

ARDERSIER & PETTY COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Mr S Devidge (Chairman)
Mrs C Wondin (Secretary)

44

27 March 08

National Planning Framework Team
The Scottish Government Planning Directorate, Area 2-H
Victoria Quay
Leith
Edinburgh
EH16 6QQ

Dear Sirs,

NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK, DISCUSSION DRAFT

We understand Highland Council intends to pursue the possibility of incorporating its A96 Corridor Strategy into the National Planning Framework as a National Development.

We do not feel there is any real argument which can be urged on Scottish ministers in justification of such a step and would like to register our strong opposition to any such adoption.

The strategy as it currently exists is by its own admission a long-term project covering at least forty years and likely in practice to prove open ended. There is no substantial record of successful prophecy about long-term Highland or even Inverness development over the past forty years which would encourage faith in any of the current promoters of the scheme – HIE (formerly the HIDB) was unable to sustain any of its proposed major developments, and the importation of oil-related industry and its consequences for Highland population distribution were very largely unforeseen and less planned than improvised. The current strategy can claim a certain relationship with perhaps two of the government's five elements of economic strategy, in that a Highland University clearly relates to "smarter", and the intention is also to create opportunities to increase wealth (though little has been said about sharing it). The Corridor will become significantly LESS "green" and the security of communities and the safeguarding of their health are so far not much more than pious expressions of hope. The claim, too, made several times in briefings to councillors in recent years that Inverness is a "City Region" in terms of national planning, is clearly currently without foundation.

The discussion document suggests that the area should be considered one of co-ordinated activity in development. So far the quality of co-ordination may be judged by a single example. The critical issues for much of the area for which immediate development is being proposed are water and sewerage. There is a consensus among the current applications for planning permission that these problems are capable of being solved and that Scottish Water has already indicated the solutions. But Scottish Water refuses to commit itself to anything until planning applications have been fully processed. Transport Scotland is unable to indicate when, if ever, the initial section of the A96 between Seafeld Retail Park and the Airport might be adopted for duelling, still less by which route.

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It might be argued that National Development status would make these problems easier to solve. But from the examples of adopted National Developments it is clear that the A96 Corridor to both too ill-defined and open-ended to be managed in that way. It is emphatically NOT a strategic exercise in any such sense, but simply a speculative invitation to invest in speculative development, for which the only clearly identifiable credible driver is a regional hub airport whose pretensions to national status are currently at best seasonal, and dependent on an inadequate high tariff local business market. The pressure on Inverness Airport would appear to be to try to nurture this market against the conflicting demands of the low-cost, mass tourist potential of budget airline travel. The element of “connectivity” essential to the kind of AB growth Inverness seems to be seeking is just not there, and this situation has remained more or less static since 2001.

What does seem likely is an extensive increase in road-based commerce. Even the much touted and wholly unjustifiable rail halt envisages a daily use over the next decade by an average of around 20 passengers, rising to perhaps 40. This is the figure quoted in the current Inverness Airport Business Park outline application to Highland Council. We suggest this may be a suitable yardstick for the credibility of other such claims put forward by Highland Council, HIE and other supporters of the claim to National Development status for the A96 Corridor Strategy.

But the convincing argument against adoption is that in proposing it, Highland Council is committing a radical breach of faith. It has been consistently maintained by the Council throughout the evolution of the A96 Corridor strategy that each of the proposals which now constitute it will be subject to the currently beginning local development planning process, and each time this undertaking has been given there has been a pointed mention of public local enquiry stage.

For Highland to renege on these repeated undertakings in an area which it has now been constrained to admit, both in private correspondence and in the last full PED meeting in the last few days that the community support it has always claimed for the strategy simply does not exist, and never has, is a clear breach of the spirit and intentions of PAN 81, and the Chief Planner’s public statements at the recent NPF conference in Inverness about the importance of community support.

Against that background, it does not seem possible that a convincing statement of need could be drafted, even if Scottish ministers were inclined to overlook Highland’s claims as no more than the usual hype.

We urge that they be rejected.

Yours sincerely

**S Devidge
Chairman
A&PCC**

