

**REPORT TO: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE ON
01 SEPTEMBER 2004**

**SUBJECT: PROPOSED NEW ROAD LINK – EDGAR ROAD TO A96,
ELGIN**

BY: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1. Reason for Report

1.1 Committee is asked to note responses received from the recent preliminary consultation process for a proposed new road link between Edgar Road and the A96 West Road, and to approve further work to investigate this and other traffic improvements in Elgin.

2. Background

2.1 At the meeting of the Environmental Services Committee on 28 April 2004 (para 20 refers), Members agreed that public consultation should be carried out on a proposed road link as shown on Plans A & B in **Appendix 1** of this report, and that the outcome of this process should be reported to a future meeting of this Committee. The preliminary consultation process has now been completed and a summary of the responses from both the public and other interested parties is contained in **Appendix 2** of this report.

2.2 The proposed road link from the west end of Edgar Road, northwards across the railway to Wittet Drive, and then joining the A96 on the West Road is part of the *Elgin Roads Strategy* within the Council's Development Plan 2000. The line of the road is indicative in the Plan, and it was decided to carry out preliminary consultation on the route at an early stage before detailed design and traffic assessments are carried out.

2.3 The current traffic situation in Elgin is one of increasing congestion at a number of locations at particular times of the day. River crossings, and more particularly rail crossings, are responsible for only some of the constraints on the road network, but they tend to be critical for future development as well as a major source of existing problems. The existing rail crossings in the town are all inadequate in different ways and most have very limited scope for on-site improvement. They are:

Reiket Lane Railway Bridge – narrow single lane bridge with traffic signal control. A contribution from housing developments is required to be made for a new bridge, but at a late stage in the housing development plans.

Ashgrove Road Railway Bridge – narrow humped-back bridge with poor visibility for drivers. Residential property would be required to replace it with a full width bridge, yet still constrained due to the bridge alignment, the nature of on-street parking and use of Ashgrove Road, and the limited capacity of junctions near either end eg. New Elgin Road/Edgar Road and A96/Ashgrove Road junction.

New Elgin Road Railway Bridge – adequate bridge width but with very limited traffic capacity at junctions at either end i.e. Laichmoray Roundabout and New Elgin Road/Edgar Road. Transport assessments carried out for successive development proposals in Elgin South and in the Edgar Road and Linkwood Road areas consistently indicate that the existing junctions will not provide sufficient traffic capacity for the predicted future increases in traffic. To concentrate improvements at this location would require substantial land and property acquisition from established businesses and potentially demolition of properties in Moss Street. Even this arrangement would still be constrained by the lack of traffic capacity at other nearby junctions eg South Street/Northfield Terrace junction Greyfriars Street at Pansport Roundabout, and southwards into Main Street, New Elgin.

The Wards Level Crossing – the level crossing creates traffic queues and prolonged delays at many times of the day and these are particularly disruptive at peak times when many drivers avoid the route. Similarly to Ashgrove Road, The Wards is effectively a restricted road link due to the business activity along its length and associated parking. Construction of a bridge is impractical due to the close proximity of Wards Road and the existing road configuration. Even if these problems could be overcome, additional traffic would be required to use Wittet Drive and a major junction improvement would be required at the A96/Wittet Drive if this route is to function as an additional *effective* railway crossing point for traffic.

Bilbohall Road Railway Bridge – minor single width access bridge capable of serving only a small residential development. If upgraded to two lanes, then properties would be affected.

- 2.4 In addition to these crossings, traffic difficulties now and with future developments must also be considered on road links such as Main Street, New Elgin and The Wards.

Growth in traffic for existing and approved developments has to be catered for throughout Elgin. Generally, without major road improvements, failure to cater for this additional traffic will lead to widespread traffic congestion. Some parts of the town which show little evidence of congestion at present will attract additional rat-run traffic in the future, whilst other locations which are already busy will suffer from increased traffic queues and delays that the public will find unacceptable. Since there is little scope for bus priorities to be introduced in Elgin, the delays will also severely affect those travelling by public transport.

Increased congestion will also inevitably result in road safety being compromised for both drivers and pedestrians over much of the road network. In addition to the dispersal of traffic into unsuitable streets to avoid hold-ups, generally increased traffic delays lead to more driver frustration which is known to cause more accidents. This is a factor which has not been a major issue in Elgin as yet, but the situation will steadily deteriorate if additional traffic is not catered for.

The Development Plan contains a list of road improvements which”*were deemed necessary to both improve the current situation and to accommodate the level of traffic generated by the developments...*”. These are summarised below:

- TSP3 Roundabout at A96 junction with Reiket Lane
- TSP4 Reiket Lane Railway Bridge
- TSP5 Reiket Lane/Linkwood Road/Thornhill Road (roundabout) junction
- TSP6 Thornhill Road link to A941
- TSP7 A941 Roundabout/junction improvement
- TSP8 Birnie Road link to Sandy Road
- TSP9 Junction improvement Birnie Road/Sandy Road
- TSP10 Sandy Road/Glen Moray Drive realignment
- TSP11 Junction improvement Edgar Road/Glenmoray Drive/Wards Road
- TSP12 Edgar Road extension – Wittet Drive The line of this road is indicative only and the Council, in consultation with SNH will require a design which will avoid damaging impacts on the natural wetland areas at the Wards – (see ENV2 and CF2)
- TSP13 New Railway Bridge Wittet Drive/Edgar Road extension
- TSP14 New Roundabout A96/Wittet Drive
- TSP15 New Road link Linkwood Road – Maisondieu Road

- 2.5 The list includes proposed junction and road link improvements from A96 West Road, along Reiket Lane, including the narrow railway Bridge, and Thornhill Road to Birnie Road and Sandy Road (TSP 3 – TSP8). Some of these works will come on stream soon in conjunction with the house-building taking place at Elgin South. The list also includes improvements at some time in the future along Glenmoray Drive and at its junctions with Sandy Road and Edgar Road (TSP9 -TSP11). Finally TSP 12 – TSP 14 are proposals to construct a link road from the west end of Edgar Road northwards, with a new bridge over the railway at the south end of Wittet Drive and a proposed new roundabout with the A96 West Road at the north end. The proposal to construct a new road link through the present freight rail shunting yard (TSP 15) is unlikely to be pursued in the short to medium term. Rail gauge improvements between Moss End in Central Scotland, Aberdeen and on to Elgin, which have the support of the Scottish Executive, are designed to attract more freight to travel by rail. The increase in retail development in particular in Elgin may result in more freight by rail in the future.

Collectively, this package of interdependent road improvements will provide Elgin with improved peripheral routes in the south half of the town which will act as “distributor roads”, and provide improved railway crossings within the town on both east and west sides.

- 2.6 It should be pointed out that existing routes are already established by drivers as unofficial “distributor roads” for traffic travelling within the town. In the north these are Morrison Road and Lesmurdie Road. South of the A96 there is an inner route comprising Maisondieu Road and either Hay Street, or alternatively Wards Road and Wittet Drive. There is also an outer route used in parts, i.e. Reiket Lane and Thornhill Road in the east, and Birnie Road, Glenmoray Drive, The Wards and again Wittet Drive in the west. As local traffic are the primary users, this occurs without the use of road signing. The Elgin Roads Strategy contained in the Development Plan is mainly based on providing improvements on or near these established routes.
- 2.7 Clearly, Wittet Drive would already be carrying much more traffic than at present were it not for the substandard junction with the A96 and traffic restrictions on The Wards. It is likely that the junction of the A96 and Wittet Drive would require improvement in the near future anyway, but particularly if it was decided to improve The Wards rather than provide a new railway bridge. Traffic volumes would increase accordingly and road safety problems would be anticipated at the A96 junction as the layout becomes more and more inadequate for the traffic flow.
- 2.8 The last major road improvements to be carried out in Elgin were the new routes of Alexandra Road, Hay Street and Bishopmill Brae. Elgin has seen many new developments since then, particularly in the retail and residential sectors, and traffic volumes have grown considerably. The Elgin Roads Strategy has been identified to deal with the transport impact of developments proposed in the current Development Plan. Beyond this period, it is stated in the Plan...*“As development proceeds (controlled by the phased release of further land over consecutive 5-year periods) further significant road schemes will be necessitated....”* Whatever options are chosen, properties will be affected. Every effort is made to try to minimise this but it cannot be eliminated.
- 2.9 The Development Plan contains a number of proposals which potentially put additional pressure on the New Elgin Road railway crossing. The Elgin South residential allocation of initially 700 houses, followed by a further 400 houses on reserve sites in the Plan will have a significant impact. Developer contributions for road improvements have already been agreed in respect of the first phases of this development and it is possible that these funds could contribute to works elsewhere which would relieve traffic congestion at New Elgin Road. The Plan also contains two large “opportunity sites” in the vicinity of Edgar Road and Linkwood Road which presently generate no traffic. It is likely that further developer contributions may be an appropriate method of catering for traffic impact at these sites. In addition, the traffic generated by the existing retail outlets on Edgar Road is significantly more than when the Development Plan was prepared. A resource centre has been located on Edgar Road since the Plan was approved and it is anticipated that The Wards wetland site will encourage visitors in the future. The Development Plan proposes a co-ordinated picture for the Elgin South–West area, which should be predominantly a residential area, with a Wetland Park, and a distributor road serving these land-uses and connecting to other areas of the town.

- 2.10 In addition to the list of local road proposals, the Development Plan includes a proposal for an Elgin Bypass. Extensive public consultation on the Plan, with associated press coverage at the time, culminated in a 3-week Public Local Inquiry in August 1999. The option for a southern route around the town attracted some opposition, mainly from the Elgin Golf Club, but there were no objections to the Wittet Drive proposals.
- 2.11 The recent public consultation exercise on the Wittet Drive proposals has indicated that there is confusion in some quarters over the respective roles of an internal road link over the railway and an A96 Bypass. The internal road link proposals are not the substitute for the bypass. Whilst any new road proposal can have some influence on any other, the functions of each in this case are basically different. Unlike the Wittet Drive proposals, an A96 Bypass would aid east-west movements, and because the Scottish Executive would insist on as few intermediate junctions as possible on the route (possibly only one at the A941), it would provide little assistance for traffic distributing within Elgin, and most of the vehicles using it would be long distance through traffic. Conversely, whilst there is a presumption against large numbers of minor junctions in the design of a distributor road, its purpose is primarily to distribute traffic between the different parts of the town. There is, in practice, some overlap between these functions, depending on junction locations and prevailing traffic movements, but essentially the roles are different.
- 2.12 Members will be aware of the recent campaign in support of an Elgin Bypass which led to a debate on 17 September 2003 in the Scottish Parliament initiated by Mrs Margaret Ewing MSP. It is interesting to note that one of the articles in the Northern Scot newspaper in January 2002, during the earlier part of the campaign, showed a plan of Elgin depicting various lines for an A96 Bypass together with the proposed line of the Wittet Drive link road. A previous investigation by The Babbie Group, consulting engineers representing the Council, concluded that an A96 Bypass should be viewed as a longer term objective, and that the more immediate need was for internal road improvements within the town, both on and off the A96, principally to deal with local traffic. This was accepted by the Council and many Elgin Councillors at the time acknowledged that traffic was congested in Elgin. In the Parliamentary debate the Minister, in indicating a possible way forward for an Elgin Bypass, also stated the importance of providing local road improvements first.
- 2.13 One of the criticisms which was used by many against the proposed Wittet Drive proposals during the public consultation was that it might somehow jeopardise the case for an Elgin Bypass. There is evidence to suggest that inactivity on the Council's part to bring forward local road improvements, particularly those which would remove some local traffic from the A96, will not help the case for eventually achieving a Trunk Road Bypass of the town.

2.14 Alternative approaches to solving Elgin's traffic problems have been considered:

Do Nothing - This is not considered to be a viable option, in terms of road safety and in respect of the current Development Plan proposals as investment decisions have been made on the basis of schemes contained in the Plan. A failure on the part of the Council to provide the road infrastructure in the Plan could deter future investment and potential developers could challenge the Council. The Chamber of Commerce have previously supported the view that a congested road network does not attract further business to the town. In addition to the impact on economic growth, the physical development of the town is dependent on road improvements keeping pace with development proposals. Worsening congestion in Elgin will affect the quality of life for the residents of Moray as well as tourists to the town.

The Green Travel Approach – This is an approach which seek to find alternative solutions to minimise additional traffic movements and this method will continue to be encouraged, but alone it is not a practical solution to the existing traffic problems in Elgin, nor will it cater completely for the impact of future development. Unfortunately in this area, irrespective of the particular development proposal under consideration, the car is needed for most journeys.

Improvements restricted to the area around New Elgin Road Railway Bridge – Some of the implications for property have been discussed earlier in this report, but fundamentally there is a limit to how much additional traffic capacity can be provided here. Existing traffic conditions during evening peak periods and during the busiest shopping times on Saturdays at these junctions are well known. Particular traffic movements in the future are predicted to increase to levels which cannot be accommodated with junction improvements alone. Dispersal of some traffic wishing to cross the railway, to crossing points elsewhere, will be essential in the near future.

Construction of a "part Bypass" – The previous report on to this Committee on 28 April 2004 included a Plan C (in Appendix 1 of that report) depicting a possible new link road from the west end of Edgar Road, skirting west of the town, and joining the A96 at the existing junction with Morrision Road. This was one of a number of alternatives considered previously but it was not chosen as a preferred route for consultation. It is far removed from the indicative route in the Development Plan, but more importantly it is considered to be less attractive to traffic within the town and therefore would be less effective in solving present and future traffic problems elsewhere. Costs are likely to be in the order of 3 or 4 times the Development Plan option due to the longer route length and the need for additional river bridges, and unless it was built to Scottish Executive specifications for Trunk Roads it could adversely affect later consideration of a southern route for an Elgin Bypass. The only clear advantage of this option is that it is away from existing properties in the West end of the town. This option was suggested by a significant number of residents in the Wittet Drive area in response to the consultation.

- 2.15 Various design options were previously considered for the new railway crossing and the associated line of the road in addition to the “part bypass.” Members are reminded that there is currently a planning application for residential development from Robertsons to be determined for site R9 Bilbohall North through which the Development Plan option for the road link passes. The position of the road line should be established first since the application, as submitted, conflicts with the indicative line in the Development Plan. It should be stressed that this is not because the link road is required to carry the traffic from the proposed development, but rather that the extent of the housing site indicated by the developer affects the proposed road. Further investigation of the Wittet Drive link would require detailed discussions with the rail authority concerning design options at and near to the proposed bridge.
- 2.16 Previously the Environmental Services Committee gave approval to consult on two different options for a new roundabout junction at the north end of Wittet Drive at the A96 West Road. Either one would require property acquisition. Investigations have been carried out to try to achieve a satisfactory roundabout at this location without property acquisition. The indications from the design work and from initial discussions with a representative of the Scottish Executive are that an acceptable junction cannot be achieved at this location without some direct impact on residential property.
- 2.17 A consultation exercise on the Edgar Road - Wittet Drive road improvements was carried out in accordance with the outline given in paragraph 2.14 of the previous report to Committee in April of this year. Letters with outline plans of the proposals were sent first of all to owners of those properties which were most likely to be directly affected by the proposals i.e. acquisition of property or any garden ground, and those whose houses are in front of the proposed embankment which would form part of the railway bridge. These residents were invited to meet with officers and discuss the proposals in person, and almost all took up this opportunity. Only after that first stage was complete did letters and outline plans go to all other residents on Wittet Drive and to those properties fronting the west end of Edgar Road. This letter informed them of the dates and times of a local exhibition of plans over two afternoons and evenings, and all were invited to attend and to ask questions of officers present and to make comments.
- 2.18 At the same time press releases were issued to the Northern Scot and Press and Journal newspapers, outlining the proposals giving details of the consultation arrangements and inviting anyone along to the exhibitions. Official notices were also placed with these newspapers to reinforce the publicity. An exhibition of plans was held at West End Primary School, between the hours of 3.30pm and 8.30pm on Monday 28 and Tuesday 29 June 2004. It was emphasised in advance, as it was to all those who contacted officers in advance of the exhibitions, that this was a preliminary consultation on the line of a road only, and that only outline plans would be available. Detailed information could not be determined until the Council gave approval for detailed work on this option to proceed, and it had been decided to carry out early consultation in advance of this. In parallel with this, letters requesting initial comments were sent out to 3 internal consultees and to 15 interested outside bodies. All aspects of the consultation process were agreed in advance with the two Local Members, Councillor R Burns and Councillor A Bisset.

- 2.19 Both public exhibitions were well attended and it was evident that attendance was almost exclusively from those living on Wittet Drive or nearby. A relatively small number of residents from Edgar Road area attended. All were advised to make their comments in writing and comment sheets were provided for this purpose. A return date of 16 July was requested. Analysis has been carried out for the 61 comment sheets and 128 letters received up to 9 August. Whilst more letters have been received, and continue to be received since that date, the comments therein will be considered but they do not form part of the summary analysis for the purpose of this report. It should be pointed out that some comment sheets and a number of letters are from different individuals within the same household. Also, a significant number of letters are in the format of a standard letter which has been distributed from one source to residents, and these have been signed and submitted by those residents. A petition has been received by the Council.
- 2.20 A very brief summary of the main points raised is contained in **Appendix 2** to this report. A file containing all correspondence received up to and including Friday 20 August has been placed in the Members library. This also contains a more detailed spreadsheet summary of the main comments made in both the comment sheets and the letters received. Copies of the same file have also been supplied to both Local Members, Councillor Bisset and Councillor Burns.
- 2.21 There is general opposition to the proposals from the great majority of those members of the public who took part in the consultation exercise. Almost all made some reference to the likely adverse impact of additional traffic, or the physical works which would be required, on their houses or on the area as a whole. Noise, air pollution, reduction in property values and general quality of life for residents were amongst the main areas of concern. General concern was expressed by many for the likely effect on pedestrians, particularly children and the elderly, and some considered that additional traffic should not be routed near two primary schools. Many people expressed the view that “a proper bypass” should be built instead and considered the proposals to be a “bypass on the cheap”. Some held the view that the proposed scheme would reduce the likelihood of obtaining an Elgin Bypass in the future. Despite statements in all the press releases, public notices and letters to residents stressing the preliminary nature of the consultation exercise, and stating that detailed information was simply not available at this stage, many of those consulted criticised the lack of detailed information on plans and in answers to questions.
- 2.22 **Appendix 3** contains a list of the interested parties who were consulted by letter together with a brief summary of their initial response. All of this correspondence is also copied in full to the file in the Members library and to each of the Local Members.

- 2.23 Prior to the consultation exercise it was decided that the best way forward was to report the outcome of the consultation back to the Environmental Services Committee and then to seek approval to proceed to traffic assessments and to a more detailed level of design so that many of the questions which were unanswered at the preliminary stage could be answered in full. In view of the response from residents in the area, it is considered appropriate that the proposed road link should be tested robustly against other route options in a formal framework which should be above reproach.
- 2.24 Any proposals involving Wittet Drive are not the full solution for Elgin. This is only one of a package of improvements. In accordance with the Babbie Group report on the Elgin Bypass and in line with the comments of Nicol Stephen MSP, Minister for Transport, various local road improvements should be determined, together with input from officers of the Scottish Executive. The Wittet Drive proposals should form an integral part of that package to be investigated. As stressed previously in this report, a bypass alone is not a solution, although The Moray Council remain fully supportive of it as a long term objective. The findings of the independent STAG report, which identified local distribution problems as the main source of the current problems, were agreed by The Council, the Scottish Executive and The Minister and therefore the Wittet Drive proposal in no way constitutes a “bypass on the cheap”.
- 2.25 The most recent transport white paper, *Scotland’s Transport Future*, published in June of this year, advises that the impact of new transport infrastructure on the built and natural environment must be fully considered. On Trunk Road schemes this is done with the use of Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). This is the same process on which the Babbie report on the Elgin Bypass was based. The process would examine all aspects of the proposals and would compare them, and other options, against criteria set by the Scottish Executive guidance. The main criteria within the STAG assessment are *Environment, Safety, Economy, Integration* and *Accessibility*. It is considered that a STAG appraisal is the most appropriate way forward at this stage. This is a specialist two-stage process which would require the use of external consultants but would add a degree of transparency and independence to the evaluation. Many issues have been raised regarding pedestrian safety, potential speeding problems on a straight road etc. A number of these will be considered as an integral part of the STAG process, whilst others will be dealt with during the design process if it is decided to proceed with the scheme.
- 2.26 Unfortunately the STAG process will require traffic input which can only be derived from a new traffic model which would require external consultants more than 6 months to construct. The model is required for many other purposes, not least for testing all traffic impacts for development allocations in the review of the Development Plan. Whilst approval has been granted previously to proceed with commissioning consultants to build a new traffic model for Elgin, it has been delayed because the staff needed to initially implement and then manage this process are not in post. The key post involved has been advertised and no suitable applicants applied. It is shortly to be re-advertised. In addition, renewed efforts will be made to involve Scottish Executive officers in the search for traffic solutions in Elgin to improve conditions on the Trunk Road through the town. Efforts will also be made to seek a contribution from the Scottish Executive for establishing the traffic model for Elgin.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 It is proposed that Committee notes the response from the consultation exercise for the Wittet Drive Link Road
- 3.2 It is proposed that the Director of Environmental Services be instructed to commission a traffic model for Elgin when the necessary internal Council posts have been filled, and following on from that to commission a STAG report from suitably qualified consultants to evaluate the proposed Wittet Drive Link Road and other options.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 Budget is contained within the **capital plan for 2004/2005** and beyond under the heading Elgin Traffic Management and Car Parking.

5. Staffing Implications

- 5.1 There are staffing implications for all of this work and at present the Transportation officers involved are understaffed. A number of vacant posts will be re-advertised in the near future but this will have an inevitable impact on the timescale for progressing this project.

6. Environmental Implications

- 6.1 The proposed scheme will improve road safety and traffic flows over a wide area within Elgin, and whilst there may be some local negative environmental impacts which will be minimised as much as possible, overall environmental benefits will accrue to the town. An Environmental Statement and Environmental Action Plan would be required.

7. Sustainable Development Implications

- 7.1 The social, economic and environmental issues have been considered in brief and a full assessment will be required as the scheme develops. Future consultation will be widespread and fair. Some environmental and social aspects will require mitigation and the long term scheme is considered to be sustainable.

8. Consultations

- 8.1 This report has been considered and approved by the Central Management Team.
- 8.2 The Principal Solicitor (Commercial & Conveyancing) has been consulted and agrees with the contents of the report.
- 8.3 Kathryn Macpherson, Solicitor has been consulted and agrees with the contents of the report.
- 8.4 The Head of Estate Services has been consulted and agrees with the contents of the report.

8.5 The Accountancy Manager has been consulted and agrees with the contents of the report.

8.6 The local Members, Councillors Bisset and Burns have been informed of the content of this report and will make their views known at the meeting.

9. Corporate Plan

9.1 The report encompasses the main aims of the Economic Development programme by maintaining and enhancing suitable transport facilities and infrastructure for residents, visitors, businesses and workers.

10. Recommendations

10.1 It is recommended that Committee notes the response from the consultation exercise for the Wittet Drive Link Road

10.2 It is recommended that the Director of Environmental Services be instructed to commission a traffic model for Elgin when the necessary internal Council posts have been filled, and following on from that to commission a STAG report from suitably qualified consultants to evaluate the proposed Wittet Drive Link Road and other options.

10.3 It is recommended that a further report will be presented to this Committee in due course on the findings of this report.

Author of Report: Transportation Manager

Background Papers: None

Ref: GRH/PA/R/24/44

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APPENDIX 1

Plan

Wittet Drive to Edgar Road Proposals**Summary of Consultation Feedback**

Feedback Sheets – 61 received.

Significant response	Number
Potential for pedestrian conflict particularly children and elderly	13
Increase in noise and air pollution	14
Reduction in property values due to access problems	7
Construction on a wetland	10
A bypass would provide a southern route without diverting traffic through a residential area	27
General opposition	10

Letters – 128 received.

Significant Response	Number
Potential for pedestrian conflict particularly children and elderly	76
Increase in traffic on Wittet Drive	59
Increase in traffic past 2 primary schools	43
Increase in noise and air pollution	76
Quality of residents lives affected	47
Demolition of traditional properties.	35
Reduction in value of property	50
Unanswered questions	43
A proper bypass is more appropriate	47
Present and future traffic volumes should be assessed	25
Reduces the likelihood of SE funding a bypass	22

LIST OF INTERESTED PARTIES CONSULTED AND SUMMARY OF EACH RESPONSE.

(Note that this is a preliminary consultation only based on outline plans – responses below are initial comments only based on the proposals in principle)

External Consultees

Grampian Police – Additional railway crossing will reduce congestion on existing routes. Wittet Drive wide enough but detrimental to residential area. Speed considerations on long straight route.

Grampian Fire and Rescue Service - Will provide better access to some areas in and around Elgin.

Stagecoach Bluebird – Broadly supportive – will ease traffic delays. Bus services on A96 in town will benefit. Request consideration to junction design so that services using Pluscarden Road and Wittet Drive are not delayed. Concern that services on Edgar Road may be delayed more by increased traffic.

Network Rail – No objection to overbridge subject to Network Rail requirements. Welcome proposals which would reduce traffic flow over The Wards level crossing.

Scottish Executive (letter & meeting of officers) – Welcome a scheme which reduces local traffic on part of A96 Trunk Road. Prefer option proposing new junction with A96 to west of Wittet Drive. Any new junction with A96 will have to meet all the design criteria.

Hawco (landowner).(Response from agent Future Plans) – Owners of land at West Road. Request meeting with Council officers.

NHS Grampian (landowner)- Support the provision of this link. Wish to see early implementation. Preference for an amended line for the route south of the railway further to the east, to maximise land available for residential development. Recommend phasing so that the Edgar Road – Wittet Drive section proceeds first as they consider that property acquisition at northern end will delay overall implementation.

Scottish Wildlife Trust – Given the limited information, provisionally objecting. Possible concern for hydrology of the Wildlife Site. Need more information before deciding firmly.

Scottish Natural Heritage – Insufficient information at this early stage to decide how they would formally respond to a planning application. Welcome the move which takes the proposed road line away from south-west corner of Wildlife site. Consideration required for European protected Species (EPS) such as bats, otters and great crested newts. Also for badgers and breeding birds. Would request a hydrological impact survey at a later stage.

Elgin Community Council – General support. Agree that with planned developments, existing railway crossings likely to be inadequate and it is essential for the road infrastructure to be improved. Acknowledged that a bypass would not cater for the north – south traffic, therefore relief road essential, but campaign for a bypass should also go ahead as well. Remarked that “use of Wittet Drive not a particularly agreeable route, particularly to residents, but that little alternative could be seen.” Some concerns over mini-roundabout at Pluscarden Road and vehicle speeds – problems which could be overcome in future designs.

Responses are still awaited from SEPA and Grampian Ambulance Service.

Internal Consultees

Stewart Halkett, Head of Development Services – *Treated as a Preliminary Inquiry (04/01752/PE). Advised that Environmental Impact Assessment required, various Development Plan policies relevant and proposal as shown constitutes a potential departure from the Development Plan.*

Donnie Mackay, Environmental Health Manager – *Assessments will be required for future noise levels and for air quality. To do this data relating to future traffic flows will be required when available.*

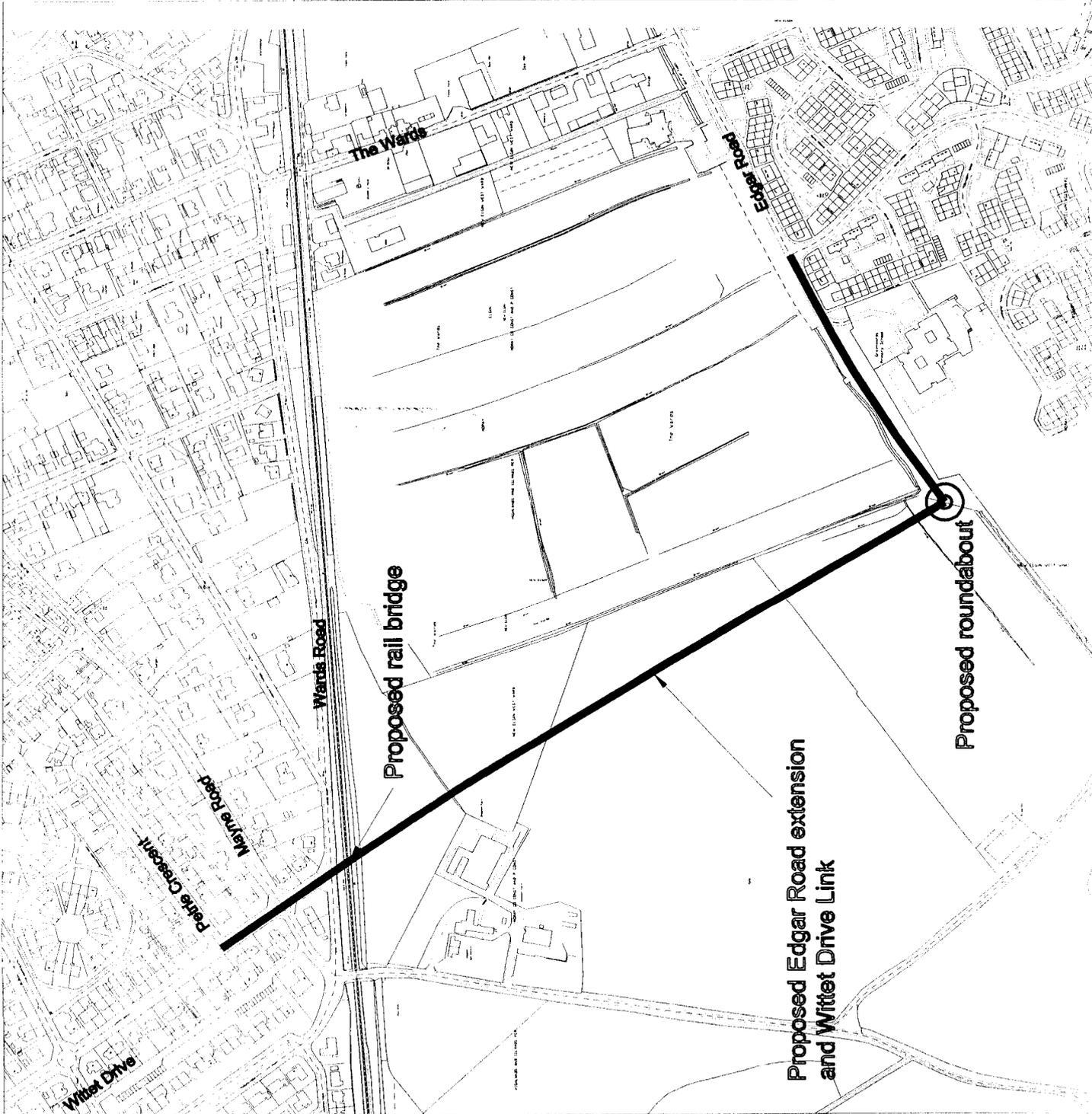
Doug Hawkes, Ranger Nature Reserve – *Commends the proposed route of the road as it now avoids The Wards Wetland Site. Care required for road drainage and construction process to ensure no adverse impact on botanical interests.*

John Black, Property Manager – *To maximise potential for future residential development would prefer proposed road alignment south of the railway to be close to the boundary of the wetland area.*

A response is awaited from Mr Mike Marshall, Head Teacher of Greenwards Primary School. Favourable preliminary discussions have already taken place with the Head Teacher and more detailed liaison with Transportation officers is planned.

APPENDIX 1

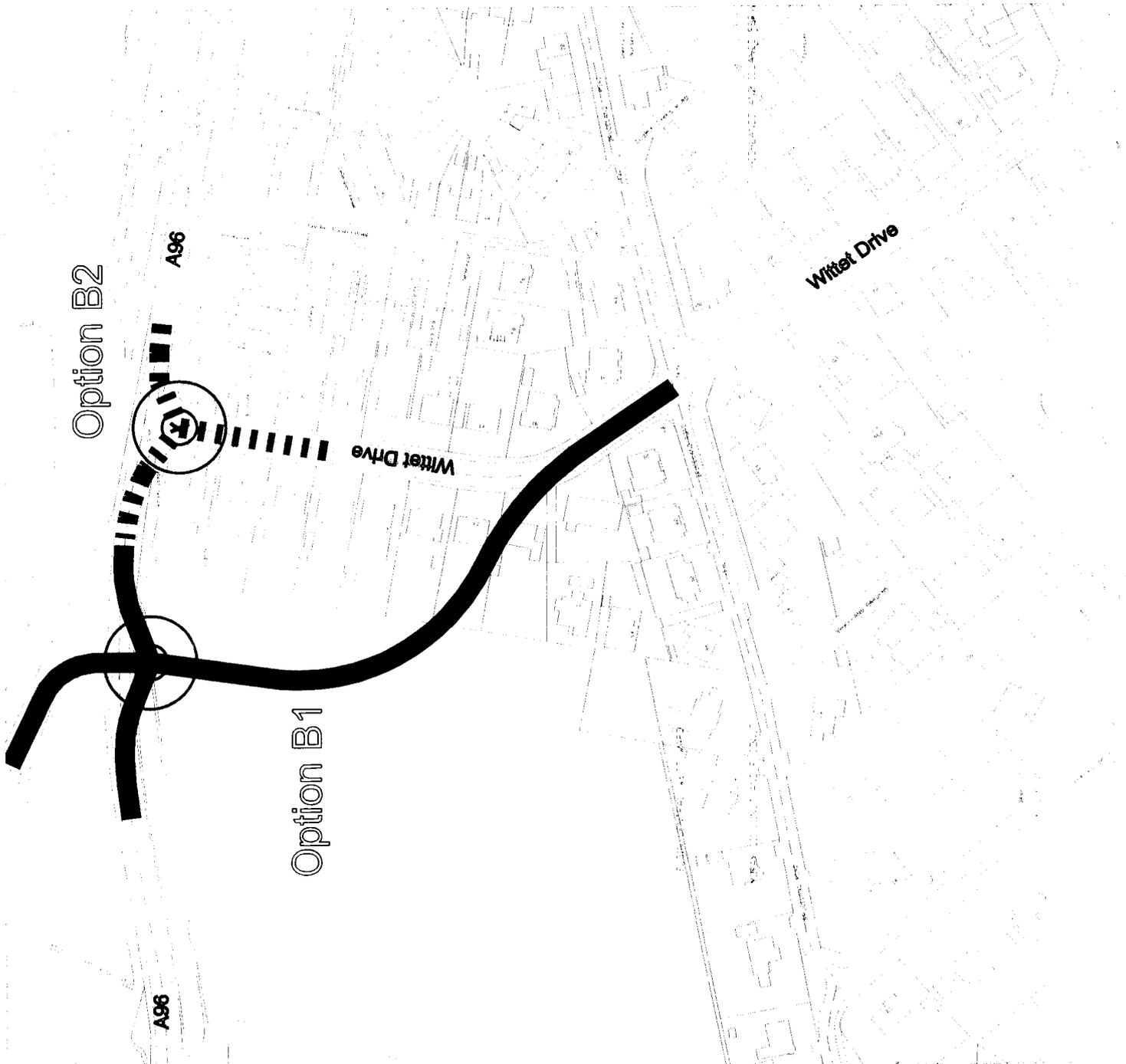
Plan A) EDGAR ROAD
- WITTET DRIVE
1:5000



APPENDIX 1

Plan B) WITTET
DRIVE/A96
1:2000

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THE MORAY COUNCIL**EXTRACT FROM MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE****1 SEPTEMBER 2004****COUNCIL OFFICE, ELGIN****PRESENT**

Councillors A.R. Wilson (Chairman), J.C. Hogg (Vice-Chairman), A. Bisset, T.M. Bothwell, A.E. Coutts, J.A. Divers, J. Hamilton, R. Hossack, A. Keith, S.D.I Longmore, E. McGillivray, G. McIntyre, J. MacKay, P.B. Paul, R.H. Shepherd, R. Sim, J. Stewart, A. Urquhart, W.P. Watt and I.R. Young

IN ATTENDANCE

The Director of Environmental Services, the Head of Development Services, the Head of Direct Services, the Development Control Manager, the Planning and Development Manager, the Head of Estates Services, the Senior Engineer (Traffic), the Trading Standards Manager, the Principal Solicitor (Commercial and Conveyancing), Angus Burnie Principal Planning Officer (Development Control), Nicola Paton Environmental Health Officer and the Principal Committee Services Officer, Clerk to the Meeting.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of R.F. McIntosh (Vice-Chairman), A.R. Burgess, R.J. Burns, P. Farquharson, L. Gorn and J.A. Leslie.

1. ADDITIONAL BUSINESS

In terms of Standing Order 25 (iv) the Committee agreed to accept as additional items of business to be transacted at the meeting the undernoted reports on the Chairman certifying that, in his opinion, they required to be considered on the grounds of urgency:

- (i) Scottish Statutory Instrument: Consultation on the Scottish Network 1 & 2 Tourist Board Scheme Orders - Report by the Director of Environmental Services
- (ii) Request for Formal Right of Access from Drumbeg Crescent, Lhanbryde - Report by the Head of Estates Services [Para 9]

It was further agreed that they be taken as items 8(a) and 23 on the Agenda respectively.

2. ORDER OF BUSINESS

The meeting noted that Item 22 had been withdrawn from the Agenda.

3. CONDOLENCES

The meeting joined the Chairman in offering their sincere condolences to Councillor McIntosh following the recent death of his wife.

4. FAREWELL

The meeting joined the Chairman in thanking Mr Joe Geoghegan, Development Control Manager, for his long and valuable service to Environmental Services and the Council and wished him well in his future employment.

5. KNOCKANDO WOOLLEN MILL

The meeting joined the Chairman in congratulating those involved in the recent campaign in an attempt to secure funding for the restoration of the Knockando Woollen Mill which had been the Scottish Finalist in the recent BBC2 Restoration Programme and noted that whilst not successful, the Woollen Mill had attracted 87,000 telephone votes which compared very favourably against the winning entry which had received 114,000 votes and which was an incredible tribute to those who voted.

6. DECLARATION OF GROUP DECISIONS

In terms of Standing Order 20 the meeting noted that there were no declarations from group leaders or spokespersons in regard to any prior decisions taken on how members will vote on any item on the Agenda.

7. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The Meeting agreed, in terms of Section 50A (4) and (5) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, that the public and media representatives be excluded from the Meeting during consideration of the items of business appearing at the relevant paragraphs of this Minute as specified below so as to avoid disclosure of exempt information of the class described in the appropriate paragraph of Part I of Schedule 7A of the Act.

<u>Para No. of Minute</u>	<u>Para No. of Schedule 7A</u>
18	8 & 9
19	1
20	1
21	1

8. PROPOSED NEW ROAD LINK - EDGAR ROAD TO A96, ELGIN

Under paragraph 20 of the Minute of this Committee dated 28 April 2004, there was submitted a report by the Director of Environmental Services asking the Committee to note responses received from the recent preliminary consultation process for a proposed new road link between Edgar Road and the A96 West Road, and to approve further work to investigate this and other traffic improvements in Elgin.

Prior to consideration, the Chairman advised the meeting that due to the importance of the item, in accordance with Standing Order 43, he would allow Members to speak for longer than the prescribed 5 minutes.

Prior to discussion, Councillor Bisset presented to the Chairman a petition, which had been presented to the Council on behalf of the "Wittet Drive Action Group".

As the local Member, Councillor Bisset addressed the meeting on the issue of the proposed new road link. In the course of his address Councillor Bisset referred to the history of measures taken to ease the flow of traffic in Elgin and, in his opinion, with hindsight their inadequacy; that he was not convinced the current proposal would address this; what he considered to be the lack of specification in the relevant Moray Council Development Plan policy statements as to the significance and therefore the consequences of the proposed road link; the strength of opposition, from the "Wittet Drive Action Group" in particular, as a consequence of the effect of the proposed new road link generally and on specific properties in particular. He also drew attention to what he considered to be the inadequate manner in which the proposal was presented to both himself as local Member and the public for the purposes of consultation.

In conclusion Councillor Bisset was of the view that the proposed new road link would not ease the flow of traffic from North to South of Elgin and vice versa and would diminish significantly the prospect of Elgin ever achieving a bypass and thereafter moved that the recommendations contained in the report be amended to read:-

- (i) to note the response from the consultation exercise for the Wittet Drive Link Road proposal, and recognise the overwhelming weight of public opposition to the proposal;

- (ii) that the Director of Environmental Services be instructed to commission a traffic model for Elgin when the necessary internal Council posts have been filled, and following on from that to commission a STAG report from suitably qualified consultants to evaluate options, other than those currently proposed for Wittet Drive in so far as they relate to the use of compulsory purchase powers and demolition of property ; and
- (iii) that a further report be presented to this Committee in due course on the findings of the STAG report.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Hossack.

Following discussion by Members, Councillor Coutts, seconded by Councillor Divers moved as an amendment approval of the recommendations as stated in the report.

In speaking to his amendment Councillor Coutts did not dispute that the ideal and most appropriate solution lay in the provision of a bypass. However, despite a concerted effort spearheaded by The Moray Council to convince the Scottish Executive of this, the resultant conclusion of the Executive was that, based on traffic volumes, a bypass cannot be justified. It was therefore his understanding that for the foreseeable future there will be no prospect of a bypass. It was therefore, in his opinion, incumbent upon the Council to seek ways to mitigate traffic congestion through the more efficient use of the roads network under the Council's direct control. Whilst fully understanding of the public reaction he also understood there were no real alternatives to the proposed road link and this was fully amplified within the report. One of the major factors, as well as the necessary roads network upgrading associated with major retail, residential, commercial and other development within Elgin, is the introduction of an additional traffic crossing over the Aberdeen /Inverness railway line. The proposed route of the road should have come as no surprise as it is well documented within the Council's current Development Plan and what is now being considered is the detail which has been the subject of a formal public consultation exercise.

As the seconder to Councillor Coutts' amendment, Councillor Divers concurred with these remarks.

On a division there voted:-

For the Motion (12)	Councillors Bisset, Hossack, Hogg, Bothwell, Hamilton, Keith, Longmore, McIntyre, Mackay, Shepherd, Stewart and Young.
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For the Amendment (8)	Councillors Coutts, Divers, Wilson, McGillivray, Paul, Sim, Urquhart and Watt.
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Abstentions (0)

Accordingly the Motion became the finding of the meeting and it was agreed:-

- (i) to note the response from the consultation exercise for the Wittet Drive Link Road proposal, and recognise the overwhelming weight of public opposition to the proposal;
- (ii) that the Director of Environmental Services be instructed to commission a traffic model for Elgin when the necessary internal Council posts have been filled, and following on from that to commission a STAG report from suitably qualified consultants to evaluate options, other than those currently proposed for Wittet Drive in so far as they relate to the use of compulsory purchase powers and demolition of property ; and
- (iii) that a further report be presented to this Committee in due course on the findings of the STAG report.

9. SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS FILM COMMISSION (SHIFC): PRESENTATION BY THE SHIFC FILM COMMISSIONER.

On the invitation of the Chairman, Trish Shorthouse, the Scottish Highlands and Islands Film Commissioner (SHIFC) gave a brief presentation to the Committee on the work of the Commission which had brought an economic benefit to the Highlands and Islands of £3M in 2002/03 and a further £8M in 2003/04 through