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A96 Threapland Junction Improvements Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary



October 2008



INTRODUCTION

An Environmental Statement (ES) has been prepared on behalf of Transport Scotland for the A96 Threapland Junction Improvement Scheme. The Scheme and the surrounding study area is shown in Figure 1.

This Non-Technical Summary forms part of the A96 Threapland Junction Improvements Environmental Statement, October 2008, and provides supporting information for the publication of Statutory Orders to comply with Transport Scotland's determination that the Scheme should be the subject of an Environmental Impact Assessment. In addition, this Non-Technical Summary describes the Scheme and summarises in non-technical language, the Environmental Statement that has been prepared in accordance with the Environmental Impact Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 1999 which implements the EEC Directive 85/337/EEC as amended by the EC Directive 97/11/EC, and guidance provided in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), Volume 11.

The A96 Inverness to Aberdeen trunk road is an important strategic link in the National Trunk Road network and the efficient operation of the road is essential for the economic development of northeast Scotland. In addition to its essential

strategic role, the A96 within the study area serves as part of the local road network, providing access to the local centres of Elgin, Keith, Fochabers and Mosstodloch for employment, shopping and recreational activities.

The section of the A96, at Threapland, identified for improvement runs from approximately 200m west of the access to Threapland Garden Centre for a distance of 1200m eastbound along the existing A96. This area includes the junctions at Threapland and Loch Oire Road.

The proposed scheme, as shown in Figure 1, increases safety at Threapland junction by improving visibility along the A96 and upgrading the junction itself to comply with current road design standards. As part of the scheme, Loch Oire Road junction would be closed to vehicles. This introduces safer traffic movements through the study area.

There has been much concern expressed in recent years over the safety of the junctions accessing the trunk road, in particular the number and severity of the accidents within the study area.



WHY THE ROAD IMPROVEMENT IS NECESSARY

The relatively high level of traffic combined with the sub-standard road geometry has led to a poor accident record. There have been 29

accidents, including one fatality, recorded in the past 10 years.

The main objective of the Scheme is to reduce accidents on the A96 at Threapland by improving the standard of the junction and the approaches.

Background

To date the Scheme has been subject to a Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) appraisal to examine outline improvement strategies, a DMRB Stage 2 Scheme Options Assessment and a Value Review to identify a preferred option. Subsequently, the Scheme has received a full Risk Analysis to identify potential risks and mitigate these where possible and a Stage 1 Road Safety Audit to identify and address any road safety issues.

Consultations have taken place, throughout the entire Scheme development and design process, with residents, landowners, local businesses, bus companies, local community groups and other interested parties in order to gather opinions and any possible recommendations with regards to operation of the Scheme. Where practicable, amendments have been included in the Scheme design to deal with any pertinent issues that have been raised during these consultations.

The design of the Scheme is to be in accordance with the Government's appraisal criteria for the assessment of trunk road schemes, namely to take account of integration, economy, safety, environmental impact and accessibility.

STAG

The application of STAG to road schemes states: 'all major road projects are required to be subject to full STAG Appraisal'.

The requirements for a STAG appraisal had been effectively covered by previous work on the A96 Route Action Plan, and consequently it was agreed that a review of STAG was all that was required.

This review concluded that two options be considered, these being an online solution with improved visibility splays and an offline improvement.



DMRB Stage 2 Scheme Assessment

The two Scheme Options, online and offline, were developed to a sufficient level of design for assessment purposes, so that a Preferred Scheme could be identified. The assessment was carried out in accordance with the requirements for Stage 2 Assessment given in the DMRB Standard TD 37, 'Scheme Assessment Reporting'.

The options, methodology and findings are described in full in the Stage 2 Scheme Assessment Report (S100630/REP/16). This

concluded that Option 1 – Online, was preferred overall in terms of engineering, operational, traffic, economic and environmental issues, and provided the best value for money while addressing all the Scheme objectives. Neither option had a significant environmental impact, however, the offline implications of Option 2 resulted in a greater impact overall.



THE SCHEME

The Scheme, as shown in Figure 1, incorporates improvements to the vertical geometry of the A96 with no alteration to the current horizontal alignment. The existing Threapland junction arrangements will be upgraded to comply with current standards, and Loch Oire Road junction would be closed to vehicles. The new Threapland south junction would be situated 85m west of the existing north junction, thus introducing a more favourable right-left junction and the substandard crest to the east would be removed. Further junction improvements at Threapland will be gained with the introduction of a ghost island to assist right turning traffic movements. The visibility splays will be vastly improved and the existing carriageway cross section would be amended to meet the appropriate carriageway standards.

As part of the ongoing scheme design and development, provisions for cyclists and pedestrians have been enhanced since the DMRB Stage 2 Assessment process was undertaken, with sections of shared cyclepath/footpaths provided on both sides of the A96. An uncontrolled crossing facility will also be provided to enable pedestrians and cyclists to cross the A96 carriageway more safely.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The baseline environmental constraints are shown in Figure 2.

Cultural Heritage

Chapter 3 of the ES considers the effects of the proposed improvements on archaeology and cultural heritage through a programme of desk-based assessment, reconnaissance field survey, consultation, and impact assessment.

Six cultural heritage sites were identified by the assessment. The sites are a scheduled stone circle, four Listed Buildings, and an unscheduled cropmark site. Of these sites, only an Automobile Association (AA) Sentry Box is in the immediate footprint of the Scheme.

The proposed junction improvements have been predicted to have a neutral direct effect on the AA Sentry Box. This will be relocated to an appropriate roadside setting, approximately 900m west of its current location adjacent to the A96.

The potential for unknown buried archaeological remains along the route of the proposed Scheme is considered to be moderate. Any remains that lie within the footprint of the Scheme would be removed during construction. A programme of mitigation works would be undertaken to offset any adverse effects and to assess the potential for otherwise undiscovered remains.

Taking the mitigation into account, no significant residual effects are anticipated in relation to

cultural heritage interests and the development proposals are considered to conform with the aims of national, regional and local planning policy as regards cultural heritage.



Disruption Due to Construction

The proposed construction works will take place over an area centred on the existing A96 carriageway and junctions at Threapland near Lhanbryde. It will include areas of agricultural land and woodland.

The construction period for the Scheme is anticipated to be around eight months. This will be preceded by utility diversions, which could take up to three months. There will also be a one-year contract maintenance period.

The Scheme will result in a number of impacts as a result of construction activity.

The main sensitive receptors will be nearby residential properties, which will experience a possible increase in noise levels during

construction. They may also be subjected to temporary access diversions and limited increase in vehicle journey times due to the construction activity.

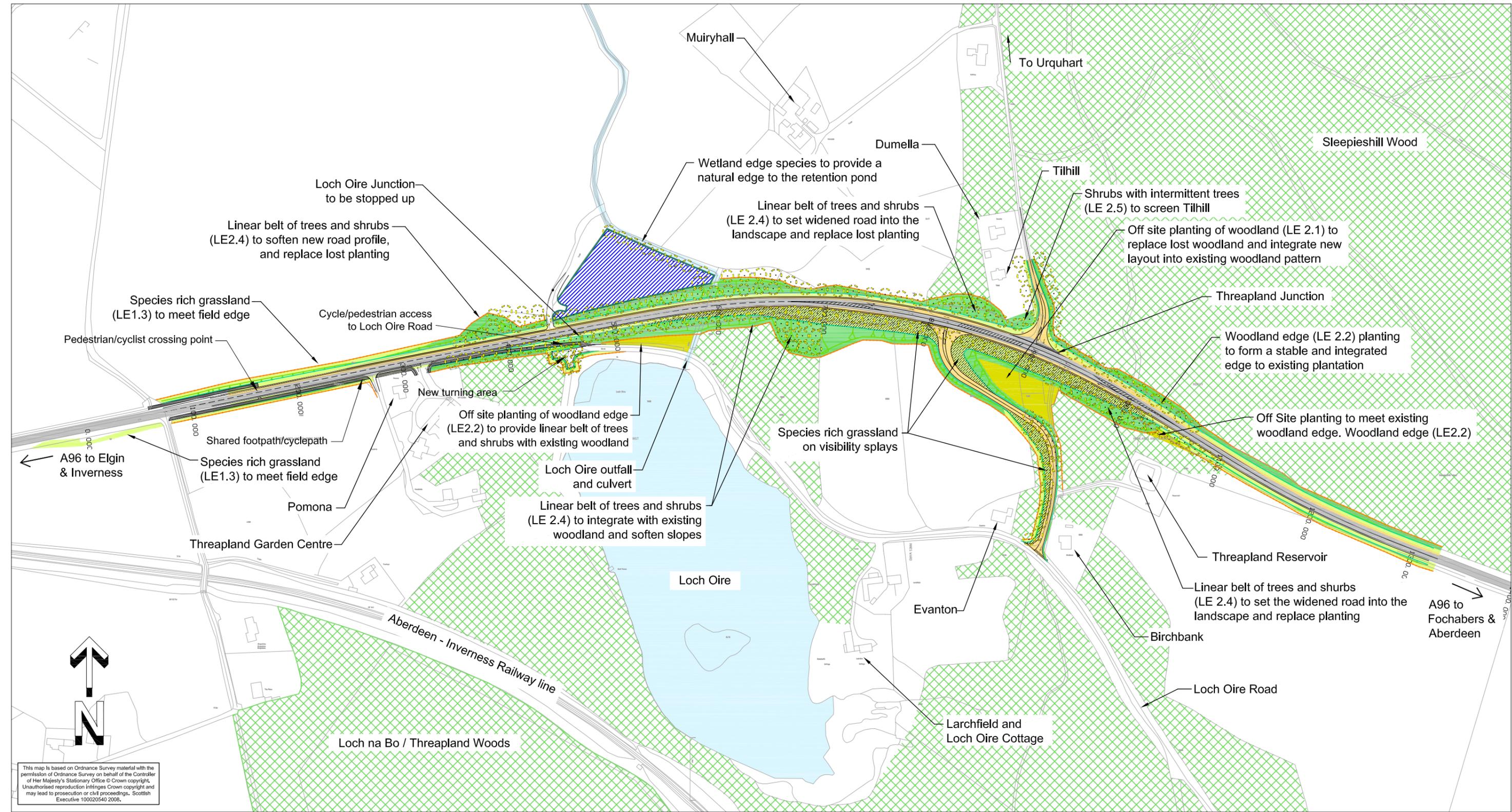
Other impacts will relate to the provision and operation of construction compounds during the entire construction period. There will be disruption to traffic on the A96 carriageway and affected side roads due to traffic management measures necessary to ensure the safety and operation of works on those roads. The construction of embankments, cuttings and structures will lead to noise intrusion and the risk of dust in the air and mud on the road will be a possibility. There is a potential for construction operations to cause damage to watercourses, if appropriate mitigation measures are not adhered to.

However, measures can be put in place to minimise the impacts and it is considered that with careful management the significance of impacts can be reduced to minor adverse. To achieve this, discussions with the planning and roads authorities will be essential in order to ensure acceptable levels of mitigation are agreed and implemented. These will be reinforced by requirements in the contract for construction of the works.

Ecology and Nature Conservation

Detailed field survey work has been undertaken as part of the scheme assessment process, and within the appropriate seasonal constraints for such work. The scope of this work was agreed with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

Loch Oire Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is the key ecological receptor within close proximity to the Scheme. It is located approximately 30m from the Scheme and proposed construction activity. No landtake or direct impacts should occur, but detailed mitigation measures are proposed to minimise the risk of any impacts upon the notified ecological features of the site.



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LEGEND		Notes:	
Existing main carriageway	Existing trees to be removed	New planting - Species rich grassland (LE 1.3)	1. Road markings only indicative
Proposed new carriageway	Existing woodland / scrub to be retained	New planting - Native trees and shrubs	2. Stagger distance at Threapland Junction:85m
Existing watercourses	Visibility splay	Off site planting	3. Cuttings at 1 in 3, embankments at 1 in 2
Proposed retention pond	Fence line	Wetland edge planting	4. Loch Oire junction to be closed to vehicles

During construction safeguards will have to be in place to prevent the release of soils, sediment or construction chemicals into the Loch. During the operational phase, mitigation measures have been proposed to prevent potentially pollutant-laden runoff from entering the Loch. It is proposed that runoff in close proximity to the Loch will enter an attenuation pond immediately downstream of the Loch outfall. With mitigation measures implemented, the impacts are not considered to be significant.



The long-established woodland of plantation origin at Sleepieshill Wood (as designated by SNH) is in close proximity to the proposed realignment of the road and will be directly affected by the Threapland Junction improvements on the north side of the A96. This is a direct and permanent impact, but the area of woodland to be removed is limited, and forms only a small proportion of this woodland. Other habitats will also be directly impacted during construction, as limited areas of semi-improved grassland, dense gorse scrub and other woodland / scattered trees areas will be removed to allow the improvements. However, these are limited in extent and ecological value, though they do have the potential to provide shelter habitat to protected species.

No otter shelters or rest areas should be directly impacted by the scheme, and to date there has been no evidence or records of otters crossing the A96 carriageway. Therefore, direct impacts

upon otters are not anticipated, though construction disturbance to the species is possible.

Significant impacts are not anticipated for bats, water voles, red squirrels or breeding birds, or any other features of ecological interest, subject to the implementation of specific mitigation measures such as pre-construction checks and method statements to avoid disturbance during construction and operation.

The ecological assessment undertaken has not identified any residual impacts that are considered to be significant.

A Confidential Badger Annex has been produced as part of the ES.

Landscape and Visual Effects

The landscape within the vicinity of the route corridor is within a gently undulating area rising from the coastal plain, which forms a transition between the coastal plain and the uplands. The study area is classified in the SNH National Landscape Character Assessment as 'The Coastal Plain Landscape Character Type' and the Coastal Farmland Landscape Character Area'. This document identifies established communication routes as having increasing dominance as linear features within the open, flat landscape. The landscape is not designated as an area of particular quality.



There will be a slight change in the landscape character when the Scheme is completed and mitigation measures have taken effect. The Scheme will result in the road becoming a slightly more engineered and prominent feature in the landscape with the loss of some enclosure and local distinctiveness. Some trees and vegetation will be lost and a new section of access road to form a realigned junction and attenuation pond will be introduced into the rural landscape. With replacement planting, the significance to the overall landscape character of the area will be negligible adverse.

As the Scheme is in a rural area there are relatively few receptors. The Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) is relatively restricted owing to the topography and the presence of woodland. The largest receptor group is the road users who will experience minor changes to their view. There are a small number of highly sensitive residential receptors located adjacent to or very close to the Scheme that will experience moderate changes to their view particularly during construction. The overall significance of the visual effects will be minor adverse.

Land Use

The effects of the Scheme on land uses are predominantly related to land take issues, both of a temporary and permanent nature. Where adverse effects are highlighted, suitable mitigation measures are prescribed, which are likely to include the provision of compensation measures.

Temporary land take will be required for a period of approximately eight months for a construction compound.

Permanent land-take is required which will affect agricultural (2.17ha) and forestry (1.33ha) land. There will also be limited landtake from the garden of the Tilhill property (79m²) and the hardstanding area at the front of the Threapland Garden Centre (194m²). Compensation measures will be required for permanent land loss. Existing sections and junctions of minor

roads that connect to the A96 will be made redundant due to the new junctions proposed under the scheme.

Water Resources

This chapter of the ES assessed the potential effects on water resources as a result of the proposed Scheme. In the context of these proposals the significant water resources were Loch Oire, the Loch Oire outfall drain, and the groundwater beneath the site. A brief summary of the predicted residual effects from the proposals is noted below.

Surface Water Quality – during construction a number of control measures should be put in place to reduce the potential for significant quantities of sediment or other typical construction pollutants being discharged into the surrounding water bodies. These measures are considered to be current best practice within the industry, and when implemented with good site management, no significant adverse effects are predicted. During operation, road run off from the improved A96 will be collected and passed to primary treatment using filter drains alongside the road and then to a retention pond beside the road before being discharged to the Loch Oire outfall drain downstream of the A96. Based on the inclusion of these treatment measures, there is not predicted to be any significant adverse effects on the existing water quality of Loch Oire and the Outfall Drain as a result of the proposals.



Flooding – during the construction works mitigation measures will be carried out to ensure that the construction of the culvert can be completed whilst maintaining flow in the Loch Oire outfall drain. As part of the new road drainage infrastructure to be installed for this section of the A96, storage provisions have been made to ensure that the outflow is reduced to a level suitable for discharge into the Loch Oire outfall drain. Based on these mitigation measures, it is anticipated that there will be no significant adverse effects on the surrounding properties or land with respect to flooding as a result of the proposals.

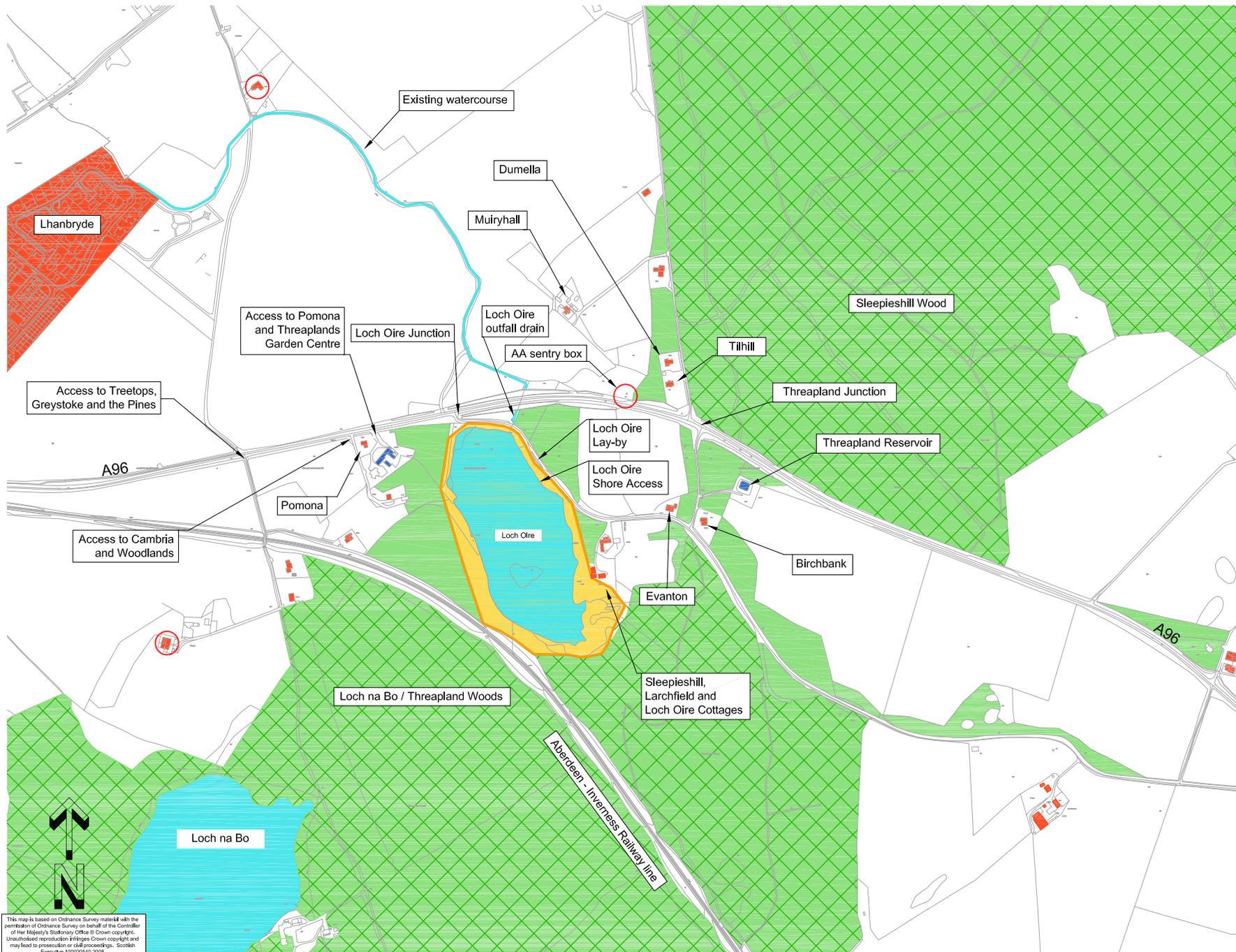
Geomorphology (form and structure of watercourses) and Hydrology (flow within watercourses) – the only works within a watercourse will be to replace the existing culvert under the A96 and the construction of a new road drainage outfall into the Loch Oire outfall drain downstream of the A96.



These works will only affect a relatively short length of this watercourse, and are not predicted to have any significant adverse effects. The construction of a new south leg of Threapland junction is not anticipated to have a significant affect on the natural surface drainage patterns in the area.

Groundwater – there will be no intrusion below the recorded groundwater level from any of the permanent works or during the construction stage, and accordingly there are not predicted to be any significant adverse effects on the overall movement of groundwater in the area. During construction a number of control measures should be put in place to reduce the potential for significant quantities of typical construction pollutants passing into the shallow groundwater. These measures are considered to be current best practice within the industry, and when implemented with good site management, no significant adverse effects are predicted on the quality of the groundwater. Impacts on groundwater quality during the day-to-day operation of the improved section of A96 are predicted to be minimal, based on the road runoff treatment measures provided, and the proposals are not predicted to have a significant adverse effect on the local groundwater quality.

With the implementation of the appropriate mitigation measures, it is predicted that there will be no significant impacts on the water resources.



- LEGEND**
- Residential/Receptor
 - Commercial / Business
 - Waterways
 - Woodland / Forest
 - Ancient Woodland Inventory site
 - Listed Buildings
 - SSSI site and boundary

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WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Depending on the nature and number of objections received, a Public Local Inquiry into the Statutory Orders may be held, together with the hearing of any opinions that may be expressed by members of the public on the Environmental Statement. If a Public Local Inquiry is held, then everyone who has supported, objected to, or made other representations about the Statutory Orders and the Environmental Statement will be informed as to the date and venue. Notices confirming the date and venue will appear in the local press at least six weeks prior to any inquiry commencing.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Copies of the Statutory Orders and the Environmental Statement will be available for inspection, during normal business hours, free of charge at the following locations:

Transport Scotland
Buchanan House
58 Port Dundas Road
Glasgow
G4 0HF

Moray Council
Council Office
Academy Street
Elgin
IV32 7JB

Lhanbryde Post Office
32 St. Andrews Road
Lhanbryde
Elgin
IV30 8LQ

Fochabers Public Library
55 High Street
Fochabers
IV32 7DY

Urquhart Post Office
Station Road
Urquhart
IV30 8LQ

Copies of the Environmental Statement including the Non-Technical Summary can also be purchased from Transport Scotland, Buchanan House, 58 Port Dundas Road, Glasgow, G4 0HF, in paper or electronic format (CD-Rom) at a cost of £150 (paper) and £15 (CD).

The A96 Threapland Junction Improvement Environmental Statement and Non-Technical Summary has been prepared by:

Scott Wilson Scotland Ltd
23 Chester Street
Edinburgh
EH3 7EN

YOUR VIEWS

If you wish to support, comment on or object to the Draft Statutory Order, or comment on the Environmental Statement, you should write, no later than 5 December 2008, to Transport Scotland at the address below:

The Chief Road Engineer
Transport Scotland
Buchanan House
58 Port Dundas Road
Glasgow
G4 0HF