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**REPORT TO: THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE MORAY COUNCIL ON 7 JUNE 2016**

**SUBJECT: TRANSPORT STRATEGY FOR ELGIN**

**BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE)**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1 This report is submitted to Council to seek authority to prepare a transport strategy for Elgin.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to The Moray Council in terms of Section II (3) of the Scheme of Administration relating to incurring (a) any capital expenditure exceeding £50,000 not provided for in the estimates and (b) any revenue expenditure exceeding £50,000 not provided for in the estimates.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**2.1 The Council is asked to:**

- i) **endorse the position that a new transport strategy for Elgin is required; and**
- ii) **approve the expenditure of £100,000 to prepare a strategy for consideration by Economic Development and Infrastructure Services Committee and Planning and Regulatory Services Committee.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 This paper is submitted following the decision of the Council to defer discussion of proposals for a new transport strategy for Elgin from the meeting on 25 May 2016 to a special meeting of the Council on 7 June 2016 (Para 18 of the draft minute refers).
- 3.2 At the meeting of the Council on 30 March 2016 it was agreed to remove the budget for the Western Link Road (WLR) from the Capital Plan (Para 7 of the minute refers). By implication it is considered that, as funding is not available to promote this project, the WLR scheme is therefore no longer a strategic project for the Council.

- 3.3 The fact that this project is no longer supported as a strategic project for the Council has a number of implications. These were highlighted in Appendix 8 of the report to the Council on the 30 March 2016, these include:
- Abortive preparatory work including planning submission, land and property purchase and a Compulsory Purchase Order.
  - Need for review of Transportation strategy.
  - Impact on Local Development Plan.
  - Impact on Affordable Housing Strategy.
- 3.3 A series of reports will be submitted to future committee meetings as implications of this decision are considered and alternative proposals developed.
- 3.4 The draft supplementary guidance for developer obligations which is currently out for consultation makes reference to the need for a strategic transport plan assessing the cumulative impact of growth. Early responses from developers indicate that they require a degree of certainty around strategic interventions. The proposed strategy will provide the evidence base and costings for developer obligations.
- 3.5 The Transport Strategy will provide evidence on the cumulative impact of growth in Elgin of all allocated sites identified in the Local Development Plan and the associated junction improvements including high level costs for these developments.
- 3.6 Without the Transport Strategy improvements will only be assessed at the time when individual planning applications are submitted with supporting Transport Assessments. This may result in developer obligations for individual schemes contributing only to localised short term solutions where trigger levels are exceeded rather than to more strategic interventions which have been designed from the outset in a cohesive and consistent way. It will also not provide certainty for developers and landowners with regard to the provision of developer obligations when preparing site appraisals and land purchase terms and as a result this weakens the Council position in cases where site viability is impacted.
- 3.7 The proposed Local Development Plan has a requirement to consider site viability in greater detail than has previously been considered. The Transport Strategy will provide an indication of infrastructure costs associated with the development of sites. However it should be noted that this strategy will not relieve developers from the need to consider the impact of their development on the local network.
- 3.8 With 4,000 additional houses planned in Elgin over the next 30 years, and a material number of these applications likely to be submitted to Planning &

Regulatory Services for consideration before the end of this year, this would be a significant lost opportunity for the Council.

#### **4. TRANSPORT STRATEGY FOR ELGIN**

- 4.1 Development of the WLR was the core output of the previous Transport Strategy for Elgin, and provided a solution for a number of strategic transport priorities in the Local Development Plan. Alternative solutions must now be reviewed.

The Elgin Traffic Management study of 2006 identified a west-south distributor road as the best single project to improve transport connectivity in Elgin. Of the distributor road options, WLR was the only scheme with a positive business case (as described in the main issues report of 2011). To review the Elgin Traffic Management study and in consequence develop a new Strategy will involve a similar quantum of work as was undertaken previously as:

- A south-west distributor road scheme (WLR) will have to be discounted as an option
- Councils are now required to give additional consideration to active travel and modal shift, an area which has progressed considerably since 2006.
- The landscape has now changed with the new sites and long sites identified in the 2015 Local Development Plan – whilst it has been possible to model the impact of these developments on schemes such as WLR, to retrofit the developments into the previous Elgin Traffic Management study will involve much of the same modelling work as is proposed for a new strategy.

- 4.2 In addition there are a number of other considerations that have to be factored into a revised Transport Strategy resulting from the removal of the WLR. These include:

- Anticipated planning applications (on designated sites in the current Local Development Plan which was framed with WLR in place) that will impact on the local road network. Background analysis and options appraisals are required as a matter of urgency to enable such applications to be fully assessed.
- Impact on developer obligations that could have contributed towards the capital cost of the WLR and consideration of what other opportunities exist for these monies to be applied to other network enhancements.
- The submission of the Main Issues report in October 2017 as part of the process for the next Local Development Plan that will exclude WLR. The Main Issues report will be considered by Planning and Regulatory Services Committee in December 2017.

- 4.3 In order to provide a robust plan for how Elgin's transport infrastructure best responds to planned growth (through the current Local Development Plan period and beyond) it is proposed that a new Transport Strategy for Elgin is developed.

#### 4.4 This strategy should:

- set out the current infrastructure provision and identify current constraints.
- assess the ability of the current infrastructure to absorb growth through to the year 2030.
- identify a model for developer contributions associated with the proportionate impact on the road network.
- identify problems, and potential short and long term solutions – including modal shift to public transport and active travel.
- set this in the context of public perception.

#### 4.5 An initial indication is that such a strategy will cost £100,000 to deliver. The brief provided to the framework contractor to create the cost estimate is attached as **Appendix 1**. This work will cover:

- Stakeholder engagement
- Junction modelling
- High level intervention costs
- Option Appraisal
- Developer Obligations Strategy
- Final Technical Report and interim reports prior to final findings

The indicative timetable in Appendix 1 will be revised should this paper be approved, however will still have the same completion date.

More detailed information on the cost and outputs is provided as **Appendix 2**

#### 4.6 The transport strategy will also provide the following additional benefits:

- The strategy assesses all modes of travel, and therefore provides a full multi-modal assessment, rather than just looking at road based enhancements
- In establishing the high level costs and transport requirements for future development sites, this will greatly assist in reducing the cost of and time to review of applications as relevant information will be available in advance to both developers and officers
- In establishing a strategy of improvements which is designed with long term needs in mind, it will assist in avoiding abortive costs associated with

addressing short term measures which are then superseded by alternative longer term solutions.

- The strategy, and creation of a list of infrastructure requirements, will make it easier for the council to support external funding applications, for example requests to the Government Town Centre Improvement Fund, HITRANS, or SUSTRANS.
- In assessing the baseline and future issues, many sources of material will be examined, including accident statistics, cycling trends etc which may provide additional benefits.
- The strategy will also collate and comment on journey destinations, patterns and issues, which may reduce costs in relation to either the parking strategy or the transportation strategy. Any relevant synergies will be explored to maximise cost efficiency.

4.7 Typically, Transportation Strategies of this scale are undertaken over approximately 6 months to 1 year, and can cost up to £250,000. In general terms the capital costs being assessed can be approximately £10 to 50million, and the assessment must be made on robust evidence and analysis to ensure accuracy. In order to meet the time constraints council officers will undertake elements of the co-ordination and activities (further detail is provided in **Appendix 1**). The activities undertaken by the council are at no additional staff cost, therefore helping to keep costs down. The programme is compressed, which has reduced the cost. The transport model that was developed for Elgin Traffic Management project and subsequently the Western Link Road, was built in such a way that it can form the baseline transport model which again reduces the cost of this study. All framework tasks are based on a time-charge basis to a ceiling level, meaning if the study is completed with a lower resource requirement than estimated, the fee is reduced. Taking on board the considerable savings achieved through doing work in house and using the existing traffic model as a base to build from, the cost estimate of the strategy is £100,000, however in progressing the study officers will look for further opportunities to reduce the overall cost.

4.8 It is proposed that work on a new transport strategy commences immediately, with a final strategy document expected in September of this year with subsequent approval sought for the transport policy document by Economic Development and Infrastructure Services Committee and for use as a material consideration by Planning and Regulatory Services Committee. This enables the strategy to inform supplementary guidance for developer obligations relating to transport and future planning applications, and in preparation of the next Local Development Plan. Although work was already underway to create supplementary transport guidance, the removal of the WLR scheme changes the baseline junction capacity and accelerates the urgency of the work, as the scheme had a positive impact on a variety of junction improvements, not only those on the direct route of the scheme.

- 4.9 Account should also be taken of how to make best use of existing developer obligations which were to be allocated to the WLR scheme, but are intended to contribute to alleviating infrastructure problems in the Sheriffmill Road, Edgar Road and Laichmoray roundabout areas. It should be noted that these monies are time limited and will have to be returned to the developer(s) if not spent on an appropriate intervention in accordance with the terms of the legal agreements entered into by the agreed expiry date.

## **5 SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

### **(a) Moray 2023 A Plan for the Future/ Service Plan**

The Plan acknowledges the need for improving the traffic management within Elgin. WLR has previously been viewed as a strategic project of the Council and work must now be done as a priority to identify alternative options to address transportation issues in Elgin.

### **(b) Policy and Legal**

While the WLR is included in the Moray Local Development Plan 2015 a revised strategy is required to influence the next Local Development Plan.

### **(c) Financial implications**

The costs (£100,000) for the development of a revised Transportation Strategy without WLR is currently unfunded from the revenue budget and additional budget provision is required from reserves in 2016/17. The outcome of the transport strategy and the actions identified will require to be included in the Council's capital plan in order to seek developer obligations towards the cost.

### **(d) Risk Implications**

Without a clear plan for delivering transport infrastructure interventions in a strategic manner, there is a risk that Elgin's road network or transport mode split will not develop in a way that can meet the increasing demand from population and employment growth.

### **(e) Staffing Implications**

There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

**(f) Property**

A new Transport Strategy will influence the decision to sell or retain/demolish properties that the Council purchased in preparation for the construction of the WLR.

**(g) Equalities**

There are no equalities issues with this report.

**(h) Consultations**

Corporate Director (Economic Development and Infrastructure), The Legal Services Manager (Property & Contracts), the Head of Financial Services, L Paisey, Principal Accountant, L Rowan, Committee Services Officer, the Equal Opportunities Officer and the Head of Development Services have been consulted and any comments taken into account.

**6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The decision taken by the Council to remove the WLR from its capital budget and, by implication, to no longer to support this as a strategic project for the Council will require a new Transport Strategy that is able to address the pressures placed on the road network from existing and future development and influence the next Local Development Plan. This must be prepared as a priority due to anticipated developments and the Local Development Plan review cycle.**

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Background Papers: