North Hertfordshire District Council: Masterplanning Guidance for Strategic Housing Sites and Significant Development: Updated March 2023

1   North Hertfordshire Masterplan Requirements

1.1   Policy SP9 Design & Sustainability of the adopted Local Plan is the key strategic policy to support place-making and design at a strategic scale The policy requires Strategic Masterplans to be produced for all the Strategic Housing Sites and significant development.

1.2   The supporting text acknowledges that the policy has to apply to a wide range of developments in terms of quantum, scale and complexity. The Policy should be applied in its entirety to Strategic Housing Sites but, for other significant development, any masterplan requirements need to be tailored on a case-by-case basis and identify a proportionate level of masterplan detail to secure design quality.   In this respect the design objectives and masterplan requirements of the policy should act as a starting point in scoping out design issues and masterplan material required.

1.3   The policy sets out a clear set of design criteria that read across to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code.

1.4   The policy also sets out 'typical' masterplan requirements for Strategic Masterplans for large-scale development. This checklist should provide the starting point for scoping out masterplanning requirements for smaller but still significant development in the context of site-specific planning and design issues.

1.5   The following sections sets out how Policy SP9 can be effectively implemented in practice.

1.6   The Strategic Masterplan requirements of Policy SP9 should form the starting point for identifying on a case-by-case basis what information is required.   A proportionate approach will be required that takes into account the scale, quantum and complexity of the site, likely form of delivery and the planning and design issues to be resolved.

2   Project Management & Governance

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                    │ Planning Project    │
                    │      Board          │
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Figure 1 Project Management Structure

Strategic Sites Steering Group (SSSG)

2.1   The role of the Strategic Sites Steering Group is to support the effective implementation and application of Policy SP9 Design & Sustainability to the Strategic Housing Site Policies SP14-SP19 and other significant development sites as they transition from allocations to the masterplanning and planning application process(es).

2.2   This officer group is collectively responsible for applying and implementing Policy SP9 Design and Sustainability in terms of the screening of applicable sites, scoping masterplan requirements, briefs and project plans and establishing and resourcing, when required, project-specific working groups.

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2.3   The Strategic Sites Steering Group, formed by senior planning policy and development management officers, undertakes the following roles.
- To identify development proposals which constitute significant development and identify the master planning and design requirements;
- To scope, establish and agree initial site-specific masterplan briefs;
- To establish project-specific working groups where required and organise the initial 'Inception Meeting';
- Co-ordinate masterplan activity and delivery with landowners and key stakeholders;
- Provide elected member briefings when required;
- Report progress to, and resolve strategic/showstopper issues with, the Project Board

Project Working Groups (PWG)

2.4   These are established as required to provide a focused and project-specific group of district and county officers to drive forward and progress masterplans with the landowner team. Where required, specialist advice on key disciplines (e.g. landscape, ecology) is procured to support the local authorities' officers and recharged through a Planning Performance Agreement (see below).

2.5   A dedicated planning officer acts as project lead/manager. The project manager is the day-to-day contact on the project. They prepare a clear masterplan brief and project plan with wider input from other officers and the landowner team. They are responsible for co-ordinating project activity and for ensuring milestones are met and progress is made within agreed timescales.

2.6   The Project Working Group/s are responsible for the following:
- Ensuring national and Local Plan policy requirements are met at a project-specific level;
- Collectively inputting to and shaping the masterplan proposals to secure an interdisciplinary and integrated approach;
- Providing continuous design quality assessment at different scales;
- Co-ordinating:
  - technical and design advice from county and district councils, statutory agencies and third-party providers;
  - input from community liaison officers, ward councillors and the local community to ensure effective local community engagement;
  - input from wider stakeholders;
- Resolving issues and drive forward delivery and quality place-making/design in accordance with the masterplan brief and project plan;
- Supporting the masterplan process and agree/sign off outputs;
- Providing progress reports to Steering Group;

- Providing ward member briefings when required;
- Seeking Project Board, Cabinet and / or Council approval when required.

Stakeholder & Community Engagement

2.7 Stakeholders will be engaged through at least one, focused workshop event. The Council will assist landowners in undertaking a stakeholder mapping exercise to ensure all relevant groups are consulted. It is expected at least one public engagement event is undertaken to inform the production of the Strategic Masterplan. The nature and timing of engagement will be agreed on a project-by-project basis to respond to the individual project needs.

Strategic Planning Project Board

2.8 In order for the council to effectively and pro-actively shape masterplan proposals, a Strategic Planning Project Board has been established with Senior Leadership from the Council[1].

2.9 The advisory role of the group is to:
- Inform place specific visions for the Strategic Housing sites that support sustainable communities;
- Provide corporate oversight and strategic direction to the implementation of strategic site project delivery;
- Ensure consistency of corporate direction and decision-making from the strategic to the site-specific and over time;
- Ensure effective use of and sufficient resources to support project delivery;
- Receive and consider progress reports and recommendations for approval of Strategic Masterplan documents;
- Agree approval process and timing for Strategic Masterplans;
- Help with the resolution and or co-ordination of strategic issues, including identification and prioritisation of green, social and physical infrastructure and s106 obligations;
- Provide, where applicable, a recommendation to the Service Director: Regulatory on the draft masterplan documentation to be subject to formal public consultation; and
- Provide, where applicable, a recommendation to the Service Director: Regulatory on the final draft Strategic Masterplans and recommending their formal approval by the Council to Cabinet and Full Council (where this applies);

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[1] This Board's remit covers a range of planning matters including (but not limited to) masterplanning and delivery. For the purposes of this guidance, references to the Board are in its capacity as the advisory body on Policy SP9 masterplanning and delivery issues only.

PPAs

2.10 Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) are an effective and commonly used project management tool for large-scale projects and planning applications. Indeed, they have become mainstreamed into planning practice and support decision-making on large-scale and complex sites and supported by national planning policy and guidance.

> *"Applicants and local planning authorities should consider the potential for voluntary planning performance agreements, where this might achieve a faster and more effective application process."*

National Planning Policy Framework (2021), paragraph 46

2.11 PPAs provide a framework within which parties come together to agree how they are going to take development proposals through the planning process to:
- Support collaborative and integrated working
- Establish the scope and task and clarity on the issues to resolve
- Provide planning certainty
- Increase the speed of decision-making
- Support better quality development.

2.12 The Council expect a PPA to be used to support the preparation of pre-application Strategic Masterplans and for other significant development schemes where appropriate. The PPA would be prepared at the initial Inception Meeting and based on the stages of masterplanning in the following section. It may be appropriate to extend the use of PPAs into any subsequent pre-application advice or planning application(s) and / or use a PPA where a masterplan is prepared within the confines of the planning application.

3   North Hertfordshire Masterplanning Process

3.1 The following section sets out the 10 key stages of a recommended collaborative masterplan process.

3.2 The Strategic Masterplan process seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- Collaborative and inter-disciplinary working to support sustainable integrated design and meet Council Corporate objectives;
- A clear site-specific vision and objectives that are locally distinctive and guide the implementation of development over a long period of time in phases;
- Provide a common design framework to secure design quality and allow flexibility of implementation;
- Provide a framework within which to develop further design instruction at subsequent stages of the project (through outline applications, pre-commencement conditions and reserved matters);
- Create an integrated evidence base and determine development capacity;
- Help to co-ordinate cross boundary working where required;
- Support the co-ordination and integration of development;
- Identify and co-ordinate what green, social and physical infrastructure is required (when, at what cost and funding);
- Ensure effective community engagement, including parish councils and build a sense of community ownership;
- Support consultation with stakeholders and their effective input;
- Support a financial viability appraisal and help parties to understand cashflow issues and funding gaps;
- Provide evidence to provide a realistic assessment of delivery through a housing trajectory;
- Assist in assessing and determining planning applications (in addition to site specific and other policies);
- Help inform, support and co-ordinate funding, phasing and delivery requirements;
- Provide planning certainty and speed up planning application process/ delivery through frontloading and early resolution of issues;
- Enable the Council to approve the Strategic Masterplan through:
  - Cabinet and Full Council as a material consideration in any subsequent planning applications; and / or
  - Planning Control Committee as part of the approval of a relevant planning application.

Stage 1
- **Project Initiation**
- Prepare and agree a masterplan brief of masterplan requirements and Council expectations.

Stage 2
- **Inception Meeting**
- Project Working Group to meet with applicant team and agree masterplan brief and project plan to steer the masterplan preparation and process. This meeting would establish the PPA if used.

Stage 3
- **Technical Surveys & Baseline Report**
- PWG meeting to agree baseline report confirming evidence base, constraints and opportunities and vision and place-making objectives

Stage 4
- **Strategic Masterplan Options**
- Stakeholder Workshop
- Preparation of Masterplan Options

Stage 5
- **Design Review**
- Collaborative design workshop

Stage 6
- **Preferred Option**
- Agreement of Preferred option
- PWG meeting

Stage 7
- **Draft Strategic Masterplan**
- Stakeholder Workshop
- PWG meeting

Stage 8
- **Public Consultation**
- . A public consultation exhibition or workshop/drop in event(s)

Stage 9
- **Final Strategic Masterplan**
- After public and stakeholder consultation on the draft a final version would be agreed by the PWG and SSSG

Stage 10
- **Approval of Strategic Masterplan**
- A report would be prepared for Cabinet to recommend the Strategic Masterplan for formal Council approval.

3.3 In practice masterplanning is not a strictly sequential process or a one-size-fits all. Rather it is iterative with the evolution of evidence and design testing throughout the masterplan development. Sometimes these stages can merge together. However, these are the broad stages that are widely recognised by good practice and should be used to tailor the approach to the project needs.

3.4 The final masterplan report should broadly contain the following information which relates to the requirements of Policy SP9 Design & Sustainability.

1. Introduction • Purpose and status of document • Scope of Document • Consultation Undertaken
2. Baseline Evidence, Local Character Analysis and SWOT (Understanding the Place) • Historical development over time • Character and Contextual Analysis (historic, landscape, townscape) and key characteristics of place to inform masterplan design • Constraints and Opportunities (technical and design description and plans) to include Strategic Connectivity, Land Use Destinations and Green Infrastructure Network • Land Use and Social Infrastructure Needs
3. Vision and Place-making Objectives • Vision • Set of placemaking objectives that respond to the site constraints and opportunities and local character (and planning policy requirements) • Summary of option development and testing (including policy compliance, achievement of place-making objectives, viability and deliverability.)
4. Land Use Framework Plan and explanatory text of amount, disposition and land uses • Residential • Education • Sport & Recreation • Mixed use local/neighbourhood centre • Green Space
5. **Green Infrastructure Framework Plan** and explanatory text identifying (as applicable) • Key green spaces, (scale, function and use) • Recreational/POS (Parks & Gardens, semi-natural and amenity) • Greenways • Outdoor and Indoor Sports Provision • Strategic Suds • Play (NEAP, LEAP, MUGA other) • Allotments • On and off-site Pedestrian and cycle routes (commuter and recreational) • Habitat to be retained/enhanced

- Biodiversity Net Gain

6. **Landscape & Biodiversity Framework Plan** and explanatory text identifying (as applicable)
   - A written description of the character and value of landscape and habitat and species baseline conditions.
   - A BNG baseline calculation using the Defra Metric 3.1.
   - A BNG Feasibility Report and Net Gain Plan.
   - Existing landscape, trees and ecological features
   - Landscape features/habitat to be removed
   - Landscape/habitat to be retained
   - Ecological Network Plan
   - Biodiversity Net Gain
   - Structural Landscaping
   - No build areas

7. **Movement Framework Plan** and explanatory text identifying (as applicable)
   - Off-site highway and rights of way improvements
   - Location of mobility hub/s
   - Key access junctions (indicative designs)
   - Primary Route
   - Secondary Routes
   - Public Transport route (on and off site)
   - Pedestrian & Cycle Gateways
   - Pedestrian and cycle routes/crossings on and off site (connections to PROW and GI network)
   - Pedestrian and Cycle Connections to key destinations and surrounding public transport provision
   - Bus priority/ accessibility/circulation
   - Street Design Principles & High-level Specification
   - Transport infrastructure phasing

8. **Urban Design Framework Plan** and strategic design principles with explanatory text identifying (as applicable)
   - Development block structure
   - Density/Key Heights
   - Gateways
   - Landmarks
   - Focal points
   - Key frontages
   - Vistas and key views
   - Edges and Interfaces
   - Public Spaces
   - Character Areas and built form principles

9. **Illustrative Layout**- indicating with further detail and evidence how a high-quality design and layout can be achieved within the parameters and principles agreed in the Masterplan Framework

10. **Sustainability & Energy Framework** identifying site wide and building scale opportunities and standards to minimise carbon emission through

	embodied and operational energy use through fabric performance and renewable technologies
11. Housing Need and Diversification	
	• Description of approach to housing mix, type and tenure, AH, specialist housing, self-build proposals to address needs

12. Infrastructure Delivery Plan
 	
This should identify the strategic infrastructure requirements for the following items where applicable.
 	
    • Off-site highway requirements
    • On site highway requirements
    • Utilities (upgrades, reinforcements);
    • Public transport provision
    • Footways, cycleways and bridleways (and crossings);
    • Early years and childcare, youth
    • Primary Education (and nursery provision)
    • Secondary Education;
    • SEND provision (if required)
    • Health Facilities;
    • Adult Care
    • Waste provision
    • Public open space/green infrastructure, allotments and play provision.
    • Indoor/Outdoor sports provision;
    • Flood risk mitigation, drainage and SUDs infrastructure;
    • Structural planting/landscaping mitigation;
    • Ecological mitigation
    • Biodiversity Net Gain
    • Sustainability and Low Carbon Infrastructure/Measures.
    • Noise /air mitigation; and
    • Other community facilities identified as necessary.
    • Other notable abnormals which could affect viability
 	
Stewardship and management principles.
Indicative phasing plan.	