



**WELWYN  
HATFIELD**

Planning Guidance Note:  
Approach to Masterplanning

February 2024



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## Approach to Masterplanning

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## Introduction

- 1.1 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, undergo a masterplanning process.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 Masterplans will be produced in accordance with the site specific requirements set out in the Local Plan along with all other relevant Local Plan policies.

## What is a Masterplan?

- 2.1 A masterplan provides a strategy and development framework which responds to the local and wider needs and issues affecting a site and its surroundings. Masterplans set a vision and implementation strategy for a development. They are distinct from local design guides by focusing on site specific proposals such as the scale and layout of development, mix of uses, transport and green infrastructure. Masterplans can vary in the level of detail they provide but may indicate the intended arrangement of buildings, streets and the public realm. More specific parameters for the site's development may be set out in a design code, which can accompany the overall masterplan. (Planning Practice Guidance; Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 26-006-20191001; Revision date: 01 10 2019)
- 2.2 'A range of other plans and technical reports may be needed alongside a masterplan, to provide supporting evidence and set out related proposals, such as a local character study, landscape assessment, transport assessment and proposals for securing biodiversity net gain. An implementation strategy could also be included, especially where development is expected to be brought forward in a number of phases.' (Planning Practice Guidance; Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 26-006-20191001; Revision date: 01 10 2019)
- 2.3 A 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 development, and sets parameters for design proposals that can inform detailed design codes and planning applications for the site.
- 2.4 If/when endorsed by the Council, a masterplan will be a material consideration for planning decisions relating to the site and a reference to statutory consultees and local stakeholders. It is intended to be a reference tool and steer for land owners, developers and designers preparing planning applications and design codes for the site.

## How can Masterplans be Prepared Most Effectively?

- 3.1 The masterplanning process involves the local planning authority and the landowner and/or site promoter working collaboratively with other statutory authorities, community representatives and local interest groups to develop a vision and strategy for the development of the site. This enables aspirations, opportunities and constraints to be understood and helps clarify design expectations early in the planning process.

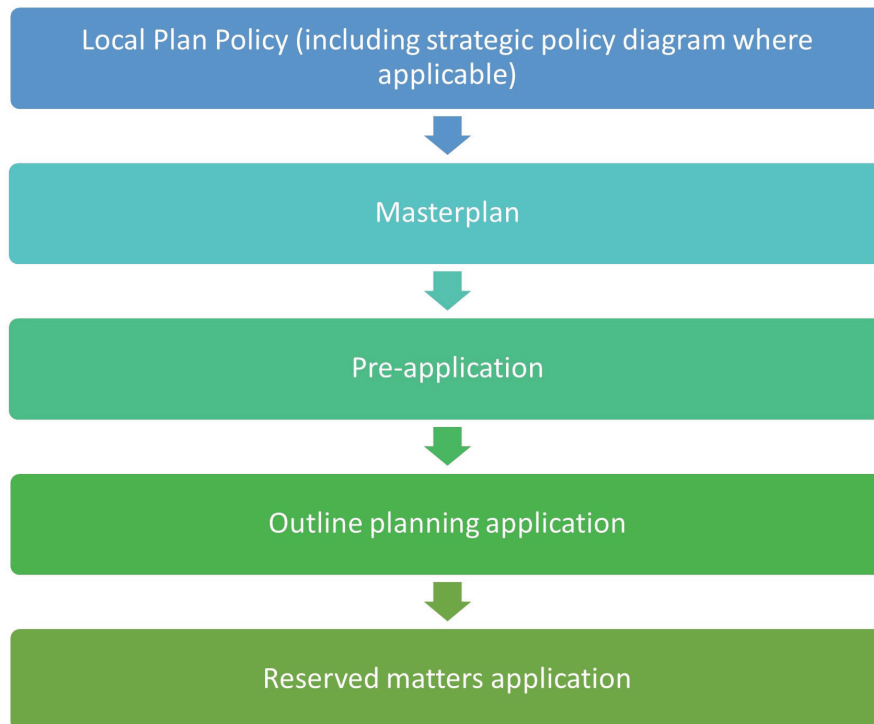
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- 3.2** Masterplans often apply to schemes that are developed over a long time period and so may need to be subject to regular review and be flexible to adapt to changing circumstances.

### Where does Masterplanning sit within the Planning Process?

- 4.1** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023) sets out that policy-making authorities, in conjunction with communities and other authorities should identify suitable locations for development (para 74), 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)).
- 4.2** The NPPF also states that masterplans are one of a number of tools that can help ensure that land is used efficiently and achieve appropriate densities (para 129), whilst National Planning Practice Guidance outlines what masterplans are and how they can be used most effectively (see above).
- 4.3** According to section 38(6), applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise (Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
- 4.4** Policy SP 9 of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (adopted October 2023) requires that a comprehensive approach is taken to the development of large sites. This is to be achieved through the production of a masterplan and agreement by the Council prior to determination of any planning application.
- 4.5** The policy requirement for a masterplan will therefore carry significant weight in the determination of a planning application. If/when the masterplan for a site is endorsed by the Council, the masterplan will be a material planning consideration in the determination of any relevant planning application.
- 4.6** Masterplans can provide a level of certainty to assist the planning application process and should be used to inform any pre-application discussions and form the basis for future planning applications, both outline and reserved matters. Development proposals will need to be in accordance with the endorsed masterplan.

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## When is a Masterplan Required?

**5.1** Policy SP 9, requires a masterplan to be produced in any one (or more) of the following circumstances:

- Proposals of 500 or more dwellings
- Large scale mixed use proposals (at least 500 dwellings and/or at least 10,000sqm of employment floorspace)
- Proposals related to major development (as defined by the NPPF) in the Green Belt
- Sites where there are potentially complex or sensitive issues such as listed buildings, conservation areas or heritage assets, including those with archaeological interest
- Sites in multiple land ownership where coordination between parties will be required to ensure the delivery of a high quality, coherent development
- Mixed-use sites where consideration needs to be given to their integration into the surrounding area

**5.2** Other policies in the Local Plan also make reference to the need for a masterplan. This is in the policy wording for topic-based policies (for example, policy SP 14 New Schools), or is set out in the site-specific requirements for certain sites, or is included in the associated policy justification.

**5.3** The following table summarises the sites in the Local Plan which require a masterplan. This list is included as an indication only, and is not exhaustive. Other sites/ applications for development may also require masterplanning should they meet the relevant policy criteria.

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Site	Reason for Masterplan
<b>SDS1 (North East of Welwyn Garden City)</b>	Required in Policy SP 18; meets the criteria in Policy SP 9
<b>SDS2 (South East of Welwyn Garden City)</b>	Required in Policy SP 19; meets the criteria in Policy SP 9
<b>SDS3 (Broadwater Road West)</b>	Required in Policy SP 17; meets the criteria in Policy SP 9
<b>SDS5 (North West Hatfield)</b>	Required in Policy SP 22; meets the criteria in Policy SP 9
<b>SDS7 (Marshmoor)</b>	Required in Policy SP 23; meets the criteria in Policy SP 9
<b>HS6 (Land at Gosling Sports Park)</b>	Required in the site specific considerations for Policy SADM 21
<b>HS22 (Land West of Brookmans Park Railway Station)</b>	Meets the criteria in Policy SP 9 for a mixed-use site requiring integration into the surrounding area
<b>HS28 (Land South of Northaw Road East)</b>	Required in the site specific considerations for Policy SADM 33
<b>HS37 (High View)</b>	Required in the site specific considerations for Policy SADM 26
<b>Hatfield Town Centre</b>	Required in Policy SP 20 when applying across multiple sites
<b>University of Hertfordshire</b>	Masterplan already produced and referred to in Policy SP 21
<b>Major developed sites in the Green Belt</b>	Required in Policy SADM 34



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## Key Policy Objectives for the Masterplan

- 6.1** Policy SP 9 and the supporting justification for the policy sets out that the masterplan is to be:
- Informed by an appropriate evidence base
  - Informed by consultation
  - Subject to design review
  - Agreed by the Council prior to determination of any planning application
- 6.2** The level of detail required will vary according to the size and nature of the site allocation, and the site specific requirements. In some cases, specific requirements will be set out in the Local Plan in the policy wording or justification. In other cases, a proportionate and balanced view should be taken of the level of detail required.
- 6.3** Similarly, the extent to which engagement/consultation is undertaken will be determined by the size and complexity of the site, and should be decided in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
- 6.4** For smaller sites, a design review could be carried out in house by Council officers in association with an external consultee. For larger sites, submission to a design review panel may be considered more appropriate.
- 6.5** Agreement by the Council could range from Council endorsement of a masterplan as a material planning consideration, to adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

## Minimum Requirements of the Masterplan

- 7.1** Policy SP 9 of the Adopted Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (2023) states that, as a minimum, a masterplan 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;
  - Establish the core design concepts for the site, which will be based on the principles set out in this policy.
- 7.2** Site specific policies identify further masterplan requirements for each site and may include a strategy diagram which should inform masterplanning work. In addition to the minimum requirement identified above, we encourage masterplans to explore topics such as green infrastructure, drainage and SUDS, location and mix of development type, sustainability and climate change and phasing and delivery of development.
- 7.3** Subject to the minimum policy requirements set out in paragraph 6.1 above, and based on a proportionate approach according to the size and complexity of the site, it is expected that a masterplan would include the following:

### Overview/vision for the masterplan

- A summary to set out the overriding vision for the masterplan, what it sets out to achieve and how it is intended to be used.

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## **Site overview and context, including constraints and opportunities**

- A summary of the site and its surroundings, identifying key characteristics and history of the site, any constraints to development and opportunities for improvement/development. The key findings from any technical studies should be included, which provide a robust evidence base for the masterplan.

## **Planning policy context**

- An overview of the relevant policies and guidance at a range of scales (eg. national, local, neighbourhood) that are to be taken account in the production of the masterplan.

## **Design approach and development objectives**

- Setting out the vision and approach, and identification of the key themes and principles which are to underpin the masterplan framework.

## **Summary of consultation/community engagement**

- A summary of any engagement undertaken, the key issues identified, and how these are addressed by the masterplan.

## **Masterplan framework**

- A series of masterplan strategy diagrams which address the key themes and principles identified in the design approach.

## **Illustrative masterplan**

- A summary diagram pulling together the various strands of the masterplan strategy diagrams enabling the various elements to be read together. This should establish the quantum and distribution of land uses and identify sustainable transport linkages and a movement hierarchy. This could include discussion on the various options considered prior to the final masterplan.

## **Design Principles**

- Identification of the core design concepts resulting from the masterplan process which can be used to inform more detailed design or proposals at the planning application stage.

## **Framework for delivery**

- A summary of how the masterplan site is to be delivered including details of any phasing where applicable. Reference should be made to the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

## **Stages of the Masterplanning Process**

- 8.1** The exact stages of the masterplanning process will be agreed with officers at the project brief stage, based on taking a proportionate approach to the size and complexity of the site. However, the following indicative flowchart has been included as an example of the stages that a masterplan may need to pass through from initial project brief to Council endorsement.

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8.2 In particular the flow chart aims to show that masterplanning is an iterative process, based on interaction with a number of stakeholders, such as, the steering group, key consultees at topic meetings, design review, and public engagement, to reach a final agreed masterplan.



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## Further Considerations

### Planning Performance Agreements (PPA)

- 9.1** For the larger and more complex developments the Council, as Local Planning Authority, may agree to provide advice and support to developers under a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA). Further details regarding PPAs can be found in the Planning Performance Agreement Charter (November 2014).

### Design Review

- 9.2** Design Review is an independent and impartial evaluation process in which a panel of experts assess the design of a development proposal. Design review is not intended to design a proposal but offers feedback and observations that will lead to improvement of buildings and places for the benefit of those who will live and work in them. Design review can occur early or later in the masterplanning process and can take place more than once if necessary. Timing and scale of design review will be agreed as part of a PPA. The process of design review can add weight to a proposal by giving decision makers the confidence a scheme has been tested by a team of multi-disciplinary experts independent from the masterplan design team.

### Adoption of the Masterplan

- 9.3** To increase the weight given to the masterplan when determining planning applications, the Council may take the document through Council processes for endorsement or may progress the document to become an SPD. For the latter to occur, approval must be obtained from Council to undertake a six week period for public consultation, the outcome of which may result in further amendments to the document prior to formal adoption. The route taken will be dependent upon what is deemed necessary of each individual site and will be agreed at the start of the masterplan process in the PPA.



