

Section III Planning Choices

Chapter 9: Deriving Planning Choices

Section III

Planning Choices



Deriving Planning Choices

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“Two types of choices seem to me to have been crucial in tipping [past societies’] outcomes towards success or failure: long-term planning, and willingness to reconsider core values. On reflection, we can also recognise the crucial role of these same two choices for the outcomes of our individual lives.”

– Jared Diamond

9.1 The Importance of Choice

- 9.1.1 In Chapter 4, we note that planning for diversity to provide choice is an important facet of a quality living environment. Nevertheless, often we have to make a decision on development, which calls for a directional choice for the whole city, rather than making a personal choice of lifestyle from a selection. As our society demands a greater say in the development process, being able to express our preference would be all the more important.
- 9.1.2 Making a personal choice may already be quite hectic sometimes. Making a collective choice on development options would hence be a colossal task, as individuals of the community could have extremely different priorities, likes and dislikes. This calls for a process that can effectively help us strike a reasonable balance amongst conflicting objectives.

9.2 Collective Thinking Process

- 9.2.1 In the light of the above, the HK2030 Study emphasises a collective thinking process both within Government and among stakeholders of the community. Within Government, we have a role of ensuring cohesiveness of different policies as reflected in our planning strategy. At the same time, this planning strategy needs to be owned by those people it is meant for – citizens of Hong Kong. To achieve this, we must expend our best effort in seeking their views in the strategy formulation process. This means involving stakeholders early enough for their input to be effective, letting people air their concerns openly

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and providing adequate information for them to take a view. For this reason, under the HK2030 Study, wide-ranging and multi-form public consultations have been conducted throughout the study process.

9.3 What Choices?

- 9.3.1 Many aspects of our spatial development pattern, including the supply of housing land and land for various economic activities, could involve a choice. On the other hand, there are a number of planning components that are being taken care of outside the HK2030 Study, e.g. environmental and tourism infrastructure. These will be integrated into the Preferred Development Option as “**predetermined**”, as described in Chapter 11. We could assume that choice-selection processes have already been undertaken for these predetermined.
- 9.3.2 Elements involving a choice under the HK2030 Study include locations for various major land uses (housing, office, general businesses and special industries) as well as the development form, including development densities. But more importantly, we need to decide on the overall approach to land development and establish, or re-establish, the role of government in the whole development process, as further explained in section 9.5 below.
- 9.3.3 While making choices for ourselves is important, equally significant is whether we are leaving our future generations adequate choices about how they are going to live. This is the essence of sustainable development, and must be factored into the decision-making processes.

9.4 “Development” versus “Non-Development”

9.4.1



For many years, there has been a strong belief that a city’s growth is driven by development of land and infrastructure. Underpinning this is the idea that “development” is a direct companion to such sought-after objects as “progress” and “prosperity”.

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- 9.4.2 This idea is, however, challenged by modern theories of development now advocated in many parts of the world. For example, in North America, smart growth concepts have prompted restraints on unchecked urban expansions. This is echoed in many European countries where sustainable development principles are enthusiastically espoused.
- 9.4.3 At the other extreme, total non-development could signify a miserable state of stagnancy and even retraction. Moreover, if non-development would lead to supply lagging behind demand, especially in housing and employment land, it could cause periods of tension or unwanted spurs in the property market. It seems that a more reasonable approach would be to manage growth – making more use of brownfield land, coupled with a confined level of expansion onto greenfield land, and adopting a good monitoring system to track actual market demand and supply. A critical factor is therefore the timing of development, and whether (and if so how) Government should intervene in the process, either directly as a landowner or indirectly as the approving authority for development.

9.5 Timing of Development and Role of Government

- 9.5.1 Ensuring timely and adequate land supply in different economic and social sectors is key to providing a quality living and economic environment. As concerns the timing of development, several choices are open



- developing way ahead of anticipated demand (i.e. **land-banking**); slightly ahead of demand; upon demand or behind demand.
- 9.5.2 At present, the land formation process, from study to implementation of associated infrastructure, normally takes about 10 to 15 years to complete. Creating a land bank could therefore help to ensure that there will be no delay in the delivery of land to meet requirements. However, there is a concern on whether the huge investment on land development has been made with full economic justifications

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and (when that land is available and sitting idle) whether the land would be allocated fairly and in accordance with market needs. We therefore need to strike a careful balance between the pros and cons of the concept and to confine its application only to certain uses, for example, special industries which are land extensive and the demand for which is less predictable.

- 9.5.3 For the majority of our developments, instigating implementation too early would perhaps be unwarranted. Where the demand has not emerged fully, providing infrastructure ahead of time would give rise to under-utilisation of public resources (and it is often difficult to quantify such costs and losses to Government). Moreover, the uncertainty over public demand may give rise to over-provision of infrastructure. The national Eleventh Five-Year Plan advocates development moderately ahead of actual demand in order to avoid a shortfall situation. This could be relevant to large-scale infrastructure projects such as major highways and utilities.
- 9.5.4 For other land uses serving local and relatively predictable demand such as housing or office uses, the private sector still has a positive role in meeting their demand. The Government's role, in line with its "Big Market, Small Government" notion, would be to assess the demand, plan ahead for their locations, put in place the infrastructure, monitor the demand/supply situations, while leaving the actual delivery of the product to market forces. If our market works well, we could expect provision to be exactly on time, or just slightly behind demand.
- 9.5.5 The timing of development, therefore, is determined by the extent we can bear with the risk of lagging behind. For example, belated construction of a piece of road infrastructure could end up in acute traffic problems. For housing and employment related uses, supply lagging behind demand may lead to, as noted earlier, scaling of property prices. Where provision of economic infrastructure falls short of demand, we could also run the risk of being out-competed by our competitors. These are important factors for consideration in making our choice.

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9.6 Options for Various Land Uses

9.6.1 In deriving different development alternatives, we can first take a “component approach” and look at the options available for various land uses. In proceeding with the coarse-screening of options, we have started by ruling out the “no-go” areas as described in **Annex III**. The potential options for each major type of land uses are then presented in **Table 9.1** below.



Table 9.1 Broad Assessment of Available Choices for Different Land Uses

Housing	
(A)	Optimisation of Existing Development Areas
	(i) <i>Redevelopment</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market-led, low cost to Government and involve the least intervention • Opportunities reduced as tenement blocks deplete • Marginal gain in floor area affects viability, and therefore incentive for redevelopment • Usually small-scale – less chance for comprehensive re-planning
	(ii) <i>Relaxation of Plot Ratio</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance viability of projects • Reduce need to deploy new land for development • Depend on infrastructure capacity and adequacy of community facilities, as well as other factors such as visual impact, impact on air circulation etc.
	(iii) <i>Rezoning and Infilling</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce need to deploy new land for development • Primarily involve “Industrial” zones as a result of economic restructuring, as well as sites of obsolete “Government, Institution or Community” facilities • Depend on infrastructure capacity, urban design concerns and, where applicable, resolution of any residential/ industrial interface problem • Market-driven process preferred over Government-initiated resumption

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(B) Identifying New Supply	
<i>(i) Kai Tak</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kai Tak Review recently completed • Assume a medium density for residential developments given its harbourfront location • Also include a mixture of other land uses, including cruise terminal and multipurpose sports stadium • Further detailed environmental and engineering feasibility studies are being undertaken
<i>(ii) Northern New Territories</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of New Development Areas (NDAs) were identified in previous studies • Allow comprehensive/cohesive planning • Involve extensive land resumption and engineering works – long development lead time • Further detailed environmental assessments and studies needed
<i>(iii) Other Parts of Rural New Territories</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to identify large pieces of flat land for development without extensive engineering works • May conflict with areas of significant ecological and landscape values
<i>(iv) Reclamation</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government committed that there would be no new reclamation planned in Victoria Harbour • Reclamation outside central harbour should also be avoided as far as possible but could be considered given sufficient justifications
Central Business District Grade A Offices	
(A) Consolidation of the Existing CBD	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve agglomeration economies which are essential for office uses located in the CBD • Take the form of in-fill developments, including the remaining portions of existing reclamation (e.g. West Kowloon) and vacated Government sites • Need to resolve issues such as urban design, traffic impacts and reprovisioning of existing uses

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(B)	Promoting Decentralisation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be able to totally replace the functions of the existing CBD • Need to achieve a critical mass and provide territorial transport network in order to create a new office node • Opportunity includes the former Kai Tak Airport where a new office node is planned
General Business	
(A)	Redevelopment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily supplied through the unrealised development potential arising from the redevelopment of existing industrial areas • A lesser scale of decentralisation of employment opportunities, but jobs are still not brought close enough to places of residence in the New Territories
(B)	New Business Zones in NDAs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to encourage businesses to decentralise to the New Territories • Difficult to assemble a critical mass
(C)	The Closed Area
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to resolve a number of development constraints, e.g. hilly terrain, lack of infrastructure, sites of ecological and conservation values, traditional villages and burial grounds, contaminated mud • Strategic environmental study needed to examine environmental constraints and identify areas where development should be avoided • Three locations, i.e. Lok Ma Chau Loop, Kong Nga Po and Heung Yuen Wai, have been initially identified as having potential for special uses that warrant a boundary location

9.7 Choices for Development Densities

- 9.7.1 Hong Kong is a very compact and vertical city that gives rise to not just a psychological feeling of congestion, but also likely impacts on the temperature and airflows. According to the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO), the daily minimum temperature recorded at the HKO Headquarters had increased by 0.28° Celsius per decade over

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the period from 1947 to 2005. Much of this rise could be attributed to the retention of heat by concrete structures¹. The HKO also recorded a sustained decrease in wind speed at the King's Park meteorological station between 1968 and 2005. A relationship between urbanisation and the long-term temperature trend as well as stagnant airflows could be preliminarily established. This has already aroused increasing public concerns.

- 9.7.2 Some members of the community have laid blame on high development densities for these climatic phenomena. However, we should not for this reason overlook the many merits of high-density living, including more efficient use of land and infrastructure, less intrusion on land with conservation value, shorter journeys to work or school as well as less reliance on cars. On the other hand, while a low-density development form may require more land, we should also be aware of its merits. These include the offer of a better micro-climate, the provision of a more spacious living environment and better opportunities for incorporating urban design features.
- 9.7.3 While public comments received on the density issue are quite diverse, they generally indicate that we should adopt a flexible approach in managing the level of density in the Metro Area (i.e. the areas covering Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung and Tsing Yi) whilst adopting a generally lower density in the New Territories to provide an alternative choice of living. Many consider that building and urban design would be more significant than development density per se in generating a desirable living space. However, some members of the community do consider that there is a need for reduction of development intensity at certain locations within the congested urban areas.

Metro Area

- 9.7.4 Taking into consideration public views, different options for reducing the development densities in parts of the Metro Area have been considered:

¹ C.Y. Lam (2006) "On Climate Changes Brought About by Urban Living", paper presented at the PGBC Symposium 2006 on Urban Climate + Urban Greenery on 2 December 2006.

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- (a) applying appropriate development controls, including building bulk and height control on government sale sites, sites subject to lease modifications and “Government, Institution or Community” sites, especially those at unique locations, including areas with special urban design characteristics and functions;
- (b) reviewing whether and how the “net site” concept should be applied to large redevelopment sites in urban areas and continue to applying the concept in the planning for new development areas;
- (c) reviewing the current practice in granting concessionary floor areas;
- (d) adopting urban design and environmentally friendly guiding principles that can help reduce building congestion in planning layouts.

New Towns

9.7.5 In new towns, the plot ratios for residential developments were reviewed in the 1980s and subsequently increased from a maximum of 5.0 to 6.0 (e.g. Sha Tin and Tung Chung), 6.5 to 7.0 (e.g. Ma On Shan) and 8.0 (e.g. Tseung Kwan O).



9.7.6 However, the Tseung Kwan O experience has prompted a need to review plot ratios to take into account the resultant built form and townscape. This called for the lowering of development densities in the remaining undeveloped parts of new towns, which has already been done for Tseung Kwan O. However, in the process of reviewing the development density, (hence the housing quantum) we need to consider whether the infrastructure in place may be rendered under-utilised, or that a population threshold may not be reached for the provision of certain important facilities, e.g. rail stations, hospitals.

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New Development Areas (NDAs)

- 9.7.7 Having regard to past experience in the planning of new towns, the development intensity of future NDAs would need careful consideration. Balancing different factors, namely development pressure and efficient use of land resources and infrastructure on the one hand, and the resultant visual impacts and physical harmony on the other, one option is to apply a medium to high density form (plot ratio 5 to 6.5) at the core area/rail stations while leaving the rest of the NDAs at a fairly low density. Another option is to return to the level of intensity of first-generation new towns like Sha Tin with plot ratios not exceeding 5 throughout.
- 9.7.8 We have consulted the public during Stage 2 of the study on the issue of development intensity of NDAs. Many people expressed dissatisfaction with the intensive form of development like that of Tseung Kwan O but could accept a plot ratio of about 6.5. Some respondents urged that more attention should be given to the design, layout and connectivity of open spaces which would greatly affect the quality and character of the living environment.

9.8 Amalgamated Options for Comparison

- 9.8.1 Under Stage 3, two development options, namely the Consolidation and Decentralisation Options, were derived through combining land use options set out in paragraphs 9.6 and 9.7 above. A population assumption of 9.2 million by 2030 was adopted then, but this assumption has subsequently been revised to 8.4 million in Stage 4, taking into account the latest population trends and projections. Due to the revised population assumptions, many of the proposals contained under these two options are no longer valid. They are however presented here for the purpose of making a broad comparison of the concepts rather than of the details.

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Consolidation Option

- 9.8.2 This option assumes sites in the urban areas will be developed first and no NDAs in the New Territories will be completed before 2020. The provision of housing land to meet the medium-term demand will mainly be generated from developments at the former Kai Tak Airport, existing vacant or under-utilised sites, urban renewal schemes (assuming more redevelopment and less rehabilitation) and redevelopment of other existing buildings within the built-up areas.
- 9.8.3 To accommodate long-term housing needs, five NDAs respectively at Hung Shui Kiu, Kwu Tung North, Fanling North, Hung Shui Kiu North and Kam Tin/Au Tau will be required beyond 2020.
- 9.8.4 The provision of prime office and general business space will mainly be market-led. Part of the longer term requirement for high-grade offices will be met by on-going private-sector initiatives in the Central Business District and surrounding areas, as well as development of an office node at the former Kai Tak Airport.

Decentralisation Option

- 9.8.5 This option takes a different orientation and focuses on development of the New Territories in the initial stage. Three priority NDAs in Hung Shui Kiu, Kwu Tung North and Fanling North will be developed before 2020. Development/redevelopment in the Metro Area will proceed more slowly, spreading over a longer period. Urban renewal will focus on rehabilitation rather than redevelopment. Compared to the other option, the process of intensification in the Metro Area will be slower. Beyond 2020, four additional NDAs in Hung Shui Kiu North, Kwu Tung South, Kam Tin/Au Tau and San Tin/Ngau Tam Mei, will be implemented.

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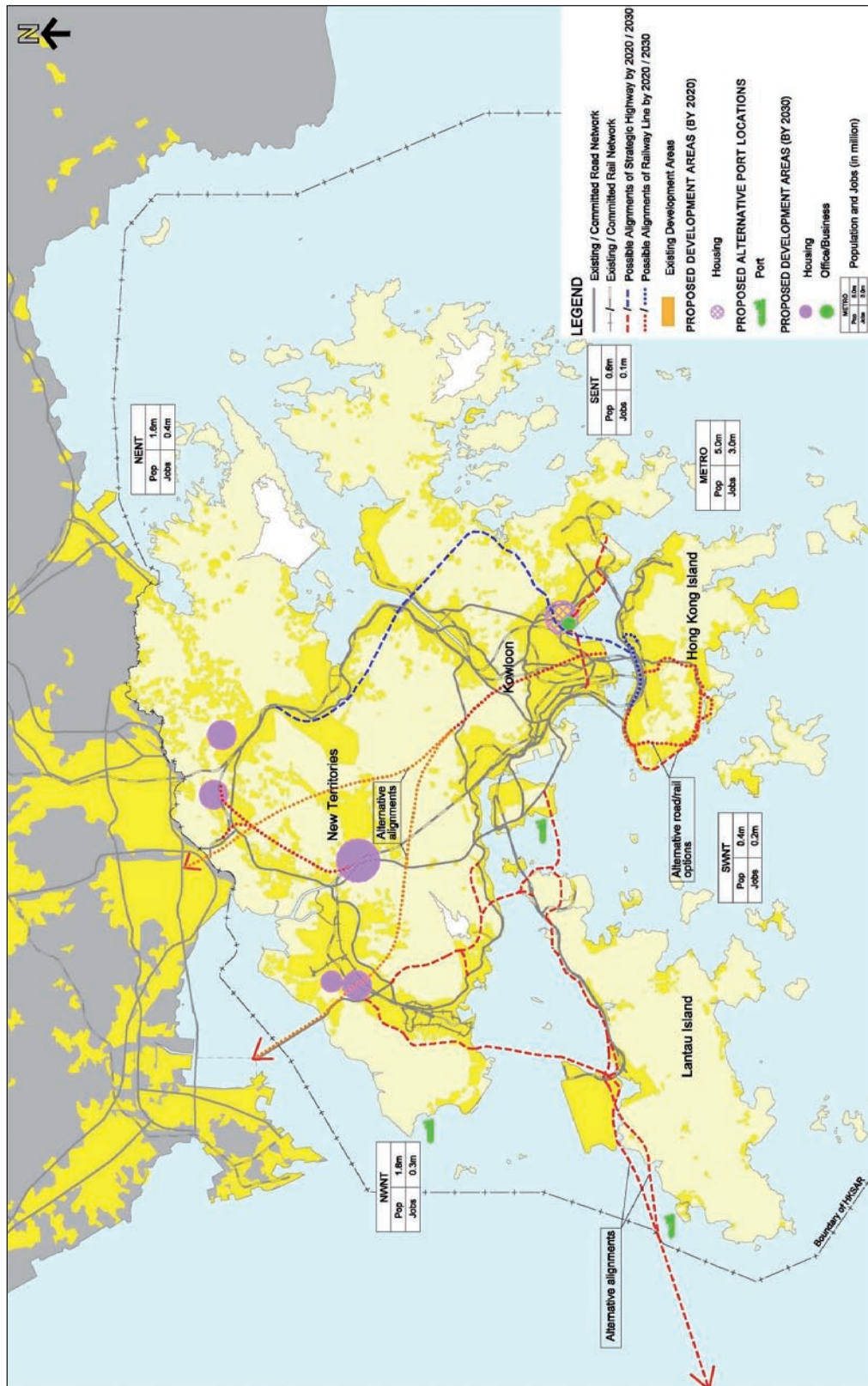
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- 9.8.6 As for employment related uses, this option assumes that a new secondary employment node in Hung Shui Kiu and special economic activities at the Lok Ma Chau Loop (subject to resolution of the environmental and related issues) will be in place in the short to medium term. The provision of high-grade offices will mainly be market-led, supplemented by the development of an office node at the former Kai Tak Airport before 2020.
- 9.8.7 **Table 9.2** below summarises the key elements of the two broad development patterns. The broad locations of the proposed developments are indicated on **Figures 9.1** and **9.2**.

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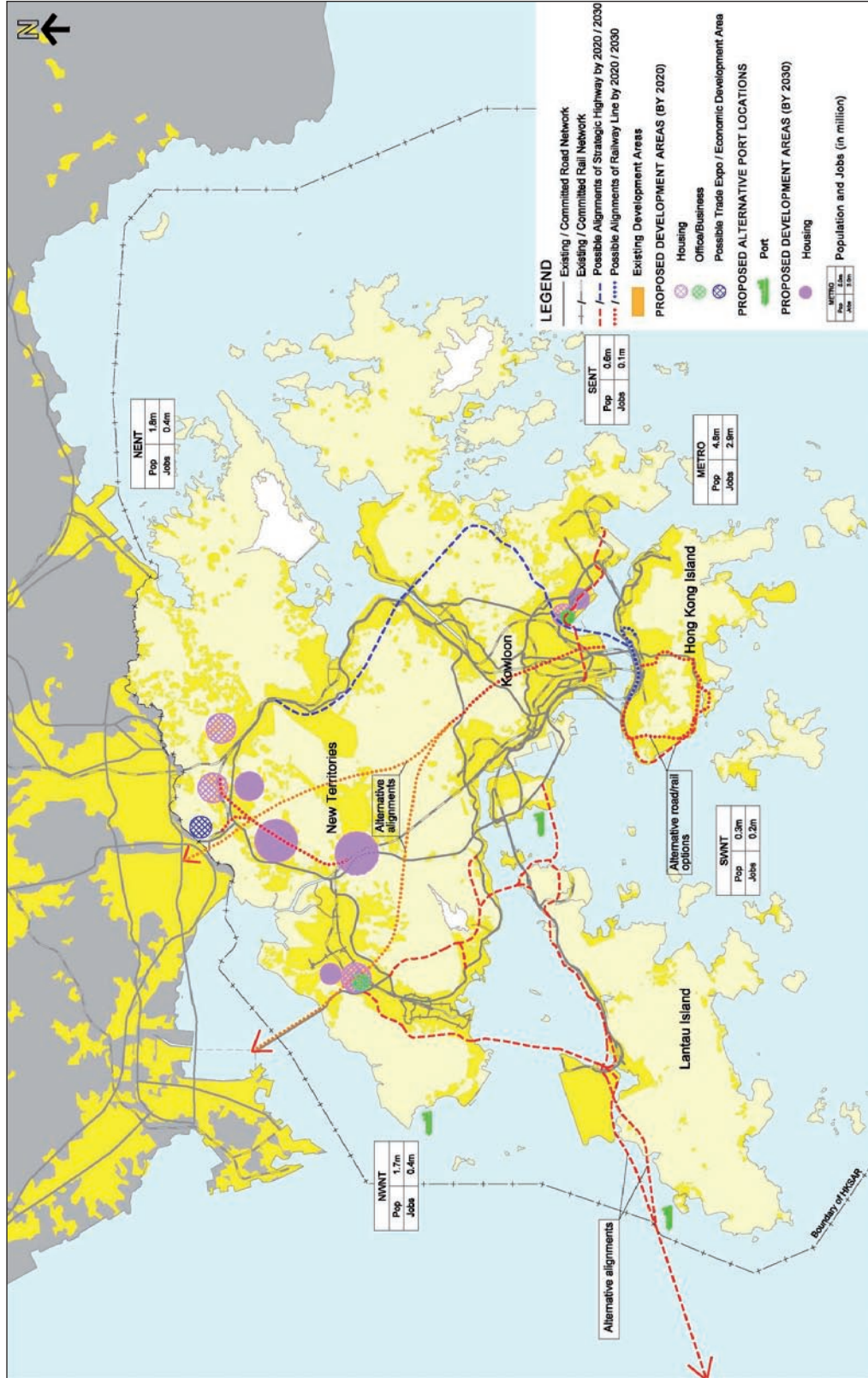
Figure 9.1 Consolidation Option



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Figure 9.2 Consolidation Option



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Table 9.2 Key Components of Two Development Options

By 2020	Provision of Housing Land	
	Consolidation Option	Decentralisation Option
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • former Kai Tak Airport (whole) • urban renewal (more redevelopment, less rehabilitation) • Government land in existing built-up areas • no New Development Area (NDA) in the NT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • former Kai Tak Airport (partial) • urban renewal (more rehabilitation, less redevelopment) • Government land in existing built-up areas (fewer than in the other option) • 3 NDAs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fanling North - Hung Shui Kiu - Kwu Tung North
	Provision of Land for Office/ Business	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • existing and oncoming supply • redevelopment/ conversion of existing industrial buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mainly from existing and oncoming supply • Premier office centre at the former Kai Tak Airport • provision of land for office/ business uses in Hung Shui Kiu which will lead to a slower pace of redevelopment of old buildings • Lok Ma Chau Loop to be developed for special economic activities (subject to resolution of the environmental and related issues) 	
Cross-boundary Transport Infrastructure		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link • Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge 		

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By 2020	Domestic Transport Infrastructure	
By 2030	Provision of Housing Land	
	Consolidation Option	Decentralisation Option
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development at former Kai Tak Airport completed before 2020 • urban renewal (more redevelopment, less rehabilitation) • 5 NDAs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hung Shui Kiu - Kwu Tung North - Fanling North - Hung Shui Kiu North - Kam Tin/Au Tau • Remaining government land in existing built-up areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • former Kai Tak Airport (remaining areas) • urban renewal (more rehabilitation, less redevelopment) • 4 additional NDAs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hung Shui Kiu North - Kam Tin/Au Tau - San Tin/Ngau Tam Mei - Kwu Tung South • Remaining government land in existing built-up areas
	Provision of Land for Office/ Business	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • premier office centre at the former Kai Tak Airport • private-sector redevelopment for office and general business uses • remaining government land in existing built-up areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of premier office centre completed before 2020 • private-sector redevelopment for office and general business uses • remaining government land in existing built-up areas

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By	Domestic Transport Infrastructure
2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Hong Kong Island Line (rail) • Eastern Highway (Northern New Territories to Hong Kong Island)

9.8.8 **Table 9.3** below gives a broad comparison of the merits and demerits of the two development options. A more detailed evaluation of the two options is contained in the next chapter.

Table 9.3 A Broad Comparison of Two Development Options

Merits	Consolidation Option	Decentralisation Option
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - better use of developed areas; efficient use of infrastructure in the Metro Area - shorter travel distances; proximity to work; convenient connection to facilities - reduced upfront cost for the development of NDAs - keeping the undeveloped areas untouched, and leaving greater flexibility for future development, particularly in case of lower population growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - offers more opportunities for achieving lower development densities in the Metro Area - building up population in the three NDAs; allows earlier provision of infrastructure to the Northern NT and ensures viability of new infrastructure - provides greater diversity of densities, design and built forms through NDA development, and allows greater flexibility for adopting environmental measures and facilities - promotes “cleaning up” of degraded countryside and establishment of “gateway towns”
Demerits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - less scope to relieve over-crowding in the Metro Area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - requires upfront cost at an early stage - longer travel time and distances

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Demerits	- pressure on the capacity of existing infrastructure in the Metro Area	- more resources are required for land resumption and clearance for NDA development
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9.9 Priority of New Development Areas

9.9.1 Previous studies² have identified a number of potential NDAs in the New Territories. We need to establish priorities for their implementation. Relevant factors for consideration include:

Planning Requirements

- Urgency of the proposed use(s)
- Creation of a balanced development, i.e. appropriate balance between population, local employment and services with a mixture of different uses
- Interaction with the existing uses, i.e. ensuring minimal social and economic disruption to the existing users/occupants
- Impact on the environmental quality, i.e. achieving highest environmental gain and least impact
- Ability to optimise existing and planned infrastructure, making effective use of spare capacities
- Ability to enhance links with the Mainland

Implementation Requirements

- Cost-effectiveness in public investment
- Feasibility, i.e. ease of implementation within the current legislation, government procedures and socio-economic practices
- Flexibility, i.e. function effectively at different levels of population and employment and able to adapt to changes in socio-economic profile and types of activities

9.9.2 A discussion on the prioritisation of the potential NDAs is given in Chapter 11.

² Planning and Development Studies on North West New Territories and North East New Territories