

**The Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan
Strategic Options**

Results of the Community and Stakeholder engagement

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Executive Summary

- 38 workshops were held across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire to discuss the “Strategic Options” for the new structure plan with communities and other stakeholders.
- The method used for these workshops was largely as agreed between the two Councils in the document “Method statement for community and initial stakeholder engagement”.
- Over 850 invitations were sent out to these workshops with an attendance rate of 43%.. Response ranged from 29% across the 4 meetings held in Aberdeen City was 29 to over 80% in that part of Aberdeenshire closest to the City.
- A high degree of consensus was expressed for medium / high growth. The need to accommodate local aspiration and need was also widely acknowledged.

- A high degree of consensus was also expressed for a degree of front-loading of development during the plan period.
- There is a clear bias towards strategies that include the majority of development in Aberdeen City in comparison to those that seek to promote the majority of development in Aberdeenshire.
- Development in growth poles, development in Aberdeen City and development in the existing transport corridor may be popular components of a final strategy.
- Development of a new settlement is an unpopular strategy, particularly in those areas more distant from Aberdeen.
- Development in growth poles is popular due to the perception of it assisting the spread of economic growth. However, there are risks attached to this strategy.
- An issue that requires to be addressed by the political process is the degree of risk that the structure plan should adopt in identifying a preferred strategy.

1. Objectives and Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to present the results of the stakeholder engagement on the “strategic options” identified for the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan. In particular, it will present conclusions associated with the three engagement themes of how much development should occur, where that development should take place, and when in the plan period development should be promoted.
- 1.2 These results highlight the options that stakeholders support, or otherwise, and provide an insight into the aspects of each strategy, which are deemed to be important in the choices that have been made.

2. Method

- 2.1 A detailed method statement for the stakeholder engagement exercise was developed (see Method statement for community and initial stakeholder engagement v5 22/02/2007) and followed throughout the process. Deviation from this method statement included: Meetings took place between March and August 2007 with a range of community and stakeholder groups to engage on the options being considered for the strategy of the next structure plan for Aberdeen City and Shire. Meetings took place throughout the area and lasted for approximately 2 hours but occasionally longer. Community events were organised in the evening while stakeholder events tended to be organised during the day.

- Community meetings were delayed by 4 weeks due to unavailability of an agreed set of strategic options on which to consult. This had significant implications in terms of disengaging the consultation on the Issues Paper from the engagement on the strategic options. Due to pressures of time at each meeting the second element of the strategic options exercise (participants, views on the distribution of development) was not undertaken in all cases. Regularly it was used as a time-filler to allow other groups to finish the substantive part of the exercise.
- There was no attendance of staff from one authority in the meetings of the other.
- Meeting notes were placed on the Structure Plan website rather than being sent to participants, as postal addresses were not collected at the meetings. Reference to this was made at the meetings themselves.

2.2 Engagement with Community Planning staff, when it occurred had a positive outcome. There is an apparent correlation between those areas where Community Planning staff were involved in generating interest (Marr Area in particular) and the number and variety of attendees at the meetings themselves.

2.3 The workshops were designed to be participative and ‘hands-on’, with background material circulated in advance to aid the progress of the sessions. Each meeting engaged both with the whole group (when discussing issues of the scale and phasing of development) as well as subgroups made up of 3 or 4 participants (when considering the spatial options and the distribution of development). In all cases an active attempt was made to create sub-groups of mixed interests.

2.4 The same method was used in engagement with elected members in Aberdeenshire through workshops with Area Committees, although one Area Committee felt unable to respond to this format. In Aberdeen City, a special event was organised for a broader purpose and, although there were common elements, it followed a distinct format.

2.5 In total 38 workshops were held and over 850 people invited. as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Stakeholder Engagement Workshops

Type of meeting	Number of meetings	Number of invitations made	Number of attendees	Attendance rate
Community	24	602	240	40%
Elected member	7	110	58	52%
Interest group	7	141	68	48%
Total	38	853	366	43%

2.6 While some may have attended through “word of mouth” invitation, it is estimated that around 43% of all those invited attended a meeting. In

that part of Aberdeenshire closest to Aberdeen City this increased to over 80%, while in Aberdeen City the response rate was 29%..

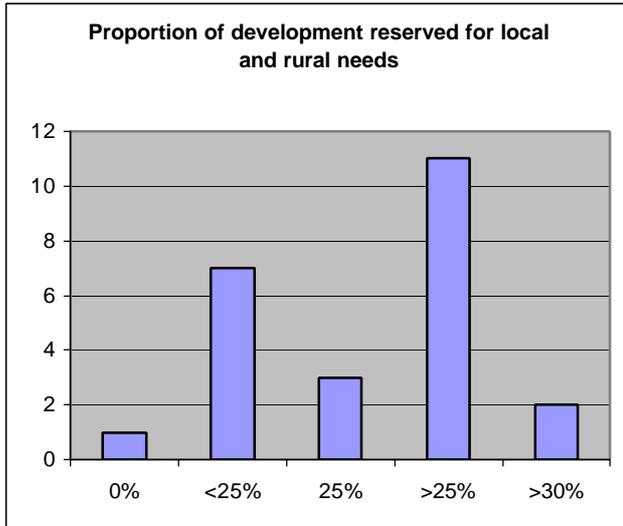
- 2.7 In Aberdeenshire 52% of all Community Councils attended meetings, but there is a great difference in attendance for those Aberdeenshire Community Councils in the area around Aberdeen, to those distant from it. 92% of Community Councils in the Aberdeenshire part of the Aberdeen Housing Market Area attended meetings compared to only 34% in the Rural Housing Market Area attending meetings. 30% of Community Councils in Aberdeen City attended meetings.
- 2.8 In total. 67% of all Councillors in Aberdeenshire participated in one of the six workshops, while a comparable figure for the meeting in Aberdeen City was 30%. This can in part be explained by the need to convene a special meeting in Aberdeen.

3. Scale of development

- 3.1 Questions relating to the scale of development centred on two themes: the amount of development required for the needs of the city region (as opposed to local needs), and the overall scale of development that should be promoted. In most meetings these discussion centred on the “working hypothesis” that 25% of all development should be considered for “local needs”, and that scale of development could be considered as being “high” or “low” in comparison to the status quo. Some participants were uncomfortable about giving a view on these issues without significantly more familiarity with the technical issues associated with each scenario. It is therefore necessary to record that the views given are based only on the experience of the individuals concerned. It is also important to note that the majority of respondents were from Aberdeenshire, and this may bias any conclusion that can be drawn. This bias has been minimised by analysing the views of those groups held closest to Aberdeen separately from with those areas more distant from Aberdeen.

Local needs

- 3.2 When asked whether the structure plan should seek to be comprehensive in its approach, or to allow local determination for local and rural needs, all but one group expressed that it should allow for local needs.
- 3.3 When asked whether that level of need should be greater, or less than that currently observed, almost one third of all groups were unable to come to a consensus on the ideal split between local and regional requirements. An analysis of the 65% of groups who did express an opinion is given in Figure 1 below.

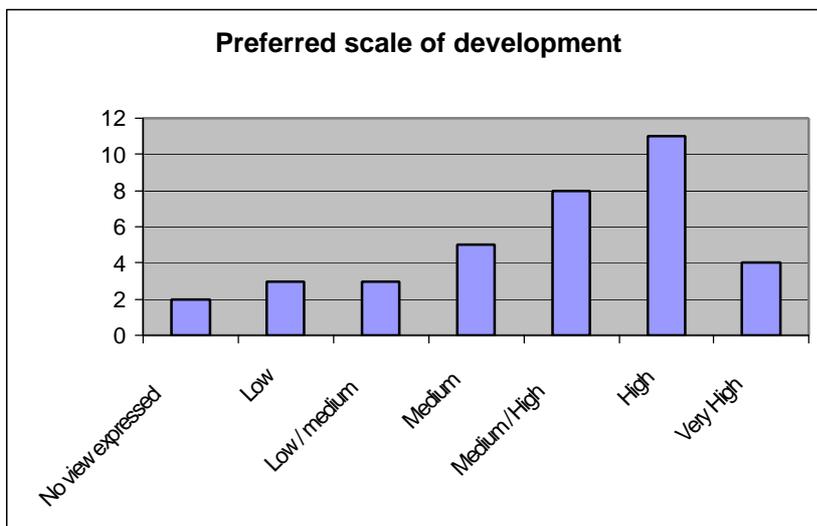


- 3.4 55% of groups who responded expressed a view that a proportion of development greater than that currently observed should be allocated for local and rural needs, but only 2 groups thought this should be greater than that currently allowed for within the current Structure Plan (which specifies 30% of all development opportunities should be allowed in the Rural Housing Market).
- 3.5 When the community meetings are analysed on the basis of whether the area was a “commuter” area or not, the views on the need for an element of flexibility for local needs is strongly supported in rural areas. In these areas 73% of responding groups wished to see greater opportunity, in order to meet local needs.

Scale

- 3.6 The following chart (Figure 2) summarises the preferred scale of development, by the number of workshops at which such views were expressed.

Figure 2: The Preferred Scale of Development

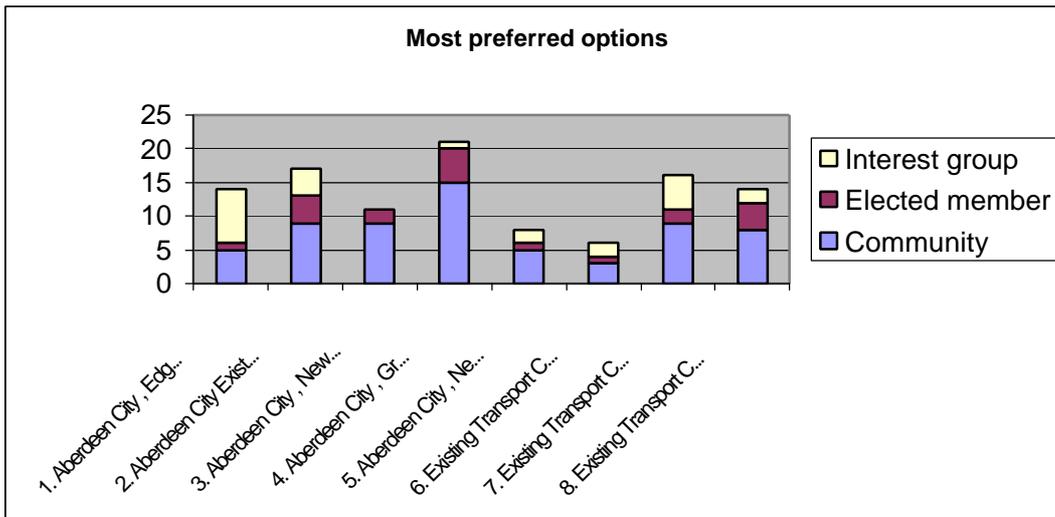


- 3.7 Greatest support was expressed for high growth is apparent with it being recorded that 66% of groups wished to see either medium / high, high, or very high growth.
- 3.8 Two groups were unwilling to express an opinion on this issue without further information on the implications of the scenarios.
- 3.9 Low growth was only supported by three groups, two of which were in Aberdeen City, with a further three groups suggesting low to medium growth strategies. Common reasons recorded for suggesting a low growth scenario were pessimism about the economic prospects for the area in the future, the need to plan for an area that is globally sustainable and the potential for adverse environmental impacts of the other scenarios. The adverse implications of a low growth strategy on issues such as the affordability of housing was noted by a number of groups.
- 3.10 Medium growth was supported by 5 groups, who considered that such a scenario could provide growth, without incurring the risks they associated with high growth. Medium growth was seen as a means of addressing possible economic decline and a response to the impacts of the high growth scenario on a community's quality of life and the natural environment.
- 3.11 Medium to high growth was promoted by 8 groups for similar reasons to those advocating medium growth. It was thought that there was a need to promote growth to encourage a competitive and viable economy, and sustain jobs, but that there were risks associated with environmental impacts and high growth in an uncertain economic climate. In addition a number groups identified the need to accommodate demand for development land with the caveat that the region was currently booming and rates of development are abnormally high at the moment. The ability to deliver both medium and high growth was questioned.
- 3.12 High growth was advocated by 11 groups, including business, and transport stakeholder groups. The Key Stakeholder Reference Group also promoted this strategy. Common reasons given for this view were the need to be aspirational about the economy and to resolve issues associated with the affordability of land for both housing and business uses. The merit of a high growth scenario in being able to accommodate unforeseen opportunities and provide flexibility was also noted. It was acknowledged that such a strategy was not without risks, particularly on the strength of the housing market.
- 3.13 Four groups advocated very high growth, all on the basis that the high growth scenario presented was not ambitious enough. These included development industry, house builders and business stakeholder groups.

4. Location of development

- 4.1 Across the 38 meetings held, at least 108 sub-groups considered the spatial options and expressed views on their merits and de-merits. Each group recorded their preference for a strategy, and more than half also recorded their least preferred strategy. It is important to note that the majority of respondents were from Aberdeenshire, and this may bias any conclusion that can be drawn.
- 4.2 The following charts illustrate the distribution of preferences from groups undertaking the exercise at the strategic option workshops. Locating most of the development in Aberdeen City was identified as a component of options which were both most and least favoured. However, 66% of the groups chose a 'preferred option' which had Aberdeen as the major component of the option. This assumes that the location of "most" of the development played an important part in determining a group's preference for an option. All of the Aberdeen City based groups supported most of the development taking place in the City.
- 4.3 While these charts indicate an apparent preference for those options which promoted the majority of the development within Aberdeen City (insofar that more groups identified one of the first five options as their preference than identified one of the last three) it must be noted that 62% of the options presented included Aberdeen City as the major component, so that there is an inherent bias. In this context 66% preference is by no means overwhelming. Statistical analysis using the "binomial test" was used to confirm that the observed distribution could not have occurred by chance, and that there was a statistical significance associated with the choice of Aberdeen City as a major component of the final strategy.
- 4.3 All options (as shown in Figure 3) were favoured by at least six separate groups, but Option 5 (Most of the development in Aberdeen City, significant development in a new settlement) and Option 6 (Most of the development in the existing transport corridor, significant development in Aberdeen City) received somewhat fewer statements of support than the other options.

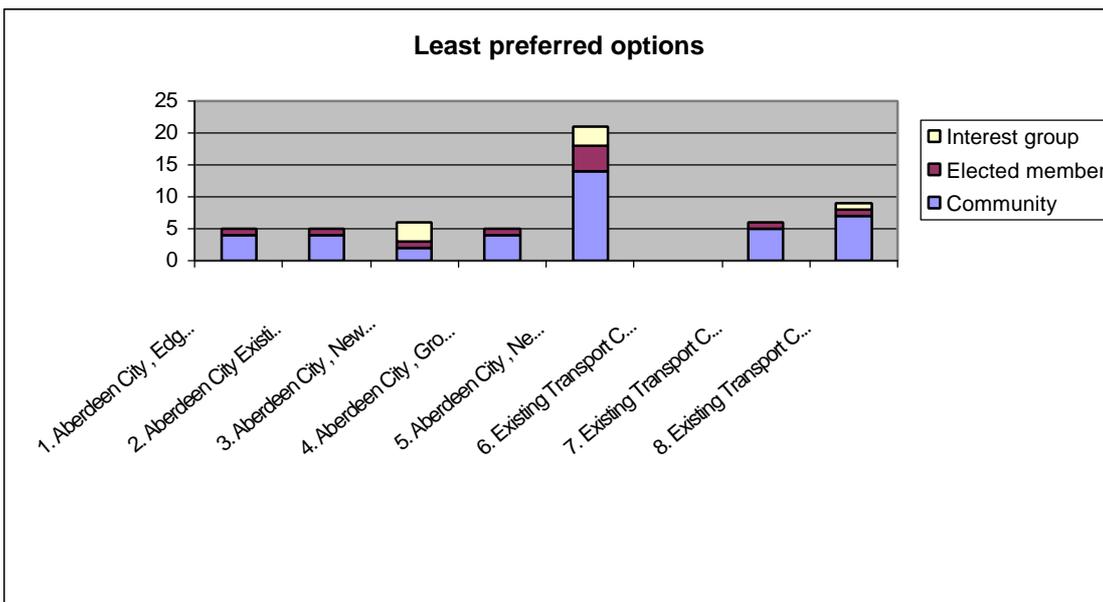
Figure 3: Most Preferred Options



4.4 Support shown for Options 2,4 and 7 would tend to suggest that development in growth poles, development in Aberdeen City and development in the existing transport corridor may be popular elements of potential strategies. Development in edge of city communities proved to be particularly popular with some of the topic stakeholder groups, but had limited support from elsewhere.

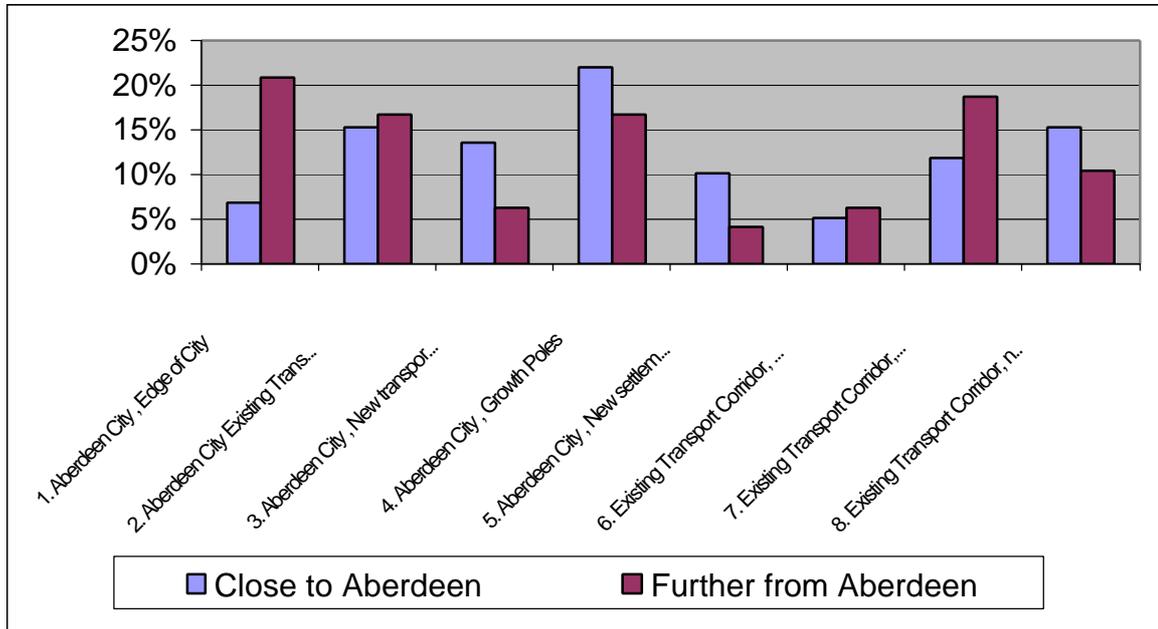
4.5 In terms of least favoured options a clear dislike was expressed for Option 5 (Aberdeen City, New Settlements). f Option 6 (New Transport Corridor, Aberdeen City) was not identified as the least preferred option by any group.

Figure 4: Least Preferred Options



4.6 In terms of geographic variations, Figure 5 shows the distribution of preferred choices grouped by whether the area is a “commuter” or “peripheral” area. This analysis excludes topic stakeholder groups.

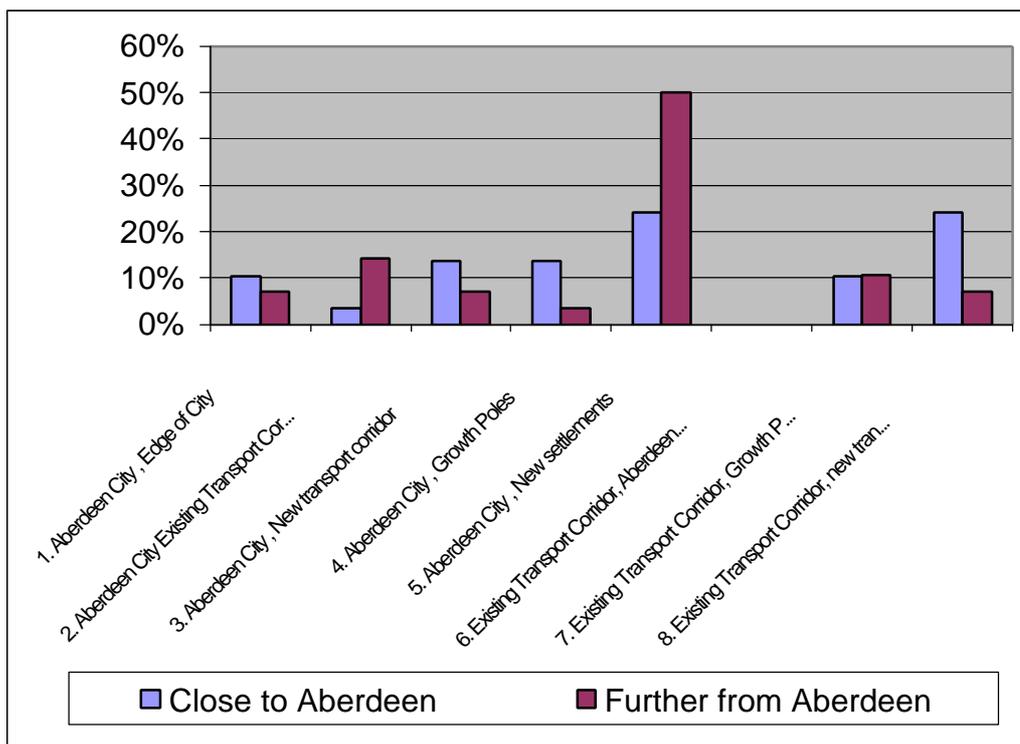
Figure 5: Preferred Option by Area



4.7 A clear geographic bias can be seen with commuter areas (including groups in the City) favouring the association of growth poles with most of the development in Aberdeen City, as opposed to development of growth poles and with most of the development in the existing transport corridor. Commuter areas also show very little support for development in edge of city communities. Likewise identification of a preferred option including new settlement is significantly higher in the commuter area than closer to Aberdeen that further away.

4.8 The Figure 6 shows 'least' preferred options, and from this it can be seen that half of the groups more distant from Aberdeen expressed a dislike for the Option 5 (development in Aberdeen City and new settlements). While there is a dislike for Commuter areas all, they were equally disenchanted with development in the scenario which included two transport corridors.

Figure 6: Least Preferred Option by Area



Option 1 **Most of the development in Aberdeen City, significant development in edge of city communities**

- 4.9.1 Option 1 was favoured particularly for the perception that it would be efficient and promote choice. Many groups noted that this option, through proximity to the City and accessibility to key destinations, would reduce travel distances and would encourage modal shift to public transport. There is also a clear view that this option is efficient in its use of existing infrastructure, particularly the AWPR. However, it was also noted that there are risks that employing this option would only exacerbate existing transport problems and it may not be practicable to suggest improving all routes into the City. It was also noted that the existing transport infrastructure it did exploit was limited to only that around Aberdeen itself; and it was felt that the option ignored the railway line and the opportunities that it provides.
- 4.9.2 The promotion of choice was also seen to be an advantage of this option, providing a greater choice of marketable development sites through the dispersal of development opportunities in edge of city communities. Development opportunity would be located in areas of highest demand. Some observers thought that this option has the ability to accommodate the scale of growth required.
- 4.9.3 Protection of other areas from the dis-benefits associated with 'urban sprawl', encouragement of the use of previously developed land, the assistance that this option would give to creating a critical mass for improvement of facilities in the edge of city communities, and of the city itself were all cited as positive aspects of this strategy.

- 4.9.4 On the other hand, the main reason for disliking this particular option was the impact that it would have on other areas, in terms of providing all the employment opportunities in one area, and the perception that it would reduce choice and opportunity.

Conclusions on Option 1

- *Capitalises on strengths of Aberdeen City.*
- *Meets demands.*
- *Efficient.*
- *Risky regarding impacts on transport network.*
- *Does not exploit regional assets.*

- 4.9.5 *The views expressed are valid. There is a clear reduction in travel distance from promoting development in this pattern, with the caveat that it may be difficult to accommodate the improvements in infrastructure that would be required. Comments made regarding choice are open to interpretation: the option does provide a choice of living environments and business locations but these may be limited in comparison to other locations. Given the scale of development in current edge of city communities it may not be practical or desirable to promote additional development in these areas. Concerns about reducing opportunity elsewhere may be addressed through providing for appropriate local development needs.*

Option 2 **Most of the development in Aberdeen City, significant development in the existing transport corridor**

- 4.10.1 This option found favour particularly in terms of the opportunities it would provide to achieve a shift to more sustainable modes of travel, and the efficiency with which it would use existing infrastructure, resulting in a lower overall cost. It was seen to promote reduction in road traffic flows into and out of Aberdeen City through reducing the need to travel, and promoting a critical mass to sustain efficient public transport. This, in turn, was seen as a positive economic impact.
- 4.10.2 Many observers recognised the role of the city in the economy of the area, the need to sustain the city's critical mass, and the importance of developing within, and in locations accessible to, this "natural centre" of the region. Development on the rail corridor was thought to assist regeneration of the city.
- 4.10.3 The benefits of the city focus of this option was highlighted on a number of occasions, but the improvement in choice that this option provides was seen to be very important, promoting opportunity for development in a range of accessible locations where demand exists and development could be delivered. The opportunity to develop previously used land afforded by this option was particularly highlighted.
- 4.10.4 This option was observed to promote economic growth by providing for choice of business locations, in spreading benefits to accessible

locations (and thus reducing costs to business), and promoting the development of local economies. The improvement that this option would bring to external connectivity was also highlighted. Development opportunity would be located in areas of highest demand. Some observers thought that this option has the ability to accommodate the scale of growth required.

- 4.10.5 As with other options the avoidance of impact on other areas was seen as a positive benefit of employing a spatial strategy such as this.
- 4.10.6 Not all the comments made were positive. Many groups concluded that this option provided insufficient choice in that it inhibited development and investment in other places, and could result in these locations not achieving the “critical mass” that they required to sustain improvements.
- 4.10.7 There was also some concern that this pattern of development would promote an imbalance of housing and employment land opportunities. There was a view that the “critical mass” on the transport corridor would not be achieved to a scale that would deliver the required transport improvements, leading to additional congestion and pressure on the road links into Aberdeen City.
- 4.10.8 Other issues identified as detracting from this option were the increase in travel generally that this option could promote; concern that there was over reliance on the benefits of rail improvements; and concern over possible adverse impacts on the transport corridor’s settlements due to over-development .
- 4.10.9 Whether the scale of development anticipated in Aberdeen could be accommodated, and the impact that this could have on urban greenspaces were also noted.

Conclusions on Option 2

- *Capitalises on strengths of Aberdeen City.*
 - *Promotes opportunity for modal shift to public transport.*
 - *Promotes connectivity.*
 - *Promotes choice.*
 - *Risks if modal shift is not achieved.*
- 4.10.10 *The positive environmental impacts of promoting public transport corridors has to be weighed against the overall increase in travel that would result from dispersing any growth away from Aberdeen City. All of the points are well made, although concerns about reducing opportunity elsewhere may be addressed through providing for appropriate local development needs. As this strategy builds on existing infrastructure, and incorporates the possible development of existing towns, risks are probably relatively low.*

Option 3

Most of the development in Aberdeen City, significant development in a new transport corridor

- 4.11.1 Developing a new transport corridor north of Aberdeen City, while promoting the majority of development in Aberdeen City was seen to be equitable. It was thought to promote development of an area that has suffered decline and economic disadvantage in the past. It was identified as both increasing accessibility, particularly to the Banff and Buchan and Buchan areas, with associated benefits for the local economy in this area, particularly leisure, tourism and other aspects of the rural economy. This option was seen to promote accessibility and the shift to sustainable transport modes all along the coastal strip.
- 4.11.2 The merits of developing Aberdeen City were also recognised, in terms of promoting the use of previously developed land and ensuring that the city stops declining and grows to an appropriate size to provide a complete range of regional services.
- 4.11.3 This option was seen to have benefits in terms of spreading development to areas that have “lost out” in the past, and in an area of relatively low environmental sensitivity.
- 4.11.4 However, concerns were voiced about the impact that this would have on existing communities and on road traffic and travel distances, especially if a rail link were not provided (and about the financial viability of the option, on which there was considerable scepticism). Concern was also voiced that this option was too focused on one area, represented an imbalanced proposal, and that development in other areas, particularly the existing transport corridor, could suffer from lack of investment. It was questioned whether the new transport corridor would be attractive to home buyers and business, as it is not an area where there is currently high demand.

Conclusions on Option 3

- *Capitalises on the strengths of Aberdeen City.*
 - *Promotes economic development of disadvantaged areas.*
 - *Risky if transport improvements cannot be provided.*
- 4.11.5 *All of these comments are valid. Questions about deliverability and marketability are addressed within the technical assessment.*

Option 4 **Most of the development in Aberdeen City, significant development in growth poles.**

- 4.12.1 This option generated the most comments of all options with 165 positive comments and 34 negative comments. As could be expected there was considerable repetition within the comments made between groups, indicating a degree of consensus on the views expressed. Almost all the comments received considered only the merits of the growth poles element of the option, although the choice of this option indicates an explicit recognition of the benefits of promoting development within Aberdeen City (although one comment made specifically suggested that the idea of “most” of the development in Aberdeen City was unfair).

- 4.12.2 Specific benefits of an approach that combined growth in Aberdeen City and in “growth poles” across the region included the perceived benefits associated with enabling home-working and the provision of local employment opportunities. Many respondents suggested that reductions in commuting and other road traffic would be a significant positive benefit of this approach. Maximising the use of existing road and port infrastructure was also suggested as a benefit in this context.
- 4.12.3 Growth poles were clearly seen as a means of promoting rural development and reducing the dependency of Aberdeenshire on Aberdeen City, although it was acknowledged that this strategy promoted regeneration within Aberdeen City. Stabilising rural communities, retaining skilled residents and addressing issues of demographic change in less central areas were all cited as good reasons for following this strategy. Dispersal of development opportunity to allow many areas to benefit and for rural areas to develop a “critical mass”, and so be sustained, was commonly held as desirable outcomes of this strategy. Comments were made on the benefits of using this strategy both to build up the economy of the region as a whole and revitalising Aberdeen City itself. It was viewed as an equitable approach to the parts of Aberdeenshire further away from the city.
- 4.12.4 The view was expressed that development of this option would allow good urban design to be implemented, and avoid the future creation of large characterless developments. The spread of opportunity was thought to increase choice and avoid the potential for overwhelming impacts on any one community. Growth in this form was seen to develop community capacity and resilience while promoting high quality of life.
- 4.12.5 Issues identified with this option included the dilution of public investment to a large number of locations, leading to a loss of opportunity associated with strategies that promote a more concentrated growth form. This option was identified as increasing pressure on infrastructure across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, without creating the “critical mass” of development that would enable serious infrastructure deficiencies to be addressed. The implications of this strategy on economic growth in the region, and the risk in terms of increasing commuting caused by dispersal of a proportion of the population were also highlighted. It was described as a “scattergun” approach.

Conclusions on Option 4

- *Capitalises on the strengths of Aberdeen City.*
- *Promotion of local economic development opportunities and rural development.*
- *Widespread service and facility improvements.*
- *Ability to provide better urban design.*
- *Reductions in the need to travel and commuting.*
- *Risks that economic development would not occur in these areas .*

- 4.12.6 *Many of the views expressed seek to secure local economic development in areas that are perceived to be disadvantaged in comparison to Aberdeen City. Few respondents made the connection between any “local needs” element of any allocation and the redistribution of development opportunity away from the core of the city region to the periphery. It was assumed by many that local economic opportunity would be taken up by local people but it is perhaps unlikely that all members of a household would find employment in the (relatively) small growth pole settlements: commuting is likely to persist and increase.*
- 4.12.7 *Some comments also reflect the view that providing opportunity will facilitate economic development, whereas the experience from the current structure plan has been that if opportunity is not where business wishes to locate, then no matter how much land is provided, business will not take it up. This strategy can only work if economic development is realised in the growth poles.*

Option 5 **Most of the development in Aberdeen City, significant development in new settlements**

- 4.13.1 The Aberdeen City, new settlement option received a mixed reception. As noted above, many groups identified this as the least preferred option, but the reasons given are perhaps of greater interest.
- 4.13.2 The main advantages seen in the provision of a new settlement were the environmental sustainability benefits associated with starting with a blank canvas. This was perceived to allow the creation of a self-contained community, with the highest standards of environmental design, and a layout that promotes sustainable transport and reduces the need to travel. Quality of life could be designed in.
- 4.13.3 Economic benefits were seen to be provided through creating an efficient land use pattern that reduces the need to travel and promotes accessibility to rail and road networks (and the AWPR in particular). It was argued that a new settlement would generate economic investment by providing a sufficiently large labour pool to attract employers within an area of high environmental quality.
- 4.13.4 However, by far the greatest benefit of a new settlement option was seen to be through the lack of impact that development would have on other areas: other areas would not be “overdeveloped” to accommodate the scale of growth required.
- 4.13.5 These potential benefits need to be set against the perceived dis-benefits associated with this option. Groups thought that principal amongst these was that this particular strategy is focussed too much on Aberdeen City and promotes centralisation of opportunity only in one place. It was suggested that this option would provide no opportunity for the improvement of other places through planning gain and that they would decline in comparative terms.

- 4.13.6 This option was also perceived to have environmental dis-benefits in terms of increasing the need to travel and commuting, and having possible impacts on greenbelt. Some groups thought this option would promote urban sprawl on greenfield land.
- 4.13.7 The scale of infrastructure investment required was perceived as being poor use of existing assets, particularly public transport, railways and ports, with associated greater costs. The new settlement option was thought to be reliant on the AWPR.
- 4.13.8 Economic development opportunities were also seen to be restricted by this option with less flexibility and less diversity. It was observed to ignore key elements of economic activity, and to risk impacting on other, existing, employment areas.

Conclusions on Option 5

- *Capitalises on the strengths of Aberdeen City.*
 - *Delivery of significant volume of low impact and sustainable development.*
 - *Efficient.*
 - *Marketable.*
 - *Loss of opportunity to other places.*
 - *Poor use of existing infrastructure.*
- 4.13.9 *Dis-benefits of this option may be overstated, particularly environmental impacts and the scale of infrastructure investment required. A new settlement need not impact on critical elements of the greenbelt. Development will require infrastructure wherever it goes, and while it is true that this option does not capitalise on existing infrastructure, there may be economies of scale associated with new settlement development. There is less risk involved in this option than other options.*

Option 6 **Most of the development in the existing transport corridor, significant development in Aberdeen City**

- 4.14.1 This option is very similar to option 2 and generated similar kinds of comments (with recognition that the greater part of development would be directed to Aberdeenshire). While no-one identified this specifically as their least favoured option, some groups did acknowledge dis-benefits as well as benefits.
- 4.14.2 Opportunities were seen for this option to provide for the delivery of transport infrastructure and, as a result, improve transport efficiency, promote accessibility, promote modal shift to public transport, reduce congestion and the need to travel. It was observed to encourage the alignment of business with the transport network (and thus promote flexibility in the workforce). It was also seen to promote equity by promoting accessibility to regional facilities.

- 4.14.3 A key advantage of this strategy over Option 2 was seen to be the reduced impact that would result on both greenbelt and Aberdeen City's greenspaces from reduced levels of development in the city. Likewise it was seen to be a positive attribute that it provides a range of choices of potential locations.
- 4.14.4 A small number of dis-benefits were recorded. Many are generic (such as "it would consume resources"), but the most significant being that it would restrict development opportunity elsewhere, and would promote centralisation in and around Aberdeen City.

Conclusions on Option 6

- *Promotes opportunity for modal shift to public transport.*
 - *Promotes connectivity.*
 - *Promotes choice.*
 - *Capitalises on the strengths of Aberdeen City.*
 - *Loss of opportunity to other places.*
 - *Risk.*
- 4.14.5 *The key advantage observed by this strategy is the increased investment it would permit on the transport network, in comparison to Option 2. Due to the greater demands placed on the transport network, risks are somewhat greater than for Option 2.*

Option 7 **Most of the development in the existing transport corridor, significant development in growth poles.**

- 4.15.1 Option 7 proved to be very popular, combining the advantages of development on the transport corridor with development in peripheral locations. It was seen as addressing issues of both deprivation and connectivity (and was seen as the only politically acceptable option by some observers). In many groups' views this option would promote an equitable spread of development, create balance between the City and the Shire, and spread wealth while at the same time working on the existing strengths of the area and protecting sensitive areas.
- 4.15.2 Promoting development in this pattern was thought by some to reduce the need to commute or otherwise travel and result in shorter trips, with the associated benefits of carbon and air pollution reductions. The option was seen to promote a travel pattern which would facilitate public transport and promote accessibility to City facilities. Reductions in the travel to work were seen to have positive quality of life implications.
- 4.15.3 This strategy was also observed to build on the existing infrastructure capacity, particularly unused road capacity, while exploiting the ports and the railway line. It was observed to make best use of the AWPR. One group observed that this strategy would result in widespread improvements to transport infrastructure.

- 4.15.4 This strategy was perceived to promote a market-led expansion of business opportunities into new, desirable, geographical areas, supporting indigenous industries and stimulating the rural economy. Encouraging economic development outwith the City and providing a wide diversity of business opportunities was seen to benefit the areas more distant from Aberdeen.
- 4.15.5 Dispersal of development, it was thought, would result in smaller scale developments, increase choice and address issues of deprivation and regeneration in Aberdeenshire Towns.
- 4.15.6 These positive views need to be contrasted with those that were less positive. Some groups saw this strategy as resulting in increased travel distance, especially in relation to commuting and business travel. Despite the aspiration to spread economic development a number of groups suggested that there was little market demand for development in the periphery and that pursuing such a strategy would increase costs, reduce the economic cohesion of the area and have an overall effect of reducing business competitiveness of the North East. Both the city area and rural areas were thought to be disadvantaged by this strategy.
- 4.15.7 Risks were also identified in relation to whether the growth in population in the growth poles would be sufficient to create the critical mass necessary to provide the improvements to infrastructure and services required, or whether it would only result in overdevelopment of small towns, with consequential impacts on their social cohesion and character.

Conclusions on Option 7

- *Promotes connectivity.*
 - *Addresses disadvantage.*
 - *Reduces the need to travel.*
 - *Builds on existing infrastructure.*
 - *Encourages rural development and indigenous industries*
 - *Risky.*
- 4.15.8 *Almost all the comments recorded related to the growth pole element of this strategy. Very few comments, either positive or negative were generated relating to the transport corridor aspect of the option.*
- 4.15.9 *Some groups thought this option would reduce the need to travel; others thought that it would increase travel. Clearly promoting this land use pattern, which disperses development away from the economic core, is likely to increase the need to travel, even though it may have a local impact on travel patterns. Any travel reduction would be dependent on attracting business to these area, and there has to be some doubt as to whether those businesses which would otherwise locate in Aberdeen could be persuaded by the availability of development land, to locate in these locations, distant from the regional labour pool and markets.*

- 4.15.10 *Likewise the risks associated with not achieving a critical mass of development in these locations cannot be discounted, and could result in a worsening of the current situation, rather than any improvement. Connectivity can only be improved with investment, and the scale of development proposed for each growth pole may be such that it is insufficient to make any material difference.*

Option 8 **Most of the development in the existing transport corridor, some of the development in a new transport corridor.**

- 4.16.1 This option was observed to provide significant growth opportunities by the groups evaluating it. It was thought to provide sufficient choice for business development and to be particularly conducive to the development of business clusters. It was thought to spread development opportunity, while at the same time recognising the needs of Aberdeen City.
- 4.16.2 Groups thought that concentration on the travel corridors would reduce the need to travel and congestion, through promotion of modal shift to public transport. It was seen to provide good access to major port facilities (and consequently onwards to the Baltic countries), rail, airports (including the possibility of a subregional airfield at Longside) and the AWPR, and promote accessibility to regional facilities based in Aberdeen City.
- 4.16.3 It was considered to be an efficient development pattern, capitalising on existing infrastructure and concentrating development where infrastructure investment is required. Peterhead, as a deep water harbour and the second biggest town in the region, was seen to be an asset for the region that should be exploited.
- 4.16.4 This option was thought to provide attractive choices for both residents and business, and assist in the redistribution of wealth to include northern parts of Aberdeenshire. Through concentration in a few areas, it would result in lesser impact elsewhere.
- 4.16.5 The dis-benefits of this option were seen to be related to exclusion of other areas from the strategy, impacts on the areas where development would be required, and risks associated with failure to improve transport infrastructure.
- 4.16.6 Exclusion of Aberdeen City was seen by a number of groups as a serious flaw in this strategy, while others thought a significant dis-benefit was that it excludes other parts of Aberdeenshire and their assets, and consequently limits choice. Likewise this option was seen to curtail opportunities for rural development.
- 4.16.7 Impact on smaller communities within these development corridors from the scale of development proposed was identified as a dis-benefit.
- 4.16.8 The option was seen to increase travel distances, promote commuting and increase congestion, particularly if the modal shift and transport infrastructure improvements were not provided. An adverse impact on

the AWPR was predicted. The capital cost of the infrastructure investment required to deliver this option was thought by some groups to make it a very risky strategy.

Conclusions on Option 8

- *Economic growth opportunities.*
- *Promotes opportunity for modal shift to public transport.*
- *Promotes connectivity.*
- *Promotes choice.*
- *Good use of regional assets.*
- *Flawed by exclusion of Aberdeen City.*

4.16.9 *The risks associated with this strategy are not to be discounted but could potentially be managed, for example through the use of phasing to ensure substantial development in the new corridor only takes place once infrastructure is guaranteed.*

4.16.10 *The recognition that a dis-benefit of this strategy is that it excludes Aberdeen City is notable. Exclusion of other parts of Aberdeenshire, and the need to accommodate rural development can be accommodated by a strategy that promotes an element of allocation for local needs.*

5. Phasing of development

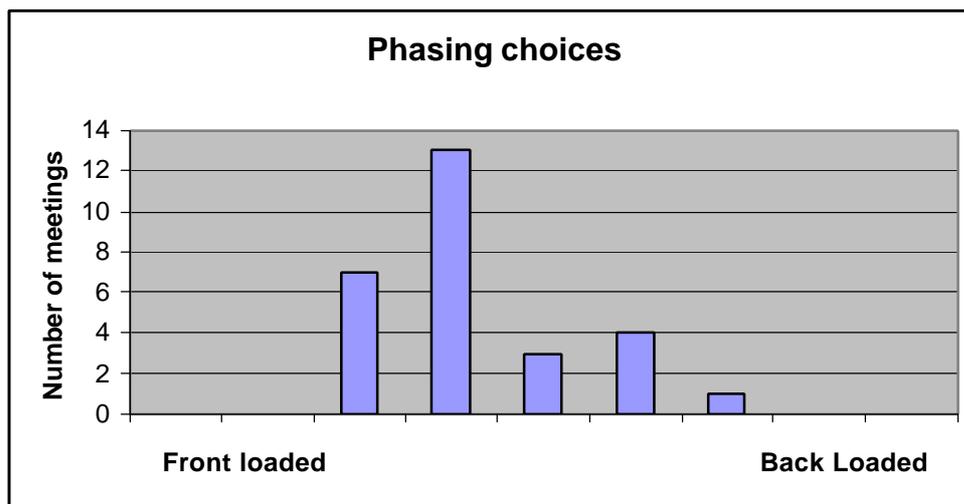
5.1 It was put to participants that, with a 25 year plan there was significantly greater opportunity to use phasing as a means to achieve vision objectives. Attendees were engaged in discussion about the relative merits of phasing options, and asked to come to a general consensus on the timing of development.

5.2 Unfortunately 9 groups felt unable to give a view on this matter, partly because of lack of time at the meetings but also due to a reluctance to express a view without additional information.

5.3 Overall a strategy that promotes more development in the early phase of the plan was preferred over a strategy that “back-loads” the plan. This preference was almost 4 to 1. The degree of front-loading preferred depended to a large extent on how bullish the group were, with a clear correlation between those meetings where conclusions on the scale option suggested that high or very high growth options should be pursued also promoting a high degree of front-loading.

5.4 Figure 7 below illustrates the distribution of preferences.

Figure 7: Phasing



5.5 From this the bias towards front-loading can be clearly observed.

6. Conclusions

6.1 In conclusion, the workshops presented a valuable means of obtaining stakeholder and community views on the components of a potential strategy for the next structure plan.

6.2 It must be recognised that the groups participating in this exercise were mostly drawn from Aberdeenshire. As noted at paragraphs 3.1 and 4.1, the analysis presented has to be considered in this context. It also has to be recognised that many of the views expressed by lay-people represent an aspiration for what development might deliver (for example economic growth or enhanced facilities and services). The other elements to the assessment of the options will be important in understanding the extent to which these aspirations and perceptions are realistic.

6.3 A high degree of consensus was expressed for a medium / high growth scenario in order to overcome issues of land availability and to stimulate economic development. The need to accommodate local aspiration and need was widely acknowledged.

6.4 A high degree of consensus was also expressed for a degree of front-loading of the plan to stimulate economic development and to overcome backlogs of development aspiration, taking advantage of the demand which currently exists.

6.5 Common themes that led people to choose between spatial options were:

- Impacts on transport efficiency, congestion and travel to work.
- The implications for the provision of new infrastructure, or existing infrastructure (especially transport infrastructure).
- Promoting widespread economic opportunity and diversity.
- Loss of opportunity and impacts on other areas from directing development within a spatial strategy.

- 6.6 No one spatial option was seen to be particularly better than any others, and a number of groups suggested amalgamating scenarios 2 and 8 (to give a City, new transport corridor, existing transport corridor strategy) or 2 and 7 (to give a City, existing transport corridor, growth poles strategy). This latter strategy is effectively that carried forward in NEST. However, the clear majority of groups favoured strategies which had Aberdeen City accommodating around half of the development in the structure plan area.
- 6.7 Popularity of the growth poles option was firmly rooted in a belief that allocation of land in areas distant from Aberdeen would stimulate these local economies and reduce commuting to more central areas. However, evidence suggests that these advantages may be based more on an aspiration than on reality. In the existing structure plan take-up has been slow and the persistence of constraint by its 'marketability' has affected large quantities of allocated land. Housing land take up has also occurred without commensurate employment land development, resulting in additional travel.
- 6.8 Risks that development will not occur in the pattern promoted by the spatial strategy exist for all the strategies. However, the implications of this are greatest for a "growth poles" options as they actively seek to redistribute economic activity away from the existing Aberdeen City economic zone. The risk is that development unable to locate in and around Aberdeen will locate in another city region, rather than Banff or Fraserburgh. A similar, but smaller, risk exists for the "new transport corridor" strategy, which could be implemented in such a way as to meet demand for land proximal to the city, if locations in Peterhead remain unattractive to the development industry. These issues of the degree of risk that the plan should adopt for the strategy for the structure plan is an issue that requires to be addressed by the political process.