

Highland Council

A96 Corridor Landscape Assessment

Landscape Assessment Report

October 2004

Entec UK Limited



Report for

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Landscape Assessment Report Study
Report

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project Brief

The A96 Corridor Masterplan brief set out as part of the Phase 1 Planning stage the implementation of a capacity assessment with the view of formulating an overall masterplan for the corridor.

1.1.1 Capacity Assessment

Capacity Assessment

The Council wishes to create a complete future living environment within the A96 Corridor, which will stand comparison with the best standards and quality of new community development anywhere in Northern Europe. The recent Inverness City-Vision is critical of the bland and undistinguished suburban developments which have characterised much current building, and the corresponding degradation of settings and habitats which are acknowledged to be of international standing. This is more than an exercise in town building – a holistic solution embracing every hectare of land in the Corridor is being looked for. At the same time, the structure, format and density of any new settlement forms need to cater for all sections, tastes and expectations of our future population, not least the well-educated and high-earning young people that the Highlands need to retain and attract in significant numbers. The design of new communities as distinct, unique and special places is paramount. Equally these communities need to be optimised for sustainable travel with state of the art pedestrian and cycle prioritisation, with higher density cores clustered at key public transport interchanges and other central access points but also providing opportunities for more traditional and less intensive accommodation around their edges. Key wildlife and other special heritage features must be safeguarded or enhanced through appropriate management and interpretation regimes. This should have particular regard for the availability and usage, threshold capacities and ease of enlargement of current transport and other utility networks.

Overall Masterplan

The consultants were asked to create a spatial database covering the whole of the A96 Corridor. The Council holds a catalogue of planning constraints and other datasets plus full digital mapping coverage which will go some way towards populating this database. Taking the outputs from the Proof of Concept stage and Capacity Assessment, together with this spatial data, a selection of land-use/transport scenarios and comparative appraisal information leading (after discussions with the Council) to selection and suitable mapping/illustration of a preferred masterplan solution will be prepared.

2. Policies and Plans

2.1 Scottish Planning Policy Guidelines

The overall project to accommodate 10,000 new homes, as well as the relevant services, is a major development and the surrounding landscapes and countryside must be preserved so that the overall project is not only successful but is attractive and relates to its surroundings.

The governments policy, SPP3; Planning For Housing, sets out the aims of the Scottish Executive in relation to new housing and its contribution to the surrounding environment. The policies are broken into several areas; The creation of a quality residential environment, which includes design, energy efficiency, form, density & landscape and tenure mixture. The guiding of development to the right places, that involves sustainable settlements, accessibility, location of housing, settlement extensions, rural housing & new settlements. Finally delivering housing land, involving the creation of development & housing land audits, affordable housing, planning agreements, and the determination of planning applications.

The design of developments is extremely important as it governs whether or not a settlement will blend in with the landscape:

“The overall design of development should be fully addressed, particularly matters such as microclimate; layout of roads, cycle routes and footpaths; the separation and collection of waste; links with local centres; and the relationship to existing development nearby.” (SPP3, para7)

There are a number of factors, that a planning authority, and developers alike, must consider with any new settlement in the countryside. These are siting, form & proportion, materials, historic considerations and general design standards. Developers must consider the surrounding and existing settlement layouts, and positioning, in order to integrate developments and safeguard access routes used by existing communities. The local vernacular should be studied to ensure integration of design.

Paragraph 10 notes the importance of these design features and considers that:

“Planning authorities should make use of design guides to influence the design of new housing development generally. For significant or sensitive sites, they should draw up a development brief, indicating any important natural or built features which are to be retained, and guiding developers in matters of density, layout, building heights and materials.” (SPP3, para10)

The overall layout of developments must continue the form of the existing settlement. A good layout is the key to a successful development as it allows for a much more secure and sustainable expansion to countryside areas.

There are a number of issues which planning authorities and developers must consider when selecting sites to develop for housing.

As Paragraph 41 states that:

“Not all sites will be capable of providing good residential environments, mainly because of safety or amenity considerations.” (SPP3, para41)

Existing land uses must be measured in terms of their detrimental effects on new housing and their occupants. Health and safety issues, as well as pollution issues, should guide developers into areas which are away from areas such as, safety exclusion zones, busy trunk roads and rail lines, mineral workings and sewage works. The problems of noise pollution and safety, which relate to airports and airline flight paths, should also be understood when planning for housing. Most importantly, housing must not be located on areas where flooding is frequent at certain times of the year. Planning authorities must always be aware of such issues, as public safety must be a primary consideration when bearing in mind new housing developments.

The surrounding and existing landscape is an integral part of a development:

“Developers should consider landscape as a part of the design and layout from the outset of the development process. Where land is allocated for future residential use, developers should consider advance structural planting to establish a landscape framework within which development can take place.” (SPP3, para16)

The consideration of these landscapes is an important factor as it adds to the overall beauty and enjoyment of a settlement and well as preserving the heritage of the surrounding countryside. Developers must consider these issues as not only will it allow the integration of open spaces with urban areas, it will also increase the chances of gaining planning permission. As with any application of this size, the council must first consider the way in which a development affects the surrounding area and the consideration that has taken place for retaining the natural heritage:

“New development should respect and where appropriate enhance existing vegetation and other natural features. Mature trees should be retained wherever possible and replanting should be undertaken where development involves their loss.” (SPP3, para17)

“Planning authorities and developers should make sure that provision is made for the long-term management of open space, landscaping, drainage systems and other common facilities proposed as part of residential developments.” (SPP3, para20)

The effect of landscaping is important. Landscape design cannot cover up poor layout or built form and it is critical that developers, if they are to be successful with their proposal, take into account the natural & protected environment, as well as the built environment:

“Plans and proposals for residential development, should seek to minimise adverse effects on natural heritage, including landscape character and biodiversity. Care should be taken to safeguard national and international natural heritage designations.” (SPP3, para38)

Where extensions to existing settlements are proposed, planners must consider the surrounding area and respect the layout, building types and architecture so that new housing blends in with the surrounding environment. To achieve these aims, developers must pay attention to the visual impacts from not only from inside the existing settlement but also the visual impacts from areas outside the town, or village, for example from major roads, rail links and any other view points in which the extension can be seen:

“Extensions to settlements need careful planning. The landscape settings of existing towns and villages must be respected...”(SPP3, para45)

Much like an extension to a settlement, new settlements must respect the current form and scale of existing towns and villages. Layouts and design inspirations should relate to these rural areas and not be influenced by suburbia, as the integration of proposals into the countryside is an important issue which planning authorities must consider.

3. Methodology

3.1 Landscape Capacity Assessment

3.1.1 Landscape Capacity Assessment Methodology

The landscape capacity assessment of potential development areas draws from the *Guidelines on Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Second Edition* (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Assessment, 2002) and in particular the *Inner Moray Assessment* (Sarah Fletcher, Scottish Natural Heritage Review No.90, 1998). Further reference has been made to the following key publications:

Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, (University of Sheffield and Land Use Consultants, 2002).

The Highland Structure Plan

SPP3 - Planning for Housing

PAN 44 – Fitting New Housing Development into the Landscape

PAN 52 – Planning for Small Towns

PAN 65 – Planning and Open Space

PAN 60- Planning for Natural Heritage

The assessment process has been divided into four stages, as follows:

- a description of the existing landscape resource;
- a report on the assessment of landscape character surveyed within the A96 study area;
- an assessment of the sensitivity of landscape character to potential housing development and
- An assessment of landscape capacity of the study area for new settlements and future development.

Definition of the Study Area

The study area extends from Inverness to Nairn and includes the landscape setting of small settlements, urban edge of larger settlements and views from the main approach roads and closest hilltops and skylines enclosing the settlements. A red line shown on the figures indicates the initial outer boundary of the study area. However, this boundary has been treated as flexible and the landscape survey has extended this area to include landscape contributing to the immediate visual setting for each settlement.

3.1.2 Description of the Existing (Baseline) Landscape Resource

A description of the existing (baseline) landscape resource and visual amenity forms a cornerstone of the assessment process and establishes the landscape context and sensitivity of the study area.

This section will refer to broad regional landscape character areas and landscape character types, identified in *'Inner Moray Firth Landscape Character Assessment'* (Sarah Fletcher, Scottish Natural Heritage Review No. 90, 1998). Although parts of the study area are within the *Inverness District Landscape Character Assessment* and *'Moray and Nairn Landscape Assessment'* as illustrated in Figure 1. The description of the existing landscape resource also documents landscape designations and other landscape features, elements and landmarks contributing to the value and sensitivity of the landscape. Each of the following features considered as part of this assessment is listed below:

- Topography – areas of high and or steep ground;
- landscape designations;
- water courses and main areas of woodland;
- existing landscape character areas;
- tourist destinations and local landscape features or landmarks;
- areas of existing built development;
- main transport routes (into and out of the settlements), and
- existing (above ground) industry and utilities, including electrical transmission lines.

The assessment has examined the historical and urban development of the settlements in terms of how they are approached and accessed as well as their form, scale, character and identity.

The character assessment survey is divided into three areas as follows:

- i) **Landscape Characteristics** surveys the characteristics of the area with reference to the following components.

Essential Character: A brief description of the areas essential characteristics and key features is provided.

Landscape Elements: A description of the main component parts of the landscape that contribute to local character.

Landform / Natural features: A description of the landform features and hydrology.

Land use / Landcover: A description including any man-made features and elements as well as vegetation type and pattern.

Landscape Patterns / Field boundaries: A description of landscape patterns usually field boundary types, condition, and size of fields.

Heritage Features: A description of any visible landscape or cultural features, landmarks, and or landscape related tourist attractions.

Building Materials: A note of the colours and materials commonly used in the area.

Aesthetic factors: These refer to the relative scale, sense of enclosure or openness, diversity, texture, colour, balance, movement, form, remoteness, and sense of security present in the landscape.

Views and visual focus / landmarks: A description of these man-made or natural features, including description of the main views.

Adjoining Urban Edge: Description of the building character / housing type, views and urban edge characteristics of the area.

Landscape Quality: A judgement on the state of repair or condition of the elements of a particular landscape, it's integrity and intactness and the extent to which it's distinctive character is apparent.

Landscape Value: The importance attached to a landscape, often as a basis for designation because of its quality, cultural associations, scenic or aesthetic characteristics. It should be noted that a landscape of high value may not always equate to areas of high landscape quality (particularly if they are designated for other landscape and visual reasons) and that areas of low landscape value may contain areas of higher landscape quality.

- ii) **Landscape and Visual Effects** considers the potential landscape and visual effects of housing development in that area particularly loss of rural landscape, vegetation and visual prominence on the skyline with regard to:

Landscape 'Fit': Consideration of how the proposed development would fit or be located in the landscape in broad terms.

Visual effects (skyline): Consideration of the visual effects and skyline visibility.

Loss of vegetation/features: Consideration of landscape features that would be lost or threatened by development.

Degree of Urban Integration: Consideration of how proposed development would relate to the existing urban edge.

- iii) **Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity** examines the capacity of the landscape to accommodate development. Landscape capacity is closely related to landscape sensitivity and this is determined by consideration of landscape value, quality and capacity for development. Areas of higher landscape sensitivity generally have a lower capacity or no capacity (unsuitable) for development whilst areas of lower sensitivity generally tend to have some capacity for development, which may be subject to particular conditions or landscape constraints such as the preservation of an existing tree belt. Areas not suitable for development may also be identified as suitable for inclusion in a landscape strategy to preserve areas of particular landscape value or green space.

Capacity is considered in respect of:

Landscape capacity: The capacity of a particular type of landscape character to accommodate change brought about by development without unacceptable adverse effects on its character. Development has been referred to in broad design terms of scale, height, density, and setting of development within a particular landscape area.

Design constraints and opportunities: identified for each area and considered by reference to the landscape characteristics observed on site.

Management Strategy: Each area is considered in terms of the overall landscape management recommended, which may be either conserve / restore / enhance and or create new landscape.

3.1.3 Housing Development and Potential Landscape Effects

In considering the landscape sensitivity to housing development it is important to consider the likely and typical landscape and visual effects brought about by this form of development as these will have a bearing on the sensitivity of one landscape type compared to another.

The Landscape Institute defines landscape effects as ‘*changes to landscape elements, characteristics, character, and qualities of the landscape as a result of development*’ these may be negative or positive. Visual effects are recognised by the Landscape Institute as a ‘*subset of landscape effects and are concerned wholly with the affect of development on views, and the general visual amenity*’. There will be further townscape or urban design effects of development on the urban character and quality as a result of development.

The potential effects considered as part of this assessment and associated with potential housing development, may therefore include, but are not restricted to, the following:

Changes to landscape character - erosion of landscape character, elements and patterns, particularly those, which form characteristic elements of landscape character along the boundaries of new development, adversely affecting landscape character and the rural setting of settlements.

Loss of rare or unique areas of local landscape character and elements – local landscape features and landform.

Skyline Effects – Development located in visually prominent locations across hilltops or alongside roads that would lead to a visual prominence of urban development adversely affecting the apparent scale, character, and landscape setting of settlements.

Poor integration of Urban Fringe and urban edge areas – The establishment of a new urban edge, through new development that extends the settlement boundaries requires sensitive integration with the surrounding landscape to reduce adverse visual impact.

Visual effects from key viewpoints - a change in the appearance of the landscape as a result of development may be heightened if the viewpoint location is associated with a valued landscape or frequented view such as from a main access road or bridge.

Visual coalescence – The increased inter-visibility of the two of more urban areas within a landscape such that the separate identities and setting of each are affected.

Ribbon development – Extended development along main transport routes at increased distance for the town / village centre adversely effecting the cohesion and legibility of the settlement and adversely affecting the apparent scale, character and setting of settlements.

Effects on setting – Changes to the visual appearance of a particular landscape or townscape character or the ‘sense of place’¹ of a settlement or valued landscape / landmark that is significantly changed in views from the location as well as towards the location from nearby surrounding viewpoints or visual receptors.

A typical assessment form is illustrated below in Table 2.1

¹ ‘Sense of Place’ Is defined by the Landscape Institute as the essential character and spirit of and area also known as ‘Genus loci’.

Table 2.1 Character Assessment Survey Form

Character Assessment Survey Form					
Job No / Client: Highland Council		Job Title: A96 Corridor			
Date / Weather: 9 September 2004 / Fair		Location No:			
Camera Format: SLR D100 (Digital)		Film/Photo No:			
Essential Character Description: <i>The areas essential character, location and key features.</i>					
Landscape Elements: <i>Component parts of the landscape contributing to its character or distinctive character.</i>					
Landform / Natural features: <i>Describe the landform features and hydrology.</i>					
Land use / Landcover: <i>Including any man-made features and elements as well as vegetation type and pattern.</i>					
Field boundaries / Field Pattern: <i>Boundary type, condition, and scale of fields.</i>					
Heritage Features: <i>Tourist attractions, visible historical features.</i>					
Building materials: <i>Colours and type.</i>					
Aesthetic Factors:					
Scale:	Intimate	Small	Large	Vast	
Enclosure:	Tight	Enclosed	Open	Exposed	
Diversity:	Uniform	Simple	Diverse	Complex	
Texture:	Smooth	Textured	Rough	Very Rough	
Colour:	Monochrome	Muted	Colourful	Garish	
Balance:	Harmonious	Balanced	Discordant	Chaotic	
Movement:	Still	Calm	Lively	Busy	
Form:	Straight	angular	Curved	Sinuous	
Remoteness:	Wild / wilderness	Semi-wild	Farmed	Manicured	
Security:	Comfortable	Safe	Unsettling	Threatening	
Views and visual focus / landmarks: <i>May include man-made or natural features, also viewers of the area – quantities and direction and types of views.</i>			Adjoining Urban Edge: (housing type, settlement boundary, views) <i>Describe character of main settlement, adjoining urban edge, visual character, and housing type.</i>		
Landscape Quality:		<i>Condition of landscape elements and intactness of character</i>			
Landscape 'Fit':		<i>How would proposed development fit into this landscape?</i>			
Visual effects (skyline):		<i>What would be the visual effects, would this effects the skyline?</i>			
Loss of vegetation/features:		<i>What would be the landscape effects</i>			
Degree of Urban Integration:		<i>How would the site interact with the adjacent urban edge?</i>			
Landscape Capacity:	Landscape Strategy	Not suitable	Limited Potential	Potential	Most Suitable
Design Opportunities:					
Design Constraints:					
Management Strategy: <i>Conserve / Restore / Enhance / Create New</i>					

4. Landscape Character Assessment

4.1 Existing Landscape Context

The study area is located on the on the edge of the Moray Firth and Inner Moray between Inverness and Nairn and includes the settlements of Culloden, Westhill, Smithton, Balloch Croy, Ardersier and Lochside.

4.2 Regional Landscape Character

The existing landscape character is mapped in Figure 1, most of the study area is documented in the '*Inner Moray Firth Landscape Character Assessment*' (Sarah Fletcher, Scottish Natural Heritage Review No. 90, 1998). Although parts of the study area are within the *Inverness District Landscape Character Assessment* and '*Moray and Nairn Landscape Assessment*'. Each of the landscape character types are described in Table 4.1

Table 4.1 Landscape Character

Inner Moray Firth Landscape Character Assessment	
Landscape Character Type	Description
Forest Edge Farming	<p>The area comprises of gently undulating land and convex slopes, which is characterised by a framework of coniferous woodland and rectilinear field patterns. This landscape forms a distinct wedge between Inverness and Nairn separating the hills and high ground of Moray with the coastal farmland areas.</p> <p>Typical settlements of this landscape are farm holdings with some small villages including Tornagrain and Croy.</p> <p>Views are generally restricted due to the existing forestry although there are some areas with expansive views e.g. south of Smithton and Westhill of the Moray Firth and Black Isle</p> <p>(This landscape overlaps with Inverness District Character Assessment)</p>
Intensive Farming	<p>The area comprises of generally flat to undulating landform composed of large arable fields interspersed with forestry plantations. The simple wide horizontal landscape and lack of structural elements gives it an overriding expansive scale.</p> <p>Large farm holdings are typical of this landscape often associated with mature trees and forestry.</p> <p>Views are open with extensive views to Moray Firth and Black Isle</p>

Inner Moray Firth Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Type	Description
Enclosed Farmed Landscapes	<p>The area comprises of flat to gently undulating lowlands, of firths and flood plain with remnants of estate woodland, scattered mature trees and open fields.</p> <p>Farm holdings within this landscape are often enclosed by mature trees and development expansion at Inverness and Culloden has encroached on the landscape</p> <p>Views are generally semi enclosed with some views to the Moray Firth and Black Isle.</p>
Enclosed Firth	<p>This is a coastal landscape type with a variety of shorelines and intertidal areas with the edge of the firth often characterised by complex natural patterns including mudflats.</p> <p>Industrial and urban features are prominent features along the coastline with the</p> <p>Views are open to the Moray Firth and Black Isle.</p>
Open Firth	<p>Open Firth is a flat to gently undulating coastal landscape with large expansive areas of sand and shingle beaches. The coastal edge consists of natural landscape patterns and characteristic vegetation is low lying and salt tolerant.</p> <p>Existing settlements are located at river mouths, back dune systems or on rocky headlands where there is access to deep water.</p> <p>Views along the coastline and to the Black Isle are expansive.</p>

Inverness District Landscape Assessment

Landscape Character Type	Description
Rolling Farmland with Woodland	<p>This landscape has been strongly influenced by human occupation and is characterised by rolling landform with hill slopes and plateaux with a diverse mix of open agricultural land and woodland. The woodlands vary in character from dense coniferous plantations to mature broad-leaved, together creating varying patterns of openness and enclosure.</p> <p>The main form of settlement occurs as small farms or small villages, which are typically associated with road junctions and bridging points. Expansion of Colluden and Ballioch has encroached into this landscape.</p>
Farm Staths	<p>This landscape consists of broad, flat to gently undulating landform edged by the steep, rocky, side slopes of the surrounding uplands. The character varies from high exposed rough pasture to sheltered improved pastures in low-lying areas.</p> <p>Typical settlements of this landscape are farm holdings and estate buildings.</p> <p>Views are semi enclosed with wider views to the hills and uplands to the south.</p>
Flat Moorland Plateau with Woodland	<p>The area comprises of flat to gently undulating moorland plateau and is characterised by open heather moorland creating a uniform open landscape. The scale of the landscape is large and there is a general feeling of openness with some areas of plantation forestry.</p> <p>This landscape is largely uninhabited and settlements are concentrated on outer edges and adjacent landscape character types.</p> <p>Plateau areas are open with expansive views of the uplands and distant hills however plateau side slopes restrict visibility of adjacent lower areas.</p>

Moray and Nairn Landscape Assessment

Landscape Character Type	Description
Rolling Farmland and Forest	<p>This landscape is made up of diverse range of landform including rounded hills, broad and narrow incised valleys and undulating upper slopes. The gently rolling landscape has a visual balance of open farmland and woodland, the mix of native and coniferous woodland and hedgerows form dominant enclosing features within the agricultural landscape.</p> <p>Typical settlements of this landscape are traditional farm holdings with some small villages. Recent housing associated with some traditional settlements tends to dominate the landscape due to differing scales and contrasting layout patterns.</p> <p>This landscape character type overlaps with the Forest Edge Farming landscape character area in the Inner Moray Firth Landscape Character Assessment.</p>
Coastal Farmlands	<p>This is an expansive coastal plain landscape consisting of flat to undulating arable fields with a mixture of broad-leaved woodland and coniferous forestry. The bands of coniferous planting creating a strong backdrop to the large fields</p>
Soft Coastal Shore	<p>This area is a flat to gently undulating coastal landscape with large expansive areas of sand and shingle beaches. The coastal edge consists of natural landscape patterns and characteristic vegetation is low lying and salt tolerant.</p> <p>Existing settlements are located at river mouths, back dune systems or on rocky headlands where there is access to deep water.</p> <p>Views along the coastline and to the Black Isle are expansive</p> <p>This landscape character type overlaps with the Open Firth in the Inner Moray Firth Landscape Character Assessment.</p>
Upland Moorland with Forestry	<p>This landscape character area is located on the boundary of the study area and comprises of largely inaccessible areas of broad, rounded hills and upland plateaux.</p>
Open Uplands	<p>This landscape character area is situated to the south of the study area and consists of rounded hills and gently undulating plateaux.</p>

4.3 Landscape Designations

There are two Local Plan Policies that relate particularly to landscape related designations in the study area, and each of these is listed as follows

4.3.1 Areas of Great Landscape Value

With regard to Areas of Great Landscape Value Local Plan policies are as follows:

'BP3 Amenity (Inverness) and (ENV3) Nairnshire - The Council will presume against development particularly where there would be significant damage to heritage, amenity or public health.'

4.3.2 Gardens and Designed Landscapes: Dalcross Castle

Dalcross Castle is listed in the inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes and it may be that other landscapes will be added to the inventory in the future. The Structure Plan Policies for this are listed below:

'Policy BC4 - The Council will seek to preserve historic gardens and designed landscape identified the 'Inventory of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscape in Scotland' and any additions to it.'

Local Plan Policies Gardens and Designed Landscapes are as follows:

'BP3 Amenity (Inverness) and (ENV3) Nairnshire - The Council will presume against development particularly where there would be significant damage to heritage, amenity or public health.'

4.3.3 Trees and Native Woodland

With regard to areas of Semi Natural and Ancient Woodland and Tree Preservation Orders Local Plan policies are as follows:

'The BP3 Amenity (Inverness) and (ENV3) Nairnshire Council will presume against development particularly where there would be significant damage to heritage, amenity or public health.'

4.3.4 Conservation Areas

With regard to Conservation Areas the local plan policies are as follows:

'The BP2 Heritage (Inverness) and (ENV2) Nairnshire Council will favour development unless this would significantly affect factors of local importance.'

4.3.5 Other Environmental Policies

Nature Conservation

The Highland Structure Plan states the following

'The Council's policy for the protection of nature conservation interests follows the hierarchical approach as set out in NPPG 14 Natural Heritage. Internationally important

areas are Natura 2000 sites and Ramsar sites. Nationally important areas are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNR). Locally important areas are as identified in Local Plans, following consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Wildlife Trust. These will be called Sites of Local Nature Conservation Interest.

Policy N1 Nature Conservation: New Developments should seek to minimise their impact on nature conservation resource and enhance it where possible.

Further reference has been made of the Local Plan policies relating to built and cultural heritage and the environment as follows:

Built and Cultural Heritage Policies:

'BP4 Amenity (Inverness) and (ENV4) Nairnshire - The Council will not approve development unless there is an overriding social, economic, public health or safety reason, or for benefits of primary importance to the environment.'

5. Landscape Capacity

5.1 Landscape Capacity

Landscape capacity is a measure of the degree of acceptable modification that the landscape can absorb. It embraces:

The capacity of sensitivity of the landscape;

- The potential of new elements to strengthen positive attributes (such as an attractive wetland area) and ameliorate the impact of elements which detract from the overall integrity of the landscape (for example, derelict buildings and degraded land).
- Landscape capacity can be established by recording and integrating the natural features of the landscape such as the incidence of and scale of valleys, woodland and so on. Essentially, capacity is a function of topography, (i.e. landform and groundcover vegetation). The interplay of these can combine to create a landscape of high capacity, (e.g. undulating with tree cover or low capacity, e.g. open, expansive, and bare).
- The character of the landscape is used to interpret its capacity to absorb development and can be described using a standard vocabulary and associated plans, sketches and photographs.
- Generally speaking, undulating and complex topography will create opportunities to absorb new development, as well wooded or afforested areas. This will not be the case with flat lowland landscapes or open and expansive upland landscapes.
- The principles of landscape analysis can be applied to the landscape around a settlement in order to come to a view about the capacity of a landscape to absorb further development. Equally, this process could be used to establish planting guidelines to assist in ameliorating the impact of existing developed areas.

5.1.1 Open Firth and Soft Coastal Shore

Open Firth is a flat to gently undulating coastal landscape with large expansive areas of sand and shingle beaches. The coastal edge consists of natural landscape patterns and characteristic vegetation is low lying and salt tolerant.

Statutory Designations

Significant areas of this landscape character type are designated for protection because of scenic, environmental and ecological importance, resulting in a policy of no change or positive management in these areas.

Existing Settlements and Historical Context

Nairn is the largest town within this character area with a population of approx. 9000 and located on the eastern edge of the study area.

The town had grown by the 1880s its place on the Victorian railway network of north Scotland had ensured its rapid growth as a seaside resort. The Clava Cairns dating from the early Bronze Age also represent much earlier history locally.

The urban form of Nairn is generally nucleated with the historic core and commercial centre situated to the west of the river

There is also the Ardersier Fabrication Yard Oil fabrication activity has finally come to a close at the Ardersier yard marking the end of an era.

Open Firth / Soft Coastal Shore



Character Assessment Development Guidance

The Soft Coastal Shore is highly sensitive to change, particularly changes associated with built development, where the low lying and open character of the landscape allows little scope for screening. The dynamic nature of geomorphological systems working on the coast are also sensitive to disturbance by human activities while the fragile ecosystem and the overall natural qualities and sense of remoteness experienced within parts of the landscape, are important characteristics which should be conserved.

Due to the nature of the predominantly mobile coastal edge, with unsuitable ground conditions for building, and a lack of existing infrastructure, built development tends to be placed on the periphery of an existing settlement, or falls into a neighbouring character type. In this latter case the visual impact of housing on the Open Firth landscape can still be one in which the built form dominates as a ribbon sprawl along a roadside.

5.1.2 Enclosed Firth

This is a coastal landscape type with a variety of shorelines and intertidal areas with the edge of the firth often characterised by complex natural patterns including mudflats.

Existing Settlements and Historical Context

The main coastal settlements are Fort George and Ardersier. Fort George is a substantial fortress built on a peninsula jutting out into the Moray Firth. It is an artillery fortress built between 1748 and 1769, and at the time was probably the most defensible fortress. It was built as a direct result of the battle of Culloden, when the nervous government ordered a large fort to be built. It survives today as the best preserved 18th century military fortification in Europe. The immense scale of the place can only be seen from within, since from the outside, the fort appears flat.

Inverness is situated at the north end of the Great Glen the town being backed by hills to the south, and firths and tidal lands to the north. Panoramic views can be obtained across the open firths to the Black Isle and hills beyond. The firth and harbour area has expanded in recent years with various forms of commercial development.

Ardserier is a small coastal village wedged between coastline and steep escarpment and was formed along with Fort George in the aftermath of the Battle of Culloden. In the 1750's the parish of Ardersier was sparsely populated and only small scattered hamlets would have existed in the area. The village expanded in the 19th Century as a residential area for Fort George as a fishing village.

The village is designated a conservation area and the urban form is one of a linear settlement reflecting the constraints imposed by the firth landscape.

Enclosed Firth



Character Assessment Development Guidance

A feature of the settlement in this character type, is the density of the huddled urban form, integrated into the strongly natural coastline. Added housing can cause additional sprawl outwith this immediate setting and along the coastline, whilst housing placed further up-slope can visually and physically impact on the landscape setting, reducing the inherent unity of the settlement.

In some areas reclamation of land to the seaward, creates a sharp transition between land and sea, giving an artificial edge to the firth and reducing the sense of interconnection between the water and the shifting mobile coast.

Additional housing must first respect the shape and density of the existing settlement so that it is seen as part of the urban fabric, and reads as a group. Sensitively sited housing will not conflict or compete with the strong landform of the setting.

5.1.3 Intensive Farming

Inverness Airport is a prominent feature within this landscape and the boundary adjoins the neighbouring Forest Edge Farming landscape character area.

The remnants of estate, policy woodlands are a feature of this landscape and often associated with farm settlements such as Gollanfield.

Intensive Farming



Character Assessment Development Guidance

The urban edge of a settlement tends to be seen as a pale band within the strong horizontal composition of this landscape character type. Although the intensive farmland is one of the few landscape types that can actually absorb the larger scale of urban expansion, the openness of the relatively flat landscape provides no obvious cues to creating a sense of place and strong setting for the new housing. The characteristic exposure of this landscape requires a design which creates shelter and enclosure at a scale that reflects the surrounding landscape whilst not dominating the human scale of the residential area.

Within such an open landscape, where there is an obvious lack of a setting for new houses, maximum use should be made of the positive aspects of the location, namely the wide open views into the surrounding landscape. The structural properties of woodland and forestry can be used to create a setting for housing, which helps to modify the microclimate on the one hand, but retain the views on the other.

The design of the woodland should be of a scale that complements the surrounding landscape and seeks to link the urban forms to farmland. The relationship between the built form and the woodland edge can follow a strong linear form, as is often found in existing plantations. It is important that visual and physical access into the surrounding landscape is considered in the layout of the urban estate so that people's experiences of that landscape become a part of its sense of place.

5.1.4 Coastal Farmlands

This landscape extends west of Nairn and overlaps the Intensive Farming and Forest Edge Farming character types within the Inner Moray Firth character assessment.

Existing Settlements and Historical Context

Small settlements include Clephanton and Lochside, which are both on the boundary of the character assessment areas. Remnants of old estates and policy woodlands are evident throughout this landscape which provide visual interest. The urban edge of Nairn is a prominent feature in this landscape.

Coastal Farmlands



Character Assessment Development Guidance

The urban edge of many of the settlements in the area tends to be seen as a pale band within the strong horizontal composition of this Landscape Character Area, particularly where recent development comprises buildings of uniform height, style and colour. Although the Coastal Farmland is one of the few landscape character areas which, as a result of its scale, can accommodate urban expansion, the openness of the relatively flat landscape provides no obvious cues for the creation of a sense of place, a strong setting and/or partial screen for new housing. The characteristic openness of this landscape requires design, which would create shelter and enclosure at a scale, which would reflect that of the surrounding landscape, without dominating the human scale of the residential area.

Within such an open landscape, where there is an obvious lack of setting for new houses, maximum use should be made of the positive aspects of the location, namely the wide, open views into the surrounding landscape. The structural properties of woodland and forestry should be used to create a setting and backdrop for housing, which helps to visually 'tie in' development to landscape on the one hand, but retain the views on the other. Where woodland and shelterbelts are absent, planting of new woodland should be undertaken ahead of development taking place.

The design of new woodlands should be of medium to large scale, thus complementing the surrounding landscape, and should aim to link new built development with surrounding open farmland. The relationship between the built form and the woodland edge could follow a strong geometric form in the flatter parts of the landscape, creating strong compartments or 'rooms' as are often found in existing plantations and shelterbelts. The grading of woodland margins in order to increase visual diversity should be considered as an integral part of the design of new planting (see Coastal Forest Guidelines). It is important that visual and physical access into the surrounding landscape is considered in the layout of the urban estate.

Within the open landscape there is an obvious lack of setting for new housing such that the urban edge is often seen as a pale band with a strong horizontal composition.

5.1.5 Enclosed Farmed Landscapes

The area comprises of flat to gently undulating land with remnants of estate woodland, scattered mature trees and open fields.

Existing Settlements and Historical Context

Culloden and Smithton adjoin the eastern edge of Inverness and along with Balloch and Cradlehall – Westhill .

Culloden is located to the east of Inverness comprises a sizeable commuter settlement, Culloden House, Culloden Forest and Culloden Muir which was the scene of a battle fought on 16th April 1746 at which the Highland army of Prince Charles Edward Stuart was defeated by the forces of the Duke of Cumberland. A National Trust for Scotland Visitor Centre houses a permanent Jacobite exhibition and also in the Trust's care are the Graves of the Clans, the Well of the Dead, the Memorial Cairn, the Cumberland Stone, the Field of the English and Old Leanach Cottage which survived the battle being fought around it. Built in 1772-83, Culloden House between Smithton and Balloch belonged to the Forbes family

Culloden and Smithton have expanded since the 1970s and have developed around the railway A96 and B9006 roads and form the main urban edge to this landscape and are separated from

Westhill area by the railway. The overall structure of Culloden is linear with a mixture of 70's local authority and private housing.

Development and expansion of East Inverness has encroached into this landscape.

Remnants of designed landscapes and estate woodlands are evident forming strong visual barriers and features throughout this landscape.

Enclosed Farmed Landscapes



Character Assessment Development Guidance

The sense of enclosure and structure that the trees bring to this landscape by their vertical presence is in areas of urban expansion replaced by a mass of built forms with a seemingly random scatter of garden shrubs and trees. The overriding similarity of the housing estate with single buildings in small plots and uniform access roads creates a chaotic patchwork effect which contrasts strongly with the geometry of the surrounding fields and woodland elements.

This chaotic layout, and the demise of strong tree lines creates visual confusion, as there are no longer prominent feature on which to focus, and to aid orientation.

The growth of housing estates should be incorporated into the existing geometric pattern of fields with mature tree lines being retained, and/or new lines incorporated into the new housing area. This will only give an overriding sense of order of the housing, but also provide a sense of place and continuity to the newer settlement within the older pattern.

The stark contrast between rural and urban environments is also reduced as the strong presence of trees will still be the main focus of attention and reduce the impact of the built forms.

5.1.6 Forest Edge Farming / Rolling Farmland and Woodland

This landscape extends the length of the study area from Inverness to Nairn and overlaps with the Rolling Farmlands and Woodland character type within the Inverness character assessment. and the Coastal Farmlands character type in the Moray and Nairn character assessment.

Existing Settlements and Historical Context

Typical settlements of this landscape are farm holdings and villages with the forest edge and mature trees providing a backdrop and landscape features alongside the buildings.

Croy is located on the edge of the study area on the B9091 road and consists traditional stone dwellings and local authority housing.

Dalcross Castle is a Historic Garden and Designed Landscape and was built in 1621 by the 8th Lord Lovat and was the mustering point of the Government troops before the battle at Culloden in 1746. By the 19th century the castle had lost its roof and upper floors, but descendants of the earlier Macintosh lairds later restored it. It used to be open to the public until it was sold in 1996. It is a grade A listed building with many fine rooms. Not open to the public.

Forest Edge Farming



Character Assessment Development Guidance

Housing estates that are placed as an entity on settlement peripheries often lead to a loss of point features within the areas of open farmland, which are characteristic of the traditional dispersed settlements. Instead, the simple, straight, vertical edges to the urban form cut across the field patterns and shelterbelts rather than being contained by them.

Where there is adequate existing infrastructure for expansion and nearby centres of employment there is likely to be an increased pressure for residential development. New housing placed within these areas can be particularly visually obtrusive when inadequate consideration is given to the detailed siting and design.

Concentrations of housing tend to evolve, with housing sometimes being placed along both sides of a narrow road or next to the forest edge, both of which contrast with the typical pattern of dispersed farm holdings. Buildings placed next to the forest edges, often responding to perceptions of shelter and prospect, are not only visually very prominent but can suffer from the disadvantage of the locally modified microclimate if north facing.

Even where the landform of the foothills enables the ready creation of a setting, the urban periphery tends to sprawl out in an irregular fringe. The vertical qualities of the forest and shelterbelts can be used to provide structure to the edges. The sizes of the existing woodland blocks can be used as a template from which new blocks can be based upon according to sites and scales of planting.

When there is demand for housing within rural areas, the small-scale expansion of villages where services and infrastructure can cope, may be the more favourable option in landscape terms. This would respect the dispersed pattern of settlements within the landscape and could create focal points of interest within the forest structure.

5.1.7 Capacity Conclusions

This leads to conclusions in the report of the A96 corridor's overall landscape capacity, which is summarised below.

There is some capacity within the landscape for development east of Inverness and north of Culloden, the existing woodland features have the potential to form a visual barrier and enhance the setting to development. The issue of settlement coalescence between Inverness and Culloden/Smithton would have to be considered within the new landscape strategy. There would be capacity to develop recreation and open space features in this landscape the existing woodland adjacent to the firth edge and urban areas would provide a valuable backdrop and setting to any new proposals.

Development proposals for any new growth near Gollenfield would require a landscape strategy due the openness of the landscape. Capacity for development exists south of Inverness Airport the mature forest edge and woodland will create strong visual barrier and a valuable starting point for an integrated landscape framework within the settlement.

Development at Morayhill could be accommodated within the landscape using the existing topography to contain the settlement. Steeper topography south of A96 and future felling of any forestry will have to be considered when considering size and location of any new settlement.

There is some capacity to develop near the coast at Redhill although the location of a new settlement may be constrained by intervisibility between landscape character areas and skyline

development issues. Views from flat ground to south and west as well as views from Black Isle would have to be considered.

The overall landscape capacity is favourable at Mosshall to the west of Nairn, the existing woodland to the north of the site acting as valuable containment and backdrop to a small settlement.

There is capacity to expand Ardersier development to avoid conflict with existing landform and designations in this area.

The concentration of existing woodland and forestry would allow some settlement growth at Croy and Torngrain pending future forest management.

There is landscape capacity for a new settlement south of Airport, the existing forestry and woodland near Torngrain and North of Croy providing visual containment for new development.

The overall landscape capacity of the A96 corridor is illustrated in Figure 2.

5.2 Development Model Options

This section examines the development options for the A96 corridor that were formulated from stakeholder and technical work. The model option figures are illustrated within Appendix A.

An assessment of their landscape input is provided.

5.2.1 Option 1: Eastern Growth

This option focuses growth in a chain of settlements running Nairn to Ardersier to the east of the corridor within Open Firth and Intensive Farming character types. It includes substantial growth of Ardersier. This option also includes a substantial new settlement located on the northern part of the Ardersier Fabrication Yard. These settlements would sit within a landscape and recreational setting linked to the local distribution network.

Landscape Capacity: Open Firth/Soft Coastal Shore

The coastal landscape character is flat to gently undulating coastal edge with tidal changes exposing vast stretches of sand and shingle beaches. Views are expansive with a dominance of sea/sky horizon. The coastline area between Nairn and Ardersier Yard is partly designated for its floral and faunal interests and valued locally for walking and outdoor pursuits. The landscape quality is generally high with distinctive coastal features and natural landscape patterns.

The capacity for settlement growth and development in this area will be limited as much of this landscape has unique characteristics that would be sensitive to change. There is also strong inter visibility with other landscape character areas including the views from Black Isle that would have to be considered when siting housing in isolated locations.

Landscape Capacity: Intensive Farming / Coastal Farmlands

This is a farming landscape with uniform topography composed of large open fields, scattered trees and extensive coniferous forests, some of which are designated as Ancient Woodland.

Views are expansive in many areas with the height of vertical elements being absorbed by the large scale of the horizontal landscape. Overall the landscape quality is medium.

The strong horizontal scale of this landscape has the potential to accommodate urban expansion and new settlement growth. However there is a lack of setting in some areas for potential new development due to the openness of this landscape and landscape design addressing issues of shelter and enclosure as well as maximising views would have to be undertaken. There is potential for small settlement growth near Milton of Balnagown using the existing forestry as backdrop and setting for new housing.

Ardersier

Ardersier is a linear settlement squeezed between land and water in a narrow setting with a mixture of traditional stone dwellings, post war local authority housing and industrial units.

The steep escarpment to the east of Ardersier would constrain development in this area due issues of skyline development and the landscape to the north east is a designated SSSI. In landscape terms there is capacity for growth of Ardersier to the south and north along the coastline.

Conclusion

The potential and overall capacity of the landscape to accommodate Eastern Growth is limited within coastal areas due the sensitivity and quality of the landscape. The location of the existing Ardersier Yard within the coastal landscape makes it a prominent landmark and capacity to redevelop this area would be limited by the quality of the coastal landscape at Whiteness Head. There is some capacity for settlement growth within the farmed landscape near Carse Wood incorporating the structural qualities existing forestry into the development. Other development in open farmed areas would require a strong landscape strategy.

5.2.2 Option 2: Polar Growth

This option focuses growth at both ends of the corridor. At the eastern end a large extension to Nairn is proposed. At the western end of the corridor a substantial extension of Inverness is envisaged. There are options in this area to exchange new settlements with proposed recreational land.

West of Nairn - Coastal Farmlands / Intensive Farming

This landscape adjoins the coastline and forms the border between the natural coastal edge and the farmed landscape. The landscape has uniform topography composed of large open fields with some scattered woodland features adjacent to the urban edge.

The capacity for settlement growth west of Nairn near Sandown would be limited to areas adjacent to existing woodland and forestry, which would enhance the setting and limit intervisibility with the coastal landscape character.

West of Nairn - Forest Edge Farming

This is generally a flat to undulating landscape with a range of spatial experiences due the variety of forestry and tree cover. Some of the coniferous forestry is designated as ancient woodland. The overall landscape quality is medium.

Landscape capacity for a new settlement exists within the flat landform west of Mosshall the forestry would contain views and provide a setting to development on the north and the railway would act as a boundary with the SSSI.

East of Inverness

This landscape on the urban fringe of Inverness and Culloden is within the Enclosed Farmed Landscapes character area and predominantly made up of flat open fields with scattered trees and mature woodland features. The landscape is undesignated and the overall landscape quality is medium.

Some capacity for development exists on the northern edge of Culloden the existing woodland and trees would provide valuable features and provide setting to new housing areas. Development would have potential to combine and integrate with a coastal recreational feature.

5.2.3 Option 3: Island Growth

This option proposes a series of independent settlements to accommodate growth including the Ardersier Fabrication Yard and Gollanfield as well as two sites between Inverness and Morayhill. This option also proposes the extension of Croy, Newlands and Ardersier.

Gollanfield - Intensive Farming

This landscape adjacent to the farm settlements at Gollanfield is flat with some undulating landform features. The farms in this area are set within pockets of woodland but generally the landscape to the north of the A96 is open with views to the Moray Firth.

The strong horizontal scale of this landscape has the potential to accommodate urban expansion and new settlement growth. However there is a lack of setting in some areas for potential new development due to the openness of this landscape and landscape design addressing issues of shelter and enclosure as well as maximising views would have to be undertaken.

Croy:

Croy is located within the Forest Edge Farming landscape character type and is small village with an older core and designated a conservation area. The landscape to the north east is designated a SSSI and runs from Loch Flemington near Lochside to the woodland to the north of the village. Parts of the woodland are designated as Ancient Woodland and valued locally for recreation. The existing forestry and woodland creates a strong visual backdrop to the village.

Landscape capacity for extension to the village exist to the north and west on flatter ground utilising the existing forest to structure new planting within the development. There are greater landform constraints to the north east.

Newlands of Culloden

Newlands of Culloden is located on the edge of the study area on the edge of Drummosie Muir within the Rolling Farmlands and Woodland landscape character type. It is a linear form of village on the B9006 road, the railway intersects the village with modern detached housing to the west and scattered settlements to the east. There open views to the Drummosie Muir and the Uplands with the railway viaduct in the foreground

Landscape capacity for extension to the village would be minimal to the south without a landscape strategy, as the character of the landscape becomes more open. There are also topographical constraints towards the River Nairn. There would be some capacity for extension of the village to north pending future felling and forest management.

Morayhill: Intensive Farming / Forest Edge Farming

Morayhill is a factory west of Inverness Airport situated between the railway and the A96 on flat to gently sloping landform with higher ground to the north and south. The landscape is generally open with views of the Black Isle, the higher ground and forest edge forms a visual barrier to views to the north. Land use is mainly arable and grazing and the overall landscape quality is medium.

Landscape capacity for development exists within the flat landform between Wester Dalziel in the north and Morayston in the south centred around the A96 road. This would utilise the steeper landform to the north and south to contain the new settlement preventing visibility of the town spilling out across the wider countryside.

Redhill: Open Firth / Intensive Farming

The Redhill area is located to the north west of Culloden between the A96 and the Moray Firth, the landscape is generally open with views to the Black Isle. There are also views towards Inverness with detracting industrial features at the coastline. The shoreline is designated for its ecological value but has limited accessibility and recreational value. The topography is flat to undulating with higher ground at the former quarry site at Alturlie Point. Land use is mainly arable and grazing and the overall landscape quality is medium.

Landscape capacity for development exists at the coastline with possibilities for a small settlement set back from the firth edge south of Brecknish.

5.2.4 Option 4: String of Pearls

This option promotes a more closely integrated approach than the island growth option. This option promotes a string of new settlements focused on the rail line along the length of the corridor. It also includes a relatively small extension or new settlement to the west of Nairn. The Golden Mile east of Inverness is promoted as a further new settlement.

Mosshall: Forest Edge Farming

The Mosshall area is located south west of Nairn between the A96 road and the Kildrummie SSSI to the south west. The landscape is typical of the Forest Edge Farming Character type with flat open fields and coniferous forestry acting as a backdrop to farms and isolated settlements. The existing forestry and woodland restricts distant views and forms a green buffer between the A96 and the Mosshall area. There is a working quarry located within the forestry adjacent to the A96 road. The overall quality of the landscape is medium.

Landscape capacity for a new settlement exists within the flat landform west of Mosshall. The forestry would contain views and provide a setting to development on the north and the railway would act as a boundary with the SSSI.

Gollanfield: Intensive Farming

This landscape adjacent to the farm settlements at Gollanfield is flat with some undulating landform features. The farms in this area are set within pockets of woodland but generally the landscape to the north of the A96 is open with views to the Moray Firth.

The strong horizontal scale of this landscape has the potential to accommodate urban expansion and new settlement growth. However there is a lack of setting in some areas for potential new development due to the openness of this landscape and landscape design addressing issues of shelter and enclosure as well as maximising views would have to be undertaken.

Inverness Airport Intensive Farming / Forest Edge Farming

The airport location is situated between the Moray Firth and A96 road. Contained within the boundary of the airport is an industrial estate, plantation forestry, and open grassland. The landscape to the east of airport is open and exposed with large field patterns indicative of the Intensive Farming character type. The topography gently rises to the south beyond the A96 where the coniferous woodland forms a strong visual barrier.

Landscape capacity exists south of the Airport utilising the existing forestry at Torngrain Wood and further south towards Croy as visual containment.

Morayhill: Intensive Farming / Forest Edge Farming

Morayhill is a factory west of Inverness Airport situated between the railway and the A96 on flat to gently sloping landform with higher ground to the north and south. The landscape is generally open with views of the Black Isle, the higher ground and forest edge forms a visual barrier to views to the north. Land use is mainly arable and grazing and the overall landscape quality is medium.

Landscape capacity for development exists within the flat landform between Wester Dalziel in the north and Morayston in the south centred around the A96 road. This would utilise the steeper landform to the north and south to contain the new settlement preventing visibility of the town spilling out across the wider countryside.

Redhill: Open Firth / Intensive Farming

This option shows growth of a new settlement centred around Redhill farm and extending to the east towards Lonnie farm. Intervisibility between adjacent landscape character areas including views from the Black Isle will have to be considered. The topography is gently undulating to the east of Redhill and there is potential for new development to be viewed against the sky, when viewed from the south and west as the landform is flat. The openness of the landscape in this area would also require structure planting incorporated with the development proposal that may create incongruous features when viewed from other coastal locations.

East Inverness: Enclosed Farmed Landscape

This landscape wedged between Inverness, Culloden and the Moray Firth and is a mixture of open flat agricultural land, estate woodland and mature shelterbelts. Farm settlements and woodland features are indicative of this landscape and are prominent features between Culloden and the edge of the firth. Views are open in some areas with the Black Isle often being viewed in the context of mature trees in the foreground of the view. The overall quality of the landscape is medium. Recent development including housing, retail and infrastructure projects has encroached into this landscape.

Landscape capacity for development exists north of Culloden and Smithton, the existing woodland would reduce the visual impact and provide a framework for new landscape structure planting with any new proposals.

5.2.5 Option 5: Land Use

This option illustrates the expansion of existing settlements at Croy, Ardersier and Newlands of Culloden.

Ardersier

This option illustrates an extension of the village to the north east. There is capacity for development extension of the village to the north and south along the coastal edge as previously discussed. Constraints on development include the SSSI designation to the north east and the steep escarpment topography to the east, which may induce possible skyline development.

Croy

As discussed previously there is capacity for expansion of the village to the north and west on flatter ground utilising the existing forest to structure new planting within the development. There may be scope for some development to the south pending future woodland / forest felling and management.

Newlands of Culloden

Landscape capacity for extension to the village would be minimal to the south without a landscape strategy, as the character of the landscape becomes more open. There are also topographical constraints towards the River Nairn. There would be some capacity for extension of the village to north pending future felling and forest management.

5.2.6 Option 6: Transport

This option shows the extension of Nairn to the west, a new settlement located between Croy and Inverness Airport and the extension Culloden/ Smithton / Smithton to the south east.

West of Nairn - Coastal Farmlands / Intensive Farming

This landscape adjoins the coastline and forms the border between the natural coastal edge and the farmed landscape. The landscape has uniform topography composed of large open fields,

The capacity for settlement growth west of Nairn near Sandown would be limited to areas adjacent to existing woodland and forestry, which would enhance the setting and limit intervisibility with the coastal landscape character.

West of Nairn - Forest Edge Farming

This is generally a flat to undulating landscape with a range of spatial experiences due the variety of forestry and tree cover. Some of the coniferous forestry is designated as ancient woodland. The overall landscape quality is medium.

Capacity for extension of Nairn to the south west is limited as ground is low lying and has the potential to be overlooked by existing houses.

New Settlement between Croy and Inverness Airport

The landscape to the north east of Croy is designated a SSSI and runs from Loch Flemington near Lochside to the woodland to the north of the village. Dalcross Castle to the east is a designated Historic Garden and Designed Landscape and some of the woodland is designated as Ancient Woodland.

The landscape to the south of airport consists of undulating farmland and large blocks of coniferous woodland including Tornagrain Wood indicative of the Forest Edge Farming character type. Much of the forestry and woodland is designated Ancient Woodland and the areas to the north of Croy adjoin the SSSI. The topography gently rises to the south of the airport beyond the A96 where the coniferous woodland forms a strong visual barrier.

Landscape capacity exists south of the Airport utilising the existing forestry at Tornagrain Wood and further south towards Croy as visual containment.

As discussed previously there is capacity for expansion of the village to the north and west on flatter ground utilising the existing forest to structure new planting within the development. There may be scope for some development to the south pending future woodland / forest felling and management.

Expansion of Culloden

This option shows the expansion of Culloden and Balloch to the north east. Much of this landscape is designated Ancient Woodland and encompasses parts of Culloden Wood and valued locally for walking and cycling.

Landscape capacity would also be limited due to the topography as it gradually rises in this area and there would be potential skyline issues with any development

5.2.7 Option 8: Infrastructure Option

This option illustrates two large settlements centrally located within the corridor one east of Airport and the other south west of the Airport near Morayhill. These areas have been discussed previously and the scale of the development shown in this option would have significant landscape and visual effects on landscape within the corridor.

6. Landscape Option

This option has been formulated using the methodology set out in Section 3 where potential landscape and visual effects of housing development are considered including loss of rural landscape, vegetation and visual prominence on the skyline. The main potential landscape and visual issues addressed within the A96 corridor include the following:

- Loss of historic landscapes or unique landscape character and elements;
- Changes to landscape character;
- Skyline effects of development – on hilltops and coastal locations;
- Visual effects from key viewpoints –including Kessock road bridge and coastal viewpoints on the Black Isle including Fortrose ;
- Visual coalescence – increased inter visibility of two or more urban areas;
- Poor integration of urban fringe and urban edge areas
- Ribbon Development
- Effects on setting of existing settlements

Ardersier

In landscape terms capacity exists to the south and north of Ardersier for development, there are some existing mature trees that would provide an enhanced setting and structure for new housing development.

Croy

Landscape capacity exists within the Forest Edge Farming landscape to extend the village to the west and north east. Development may be restricted by available land in design terms, Ancient Woodland designations and proximity to the Conservation Area.

Tornagrain

Tornagrain is a small village located close to the A96 road consisting of older traditional stone dwellings and local authority housing. The village is located within the Forest Edge Farming /Rolling Farmland and Woodland landscape character areas. Much of the surrounding forestry is designated Ancient Woodland. The topography is flat to undulating and the landform rises to the south. The existing forestry at Tornagrain Wood and to the south towards Dalcross form strong visual barriers.

There is landscape capacity for development within a small plot to the west on the northern side of the A96 road using the existing forestry as visual containment. There is also capacity to the east towards the disused quarry on the undulating farmland, the forestry to the north and south providing potential visual containment and setting.

Milton of Gollanfield

This is a farm settlement located to the south east of the airport within the Intensive Farming / Rolling Farmland landscape character areas. The topography is flat to undulating in places and is generally an open landscape with some scattered trees and small areas of forestry adjacent to the road.

There is landscape capacity for development centred on Milton of Gollanfield farm north of the A96 road. Enhancement measures and landscape strategy would be integral to any proposal to provide visual containment and setting to new settlement.

Morayhill

Landscape capacity for development exists within the flat landform between Wester Dalziel in the north and Morayston in the south centred on the A96 road. This would utilise the steeper landform to the north and south to contain the new settlement preventing visibility of the town spilling out across the wider countryside.

Redhill

Landscape capacity for development exists at the coastline with possibilities for a small settlement set back from the firth edge south of Breckneish. Any new settlement will not conflict or compete with strong landform in that area e.g. Alturie Point

Culloden / Balloch

Landscape capacity for development exists north of Culloden and Smithton, the existing woodland would reduce the visual impact and provide a framework for new landscape structure planting with any new proposals.

Landscape capacity exists to the north east of Culloden adjacent to Balloch for some small development utilising existing trees on the urban edge as a basis to create new landscape strategy for the area.

Recreation and Amenity

Pockets of agricultural land coming out of set-aside and revisions to the Woodland Grant Scheme could encourage small-scale conifer and broadleaf planting along the forest edge. Changes to the existing forest boundary and variations in the heights and textures of tree stands could give rise to a sense of visual disruption for the viewer. In some cases, however, adjustments to the forest/farm land boundary may provide opportunities for improving landscape character.

The experience of different sizes of enclosure is a major characteristic of travelling through this landscape. The opening up of distant views adds to this experience by making the transition from the enclosed forestry to open fields more extreme.

Mature deciduous trees, next to large areas of seasonally unchanging coniferous forestry, provide important pockets of colour and textural diversity, which aid orientation. Wherever possible their presence should be retained and encouraged as a feature of amenity and interest.

Culloden Forest is one of the largest consists mainly of conifer trees such as Scots Pine, Norway & Sitka Spruce and Douglas Fir. Broad-leaved trees are retained throughout the forest during all operations, and Beech, Alder and Birch are planted to enhance the conservation and

landscape value of the area. Culloden Forest has been managed and worked by the Forestry Commission since 1926.

The existing forestry management and creation of new woodlands with the Forest Edge Farming character area holds potential for new recreational facilities including new cycle routes.

The coastal areas also are popular for informal recreation and general access to the waters edge. There are opportunities and capacity within the Firth coastal edge for new recreation and enhancement measures including a coastal footpath, viewpoint areas and parkland. Design of any new facilities and infrastructure will have to be sympathetic to views and the unique landscape characteristics that exist in coastal areas.

The Landscape Option is illustrated on Figure 3.

7. Assessment Conclusion

7.1.1 Assessment conclusion

Due to the location of the A96 corridor and any subsequent development that will occur from this project, there are a number of landscape characters, which have been defined by Scottish Natural Heritage. The following principles are set as a guideline for developers in order to integrate development into the existing landscape. These principles are not in any legislative form. However due to the nature of the landscape in the highlands it is important that these guidelines are considered, as to reduce impact and also gain the support of statutory consultees and other stakeholders holders that may have an interest in any new development.

Visual access into the surrounding landscape would have to be considered in the location and layout of new places. Physical access could be designed to link into the boundary areas between woodland, countryside and the built edge, with footpaths, shelterbelts, and hedges extending from the core of the built-up area out into the woodland and or countryside. This should be considered as part of an overall cohesive design principle.

In conclusion the assessment has identified both broad areas suitable for development and settlement growth within the A96 corridor and area, which are not suitable for development in landscape terms. Three main questions have been examined covering landscape capacity for new settlement development, future expansion and development of existing settlements and landscape conservation.

New settlement capacity

The first of these questions deals with existing landscape character areas and their capacity to sustain growth.

Can Potential development be accommodated within the landscape without having detrimental landscape and visual effects on the rural and coastal setting?

This examines existing forestry, woodland and topography influenced location and mitigation measures of development within the countryside. A Requirement of a new landscape strategy addressing open space, screening and integration with the surrounding landscape has been established.

Existing settlement growth

The second question deals with the capacity for future growth of existing settlements and impact on the surrounding landscape. Development guidelines or planning strategies may be developed or referred to as follows.

- Future forestry felling and management;
- Landscape treatment of urban edges;
- Townscape and urban integration;

-
- Creation of new settlement boundaries and community woodland strategies;

Landscape Protection

The final question deals with how landscapes identified as not suitable for development, may be protected and managed to achieve the objectives of preserving the rural setting and character of settlements and preventing the coalescence of settlements with each other. Each of these areas if taken forwards will require development of a more detailed landscape strategy and policy development. The control and management of these landscapes should not only be viewed as strategies to promote urban ideals, but also as strategies that promote the continuity of healthy agrarian landscapes within the urban fringe and encourage responsible community access.

The areas of landscape protection are:

- Culloden Battlefield – Scheduled Ancient Monument
- Culloden Forest and associated areas to the north east – Ancient Woodland
- Dalcross Castle – Historic Garden and Designed Landscape
- Whiteness Head and coastline west of Nairn – Area of Great Landscape Value and SSSI.
- Carse Wood – Ancient Woodland
- Tornograin Wood – Ancient Woodland
- Delnies Wood– Ancient Woodland
- Kildrummie and Loch Flemington – SSSI.

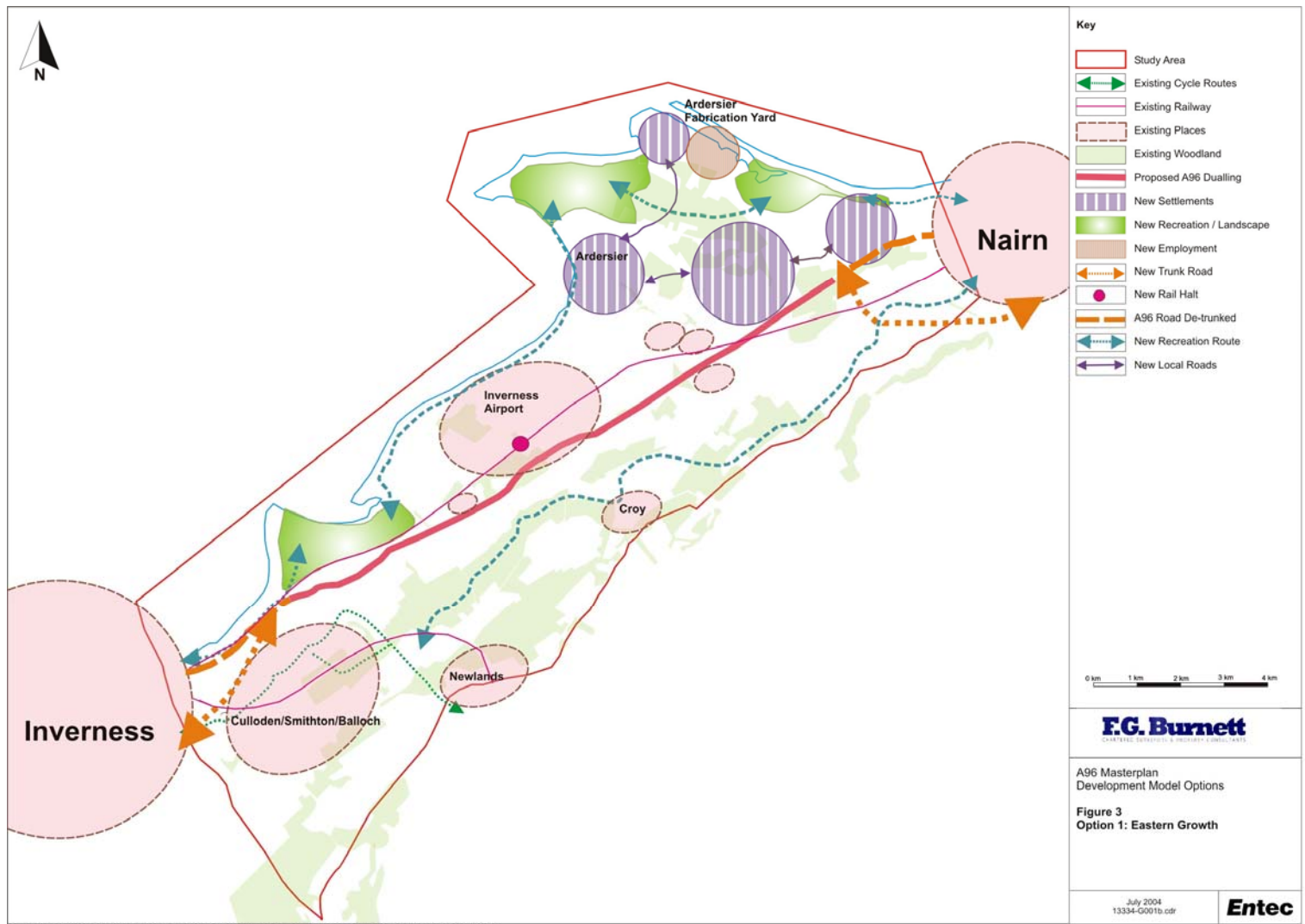
The existing designations are shown above with some of these areas designated as Areas of Great Landscape Value, others designated for ecological value e.g. Kildrummie SSSI. Some of the other areas are not designated and protecting these landscapes will require appropriate designation to be applied.

Many areas of existing woodland and forestry are protected by the local plan policies and are an important asset for future development and recreational requirements. The development of managed community woodland or indeed community landscapes that may encompass a wider variety of landscape types, may be one approach to provide physical reinforcement of policy. Bio-diverse landscapes, managed to promote wildlife may also in the longer term come under the added protection of wildlife legislation.

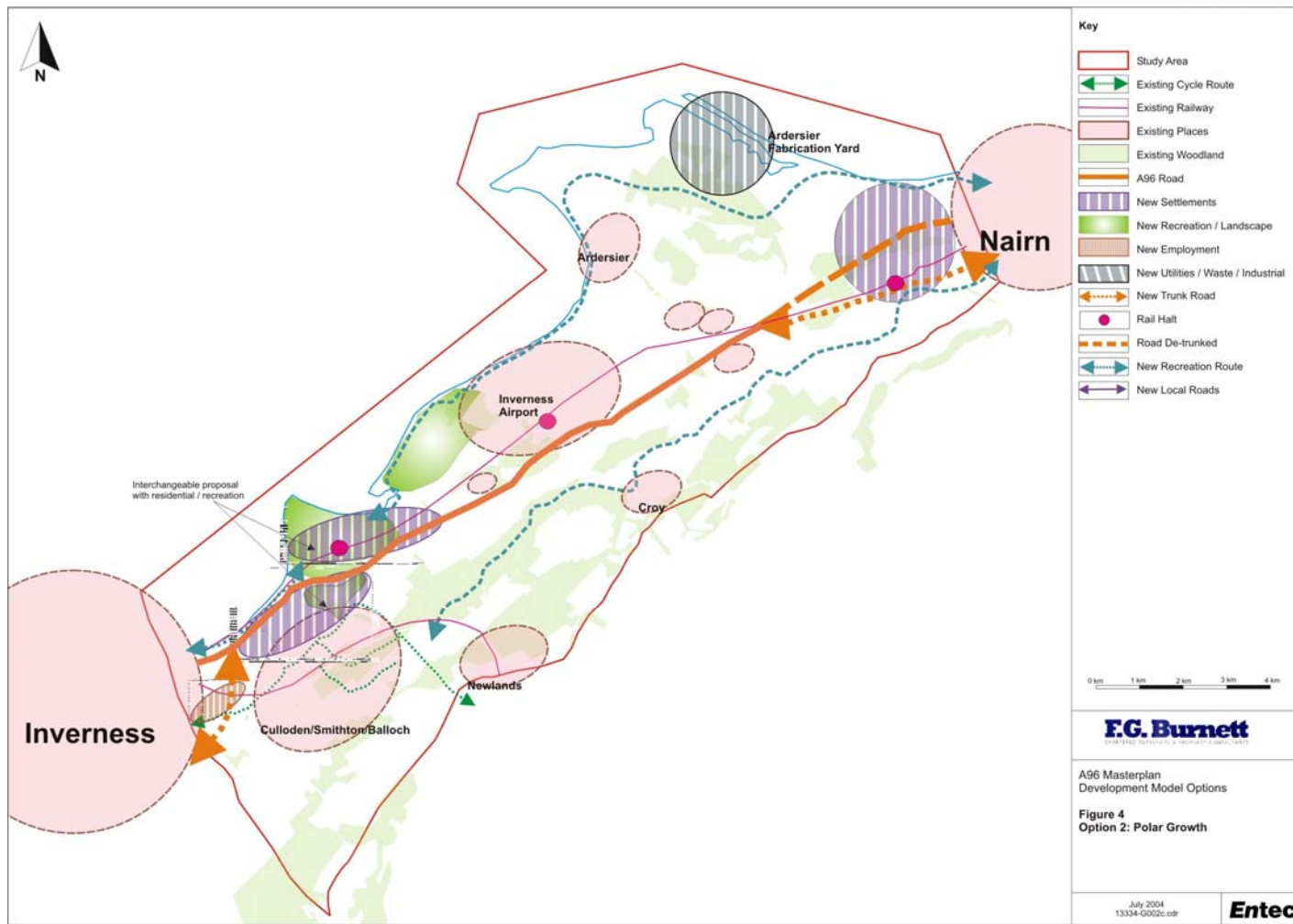
Appendix A

Development Options

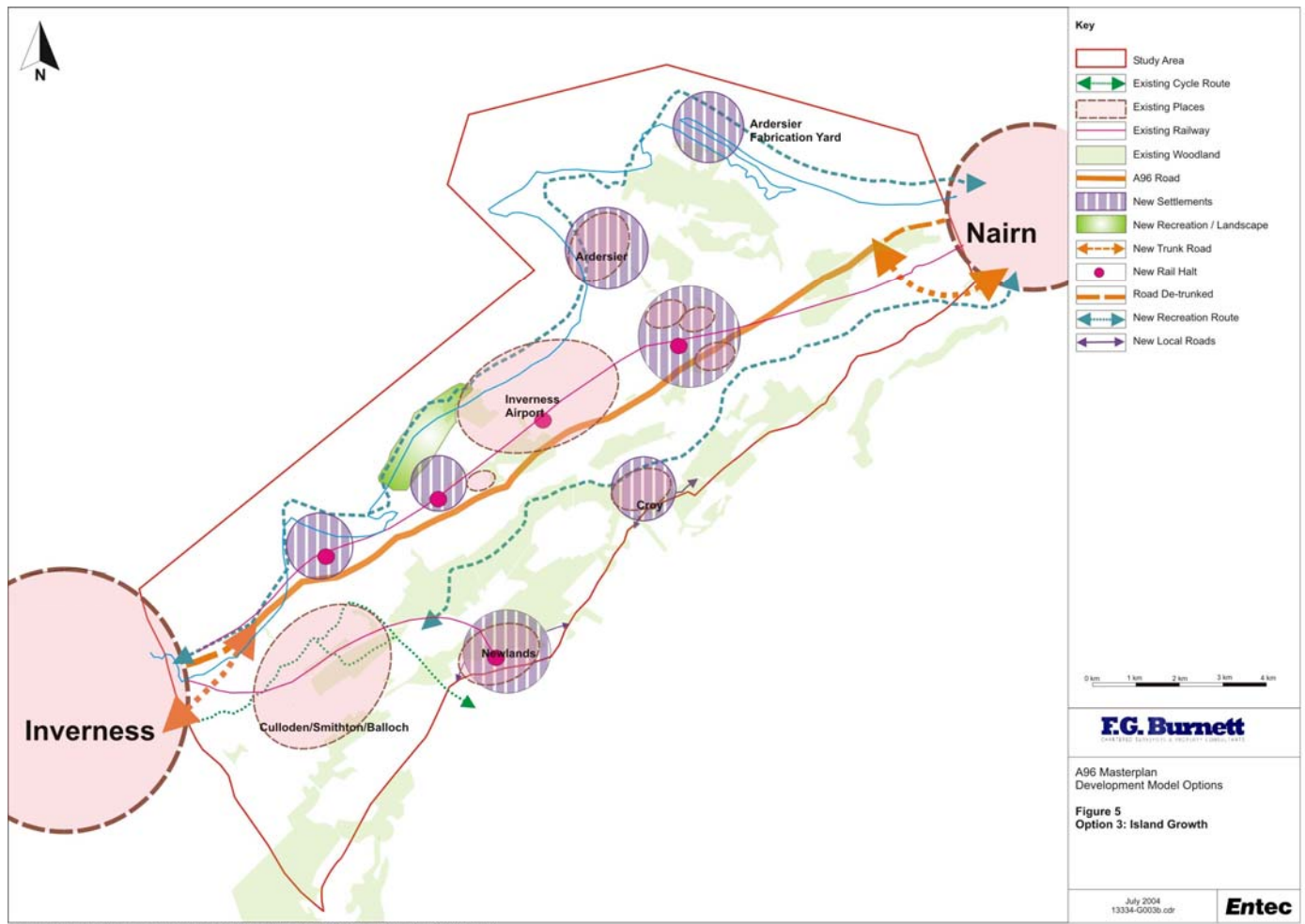
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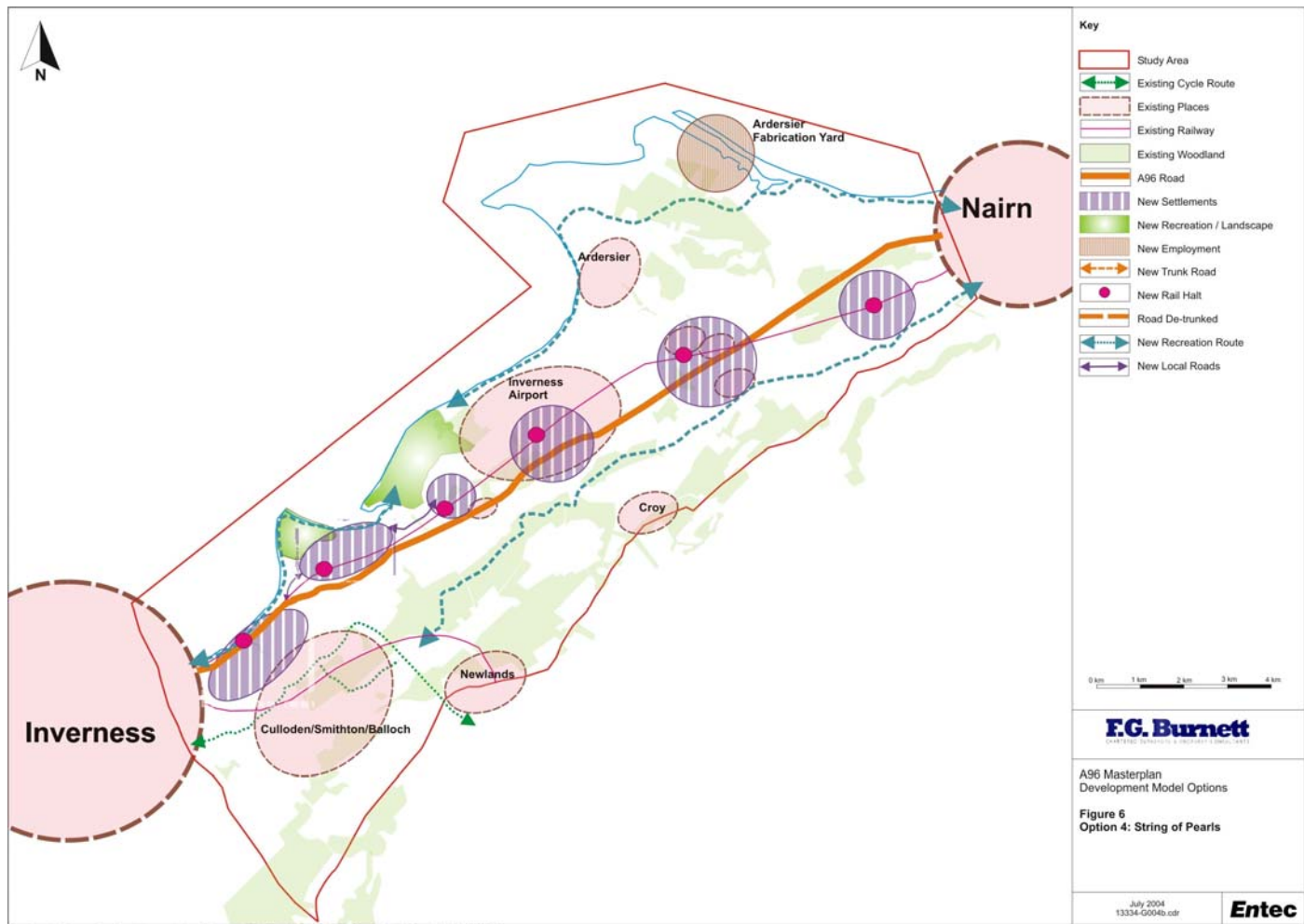
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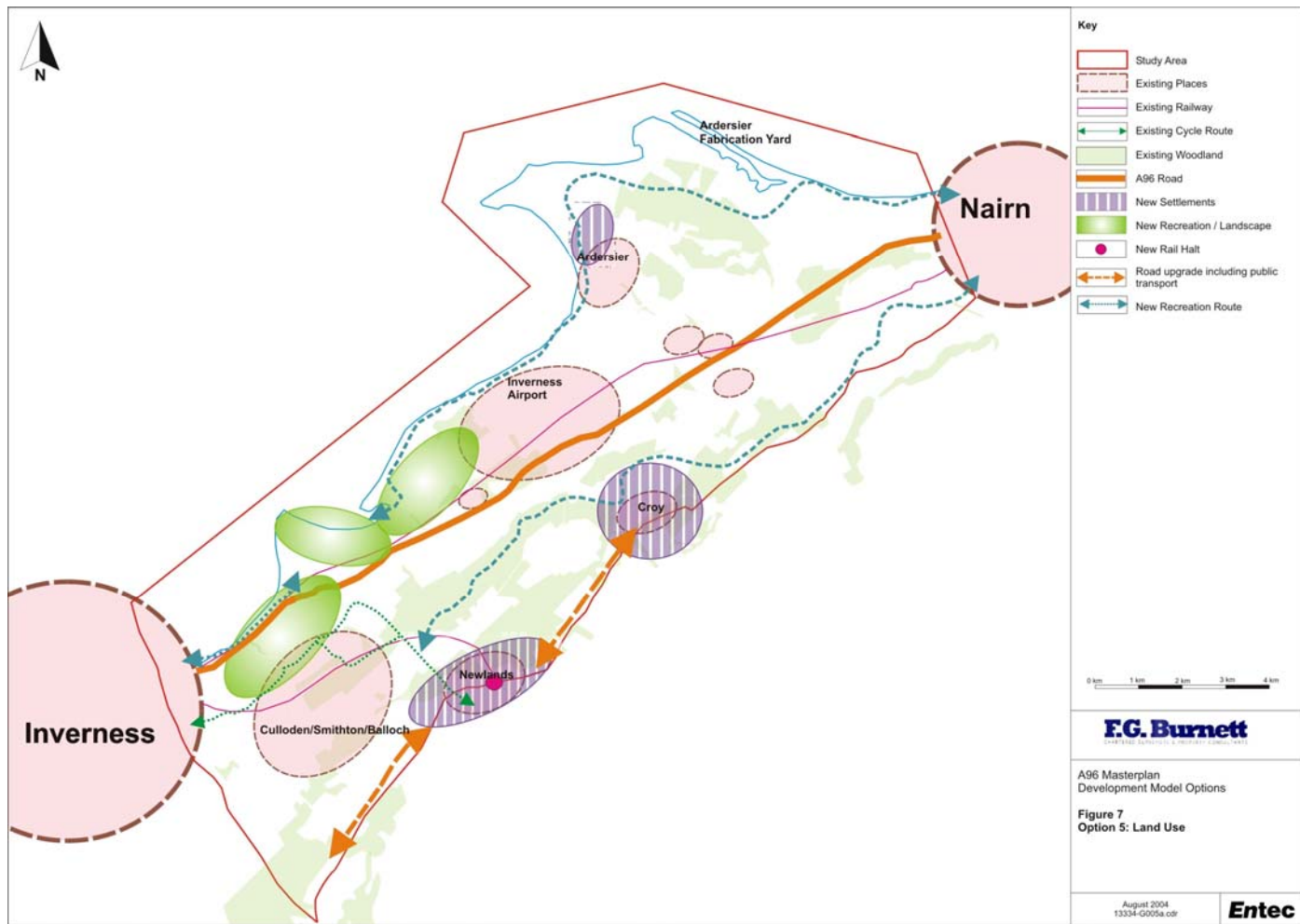
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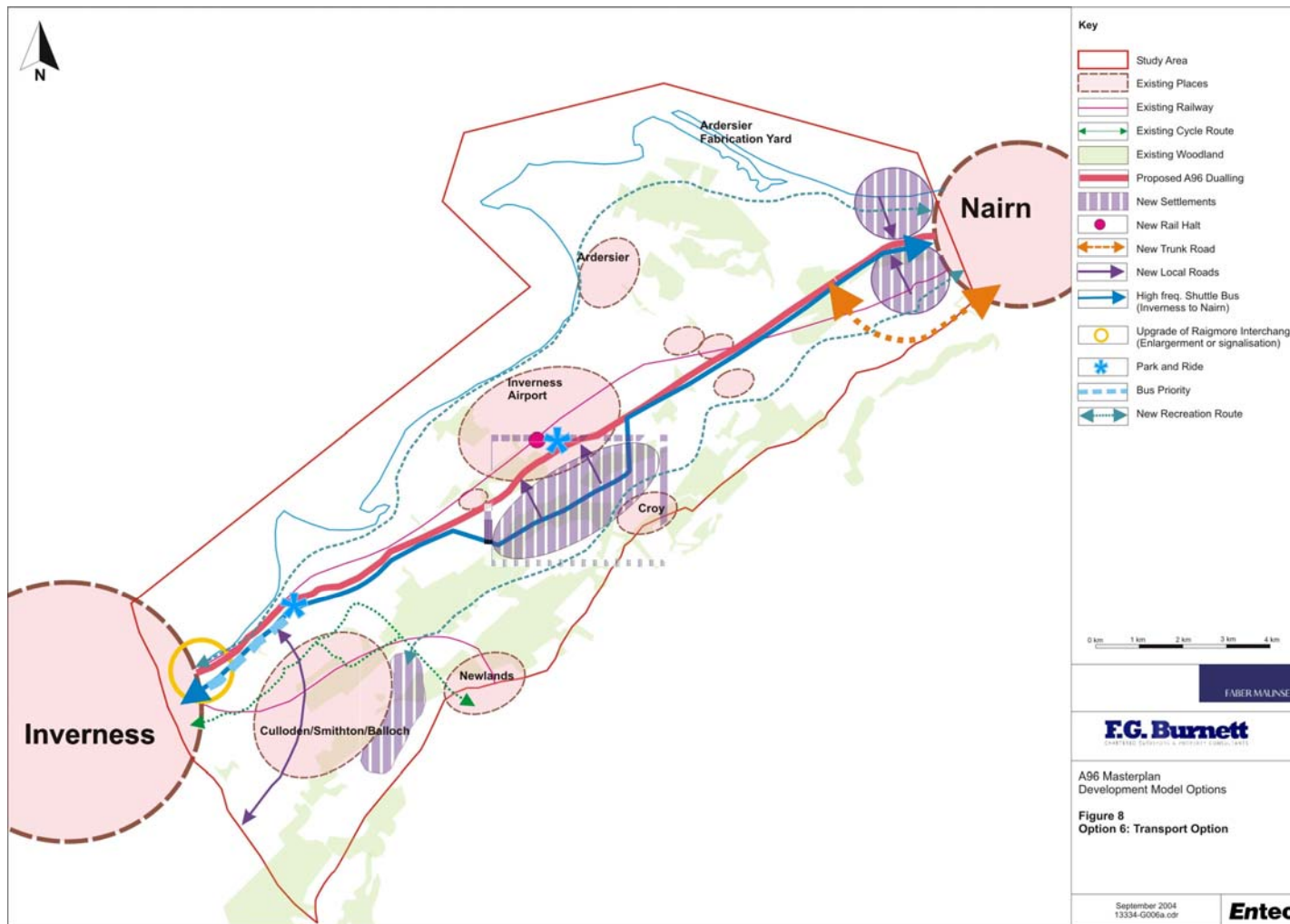
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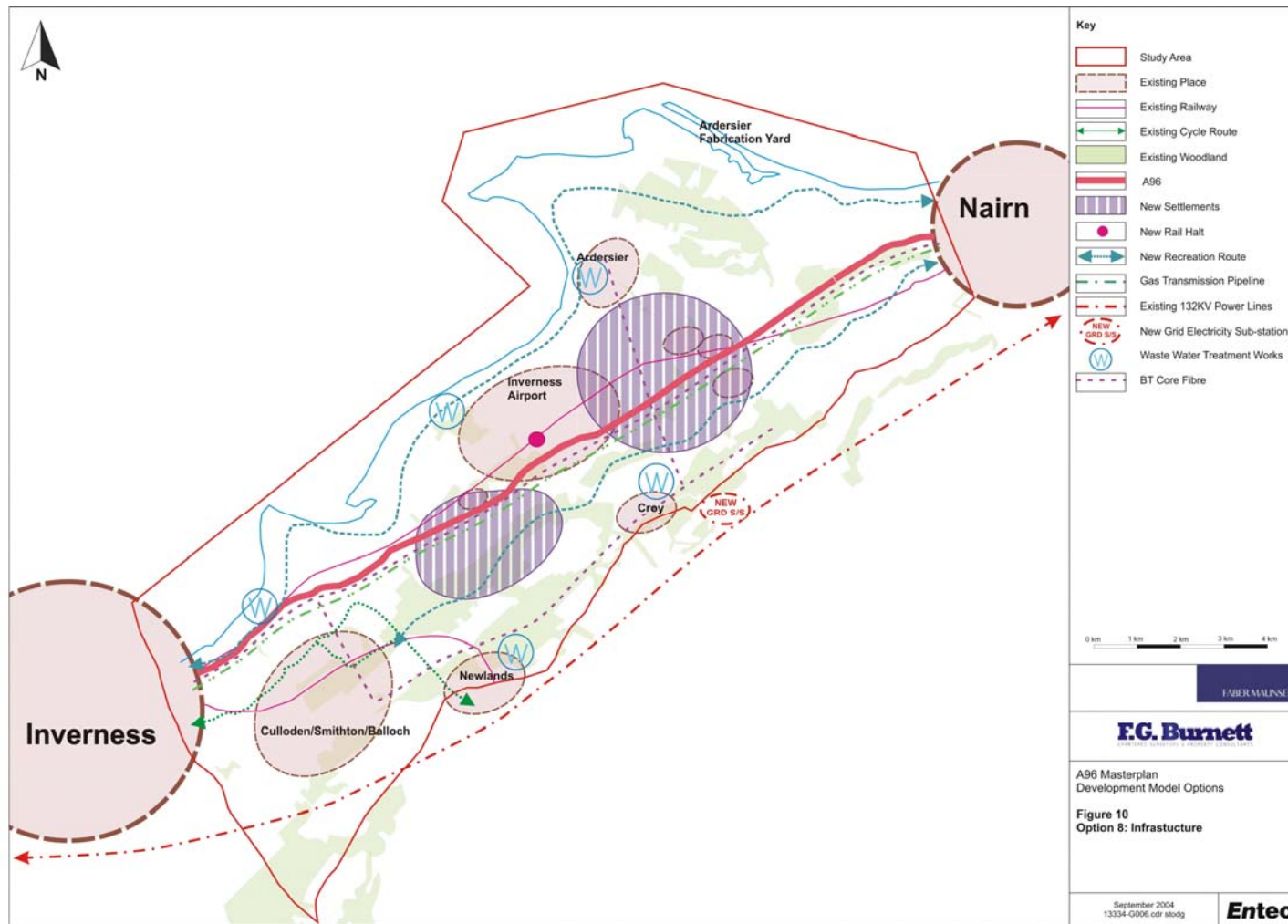
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