
REPORT TO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 28 AUGUST 2012

SUBJECT: ELGIN WESTERN LINK ROAD – PROGRESS UPDATE AND COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To update Committee on the recent progress on the scheme.
- 1.2 To seek approval of the Communication and Engagement Strategy and for a public exhibition explaining the background to and the need for the scheme.
- 1.3 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section G(16) of the Council's Administrative Scheme: to exercise all functions of the Councils as Roads Authority including safety, the detailed planning, design and construction, improvement, maintenance and lighting of roads, bridges and other structures.

2. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Committee:

- 2.1 **Note the change to the scheme title.**
- 2.2 **Approve the Communication and Engagement Strategy.**
- 2.3 **Note the progress on community engagement and detailed design of the scheme.**
- 2.4 **Approve the proposals for a public exhibition on 7 and 8 September 2012.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The scheme has historically been known as the "Elgin Western Distributor Road"; however the Scottish Government's "Designing Streets" policy states that the term "distributor road" is now not appropriate. Consequently the scheme will now be known as the **Elgin Western Link Road** which reflects equally the approach to detailed design.
- 3.2 Designing Streets is the Scottish Government's policy statement for street design. It was created to support the Scottish Government's place-making agenda and sits alongside Designing Places which is the Government's policy statement on design.

- 3.3 Designing Streets moves away from a prescriptive standards approach which tended to result in streets with a poor sense of place. The policy promotes an integrated design approach that puts people and place before vehicle movement. The approach aims to balance potential conflicts between different users and objectives without compromising the quality or sense of place.
- 3.4 Designing Streets is applicable to all thoroughfares within an urban setting and within rural boundaries. It is predominantly used for new streets but is also applicable to existing streets subject to redesign. Whilst the technical advice within the document is particularly aimed at residential and lightly trafficked streets, many of the key principles are applicable to other types of street. In the case of busier streets the movement function may become more significant and any conflicts with other objectives or users should be resolved through an integrated design approach and should not compromise the quality or sense of place.

Economic and Planning Issues

- 3.5 Reference is made to the report submitted to this Committee on 28 June 2011 (Para 4 of the Minute refers) which outlined the economic and planning background to the scheme and identified some of the planning and development implications. At this meeting the Committee approved the selection of the route.
- 3.6 Reference is also made to the separate report to this Meeting concerning the progression of the Moray Economic Strategy and Elgin–City for the Future Strategy. The provision of these documents will be reflected in the emerging Local Development Plan.
- 3.7 The Local Plan 2000 included proposals for a number of major developments mainly in the south of Elgin, and this required significant major transport infrastructure improvements (TSPs) to be provided alongside the developments to cater for the generated traffic. The approved Plan included a proposed new crossing of the railway at the south end of Wittet Drive and a major improvement scheme for the A96/Wittet Drive junction. On the basis of this, major retail developments on Edgar Road were given planning consent. Many of the developments, including the whole Elgin South housing development, progressed whilst only some of the road infrastructure improvements were built.
- 3.8 This situation has continued into the current Local Plan. The proposed road infrastructure improvements (TSPs) are still clearly identified in the Plan but the delivery of them has not kept pace with the traffic generators. The road improvements on the southern edge of the town, which were regarded as “easy wins,” have been completed, but the essential links with the remainder of the road network, one of which requires some property acquisition, and for which the Council has collected developer contributions, are now overdue. This is reflected in the level of congestion evident in many parts of the town, and is now a real constraint for developing even those sites which are currently designated in the Local Plan.

- 3.9 On Monday 20 June 2011, whilst on a ministerial visit to Moray, Fergus Ewing MSP and Minister for Enterprise confirmed the significance of transport infrastructure to sustainable economic growth.
- 3.10 In addition, two former Scottish Ministers with responsibility for Transport (i.e. Tavish Scott MSP and Stewart Stevenson MSP), during past visits to Elgin, have emphasised the importance of The Moray Council delivering on their own road infrastructure programme, including a link road in the west of Elgin, if the Council is to expect Government to improve the A96 in Elgin.
- 3.11 The recent announcement by the Scottish Government committing to the dualling of the A96 Aberdeen to Inverness Trunk Road does not change the need for the improvements to Elgin's local road network. The dual carriageway will be a strategic road between Aberdeen and Inverness and is likely to be well away from Elgin. It will make little difference to the distribution of traffic within the town.

Communication and Engagement

- 3.12 Reference is made to previous reports submitted to this Committee and specifically to the meeting of 13 March 2012 (Para 18 of the Minute refers) at which the Project Execution Plan was approved.
- 3.13 A vital part of successful project delivery involves effective communication and community engagement. The Communication and Engagement Strategy for the project has been prepared and is attached as **Appendix 1**.
- 3.14 This strategy document outlines the process and proposals for communication and community engagement during the various phases of the project. At this stage the construction timetable is uncertain but once the statutory processes have been concluded, the document will be reviewed and updated.
- 3.15 As outlined in the above document, a steering group has been set up to co-ordinate and assist with the on-going community engagement process. In addition to the Council Officers, the group includes a representative from:
- Elgin Community Council;
 - Elgin North Area Forum;
 - Elgin South Area Forum;
 - Elgin Designing Streets Action Group
- 3.16 This group has proved very useful in agreeing the form of community engagement and in the dissemination of information to the groups.
- 3.17 A pre-design workshop was held on 1 June 2012 with a number of community group representatives and other key stakeholders. A site walk-over was arranged for the previous day to enable those attending the workshop to identify and familiarise themselves with the key issues and difficulties along the route.
- 3.18 The workshop was very successful and resulted in a number of suggestions and proposals. A report outlining the various issues raised at the workshop is

being prepared. This will confirm those suggestions recommended for consideration and explain why others are not. Some of the significant changes being investigated are:

- A signalised junction on the A96 at Sheriffmill Road in lieu of a roundabout. This is more appropriate for pedestrians and cyclists and will require less land. Transport Scotland has indicated that it would have no objection in principle to this solution.
- The north end of Wittet Drive would not be part of the main route and possible measures to discourage traffic will include limited access and raising the carriageway to create a shared surface.
- The main part of Wittet Drive would consist of a narrower carriageway with car-parking and landscaping.
- The junction with Pluscarden Road would have traffic signals and incorporate advance stop-lines for cyclists, an on-demand crossing facility and intelligent signals to minimise delays.
- A single span bridge over the railway is suggested. The community perceive there could be a safety issue with any pedestrian access under the bridge. There is a need for a connection between Wards Road and Wittet Drive. Pedestrian access will be retained across the new road.
- In 2010 the Council acquired 78 Wittet Drive as there was a concern about provision of a suitable access following the construction of a bridge. Providing a suitable pedestrian link between Wards Road and Wittet Drive may prevent the construction of a suitable access and require demolition of the aforementioned property.
- The proposed roundabout near the Wetlands could be replaced with a bend in the road and a T-junction. The alignment of the road would however impact slightly on the Wetlands and this junction style may have less future capacity than a roundabout but it would be designed to be easily adapted for traffic signals in future.
- The west end section of Edgar Road would be moved slightly north to allow dedicated parking for residents on the south side. Existing junctions would be adjusted to shorten the pedestrian crossing path.

3.19 The workshop was advised that it would be unlikely that all the suggestions could be progressed. Feedback will be undertaken shortly to those who attended the recent workshop.

3.20 A public exhibition was held in January 2011 outlining the various route options. The feedback from the event was reported to this Committee on 8 March 2011 (para. 9 of Minute refers) and considered in the subsequent option appraisal process which culminated in a decision on a preferred route being made in June 2011 (see paragraph 3.5 above). While the "Wittet Drive

route” was the least popular option, it was the only one that effectively delivered the primary objectives and provided value for money.

- 3.21 However it is recognised that there is still a need to inform stakeholders better on why this scheme is necessary and on how, through incorporating the Designing Streets philosophy, it can enhance the sense of place while functioning effectively in transportation terms. Consequently a public exhibition is proposed for Friday 7 and Saturday 8 September 2012 in Elgin Library. This exhibition will explain the need for and the background to, the Elgin Traffic Management Programme as well as outlining the proposals for the Western Link Road.
- 3.22 Further meetings or workshops will be held and there will be a further exhibition later this year prior to the submission of a planning application.

Property Acquisition

- 3.23 The Economic Development and Infrastructure Services Committee on 1 November 2011 approved the approach for compensation and acquisition of properties affected by this scheme (Paragraph 17 of the Minute refers).
- 3.24 The District Valuer has been instructed to agree provisional terms to acquire three properties and associated compensation. Compensation claims have been lodged by the owners of all three houses and the District Valuer is currently negotiating these with the owners’ agents. All private landowners have been individually met and advised of the Council’s proposals for acquisition and of their rights. As the design progresses and the land requirements are finalised, negotiations to acquire the remaining land and agree compensation will be carried out by the District Valuer, on behalf of the Council.
- 3.25 A number of the design changes arising from the workshop will alter the land required for the scheme. As previously advised in the Project Execution Plan, a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) is being prepared however this cannot be progressed until a more accurate assessment of the necessary land is completed. It is planned that details of the proposed CPO will be submitted to this Committee in October 2012.

4. **SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

(a) **Single Outcome Agreement/ Service Improvement Plan**

This report is in line with National Outcome 1 and Local Outcome 3: “Moray will benefit from an improved and safer transportation infrastructure”.

Service Priority 2 (Elgin Traffic Management Plan) of the Service Improvement Plan.

National outcome 9 “We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.”
Local priority 4 “housing and homelessness – more people in Moray will have access to affordable housing” – completion of the Western Link Road will enable access to land designated for much needed affordable housing in Elgin.

(b) **Policy and Legal**

There are no policy or legal issues.

(c) **Financial implications**

The cost of the design and public engagement processes can be met from the current Capital allocation for 2012/13.

It is expected that the cost of property acquisition will be met from the current Capital allocation and this will be reviewed following further discussions with the District Valuer.

(d) **Risk Implications**

There is still a need to explain to the public why we are promoting this scheme and what it will achieve. Unless this message can be successfully delivered, not just to the public in general but more importantly to those who live close to the route, there is a risk that the public perceptions of the scheme will not change.

(e) **Staffing Implications**

There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

(f) **Property**

Property acquisitions and compensation will be reported to Committee as appropriate, in terms of the Council’s Scheme of Delegation.

(g) **Equalities**

There are no equalities implications of this report.

(h) **Consultations**

Alasdair McEachan, Legal Services Manager (Property and Contracts) has been consulted and had no comment.

Stuart Beveridge, Estates Manager has been consulted and his comments incorporated into the report.

Peter Jones, PPR & Communications Officer has been consulted and his comments incorporated into the report.

John Ferguson, Community Planning and Development Manager has been consulted and had no comment.

David Duncan, Principal Planning Officer has contributed to the report.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 It is important to acknowledge the relevance of the Designing Streets policy and changing the title of the scheme reflects the consideration being given to the policy throughout the design.**
- 5.2 There is still the need to deliver the critical message of why this road is required and what the benefits to Elgin and the wider Moray community will be.**
- 5.3 The ongoing community engagement has been very helpful in reviewing the outline design and has resulted in a number of positive suggestions. The outcomes from the workshop have been reviewed and will be given to the groups shortly.**
- 5.4 In advance of the preparation of a Compulsory Purchase Order, negotiations are underway to acquire three properties with the remaining areas of land to follow in due course.**

Author of Report: Frank Knight, Senior Engineer (Design)

Background Papers:

Ref: