

The Highland Council

A96 Growth Corridor Delivery Forum of 23 June 2009

Summary Report



Halcrow

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Halcrow Group Limited

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1. INTRODUCTION

Background

The purpose of the Delivery Forum was to inform The Highland Council's housing land phasing along the A96 Growth Corridor for the emerging Highland-wide Development Plan. The Delivery Forum brought together development interests within the A96 Growth Corridor to discuss intentions for the plan period and the likely infrastructure requirements and constraints to development.

Halcrow facilitated the Delivery Forum on Tuesday 23 June 2009 at the Eden Court Theatre, Inverness. This event brought together The Highland Council Planning and Development team, representatives from key infrastructure bodies (Scottish Water and Transport Scotland), the development sector with recognised allocations and local community council representatives with an interest.

Report Structure

This report summarises the proceedings including an overview of presentations, question and answer sessions, an open mike session and key outcomes from a developer workshop. Information is included in the following sections:

1. Morning Session Overview – outputs from the presentations and open mike session.
2. Developer Workshop Report – key outcomes from the developer workshop.
3. Conclusions and Next Steps – highlighting key outcomes.

2. MORNING SESSION OVERVIEW

Introduction

This section provides an overview of presentations prepared by The Highland Council, Transport Scotland and Scottish Water along with the question and answer session which followed. An overview is also provided on the “open mike” session which included contributions from a landowner’s agent and community council representative. This session provided a context for infrastructure provision within the A96 Corridor and gave the development sector the opportunity to raise issues relating to this and/or constraints to development.

Presentation 1 – Malcolm MacLeod, The Highland Council

The presentation commenced with a synopsis of the A96 Growth Corridor Development Framework. It highlighted the need to revise development phasing for the framework; particularly regarding housing development.

The time frame for The Highland-wide Local Plan was presented with key stages outlined as:

- March 2009 - Development Plan Scheme.
- August 2009 - Main Issues Report.
- End 2009 - Proposed Plan.

The need to identify infrastructure requirements to ensure the delivery of housing supply was stressed.

The presentation illustrated housing completion sites for Inverness and the degree of completion.

The presentation concluded that policy development of the A96 Corridor was at a critical stage and that there was a need to agree a revised phasing schedule for housing delivery that could inform the emerging Local Plan.

Q&A Session:

Concerns were raised about the development of Nairn, specifically whether Nairn would maintain its current identity as a “discrete” local centre or become a suburb for Inverness.

It was emphasised that Nairn and Inverness will be developed as separate centres and highlighted the green framework within the A96 Framework that provides a positive definition between the two centres. It was emphasised that over 90% of the A96 Corridor would not be developed.

A concern was expressed as to how infrastructure constraints would impact on where housing is

located. Specifically, whether less desirable sites with limited constraints would come forward before more suitable locations with greater infrastructure constraints.

Debate developed as clarity was sought on the analysis undertaken on population/housing growth estimates, specifically, how they have been estimated and whether estimates will be reviewed prior to the new plan. It was established that growth estimates were founded on robust research and analysis. This would be revisited in plan preparation.

Presentation 2 – Hugh Gillies and Alison Irvine, Transport Scotland

The presentation provided a background to Transport Scotland (TS) with an overview of national objectives and delivery priorities. The objectives of the Scottish Transport Project Review (STPR) that sets out recommendations for infrastructure investment in Scotland over a twenty year period were outlined.

Transport infrastructure plans for the Highlands were discussed with the following projects highlighted:

- A9 Dualling from Dunblane
- A96 Nairn Bypass
- A82 Programme of Improvement
- A96 Dualling between Inverness and Nairn, including the A9/A96 link
- New rail station at Dalcross with Park and Ride facilities

Support for developer protocol within the A96 Corridor development framework was given although no delivery schedule or funding commitment for transport infrastructure has been set. This would require analytical work as well as considering legislative and procurement issues. TS welcomed input from developer interests regarding transport infrastructure requirements and constraints to development sites.

Q&A Session:

A Government/TS commitment to funding key transport infrastructure was sought as developers were unlikely to come forward with development proposals until they were reassured.

It was acknowledged that information about the level of development was required to inform what level of infrastructure would be required.

The discussion developed as to what level of financial contribution would be provided by TS to

support investment as developers are reluctant to bring forward development if they are responsible for all contributions towards infrastructure.

Concerns about the Nairn bypass were raised, specifically with regard to the contributions plan in the A96 Framework and whether less onerous regulations could be applied in order to facilitate development. It was emphasised that regulations and due procedure must be met.

A point was raised that more junctions are required for Highland trunk roads (given the duality of use) and that a junction strategy was a welcome proposal if it recognised the unique needs of the Highlands.

It was agreed that a new approach to junction development was required with the possibility of de-trunking part of the A96 to allow new junctions over the long term and following considerations.

It was stressed that clear timescales for transport infrastructure are essential or the wrong development may come forward early.

Presentation 3 – David Weber, Scottish Water

The presentation commenced with a run through of treatment and network capacity for waste and water infrastructure serving the A96 Corridor. This identified solutions as well as highlighting areas still requiring capacity improvements. In particular, there is limited capacity for waste treatment at Nairn to accommodate proposed developments at Sandown and Delnies. With regard to water supply, a new water source will be required to meet long term development within the A96 Corridor. Scottish Water (SW) is currently finalising an approach for key developments in the Corridor including Castle Stuart, Inverness Airport Business Park, Tornagrain, Whiteness, Delnies and Sandown.

However, a broad strategic approach for waste water treatment has been developed that:

- Focuses East Inverness and the Campus through Allanfeearn WwTW.
- Focuses Dalcross requirements through Ardersier WwTW.
- Meets Whiteness needs at Ardersier WwTW.
- Addresses Nairn growth through Ardersier WwTW.

This is presented in **Figure 1**.

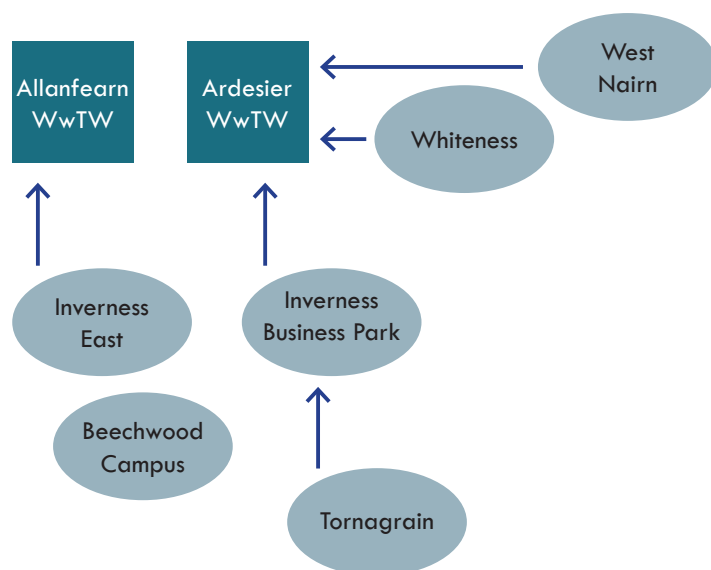


Figure 1 Waste Water Strategic Solution

Q&A Session:

Clarification on the locations of the new water source and if there will be any upper limits on capacity was sought. A number of locations had been identified including River Farigaig (medium-term) and Loch Ness (long-term) and that the new water source would not have any foreseeable upper limits.

Information on SW's investment programme was sought. It was explained that the investment programme is slightly reduced from previous years. The next spending programme will be around £550m (compared to current spend of £670m) and that infrastructure will be developer demand led.

Clarification of the impact on Nairn South was sought as this had not been explicitly addressed in the presentation. It was recognised that Nairn South would need to be modelled. However, it was likely that this would have to share Nairn infrastructure and possibly be served by Ardersier WwTW.

Open Mike Session

Ewan Anderson representing landowners to the east of Nairn presented an alternative growth strategy for the town. This was noted and comments made that this approach had been considered in optioneering for the A96 Framework.

Graham Vine, Nairn Community Council, outlined concerns with regard to infrastructure provision, its timing, its funding and the impact on development. He was also concerned about the possibility of coalescence.

3. DEVELOPER WORKSHOP REPORT

Context

The purpose of the developer workshop was to engage parties involved in the development of the A96 Growth Corridor including developers, landowners and their agents in a bid to identify a realistic phasing plan for housing development over the next 5 years. This could be recommended to The Highland Council for consideration in the emerging new Development Plan.

Workshop attendees were:

- Andrew Howard, Moray Estates Development Co.
- Peter Radmall, Turnberry Consulting (Moray Estates)
- Denis Harper, Scotia Homes
- Stephen Simpson, Deveron Homes
- Ewan Anderson, 7N Architects (Charles Allenby)
- Derrick Thomson, Scotia Homes
- Alan Ogilvie, GH Johnston
- Bruce Walker, Robertson Homes
- Dennis Watt, Scotia Homes
- Angus McNicol, Cawdor Estates
- Joanne Plant, WYG
- Stewart Burke, Waterman
- Rowena MacDougall, Bowlts (Munro/ Ross)
- Colin Mackenzie, GH Johnston
- David Cameron, Inverness Estates
- Brian Muir, Muir Smith Evans (Inverness Estates)
- Anthony Aitken, Colliers CRE (Whiteness)

Scott Davidson (SD), Halcrow facilitated the workshop.

Proceedings

SD introduced the workshop as a meeting between developer interests concerned with developments in East Inverness, Dalcross, Whiteness, Nairn and Central facilitated by him. This was to provide a view to the THC with regards housing land supply in the period 2011-2016. As a starting point the session used the A96 Framework as adopted by The Highland Council. The session was not to discuss first principles.

SD outlined a structure as follows:

1. Key principles for establishing an effective housing land supply.
2. Review of first phase roll out.
3. Discussion and debate.

SD set out a starting point for principles by outlining those set out in SPP3: Planning for Homes:

- Ownership
- Physical
- Contamination
- Deficit Funding
- Marketability
- Infrastructure
- Land Use

It was stated that the principle relating to infrastructure must surely be prioritised. Clarification as to whether the principle related to Corridor wide infrastructure or local requirements was sought. A view was expressed that, as the starting point, the A9/A96 link is required before anything else can happen as established through Faber Maunsell modelling.

A contrary view was expressed that the modelling was flawed and that a review of it was welcomed.

It was suggested that the individual applications sitting with THC have accompanying transport assessments which prove they work without the need for the A9/A96 link. These developments, it was argued, could go ahead but may not create the places desired by THC in the Corridor.

It was noted that Transport Scotland had taken a view on the A96 as an urban centre to urban centre route. The A96 should in fact be designed as a local distributor route that allows access to various communities across the Corridor. The road, it was suggested is not needed to allow early phases to commence.

SD asked for some consideration be given to the early phases of development and suggested that as a starting point Whiteness should be brought forward as a brownfield release.

The marketability of Whiteness was questioned. It was suggested that the Whiteness programme as currently set out in the Framework was ambitious in the current economic climate and it would be appropriate to revise phasing.

It was suggested that there is a requirement to provide choice. If the recovery is to be slow and progressive, a larger number of sites releasing a smaller number of units would provide consumers with choice and increase demand.

Some argued that a sustainable approach is required and that small sites in existing locations should be developed first where infrastructure costs are minimal.

It was suggested that developers need to start talking to each other within development zones. For example, in Nairn, Delnies will supply high quality family housing but there needs to be choice, perhaps delivered in conjunction with Sandown and some early Nairn south sites. It was argued that in the recovery, Nairn would be down to maybe 75 units per annum.

It was stated that Sandown was already in the housing land supply and should be brought ahead of other sites in Nairn.

Laissez-faire arguments were presented that suggested all sites should be brought forward and that the market would decide build out rates and favoured locations. There is no need to limit numbers as the market would do it.

SD stated THC is required to prepare an effective housing land supply.

It was agreed that early sites should:

1. have no infrastructure constraints;
2. be attractive to the market;
3. provide highest value to make the contributions; and
4. provide choice.

There was support for the view that costs and contributions should be revised. Perhaps a rate per sq m of houses is needed to offset the likely rise in 2 and 3 bed semi detached properties. This found general favour

SD agreed that a separate discussion is needed on the costs and contributions and that THC are aware of it.

An agreed housing land supply was reached as follows:

| Location | No. of Units |
|----------------|--------------|
| Central | 200 |
| Dalcross | 350 |
| Nairn West* | 600 |
| Nairn South | 0 |
| East Inverness | 750 |
| Whiteness | 400 |
| Total | 2,300 |

* Includes Sandown/Delnies

SD concluded by thanking all participants and stating that there would likely be a follow up session on the publication of THC LP Main Issues report.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The workshop served as a valuable tool in bringing the development sector together to progress delivery of the A96 Growth Corridor. The event was considered successful in opening up discussions on the delivery of development with regard to key infrastructure. Importantly, the developer workshop met the key objective to understand development sector's intention for housing development for 2011 to 2016.

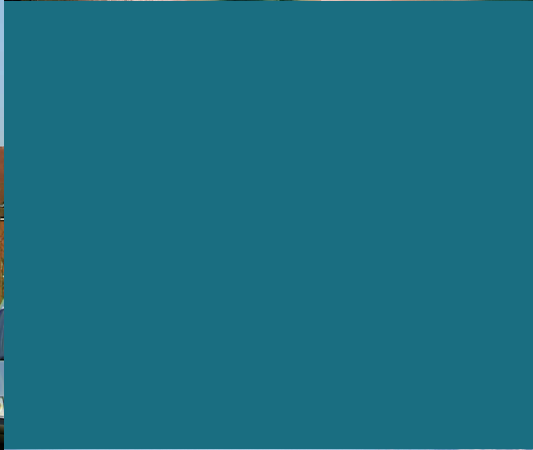
Critical considerations to emerge included:

1. Progress on achieving commitments to the A96 upgrade from Transport Scotland as this is needed to ensure certainty for development.
2. Recognising that the developer protocols, although appropriate in principle, required review in the context of changed circumstances.
3. The need and/or extent of infrastructure proposals and their cost across the Corridor could be reviewed in the context of a recessionary economy.
4. Setting out recommended effective housing land supply that delivers 2,300 units across the Corridor.

Next Steps

The outcomes of the workshop will inform the Issues Report for the emerging Local Development Plan. This will provide a context for a follow-up discussion and meeting of the Forum.

In addition, the Council would be contacting attendees direct, as part of ongoing development plan preparation and assessment of submitted planning applications.



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