

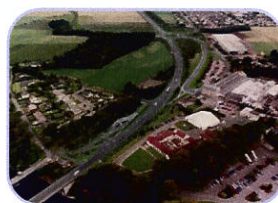
**TRANSPORT
SCOTLAND**



A96 Fochabers and Mosstodloch Bypass

Access Road to Gordon Castle Farm

Options Assessment Report



November 2007

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This Options Assessment Report sets out the initial assessment undertaken in re-examining and evaluating alternative route options for the Gordon Castle Farm access.

Transport Scotland has consulted with the following statutory consultees, Moray Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Historic Scotland and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, culminating at a workshop on 17 October 2007. This report incorporates the findings and comments from that workshop.

The proposed A96 Fochabers and Mosstodloch Bypass passes over the existing access road that provides access to Gordon Castle Farm and a number of private residences. The access road is a private access, currently managed by the Crown Estate Commissioners, but is open to the public as pedestrian access. It is also a secondary/service access to Gordon Castle.

The Scheme presented at the A96 Fochabers and Mosstodloch Bypass Public Local Inquiry (PLI) in 2003 maintained the existing access arrangements with a slightly realigned road passing below the bypass via an underbridge. The proposed arrangement in relation to the overall Fochabers Bypass is shown on Figure 1 below.

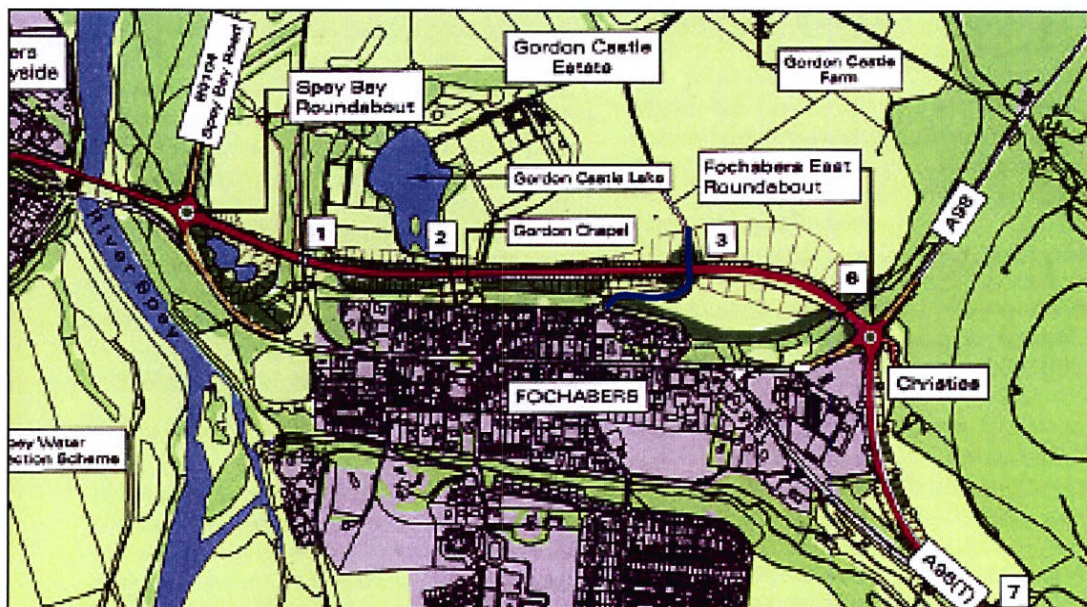


Figure 1: Proposed Fochabers Bypass- Gordon Castle Farm Access highlighted in dark blue

As can be seen Gordon Castle Farm lies within Gordon Castle Estate which is a Designed Landscape. Between Fochabers East Roundabout and the Gordon Castle Farm access road, the Designed Landscape boundary lies along the north side of the existing A96/A98.

The access is also used by haulage and agricultural businesses that operate from the farm and a 6m clearance at Gordon Castle Farm Access Bridge has been agreed to ensure the commercial activity is maintained.

The Scottish Ministers issued their decision to proceed with the northern bypass route on 17 March 2005. Their decision included the following requirement at paragraph 8(vii):-

“that the provision of a new access to Gordon Castle Farm from the existing small roundabout by Christie's garden centre at the existing junction of the A96 trunk road and the A98 road, or an alternative route off the A98 road, be examined in more detail, including horizontal alignment, vertical alignment, affect on the water supply to the lake, environmental impacts and impacts on the Designed Landscape and the estate boundary wall.”

This report sets out the results of a detailed assessment of the possible route options.

1.2 Options Assessed

In addition to the option proposed at PLI (Option 1), two options have been assessed which consider the provision of a new access from Lennox Crescent. An alternative access off the A98 was also considered. Ownership and fence maintenance of the farm access will remain with the Crown Estate.

Option 1

Option 1 follows existing alignment, though offset by approximately 30m to the north of its existing alignment. Full details are shown on Drawing no. 99DFG/SK/121 in Appendix A.

Option 2

Option 2 has a similar alignment to Option 1 through the underbridge, but then ties into Lennox Crescent approximately 90m west of the existing mini-roundabout. Full details are shown on Drawing no. 99DFG/SK/122 in Appendix A.

Option 3

Option 3 has a similar alignment to Option 1 through the underbridge, but ties into the existing mini-roundabout on Lennox Crescent. Full details are shown on Drawing no. 99DFG/SK/123 in Appendix A.

A98 Alternative Access

An assessment of an alternative access off the A98 was considered at an early stage of the Scheme Assessment. Due to the speed of the traffic and restricted visibility along the A98, extensive realignment of any new access road and clearance of trees would be required to be carried out. Therefore, this option was not considered further as an alternative option for the Gordon Castle Farm access.

Options 2 and 3 have been developed in detail since the PLI and it has been confirmed that both of these options can be achieved in terms of an acceptable engineering solution. Options 1, 2 and 3 are shown indicatively on Figure 2.

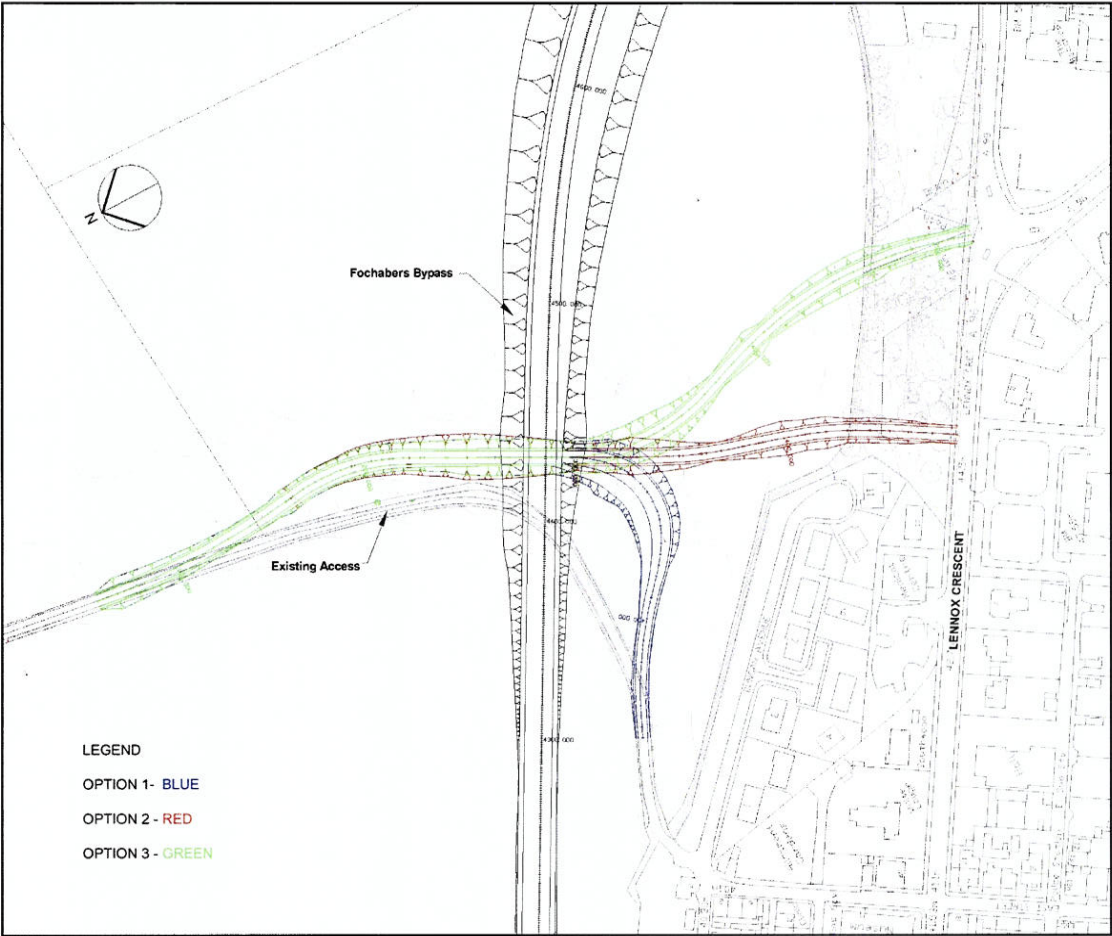


Figure 2: Route options

2 OPTION ASSESSMENT

2.1 Appraisal Criteria

In order to objectively assess the options, appraisal criteria have been derived based on the five key government high level transport objectives as follows:

- Economy Promote economic growth through improved journey time reliability
- Integration Develop a solution that integrates with current and planned land use
- Safety Improve safety of journeys
- Accessibility Promote social inclusion
- Environment Protect the environment

The options have been considered against each of the criteria as set out below. Some of the criteria do not apply and some of the criteria have been further divided into sub-criteria.

The performance against each criterion has been assessed on a seven point scale:

✓✓✓	=	<i>large beneficial</i>
✓✓	=	<i>moderate beneficial</i>
✓	=	<i>slight beneficial</i>
0	=	<i>neutral</i>
X	=	<i>slight adverse</i>
XX	=	<i>moderate adverse</i>
XXX	=	<i>large adverse</i>

2.2 Economy

Within the terms of an assessment of this nature, the key economic criterion is to demonstrate value for money. Consequently, the economy objective has been assessed in terms of the relative construction cost of each option.

Preliminary cost estimates have been prepared for each option, for comparative purposes only, for earthworks, pavement and drainage. Indicative costs are:

- Option 1: £815,000
- Option 2: £825,000
- Option 3: £830,000

The cost estimates for each of the three options are within a 3% range hence it is considered that there is no significant difference between the three in relation to value for money.

OUTCOME: Economy is considered to be neutral for all three options.

2.3 Integration

The Castle Farm Access provides mainly private vehicular access and therefore has little or no impact on transport integration. Consequently this criterion has not been used in the assessment.

2.4 Safety

Under this objective each of the options is considered in terms of its impact on road safety in the area, both for drivers and for pedestrians.

Option 1 should have minimum effect, as it is a local realignment under the new Bypass. Farm traffic shall continue to access from East Street. Option 2 forms a new junction on Lennox Crescent within proximity of the school, no dwell area¹ provided at the approach to Lennox Crescent, and a 4% tie-in gradient. Option 3 has a 40m dwell area, with a gradient of 0.9%, and ties in at the existing roundabout creating a new fourth leg.

OUTCOME: Options 1 and 3 are considered to be neutral. Option 2 is considered to be slight adverse.

2.5 Accessibility

For the assessment, accessibility has been assessed in terms of ease of pedestrian access between Fochabers and the Gordon Castle Estate.

All options remain open to pedestrians to and from Fochabers, however, from the junction of High Street and East Street, Option 2 is longer by approximately 20m and Option 3 is longer by approximately 150m.

OUTCOME: Option 1 is considered to be neutral, and Options 2 and 3 are considered to be slight adverse.

¹Dwell area – a level section of road on the approach to a junction, preferably no greater than $\pm 2\%$ gradient

2.6 Environment

In order to assess the impact on environment, it is normal to assess each option against a range of sub-criteria as recommended in Volume 11 of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges:

- Air Quality
- Cultural Heritage
- Disruption Due to Construction
- Ecology and Nature Conservation
- Landscape Effects
- Land Use
- Traffic Noise and Vibration
- Pedestrians, Cyclists, Equestrians and Community Effects
- Vehicle Travellers
- Water Quality and Drainage
- Geology and Soils
- Policies and Plans

In accordance with Volume 11 of DMRB, a scoping exercise was carried out which considered which of these sub-criteria would not significantly affect the choice of option. Consequently six of the above sub-criteria were not considered to be significant in choosing the optimum access arrangement. Therefore, the following sub-criteria have not been assessed further:

- Disruption Due to Construction
- Land Use
- Pedestrians, Cyclists, Equestrians and Community Effects
- Vehicle Travellers
- Geology and Soils
- Policies and Plans

The six sub-criteria that were considered relevant to the option assessment are assessed as follows:

Air Quality and Traffic Noise and Vibration or “Amenity”

The assessment of Air Quality and Traffic Noise and Vibration both consider the proximity of the options to nearby properties and have therefore been combined here as an “amenity” assessment. All options move the access closer to properties and hence have a negative impact.

Option 1 has no properties within 50m and has 8 properties within 100m. Option 2 has 4 properties within 50m and 8 properties within 100m. Option 3 has no properties within 50m and 8 properties within 100m. All options are closer to

properties on Duncan Avenue than the existing access, which has no properties within 50m and 6 properties within 100m.

Options 2 and 3 remove existing traffic from East Street however they both result in a change to “amenity” in Duncan Avenue.

OUTCOME: Options 1 and 3 are considered to be slight adverse and Option 2 is considered to be moderate adverse.

Cultural Heritage

The impact on cultural heritage is considered in relation to the impact of each option on the estate boundary wall. Any option that requires demolition of the wall is deemed to have a negative impact. Options 2 and 3 will require demolition of part of the existing estate boundary wall.

OUTCOME: Option 1 is considered to be neutral and Options 2 and 3 are considered to be moderate adverse.

Ecology and Nature Conservation

There are no known designated sites in the vicinity of the options, however each option has a different impact based on loss of habitats that are considered to be of ecological value. In addition, if bat roosts were to be discovered, both Options 2 and 3 would have a significant impact and if the estate wall was demolished it could encourage inappropriate badger access. Options 2 and 3 both result in a greater loss of habitat than Option 1.

OUTCOME: Option 1 is considered to be neutral and Options 2 and 3 are considered to be slight adverse.

Landscape Effects

This sub-criterion considers the impact on the Gordon Castle Designed Landscape, and in particular the visual impact of each option. It also considers the impact caused by the loss of woodland, as discussed in Ecology and Nature Conservation. The loss of trees currently acting as an established belt/screen is recognised as a negative impact, creating a hole that cannot be filled. In these terms, Option 2 is worse, not only because of the loss of a larger number of trees but also because it is straight, making the “hole” more obvious. In addition, Options 2 and 3 are on slight embankment towards the east to provide adequate clearance over the Lake Feed.

OUTCOME: Option 1 is considered to be neutral and Options 2 and 3 are considered to be moderate adverse.

Water Quality and Drainage

This sub-criterion has been considered in relation to impact on the water supply to the lake. While all options cross the Lake Feed, Options 2 and 3 require a new crossing.

OUTCOME: Water Quality and Drainage is considered to be slight adverse for all three options.

Environment Summary

The Environmental sub-objectives are summarised in the table below.

Environment	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Amenity	X	XX	X
Cultural Heritage	0	XX	XX
Ecology & Nature	0	X	X
Landscape Effects	0	XX	XX
Water Quality & Drainage	X	X	X
Environment Summary	0	XX	X

2.7 Assessment Summary

The following table summarises the overall assessment results and relative performance of each option. In the assessment, no weighting has been given to any of the objectives.

Objective	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Economy	0	0	0
Safety	0	X	0
Accessibility	0	X	X
Environment	0	XX	X
Overall Summary	0	X	X

3 SUMMARY

Three options for the Gordon Castle Farm Access have been modelled and assessed against Transport Scotland's five transport objectives.

In terms of an overall assessment, as it most closely follows the existing access road, Option 1 can be considered to be broadly neutral albeit there is some slight adverse impact in terms of a small change to the line of the road in relation to adjacent properties.

Option 2 has the biggest environmental impact, introduces a new junction on Lennox Crescent in proximity to the school and results in a less direct pedestrian route for the majority of Fochabers residents.

Although Option 3 has fewer negative impacts than Option 2, it also results in a less direct pedestrian route for the majority of Fochabers residents and has a greater environmental impact than Option 1.

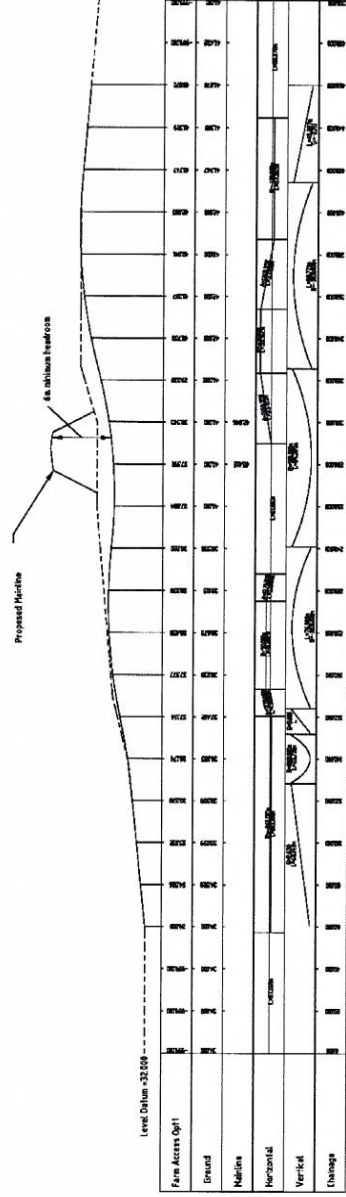
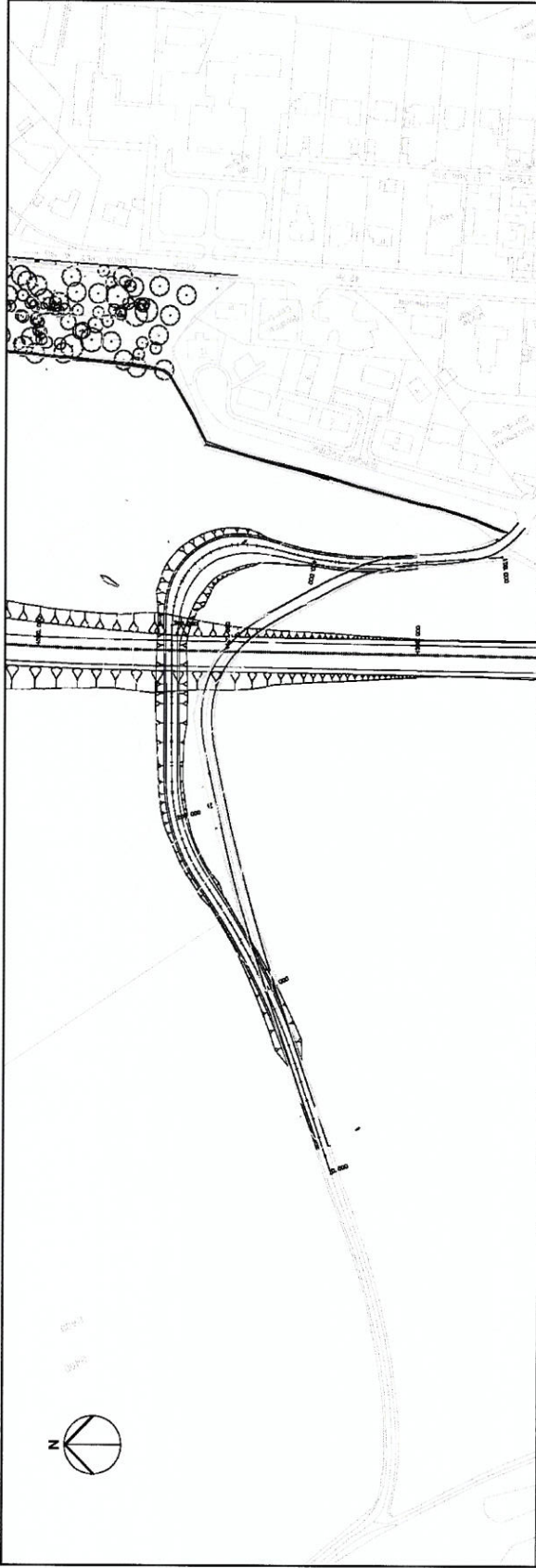
The cost estimates for the three Options are similar and therefore there is no significant difference between the three in relation to value for money.

The statutory consultees considered that although there are only small differences between the options, Option 1 has the least impact when considered against the appraisal criteria. However, Transport Scotland will also take account of your views expressed in this consultation exercise to complete its examination of the proposals. It will then publish the Option to be adopted.

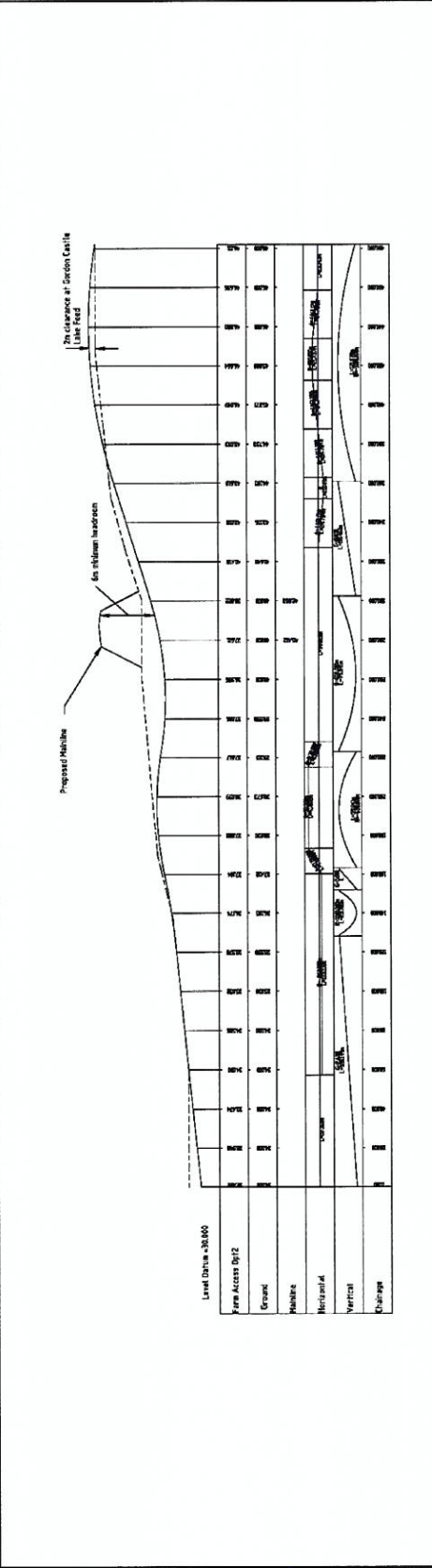
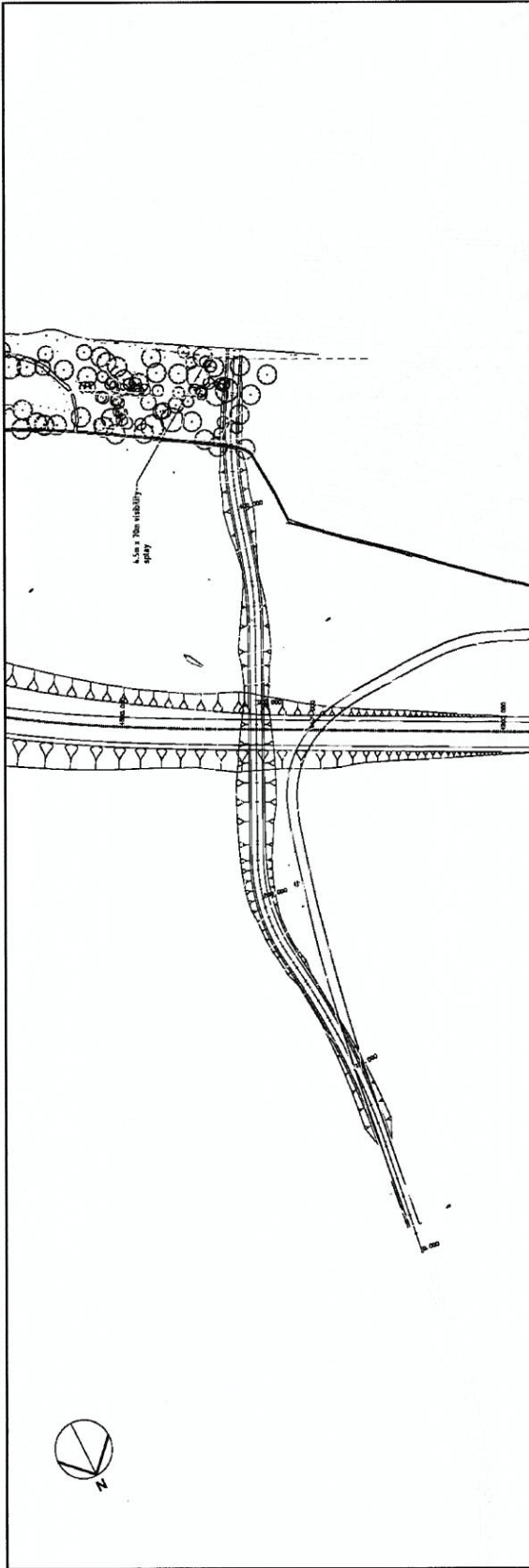


APPENDIX A

Route Option Drawings



Job No. A86 FOCHABERS - MOSSTODLOCH BYPASS	Drawing No. Gordon Castle Farm Access - Option 1 Plan and Profile	Scale 1:1000	Date 11/11/2007
Project Name A86 FOCHABERS - MOSSTODLOCH BYPASS		Client Scott Wilson	
Drawing Title Gordon Castle Farm Access - Option 1 Plan and Profile		Drawing No. 89DFGRW/121	
Designer Scott Wilson		Date 11/11/2007	
Checker Scott Wilson		Scale 1:1000	
Approver Scott Wilson		Date 11/11/2007	



Project Name Drawing No. Drawing Scale	Job No. A98 FOCHABERS - MOSSTODLOCH BYPASS	Drawing Title Gordon Castle Farm Access - Option 2 Plan and Profile	Date 12/11/2007	Author J. Wilson	Checked J. Wilson	Approved J. Wilson	Scale 1:100	Drawing No. 9810FGSKY122
			Client Scott Wilson Scotland Ltd	Project 9810FGSKY122	Drawing 9810FGSKY122	Date 12/11/2007	Author J. Wilson	Checked J. Wilson

