

REPORT TO: POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE ON 27 MAY 2008

SUBJECT: ELGIN SOUTH WEST DEVELOPMENTS

BY: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of a cross-departmental Working Group to co-ordinate the development of a number of Council projects centred on South West Elgin, and to invite nominations from Members to attend the Working Group.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Sections A(43) of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to the co-ordination of activities of other Committees, A(51) relating to the sale or lease of land or buildings, A(60) relating to the Council strategic housing plan, D(11) relating to adequate provision of facilities for recreational, sporting, cultural and social activities and E(15) relating to traffic management functions, including the preparation and implementation of traffic management schemes.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to consider the report and nominate Member appointments to the Elgin South West Developments Working Group.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council has identified a number of projects that should be sited in south west Elgin, and from time to time, Departments have reported these to the relevant Committees. The projects are listed below, and described in more detail in subsequent paragraphs:
- sports facilities and High School improvements
 - affordable housing
 - western link distributor road
- 3.2 Whilst there has been consultation across departments on the impact of each project, it will be necessary to review the proposals as currently described to ensure best fit in terms of a number of criteria, principally
- Impact for development plan including environmental designations
 - landform consideration
 - topographical and geotechnical consideration
 - infrastructure provision
 - drainage and flooding
 - services
- 3.3 There is also the potential for additional development in this corner of Elgin from public sector partners and/or private developers.

Sports Facilities

- 3.4 Elgin High School has been identified as the preferred site for the development of sports facilities, with associated work within the school

building for improved teaching facilities in spaces currently occupied by sports facilities. An allowance is identified within the Capital Plan, and proposals will be developed confirming which sports facilities should be regarded as priority and are achievable, together with the details of the improvements to the school establishment.

Housing Land at Bilbohall

- 3.5 9.6 ha of land at Bilbohall was purchased from NHS Grampian in 2007, and part of the land holding, 4.3 ha, was the subject of an onward sale to Grampian Housing Association for affordable housing. The purchase price was negotiated by the DV, and included an allowance for infrastructure and servicing costs. The remainder of the land purchased from NHS Grampian was reserved for open space, structural landscaping and road improvements. The development of this site is not possible without a new road connection.

Western Link Distributor Road

- 3.6 A comprehensive study of traffic modelling in Elgin has been undertaken, and from STAG assessment reports, it has been clearly demonstrated that a number of improvements to infrastructure and additional link roads are required. The highest priority is for an additional crossing of the Aberdeen-Inverness railway line at the west end of Elgin. Council has instructed two options be investigated in more detail

- 1) A96 West Road – Wittet Drive – Edgar Road link, and
- 2) A96 Morriston Road – Edgar Road peripheral road

Whilst design work and other investigations continue, the possible routing of both of these options are influenced by other potential constraints caused by other projects identified in this report.

Development Plan

- 3.7 In consideration of the western link distributor road, officers in Development Services have reviewed the provisions of the Adopted and Emerging Local Plans, and examined the potential to attach new development to an outer link road. A number of significant issues emerge, and these need to be considered further in terms of the combination of proposed projects identified in this brief.

The main issues are

- requires departure from National Planning Policies for NPP and Development Plan
- requires departure from Local Plan
- requires a significant shift in policy regarding the future release of land for development around Elgin, and implications of this change
- continue investigations of the potential to bridge funding gap if potential developments were attached to an outer link road and development contributions used to fund the project.

- 3.8 These projects have, up until now, been considered individually, but they lie in the same general area of Elgin, and require to be given parallel consideration

to achieve the most beneficial outcomes for the Council and the Community. They have also been considered in plan form only, but the contours of the site, and potential poor ground conditions could influence landform options. The Officers Working Group has been established to provide a joined-up approach to the development of these projects and also allow cost efficiencies in progressing investigations and design options.

- 3.9 This comprehensive plan should also acknowledge any other planning initiatives for Elgin that identifies sites for buildings and facilities required by the Community Planning partners or private sector developers.
- 3.10 As Community Planning structures and Area Forums are established, then these projects should also be considered by these Groups.
- 3.11 The remit of the Working Group should include the following actions:
- overview and steer the development of the individual projects through a comprehensive plan and thereby afford a co-ordinated approach to the development, layout and infrastructure needs, through examination and consideration of options.
 - separate development work is required for each of the projects, but brought together to ensure alignment with the overall plan
 - engagement with other public sector partners and private developers will be required to ensure that the list of potential projects is identified, and considered how they fit into the wider plan for Elgin.
 - consideration of the opportunities and constraints surrounding each of the projects – separately and collectively
 - consideration of financial implications and internal or external consultancy services required to progress the projects
 - development of an engagement strategy with key stakeholders, landowners, key organisations and the public
- 3.12 The Working Group should report to this Committee and where appropriate to the relevant Service Committee.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Development Plan/Community Plan/Service Improvement Plan

This report supports housing, leisure and infrastructure objectives contained in Corporate and Departmental Plans.

(b) Policy and Legal

This report will co-ordinate separate policy objections of the Council as set out in Section 3.

(c) Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)

The remit of the Working Group encompasses each of the resource headings above, and will co-ordinate the development and presentation of issues and options to Council, including the financial, risk and property/infrastructure implications.

(d) Consultations

- The views of the Administration were sought in advance of preparing this report.
- The Chief Housing Officer, Transportation Manager, the Educational Resources Manager, Development Control Manager, the Head of Estates and David Duncan (Principal Planning Officer) were consulted and their comments included in this report.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 That Members consider the information contained in the Background section of this report in relation to the projects identified for the South West of Elgin and nominate Members to be appointed to the Working Group.**

Author of Report: Head of Direct Services
Background Papers:
Ref: AR/PA