

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLANNING)

APPROACH TO MASTERPLANNING GUIDANCE NOTE

1 **Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report presents the Approach to Masterplanning Guidance Note for the Panel's consideration and onward recommendation for approval by Cabinet.
- 1.2 Policy SP 9 of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (adopted October 2023) requires that a comprehensive approach is taken to the development of large or complex sites. This is to be achieved through the production of a masterplan.
- 1.3 By outlining principles and requirements for development, a masterplan document sets a template for guiding development and helps ensure sites are delivered in a comprehensive and well-planned manner. If endorsed or adopted by Council, the masterplan becomes a material consideration when determining planning applications.
- 1.4 The masterplanning process involves working collaboratively with other statutory authorities, community representatives, local interest groups and the landowner and/or site promoter to develop a vision and strategy for the development of the site. This process helps to ensure development results in in well designed, high quality, sustainable and well-connected environments, and provides a level of certainty to assist the planning application process.
- 1.5 The Masterplanning Guidance note identifies Welwyn Hatfield Council's approach to masterplanning including what the masterplan must contain (as a minimum) and key stages that must take place in the masterplan process. A masterplan can be produced by the landowner/developer or Local Authority but must be a collaborative process. By outlining the process required, the guidance document will help provide certainty for all those involved and should result in better quality masterplans and subsequent development.

2 **Recommendation**

- 2.1 The Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel recommends to Cabinet that the Approach to Masterplanning Guidance Note be endorsed.
- 2.2 That Cabinet gives delegated powers to the Assistant Director (Planning) in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to make minor update the Guidance Note if required in the future.

3 **Explanation**

- 3.1 The NPPF (2023) sets out that policy-making authorities, in conjunction with communities and other authorities should identify suitable locations for development (para 73), ensuring that they use suitable tools such as masterplans and design guides or codes to meet the needs of different groups in the community (para 74 c)). It goes on to say that masterplans are one of a number of tools that can help ensure that land is used efficiently and achieve appropriate densities (para 129).

- 3.2 Policy SP 9 of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (adopted October 2023) requires that a comprehensive approach is taken to the development of large or complex sites. This is to be achieved through the production of a masterplan.
- 3.3 The policy notes that, as a minimum, masterplans will set out the vision and objectives for the development; establish the quantum and distribution of land uses; identify sustainable transport linkages and a movement hierarchy; and establish the core design concepts for the site, which will be based on the principles set out in this policy.
- 3.4 The masterplan should be informed by an appropriate evidence base, together with consultation and is to be agreed by the Council prior to determination of any relevant planning application.
- 3.5 A number of criteria are included in Policy SP 9 which set out when a masterplan is required. In other policies (such as SP 14 New Schools) and for certain other sites, the requirement for a masterplan is set out in the policy wording, in the site specific requirements or in the associated policy justification.
- 3.6 This Guidance Note has been prepared to provide guidance and information for landowners, developers, stakeholders and decision makers on the Council's expectations of the content of masterplans, and the masterplanning process.
- 3.7 To ensure that the development outlined in the Local Plan meets the needs of the Borough and results in well designed, high quality, sustainable and well-connected environments, the Council is committed to ensuring that key sites in the Borough as identified in the Local Plan (adopted October 2023) undergo a Masterplanning process.
- 3.8 By outlining principles and requirements for development, a masterplan document sets a template for guiding development and helps ensure sites are delivered in a comprehensive and well-planned manner. The masterplan is not designed to be a prescriptive blueprint for how development will come forward, but provides a clear steer on priorities and principles for the new neighbourhoods, and sets parameters for design proposals that can inform detailed plans and planning applications for the site. As such the masterplanning process comes after the allocation of sites and formulation of strategic policy diagrams in the Local Plan process, but before the planning application stage.
- 3.9 The masterplanning process involves working collaboratively with other statutory authorities, community representatives, local interest groups and the landowner and/or site promoter to develop a vision and strategy for the development of the site. As with previous masterplan steering groups, it is proposed that borough council membership be achieved on a cross party basis. Membership will be agreed following discussions with Group Leaders and the Executive Member for planning.
- 3.10 Masterplans will be produced in accordance with the site specific requirements set out in the draft Local Plan along with all other relevant Local Plan policies. If endorsed by Council members, the masterplan will be a material consideration in planning decisions, and will be a useful reference for statutory consultees, local representatives and community groups.
- 3.11 In line with national and local policy requirements, the Guidance Note sets out further detail of the information to be included in the masterplan, as well as the expected stages of the masterplanning process.
- 3.12 As set out in the Note, there will be some variation in the level of detail and stages of the process due to the relative size and specifics of the site. The Guidance Note is therefore intended to provide the minimum requirements to be met for a masterplan, rather than a rigid template which applies across all sites.
- 3.13 It is also recommended that Cabinet gives delegated powers to the Assistant Director (Planning) in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to update the

Guidance Note from time to time, where this is considered necessary in order to maintain its relevance over time, e.g., the publication of national guidance or changes to national policy, or the experience of working with developers on this issue as sites come forward.

- 3.14 The Approach to Masterplanning Guidance Note is attached as Appendix A.

Implications

4 Legal Implications

- 4.1 Local authorities are legally required to determine planning applications in accordance with the policies of an adopted local plan unless there are material considerations that indicate otherwise (see section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
- 4.2 The Guidance Note will help to ensure development is compliant with Policy SP 9 of the adopted Local Plan and policies which allocate land for major development.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however, the Guidance Note recommends use of Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) - a project management tool which allows all parties to agree timescales, actions and resources for handling major development proposals. PPA's can involve financial agreements between the LPA and the Landowner/Developer whereby the LPA is reimbursed for officer time on the project.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 The Approach to Masterplanning Guidance Note provides useful information for landowners/developers, key stakeholders, community groups and decision makers. Production of masterplans can help improve the quality of development and be a useful tool for officers in determining planning applications.
- 6.2 The Guidance Note should help reduce the risk of inappropriate planning applications coming forward and consequently help to speed up the planning application process, reducing the risk of refusals and subsequent appeals at the planning application stage.

7 Security & Terrorism Implications

- 7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications arising from this report.

8 Procurement Implications

- 8.1 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

9 Climate Change Implications

- 9.1 Many of the proposed major development sites identified in the adopted local plan are greenfield development locations and as such have a number of climate change implications. Development of such sites will use high levels of raw materials and energy, and once complete development will lead to greater energy and water consumption, and waste. Development of new housing and employment sites can lead to increased travel, whilst development of agricultural land will inevitably lead to more hard surfacing which can have implications for surface water runoff and drainage. Details of mitigation measures will be necessary at the planning application stage.
- 9.2 Masterplanning, if done well, can help to ensure development comes forward in a sustainable, well-designed manner. By outlining the approach to masterplanning expected by the Council, the Masterplanning Guidance Note should improve the

masterplanning process for the Borough's key sites and help to ensure delivery of high quality development.

10 Policy Implications

- 10.1 This Guidance Note helps explain how Policy SP 9 and site specific policy allocations in the adopted Local Plan will work in practice and provides guidance to landowners/developers, key stakeholders and members of the community on how the Masterplanning process should take place.

11 Human Resources Implications

- 11.1 The Guidance Note has been prepared by the council's planning policy team. Masterplanning work will be undertaken through the normal work of the planning team, where necessary drawing on the skills of specialists through the use of PPA's.

12 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 12.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's recently agreed Corporate Priority "Homes to be proud of", by seeking high quality homes for all and planning for future homes in the right places.

13 Equalities and Diversity

- 13.1 The Guidance Note does not propose changes to existing Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies. Accordingly, an Equalities Impact Assessment has not been completed.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Approach to Masterplanning Guidance Note