

Elgin South Area Forum comments	Western Link Road
May 2014	14/00551/APP

General

Members of the forum – like Elgin residents in general - have divergent opinions about the proposed road and it is not easy to provide a group view. However, if the road is to go ahead, we are united in wanting it to be a safe route for all (particularly vulnerable road users) and a pleasant place to live in and near, and to travel through. We have particular concern about the effects of a new road on the residents living in the south of Elgin.

We were dismayed that the original consultation on route options lacked any meaningful engagement. At the consultation meetings, residents were told that several of the available options were financially unrealistic. If this was the case, these should have been discarded prior to the consultation so that residents were voting on possible and not impossible options. Information about all the original options could have been provided together with reasons why they were not considered viable.

We were also told at the consultation that the ‘do nothing’ option was not realistic. We would have liked greater priority to have been given to investigating reducing congestion in Elgin by promoting and facilitating active travel. We do not feel confident that this was given adequate consideration. Regardless of this, if ‘do nothing’ was not a realistic option, it should have been removed from the list of possible options in the consultation.

The lack of meaningful engagement at the start of the process led to residents feeling mistrustful of the council and its proposals. Residents felt disappointed and dismayed because they would have liked to be involved in genuine decision-making in their community and the consultation had not allowed them to do so. They also had no confidence that their views would be heard in the future. The forum suggested going back to the community to ask ‘How best do we solve traffic problems in south Elgin?’ at the workshop in early 2012, in order to restore trust in the decision-making process. We regret that the council did not follow this option. We hope that those involved have increased their understanding of the importance of good community engagement, and will ensure that future consultations are dealt with more constructively.

However, we commend the council for the significant level of community involvement in the detailed design phase. Although not all of our suggestions have been used in the final design, we are satisfied that our views were heard. We have added further comments and we trust that you will give serious consideration to making changes to the design.

Opinion for and against the WLR

Residents who **support** the proposed WLR do so because they hope it will:

- By creating an additional railway crossing, minimise disruption if the other road bridge is closed for any reason,
- Provide an alternative to the Wards, which has a poor surface, is narrow and seems unfit for the level of traffic using it
- Provide a railway crossing that, unlike the level crossing at the Wards, will be unaffected by more frequent train services

- Share traffic more evenly throughout south Elgin – diverting some from the heavily-used New Elgin Road/Main St
- Allow further development in the south of Elgin

Residents who **oppose** the proposed WLR do so because they are concerned that it will:

- Increase vehicle use and CO2 emissions
- Increase noise and reduce air quality in the Edgar Rd area. This will particularly affect vulnerable people - young children at Greenwards School and people with disabilities at Cedarwood.
- Sever the 'green link' to the Wards wildlife area, making it harder to access by residents in south Elgin including Greenwards pupils
- Encircle the Wards wildlife area with roads, decreasing its value to residents as a peaceful green space that is away from traffic noise and pollution
- Encircle the Wards wildlife area with roads, making it harder for deer and other wildlife to access
- Increase traffic on Glen Moray Drive making it more difficult for pedestrians (including school pupils) to cross safely
- Be a road that (south of the railway) lacks any sense of place so will not be a pleasant or safe place to walk or cycle
- Be linked to existing and proposed housing in a manner that does not reflect existing street patterns nor encourage permeability
- Be a road that (south of the railway) has minimal design features to keep traffic speeds down

Detail

We are pleased that the detailed design has incorporated some of the suggestions that we hoped would make the road better (safer for all users, particularly vulnerable road users, and a more pleasant place to be). These include:

- √ Changing the roundabouts to signalled junctions throughout
- √ Ensuring the provision of signalled road crossings
- √ Reducing road width to minimise traffic speeds
- √ Using good road design to minimise traffic speed on the north end of the (now blocked off) Wittet Drive
- √ Including a mammal tunnel to help wildlife avoid the road
- √ Maintaining a pedestrian/cycle link from Fairfield Avenue to the Wards wildlife area
- √ Making the whole road a 30mph limit

Concerns and further requirements:

- The south section of the road has been designed as a corridor for traffic rather than as a successful place. We have not seen any evidence that *place* has been considered here (as it has on Wittet Drive) or that the road and the proposed new housing have been designed in conjunction with one another (as required by *Designing Streets*). Ideally, houses should be built up to the road and have direct access onto it. We think that this section repeats the mistakes of Reikit Lane – a road that has no sense of place at all and a continual problem of high traffic speeds that discourage active travel and make it difficult to cross the road.

- Using on-street parking on alternate sides of the road to control traffic speeds (on Wittet Drive, the new section and Edgar Road) was discussed at length in workshops and meetings but has not been utilised. Incorporating well-designed on-street parking would go some way to mitigate the effects of the otherwise fairly straight open road that is proposed.
- More clarity needs to be provided about how the impact of increased noise and decreased air quality will be mitigated in the Edgar Road area – particularly in the vicinity of Greenwards School and Cedarwards. Monitoring should take place to assess the impact of the traffic increase and the effectiveness of the mitigation measures.
- A traffic island should not be used on the south section of the road as a traffic calming device. Islands create pinch points making a road more dangerous for cyclists. Better design should be used to reduce speeds without the need for such a ‘bolt-on’ device.
- The shared-use paths give way to side roads and accesses on every occasion, creating a discontinuous route that is difficult and unsafe to use (like the one along Thornhill Road). The shared-use path should have priority over driveways and small roads e.g. at Plot 5 Wittet Drive, R8 development access, at Bruceland Road, at Mayne Road, at the spur to the new housing south of Fairfield Avenue, at the access road to the SUDS pond, at the high school access stub, at the Greenwards entrance, at the Edgar Road parking area and at the Cedarwoods entrance.
- The corner radii at the small side roads (see list above for examples) appear to be wide. This allows vehicles to turn quickly. It also requires pedestrians and cyclists on the shared-use path to take a detour to minimise the crossing distance and forces them to look far behind to check for traffic turning in – contrary to *Designing Streets* guidance. On all occasions where the shared-use path is not given priority, the corner radii must be reduced to maintain the cyclist/pedestrian desire line and make the crossings safer for pedestrians and cyclists.
- The shared-use path along the front of Greenwards does not currently show pedestrian/cyclist access *into* the school grounds. This junction is an opportunity to create an excellent active travel zone – prioritising the movement of pedestrians and cyclists, and keeping vehicle speeds and usage to a minimum. If junction radii were small and the shared-use path along Edgar Rd was given priority over the access road, it would create a table barrier at the entrance. This could be extended into the school making it clear that this was a ‘slow zone’.
- Residents on Edgar Rd wish to continue to have access to their off-road parking spaces once the crossings are in place. The crossings should be designed with this in mind.
- A green corridor should be added (east to west) to enable wildlife (particularly deer) to travel between the Wards wildlife area and woodland to the west.
- Traffic-calming measures and pedestrian crossings should be created on Glen Moray Drive prior to completing the new link. It is already difficult and hazardous to cross the road here.
- The shared-use path on the south side of the A96 should be extended from the new junction to the old Wittet Drive junction, and pedestrian/cyclist access should be facilitated south from the A96 into Wittet Drive. This will allow access to/from Sheriffmill Road with only two rather than three road crossings. (Access to Sheriffmill Road is important because it provides a quiet route from south to north and enables south Elgin residents access to NCN1.)

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to comment on this planning application. Please contact us if you would like to discuss any of these comments in more detail. We would be happy to meet to consider any aspect of this planning application.