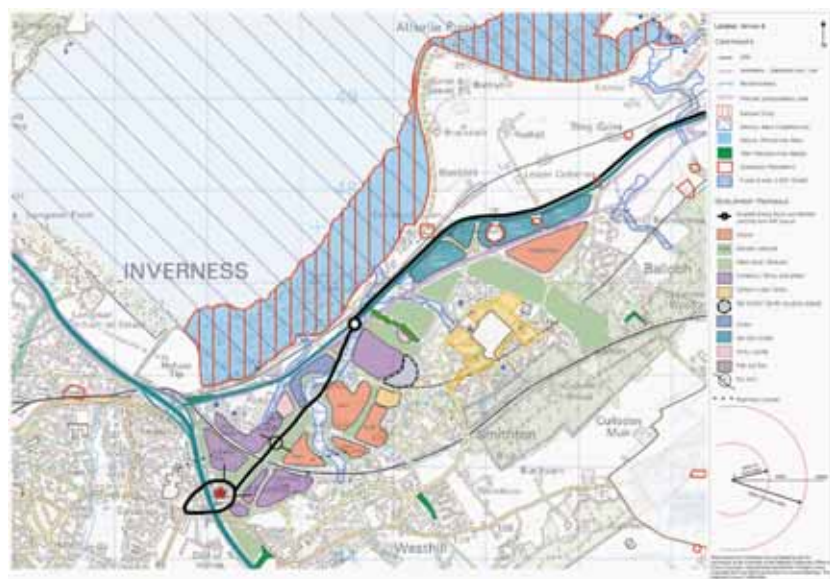
Landscape

Option A provides large quantities of green space both within and outwith the development area, affording the opportunity to not only protect and enhance existing landscape features but also to create new ones.

2.2

Option B

Option B proposes a long Raigmore by-pass route between the Inshes and the Smithton roundabout, concentrating development to the western end of the development area around a new local centre. Large areas of open space, a golf course and low density housing are proposed for the eastern section of the development area.



2.2.1

Viable and Vital Places

Option B shows the district centre located between the new development area and Culloden village which will enhance its potential to integrate into the existing urban area and create a viable and vibrant centre. However, the large retail provision proposed next to the centre may harm the vitality of the retail provision within the centre itself.

Housing is provided in 4 or 5 high density packages all relating to the existing urban fabric of Culloden. Community facilities are proposed in and adjacent to the centre with the business park and college campus planned at the Inshes Junction and along the A96.

2.2.2

The Environment

Option B protects the 1 in 200 year flood plain areas and uses passive green space to create green corridors and networks throughout the scheme. The 100+ Ha of green space proposed will afford the opportunity to create formal public spaces, SUDS schemes and to protect existing environmental features.

2.2.3

Land Use

The Campus location could offer a gateway opportunity to Inverness East but fails to connect with the medical opportunity at Raigmore Hospital. The provision of retail space at the district centre may cause unwanted competition and oversupply. The scheme does take advantage of the natural topography to create green spaces linked to the water courses and open areas.

2.2.4

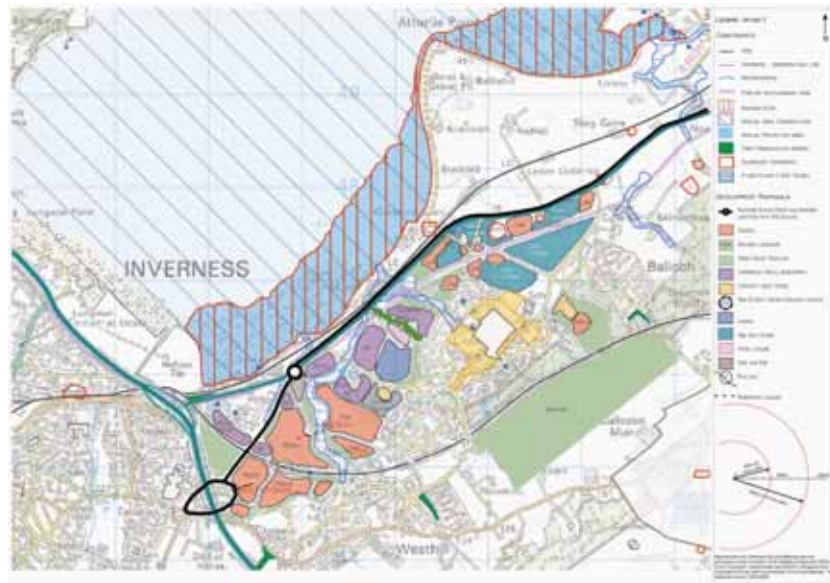
Landscape

The important existing landscape features are excluded from the development areas and the large scale greening shown in this option will afford the opportunity to create new features.

2.3

Option C

Option C proposes a short Raigmore by-pass route between the Inshes and the A96. A new local centre and the university campus are at the heart of the development, with dense housing developments shown to the western edge of the area. Retail and business provision are proposed between Culloden and the A96, with a new golf course and low density housing proposed at the eastern end.



2.3.1

Viable and Vital Places

Option C looks to deliver higher density housing towards the south west section of the proposal, providing an urban network between Inverness east and Culloden Village. Small packages of low density, executive housing will be provided throughout the scheme, linked to the A96 and business park areas.

The district centre is proposed as a hub between the higher density housing, retail provision and existing population in Culloden, focused on a new school or community use.

This proposal will help to create neighbourhoods and communities through the separation of housing, though there is a risk that the low density areas become exclusive or even 'closed'.

2.3.2

The Environment

There is limited green space in this proposal, instead it relies on existing amenity space to provide a green feel. SUDS could be incorporated into the floodplain area, though there may be limited scope for enhancement of waterways.

2.3.3

Land Use

Option C does not fully take advantage of the development opportunity at Beechwood created by the new Inshes Junction. The area around this junction does not seem appropriate for large scale housing development and the proposed

use of land adjoining Culloden for business park use does not seem compatible either.

2.3.4

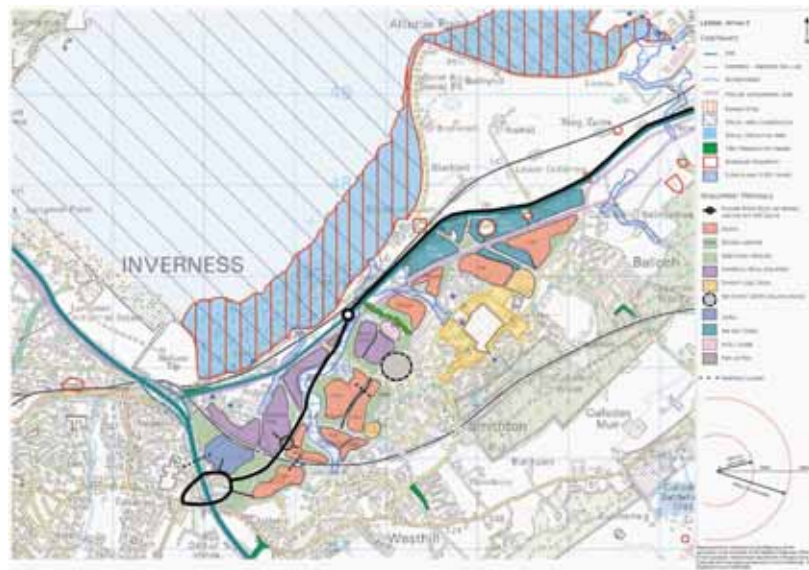
Landscape

Whilst Option C protects the major existing features in the local landscape, it does not afford the opportunity to create shared public spaces in the same manner as other options. The open space provision is focused on a large golf course which does not promote widespread public use.

2.4

Option D

Option D proposes a long Raigmore by-pass route between the Inshes and the **Smithston** Roundabout. A new local centre on the edge of Culloden will provide a central focus, with the university campus and business land provision proposed at the Beechwood location. Medium and high density housing is provided in the south west section of the area, with a new golf course and low density housing proposed at the eastern end.



2.4.1

Viable and Vital Places

Option D provides housing land throughout the scheme in a range of densities. Large low and medium density residential packages are proposed in the north east of the site with higher density housing proposed on the western edge of Culloden.

A district centre is provided at Culloden with retail provision adjacent. Community and educational facilities are dispersed throughout the scheme and the business

park and campus will benefit from easy access to the new Inshes Junction and A96 extension.

The scheme seeks to create an integrated 'town' centre as well as communities through the dispersal of facilities throughout the scheme. The only real segregation is between high amenity employment uses and the rest of the proposal, it is likely that this proposal will create successful places.

2.4.2

The Environment

The floodplains have been protected and integrated into the green network in this option, therefore there is scope to create green places, enhance environmental features and provide SUDS.

2.4.3

Land Use

Option D promotes the campus use at the Inshes Junction which will provide an opportunity to integrate with the medical sector at Raigmore Hospital, to create a green segregated campus and promote easy and effective public transport access.

There could be an issue of over provision of retail space adjacent to the district centre and the scheme does not seem to take full advantage of the green opportunities at the floodplain.

2.4.4

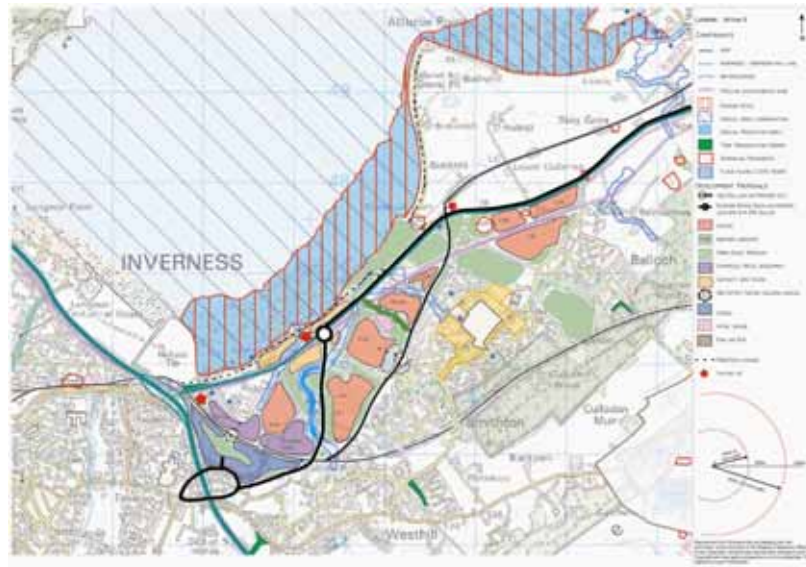
Landscape

Option D will protect the major existing features in the local landscape and promote the opportunity to create new ones. Designated open spaces throughout the scheme create a green network culminating at a new large golf course to the east of the development area.

2.5

Option E

Option E proposes a long Raigmore by-pass route between the Inshes and the Smithton roundabout. The railway line has been realigned in this option and a new rail halt and local centre will provide the focus of development. The campus and business provision is located at the western end of the development, with housing development integrated into Culloden and the new local centre. Low density housing is provided at the far east of the development area and open space is provided throughout.



2.5.1

Viable and Vital Places

Option E seeks to deliver an integrated district centre and transport hub through the realignment of the Aberdeen rail line and creation of a new halt at Culloden.

Large and dense housing sites are proposed throughout the area, with the business park and campus focused on the new Inshes Junction. Community and education facilities will be provided along the A96 corridor

The distinct segregation between the housing sites, the district centre and the community facilities may hinder the developments ability to place make. The district centre would be likely to succeed due to the population surrounding it and the focus created by the new rail halt.

2.5.2

The Environment

This proposal seeks to create additional green space, amenity space and recreation space as well as integrate these into the existing floodplain. Option E creates large designated public spaces as well as protecting open land in the development area that will afford the opportunity to create SUDS and wetland areas and to enhance existing waterway settings.

2.5.3

Land Use

Option E promotes the campus at the Inshes Junction which will provide an opportunity to integrate with the medical sector at Raigmore Hospital and to the new business park proposed here also. The district centre relates well to the

surrounding uses, though the separation between the community uses and the rest of the development would be a concern.

2.5.4

Landscape

The movement of the railway line would help to open up the waterfront area which is currently constricted by the existing line. This would create a new and widely used green space which would enhance the landscape setting in the area.

2.6

The Preferred Option

The preferred option for development at Inverness East is **Option E**.

This option opens up the Inshes Junction/Beechwood area for development and sites the campus next to the medical uses of Raigmore to allow easy synergy and knowledge sharing.

The district centre and housing land to the north west of Culloden will round off the urban area and the retail and business park provision appear a natural extension to the existing Smithton Retail Park.

The option affords an opportunity to develop a green network through the entire development area with concentration of green space along the river course and floodplain, the waterfront and towards to the north and east of Culloden and Balloch.

There is concern over the deliverability of the new rail line and halts and the segregation of the community facilities from other land uses may lead to associated problems of access, traffic generation and social exclusion.

However, there is still scope for the majority of the development shown in option E to be deliverable without the rail line, and by moving the community facilities closer to the district centre in place of housing land, the land use issue can be resolved.

3 Nairn Options

3.1

Option A

Option A proposes the middle by-pass route from Delnies to Howford. Development is separted into three main areas, with a golf course and low density housing to the west of the town, a new local centre, retail provision and high density housing to the south and low density housing and industrial land to the east.



3.1.1

Viable and Vital Places

Option A proposes a new local centre to the south of the existing Nairn town centre, with adjoining high density residential land, retailing and community facilities.

Lower density executive style housing is proposed alongside further retail provision near to a planned golf course at Nairn west, with industrial land and further lower density housing proposed at Nairn east.

This would create a natural extension to Nairn south, though the focus if the development seems segregated from the existing town and focus towards the by-pass. There is also a risk that the golf course development would become a separate community from Nairn.

3.1.2

The Environment

Option A proposes a large swathe of open space between the existing Nairn town boundary and the A96 by-pass encompassing the flood plains and existing woodland areas. This would help to protect and enhance existing environmental features as well as afford the opportunity to create new ones.

3.1.3

Land Use

There appears a distinct separation between the existing town and the new uses in all areas. The new local centre would serve the new community but is significantly separated from the existing town and would not serve the existing community. The golf course, retail provision and low density housing does not appear to relate to Nairn at all.

The industrial provision to the east of the town appears be an appropriate land use, extending an existing industrial area.

3.1.4

Landscape

The large amount of green land to the south of Nairn in this option will protect and enhance the landscape setting of the town.

3.2

Option B

Option B shows the long by-pass route from Gollanfield to Howford. This option concentrates all the development to the south of Nairn Town centre, focused on medium to high density housing surrounding a district centre. Business and industrial land is located between the rail line and the new by-pass.



3.2.1

Viable and Vital Places

Due to the proposed road layout, Option B concentrates the development towards the south of the existing town centre. Residential land is concentrated around the new district centre to create a continuation south of Nairn, with retail and industrial land proposed to the immediate west of this. Community and educational facilities are to be accommodated within the new district centre.

This option will create a tight urban area of medium and high density housing that will continue Nairn's built character southwards. The district centre will provide a focus to the community and the option is likely to create successful places.

3.2.2

The Environment

Option B protects only one of the major floodplains in the Nairn area and proposes only one area of substantial dedicated open space to the east of the River Nairn. The dense nature of development in the central area of the development site may detract from the environmental qualities of Nairn.

3.2.3

Land Use

The proposed development shown in option B would provide a tight and dense extension to Nairn, continuing the built character of the town centre southwards. There is a slight risk that the new centre is too far out, but this may help to protect and focus growth to Nairn town centre.

The industrial and business use sites will benefit from a by-pass junction and are located close enough to the town to develop successfully.

3.2.4

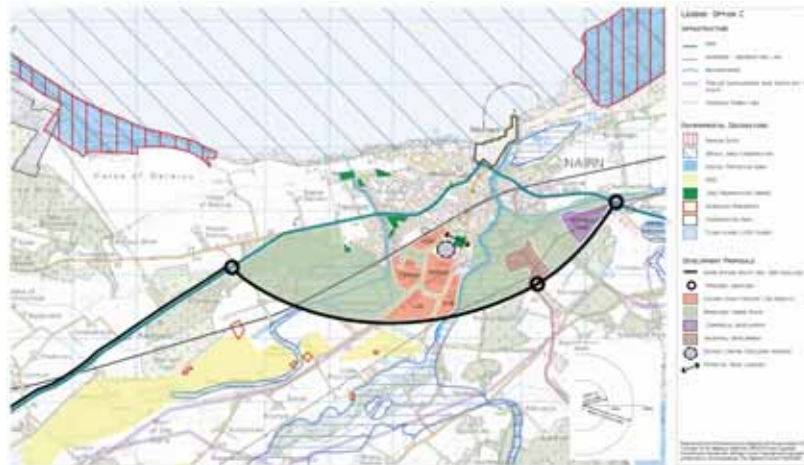
Landscape

The concentration of development through the central corridor of this option means only the floodplain area of the River Nairn can be utilised to create new landscape features. The setting of Nairn from the west and south may be detracted from by the level of development, whilst the eastern approach could be enhanced.

3.3

Option C

This development option uses the middle by-pass route from Wester Delnies and concentrates most of the development to Nairn south. The business and industrial land allocations are focussed to the east of the town around two by-pass junctions, whilst the housing and local centre lie between the two water courses, extending Nairn town centre south.



3.3.1

Viable and Vital Places

Option C has a similar focus to Option B in that the residential land and district centre will draw Nairn town centre southwards. The industrial and retail land designations are proposed at separate junctions on the A96 by pass to the east of the city, capitalising on direct access from the A96.

3.3.2

The Environment

Option C protects the main environmental features in the Nairn south area including the two floodplain areas and will afford the opportunity to create new formal public spaces.

The River Nairn would have the opportunity to develop into a quality environmental and recreational feature with the new development complementing it.

3.3.3

Land Use

The new local centre is proposed on the edge of Nairn with higher density housing surrounding it and lower density housing focused towards the by-pass. This is likely to create a successful place focusing on the new centre, but risks competition with the existing town centre if not controlled properly.

The industrial and business land uses, whilst benefiting from direct A96 access, are excessively segregated from each other, the existing town and the proposed extension.

3.3.4

Landscape

The large amount of green space created by the development option will help to protect the setting of Nairn, whilst affording the opportunity to create new formal public spaces.

3.4

Option D

Incorporating the long by-pass route, Option D proposes development throughout Nairn's hinterland. A new golf course and low density housing is proposed to Nairn west whilst housing, community facilities and retail provision is provided at Nairn south. A mixed use development area, with low density housing would provide an eastern gateway to the town.



3.4.1

Viable and Vital Places

Option D offers the long by-pass route and focuses development along the new road layout. There is a large area of mixed use development at the eastern extent of the town with housing, community facilities, retail and business land proposed along the southern periphery of Nairn. The golf course to the west of the town will provide a focus for low density housing.

There appears a distinct separation of uses and the focus of the development is on the by-pass as opposed to the town centre which is unlikely to help tackle the regeneration of Nairn issue.

3.4.2

Environment

Whilst Option D protects the floodplain areas, the development proposed does consume much of the green space that creates Nairn's setting between the town and the proposed A96 by-pass. Other open spaces are proposed at and around the golf course development to the west of the town by means of compensation

3.4.3

Land Use

The scattered approach adopted in this option focuses the development towards the A96 and does not integrate the uses particularly well. The large swathe of community facilities proposed to the south of Nairn town centre will separate the new housing and business development here from the town.

The packages of housing land around the A96 corridor will not integrate with each other or with the town centre and the large mixed use area may create competition to the town centre.

3.4.4

Landscape

The large and scattered development pattern will affect the landscape setting of the town. To the west the golf course is likely to affect the coastal area whilst the focus of development to the southern and eastern reaches of the development area will affect the views into the town.

3.5

Option E

The only option showing the short by-pass route from Easter Delnies to Howford, Option E shows two local centres. The first to Nairn South would incorporate a large area of medium and high density housing, continuing the built fabric southwards. The second towards Nairn east would provide a focus for lower density housing, retail and business land and an industrial allocation.



3.5.1

Viable and Vital Places

Option E proposes a high density, large scale extension to Nairn, incorporating two new local centres to the south and east of the town.

Medium to high density housing will continue Nairn town centre south to the A96 by-pass focused on a new local centre containing community facilities and some retail provision.

An area of low density housing is proposed in the south eastern sector of the town focusing on the greened floodplain area. This will link through to the business park and industrial uses proposed on the A96.

The second centre to the east does not appear to be well linked to either the existing Nairn town centre or to the other proposed centre and may become a secluded development area.

3.5.2

The Environment

Due to the short by-pass route, this option provides a tight green frame around Nairn including the two floodplain areas. Despite the smaller land area, the high density development means that there is still ample green space provided.

3.5.3

Land Use

The interaction of the southern local centre with Nairn will help to revitalise the town centre and create a successful place. However the second eastern development area is isolated from the town and is self contained which may produce a segregated development.

3.5.4

Landscape

The amount of green space provided in this development would afford the opportunity to protect, enhance and create passive and active open spaces in close proximity to the development areas. The tight by-pass route would also allow the wider landscape setting of Nairn to be protected.

3.6

The Preferred Option

The preferred option for development at Nairn South is **Option B**.

This option steers the by-pass quite far from the town boundary and allows expansion land for the future beyond the A96 masterplan era. The tight concentration of development as a continuation of Nairn will help to create sustainable places and regenerate the town centre. The new local centre can become a focal point for community interaction.

The concern with option B is the development of industry and business land in and around the floodplain. In the absence of information to the contrary, the SEPA floodplain areas must be adhered to and development in this area should not be permitted. There is scope for the movement of these uses to development land to the west or east of Nairn as shown in other options.