

Halcrow Group Limited

A96 Corridor Masterplan Stage 2

Technical Options Appraisal - Nairn South

October 2006

The Highland Council

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Contents

1	Introduction	3
	1.1 <i>Context</i>	3
	1.2 <i>Report Structure</i>	3
2	Technical Appraisals	3
	2.1 <i>Marketability</i>	3
	2.2 <i>Delivery</i>	3
	2.3 <i>Urban Form</i>	3
	2.4 <i>Traffic</i>	3
	2.5 <i>Planning</i>	3
3	Conclusions and Recommendations	3
	3.1 <i>Conclusions</i>	3
	3.2 <i>Recommendations</i>	3
	<i>Appendix 1 – FG Burnett’s Market Assessment</i>	3
	<i>Appendix 2 – Turner and Townsend’s Deliverability Assessment</i>	3
	<i>Appendix 3 – Whatmore’s Urban Form Assessment</i>	3
	<i>Appendix 4 – Halcrow Group’s Traffic Assessment</i>	3
	<i>Appendix 5 – Halcrow Group’s Planning Assessment</i>	3

1 Introduction

1.1 *Context*

As part of developing proposals for the growth of Nairn (in the context of considering growth across the A96 Corridor as a whole) a range of proposals were developed¹. These were designed to present options for growth at Nairn and to stimulate debate and discussion.

The options are being considered in the context of broad stakeholder considerations², general public consultation (undertaken and assessed by The Highland Council), agency consultation (undertaken and assessed by The Highland Council), contributions from the Nairn South Framework Planning Group³ and technical considerations in respect of marketability, delivery, urban form, traffic and planning.

This paper reports on the technical considerations and reviews them. It attempts to draw some conclusions that will allow a single preferred option for the growth of Nairn to emerge.

1.2 *Report Structure*

The report's structure is straightforward. It will:

- Summarise each technical paper drawing out the salient points.
- Draw conclusions and make recommendations for developing a growth option for Nairn.

¹ See Interim Report – Phase 1: Options for Development and Green Frameworks

² Utilising Collaboration for Success

³ The Nairn South FPG was set up to drive forward the preparation of a Framework for Nairn South. It is made up of key land interests and appropriate public agencies.

2 Technical Appraisals

2.1

Marketability

FG Burnett undertook an assessment of each option for Nairn (see Appendix 1). This considered the marketability of each option. In summary, the salient points for each option were:

- For Option A
 - Increase medium density housing provision
 - Employment generation has been significantly under-estimated.
 - Provision for comparative regional retail is a gross over provision
 - Clear demand for golf course.
- For Option B
 - Increase low density housing provision
 - Employment generation has been significantly under-estimated resulting in conclusions that too much land allocated for industrial and business use.
 - Provision for comparative regional retail is a gross over provision
 - Clear demand for golf course should be met⁴.
- For Option C
 - Density of housing provision is balanced.
 - Population projections are too low.
 - Employment generation has been significantly under-estimated resulting in conclusions that too much land allocated for industrial and business use.
 - Provision for regional retail (comparative and convenience) is required of around 7 hectares.
 - Clear demand for golf course should be met.

⁴ The golf course is proposed in the current local plan.

- For Option D
 - Density of housing provision is balanced.
 - Employment generation has been significantly under-estimated.
 - Provision for regional retail (comparative and convenience) is required of around 7 hectares.
 - Concern at appropriate balance of population and jobs.
 - Clear demand for golf course.

- For Option E
 - Density of housing provision is balanced.
 - Population projections are too low.
 - Employment generation has been significantly under-estimated resulting in conclusions that too much land allocated for industrial and business use.
 - Provision for regional retail (comparative and convenience) is required of around 7 hectares.
 - Clear demand for golf course should be met.

A balanced consideration concludes that **Option A** (with amendment) would be the most marketable. The amendments include to:

- Increase medium density housing provision
- Ensure a balance in employment generation with population growth.
- Make appropriate provision for sub-regional retail of around 7 hectares.

2.2

Delivery

Turner and Townsend undertook an assessment of each option for Nairn (see Appendix 2). This considered the deliverability of each option. In summary, the salient points for each option were:

- For Option A
 - Significant impact on pipeline safeguard zone.
 - Development in the floodplain may be inappropriate.
 - 5 crossings required for by-pass. By-pass 7km in length.
 - Significant loss of agricultural land to the west.

- 1.5km of powerline would require undergrounding.
- For Option B
 - Significant impact on pipeline safeguard zone.
 - Proximity of by-pass to housing allocations in the south may require sound barriers
 - Development in the floodplain may be inappropriate.
 - Some of the powerline would require undergrounding.
 - 5 crossings required for by-pass. By-pass 9.5km in length.
 - Industrial land is in an unattractive location.
- For Option C
 - Significant impact on pipeline safeguard zone.
 - 4 crossings required for by-pass. By-pass 7km in length.
 - Some of the powerline would require undergrounding.
 - Proximity of by-pass to housing allocations in the south may require sound barriers
- For Option D
 - Significant impact on pipeline safeguard zone.
 - 4 crossings required for by-pass. By-pass 10km in length.
 - Significant powerline would require undergrounding.
- For Option E
 - 3 crossings required for by-pass. By-pass 7km in length; but involves more dualling of the A96.
 - Significant powerline would require undergrounding.
 - Proximity of by-pass to housing allocations in the south may require sound barriers
 - Significant impact on pipeline safeguard zone.

A balanced consideration concludes that **Option C** would be the most deliverable as it involves limited powerline undergrounding and less dualling of the A96.

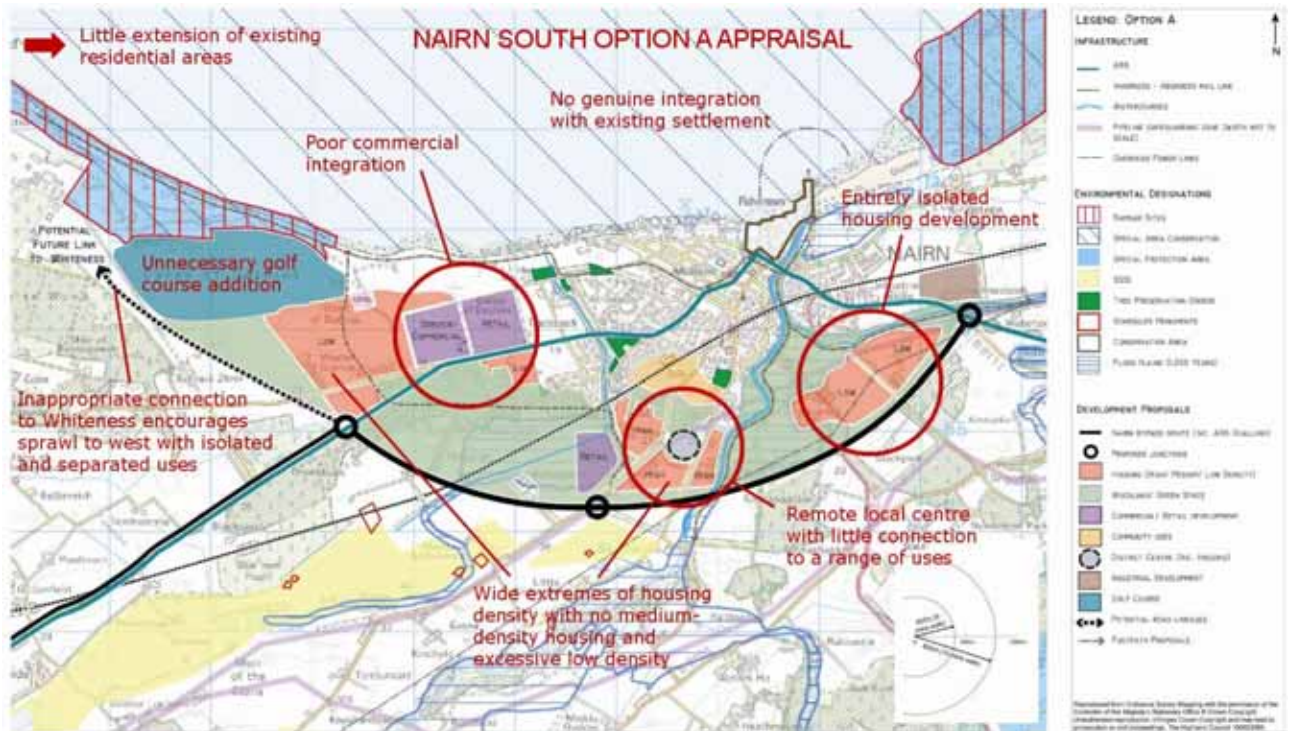
2.3

Urban Form

Whatmore undertook an assessment of each option for Nairn (see Appendix 3). This considered the urban form of each option. In summary, the salient points for each option were:

- For Option A

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Road infrastructure improvements Large open space provision Road connection to Whiteness Large bulky goods provision	Potentially divisive Reduces housing density range East-west spread too wide Uses randomly distributed	Well serviced development High density housing by centre Access to employment Commercial growth but...	Pedestrian permeability Open space is not a useful amenity Indistinct character with poor walking access ...restricted opportunity for placemaking



- For Option B

Strengths

Bypass remains to south of railway
 Higher densities nearer existing centre
 District centre with access to all housing
 Commercially attractive

Weaknesses

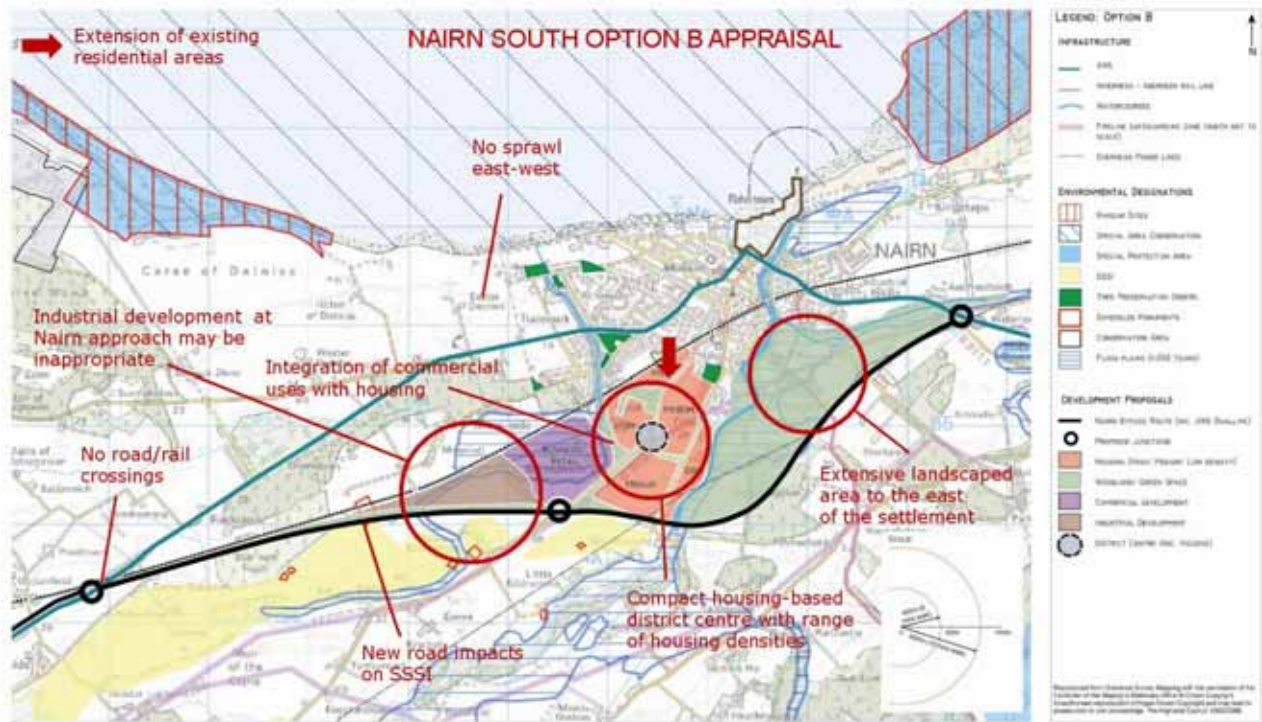
Business dominated approach
 Housing development concentrated
 Other uses more remote from centre
 Oversimplified strategy

Opportunities

Access to industry / business off bypass
 Future expansion capacity
 High level of local connectivity
 Revive existing local commerce

Threats

Business park not part of "place"
 New development in two distinct lobes
 Detrimental effect on existing local character
 Nairn entirely bypassed and may suffer



- For Option C

Strengths

Road infrastructure improvements
 More compact bypass
 Modest scale of development
 Business park located remote from centre

Weaknesses

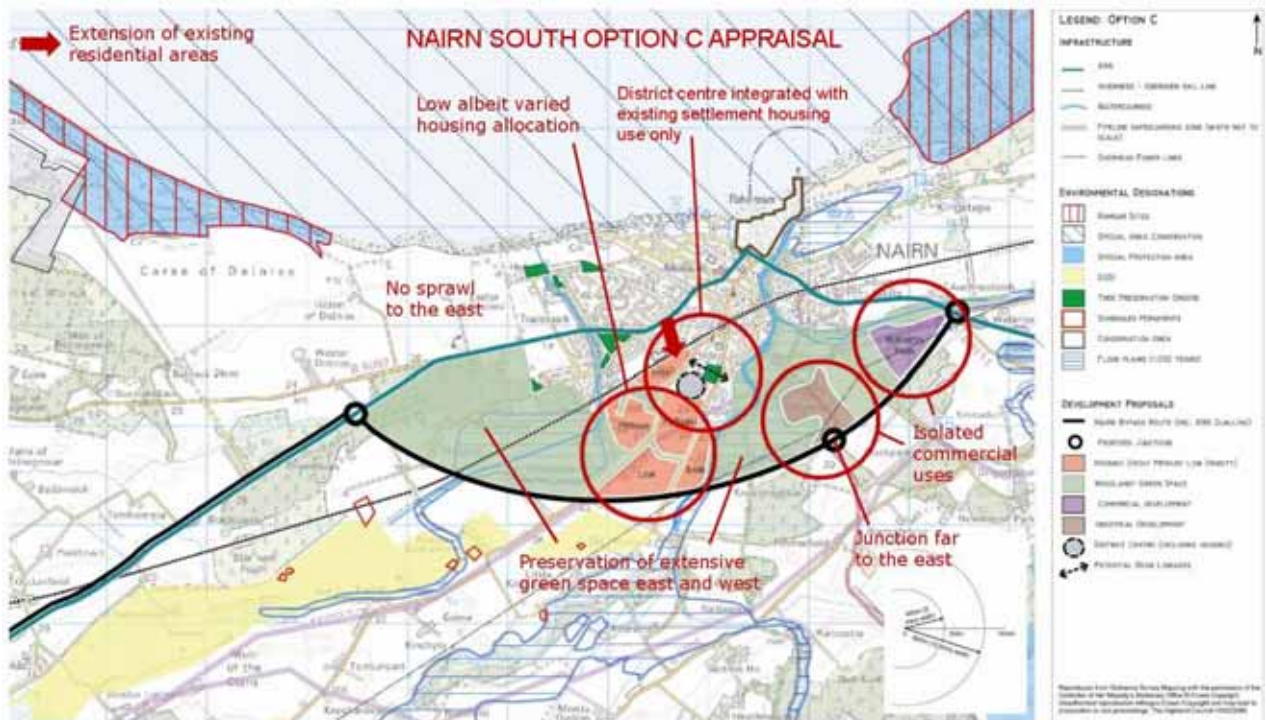
Potentially divisive
 Reliance on direct access to Nairn
 Insufficient capacity
 Inaccessible

Opportunities

Well serviced development
 Benefit to Nairn with more direct access
 Potential housing expansion
 Expansion of business / industrial premises

Threats

Pedestrian permeability
 Limited scope for access to future development
 Ineffective expansion - critical mass not achieved
 Commercially unsustainable



- For Option E

Strengths

Road infrastructure improvements
 Compact bypass
 Compact development
 Legible green space structure

Weaknesses

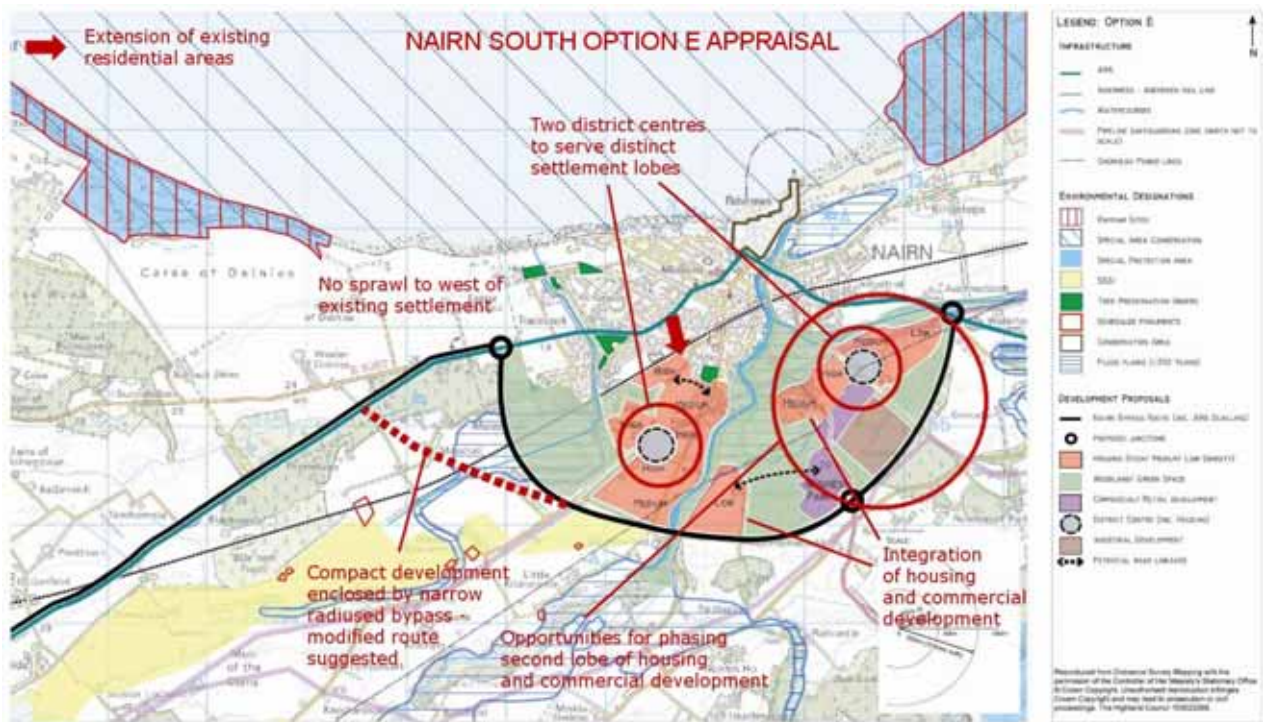
Potentially divisive
 Not most efficient traffic solution - bypass too short
 Constrained development
 Separate lobes of development

Opportunities

Well serviced development
 High degree of accessibility
 Dense development where appropriate
 Walking routes and public amenity

Threats

Pedestrian permeability
 Traffic may not use bypass
 Overwhelm character of existing town
 Limit to future expansion within bypass



A balanced consideration concludes that **Option E** would be the most favoured urban form as it promoted compact places.

2.4

Traffic

Halcrow Group undertook an assessment of each option for Nairn (see Appendix 4). This considered the traffic and movement implications of each option. In summary, the salient points for each option were:

- For Option A
 - Transport choice is limited due to dispersal of uses and significant low density provision.
 - Higher density allocations to the south will promote walking and cycling and will have good linkages to existing communities/services.
 - Low density areas will be peripheral and encourage private car use.
- For Option B
 - Provides good access to the by-pass and accessibility to the rail station by foot or cycle.
 - Access to the school across the railway would be required.
 - Compact development from makes walking and cycling attractive.
- For Option C
 - Proposed access road to north of core development area will ease congestion and promote linkages to central Nairn.
 - Transport choice is limited due to segregation of employment uses from residential uses.
 - Promotes car use that discourages integration with adjacent communities.
 - Lack of access to the by-pass for the core development area will result in increased use of existing network.
- For Option D
 - A car dominated design as development is dispersed.
 - A focus on the by-pass for access will discourage integration between old and new.
 - The by-pass route is elongated.

- For Option E
 - The by-pass is the shortest presenting good travelling times.
 - Eastern core is well integrated and attractive for public transport due to linkage to the by-pass.
 - Eastern core may encourage more car use due to its relative isolation and access to the by-pass.
 - Western core is integrated into the existing areas and promotes walking and cycling.
 - Western core area requires a by-pass junction in order to discourage car trips from the existing network.

A balanced consideration concludes that **Option B** would be the most attractive from a traffic perspective. This is due to its compact design, good accessibility for all modes of transport and it will also alleviate traffic through the town centre and the existing network.

2.5

Planning

Halcrow Group undertook an assessment of each option for Nairn (see Appendix 5). This considered the planning implications in relation to viable and vital places, environment, land use and landscape of each option. In summary, the salient points for each option are presented in the following table:

Consideration	Viability and Vitality	Environment	Land Use	Landscape
Option				
Option A	The southern core may focus to the by-pass. Western development is isolated.	Affords environmental integration	New areas are separated from existing areas and poorly integrated. Western industrial allocation extends existing uses.	Facilitates a quality landscape setting for Nairn.
Option B	The compact southern extension will create a successful place.	Development in the floodplain is inappropriate. The dense nature of development may detract from the environmental qualities of Nairn.	The district centre may be too removed from existing communities to bring benefits.	Setting to west and south may be detracted. Affords opportunity to enhance eastern approaches.
Option C	The compact southern extension will create a successful place.	Protects the main environmental features in the Nairn south area. Affords the opportunity to create new formal public spaces and develop a quality environmental and recreational feature at the River Nairn.	Promotes good compact land use approach integrated to existing community. Risks competition with the existing town centre if not controlled properly. Employment uses are segregated.	Protect the setting of Nairn. Affords the opportunity to create new formal public spaces.

Consideration	Viability and Vitality	Environment	Land Use	Landscape
Option				
Option D	<p>Separation of uses with focus on the by-pass.</p> <p>Unlikely to help tackle the regeneration of Nairn issue.</p>	<p>Consumes much of the green space that creates Nairn's setting</p>	<p>Does not integrate the uses particularly well</p> <p>Swathe of community facilities proposed to the south of Nairn town centre will separate the new housing and business development from the town.</p> <p>Packages of housing will not integrate with each other or with the town centre.</p> <p>Large mixed use area may create competition to the town centre.</p>	<p>Large and scattered development pattern will adversely affect the landscape setting of the town.</p>
Option E	<p>The compact southern extension will create a successful place.</p> <p>The eastern extension is isolated and may become secluded.</p>	<p>Provides an ample green framework.</p>	<p>Southern extension integrates with established communities contributing to regeneration.</p> <p>Eastern extension is segregated.</p>	<p>Affords the opportunity to protect, enhance and create passive and active open spaces in close proximity to the development areas.</p> <p>Allows the wider landscape setting of Nairn to be protected.</p>

A balanced consideration concludes that **Option B** would be the most attractive from a planning perspective. This option allows expansion land for the future. 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.

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1 Conclusions

The following presents the preferred options from each technical appraisal⁵.

Options Appraisal	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D	Option E
Market	◆				
Delivery			◆		
Urban Form					◆
Traffic		◆			
Planning		◆			

At first there appears to be no consensus emerging from these considerations. However, some common themes do begin to emerge with more detailed analysis. These include:

- Promotion of a good mix of housing densities.
- Integration with existing communities.
- A balance of population expansion and employment opportunities.
- The creation of compact places.
- A by-pass route that helps to integrate expansion with the town.

⁵ It is recognised that these preferences are caveated.

3.2

Recommendations

Emerging from the above there would appear to be some key recommendations for the extension of Nairn as follows:

- The by-pass route should commence at Drumdivan in the east crossing the River Nairn south of Howford before rejoining the existing A96 at Auchnacloch.
- A compact place with a range of densities should be created to the south of Nairn with its district centre to ward to northern end in order to facilitate integration. This community should be accessible from the by-pass.
- A compact place with a range of densities should be created to the west (within the new by-pass alignment) with a district centre that could be expanded to accommodate modest regional retail in the longer term.
- Business allocations should be incorporated within the above places.
- Industrial uses should be focused to the east.
- Appropriate green space should be identified that will provide valuable integrated environmental assets for Nairn and respond to the town's setting.

Appendix 1 – FG Burnett's Market Assessment

Appendix 2 – Turner and Townsend's Deliverability Assessment

Appendix 3 – Whatmore’s Urban Form Assessment

Appendix 4 – Halcrow Group’s Traffic Assessment

Appendix 5 – Halcrow Group's Planning Assessment