

The provisional strategy

On the 28 September Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Planning Committee met, and considered parts that potentially could be included in the strategy for the draft structure plan. They also dismissed from further consideration parts that had not performed well under the assessment criteria.

This decision honours a commitment given in February 2007 to publish a preferred strategy, and the reasons for choosing it.

The strategy that they provisionally agreed has six strands:

1) Rates of growth in excess of that seen in the area over the recent past.

This will result in opportunity for more than 55,000 homes and associated employment land being provided over the 25-year lifespan of the plan. Forecasts of population and the need for additional flexibility will determine how much more will be identified. A high degree of stakeholder consensus was expressed for this medium / high growth scenario in order to overcome issues of land availability and to stimulate economic development. Economic well-being and social inclusion benefits were identified, although measures may need to be employed to reduce environmental impacts.

2) An element of “front-loading” of the development opportunities towards the start of the plan period.

Appraisal against the draft vision and discussion with stakeholders suggests that a degree of front-loading is a desirable strategy to adopt, as it provides the immediate economic benefits of “catching the wave” of current prosperity, as well as providing clarity to the development industry. Some measures to minimise environmental impact may need to be employed.

3) Around half of all new development allowed for in Aberdeen.

Evidence from the engagement with stakeholders, the interim technical assessment and the assessment of the strategic options against the vision suggests that the area’s interests would be best served by promoting the majority of development within the Aberdeen City Council administrative area.

4) Significant development allowed for within the Huntly to Laurencekirk road and rail corridor.

Locating development in the existing road / rail corridor was also popular and seen to be practical. It helps to deliver many of the aspirations contained in the vision. Development within the existing transport corridor is consistently identified as a good approach to take. This strategy does not suggest development along the route of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Road, although development in Aberdeen City is likely to be close to the route. Strategies based largely on new settlements or edge of city communities are limited in the benefits they bring but may be a means of delivering part of this element of the strategy.

5) An investigation with partners of the option of additional strategic development opportunities within the Peterhead / Ellon / Aberdeen Corridor.

Basing development in a new transport corridor can be demonstrated as having considerable merits, but may be delayed by the long lead-in time needed to carry out transport improvements. It was concluded by the technical study only to be an option that could be fully implemented in the fullness of time, given the scale of road and / or rail improvements required and historical lack of demand in the northern portion of the corridor

6) Additional development opportunities outwith the strategic growth areas for business and housing land to meet local needs.

The need to accommodate local aspiration and need was widely recognised, particularly in rural areas, where development land allocations in excess of current development rates were suggested. The need to sustain existing communities outwith the growth areas is clear, was identified as being popular, but was shown to be unable to deliver strategic benefits. Promoting development on a scale to accommodate regional needs on a “growth pole” model was identified as harming both the regional economy and movement towards sustainability.

A formal consultation and opportunity to make representation will take place following publication of the draft structure plan itself in the late spring of 2008. The Strategic Planning Committee would welcome any views so as to inform finalisation of the strategy.

Any comments on the above provisional strategy should be sent to the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan Officer Group, Strategic Development Plan Suite, 27 – 29 King Street, Aberdeen, AB24 5AA, or e-mailed to team@acssp.net, to be received by **30 November 2007**.