

Revised Masterplan and Development Framework Procedure for Local Plan Development Allocations to 2041 – October 2025

1. Introduction

- 1.1 To help ensure well-designed, high quality, sustainable developments, the Council will require certain growth sites allocated in the Local Plan to go through a masterplan/development framework process. The principles in this procedure can also be applied to planning applications for non-allocated sites.
- 1.2 The 2025 update seeks to shorten the previous masterplan process where it is legitimate to do so and without compromising on the quality of the development. The previous procedure had one process for all developments requiring a masterplan. This update has identified three possible processes; each proportionate to the complexity and scale of proposed developments. The 2025 updated procedure supersedes previous masterplanning and development framework processes however, previously approved masterplans are still valid.

Objectives

- Speed up process and avoid duplication
 - Consultation level to be more proportionate to masterplan type
 - Accelerate delivery to improve future five-year housing land supply
 - To focus on uses, strategic movement/access, delivery and phasing rather than detail
 - Masterplan type to be more bespoke to development site
- 1.3 This procedure sets out three routes for sites that require a masterplan/development framework. The Council will select the required route for the developer/promoter on a case-by-case basis and the Council Director for Sustainable Communities has discretion to change the process type if necessary.

Routes

- 1) Strategic Development Framework Process - Sites that for example, are large and strategic in nature, require major infrastructure and on-site constraint mitigation, where the development framework must reflect sufficient detail.
- 2) Masterplan/Development Framework Process - Sites which are for example, less strategic in nature, do not require major infrastructure and are not heavily constrained as identified in the Local Plan allocation process

- 3) Planning/Site Brief - Prepared by the council for sites which are small, less constrained and more easily delivered.
- 1.4 A masterplan/development framework will not be necessary for solely employment sites unless major infrastructure, constraints or phasing require more up-front detail. They may also be required for other long-term projects proposing a number of linked developments for different time scales and the Council is able to request a masterplan/development framework prior to the submission of future planning applications.
- 1.5 This procedure is necessary to guide masterplan/development framework preparation and approval. The procedure sets out the obligations on the part of both the developer/promoter and the Council, the extent of engagement with stakeholders and the public and, once finalised, the status of each document. All masterplans/development frameworks should address the principles set out within the relevant site policy in the Local Plan.
- 1.6 Following approval of a masterplan/development framework, further detailed design work to cover aspects such as architecture and materials is expected to be undertaken through the normal pre-application planning process. Planning applications submitted alongside or subsequent to a masterplan/development framework are expected to reflect overlapping content and an outline or full planning application for sites that require a masterplan/development framework can only be approved once a masterplan/development framework has been approved.
- 1.7 The three largest Strategic Growth Sites in the adopted and new Local Plan will follow a strategic development framework with scope for bespoke practices. These sites are described below:
- 1.8 Strategic Growth Site 1a (Chelmer Waterside Allocations) – This site is a large brownfield Strategic Growth Site with complex land assembly and operational and utility issues which other sites do not have. However, the initial stages have been started by the City Council as the landowner to assist in the marketing of the site. In October of 2021 the Council approved a [development framework for Chelmer Waterside](#).
- 1.9 Strategic Growth Site 6 (Northeast Chelmsford) – This site is a government endorsed Garden Community which will be delivered within and beyond the plan period. The site has a significantly different delivery structure than other sites, with a Delivery Board, Steering Group and various working groups in place, including a dedicated community engagement group. In January of 2023 a development framework for Chelmsford Garden Community was approved by the Council.
- 1.10 Strategic Growth Site 16a (Hammonds Farm – East Chelmsford Garden Community) – This site is being brought forward within the 2025 Local Plan Review as a new Garden Community. The site is expected to deliver roughly 4500 homes as well as key infrastructure and place making, with the full delivery of this site is expected beyond the plan period. This site is currently undergoing the development framework process and is yet to have an approved development framework document.
- 1.11 Each process is detailed below. First, Strategic Development Framework Process. Second, the Masterplan/Development Framework process. Third, the Planning/Site Brief process.

2. Processes

Route 1: Strategic Development Framework Process (Strategic Masterplan)

Estimated duration: 9 to 12 months

Stage 0

Developer/promoter: notifies the Council that they would like to enter into the strategic development framework process.

Council: produces a framework of their own setting out what information and analysis should be included in the strategic development framework for the site. This is required to be used as a basis for Stage 1, the submission of a development framework pre-enquiry.

Steps

- This stage triggers the process of a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA). This will be tailored to the scale and complexity of the site. Where a site includes multiple parcels of land, it is required that the developer/promoter of each parcel is signed up to the agreement. However, the obligations of the individual developer/promoter will be subject to the availability of the individual sites. This allows sites to come forward independently as they become available, but development framework principles can still be established.
- The PPA will cover all the stages of the development framework, from the initial notification through to approval of the development framework by the Council. It will not include any subsequent pre-application discussions/planning applications following approval of a development framework as this will be covered by a separate pre-application PPA.
- The PPA will agree the scope, timescale, consultation and engagement approach and fee of the development framework process.

Sites requiring masterplans/development frameworks

- Strategic Growth Site 1b – Former St Peters College Approved June 2022
- Strategic Growth Site 2 – West Chelmsford (Warren Farm) Approved January 2021
- Strategic Growth Site 3a – East Chelmsford (Manor Farm) Approved November 2021
- Strategic Growth Site 3b – East Chelmsford – Land North of Maldon Road (Employment) (Joint 3a-3d) Approved June 2021

- Strategic Growth Site 3c – East Chelmsford – Land North of Maldon Road (Joint 3a-3d) Approved June 2021
- Growth Site 3d – East Chelmsford – Land North of Maldon Road (Residential) (Joint 3a-3d) Approved June 2021
- Strategy Growth Site 7a – Great Leighs – land at Moulsham Hall (Joint 7a-7c)
- Strategy Growth Site 7b – Land East of London Road (Joint 7a-7c)
- Strategy Growth Site 7c – Land North and South of Banters Land (Joint 7a-7c)
- Strategy Growth Site 8 – North of Broomfield Approved September 2020
- Strategy Growth Site 10 – North of South Woodham Ferrers Approved March 2021

Some of the above sites have existing masterplans/design briefs. The Council will review and consider whether they are relevant and/or still up-to-date to determine whether a further development framework is required.

Stage 1

Developer/promoter: submits development framework pre-application enquiry to the Council.

Council: registers entry. At this stage the documents are subject to a focused consultation (see below).

The developer/promoter and Council engage in pre-application negotiations. These should include but are not limited to:

- requiring the development area to reflect the adopted Policies Map
- requiring the framework to reflect the development principles set out in the Strategy Growth Site Policy for the area
- supporting evidence required to be supplied by the site promotor/developer. This may include transport modelling, Flood Risk Assessment, Habitats Regulations Assessment and Landscape Assessment
- where appropriate, review existing relevant evidence or guidance relating to the site and its context (for example Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), ‘made’ Neighbourhood Plans and existing Village Design Statements (VDSs).

Why is the development framework only being subject to consultation with stakeholders at stage 1?

The purpose of pre-application negotiations is to ensure the development framework responds to the vision and principles for the site to ensure the delivery of the Spatial Strategy. Site promoters may submit an initial development framework that is not consistent with the Spatial Strategy and needs substantial reworking.

Purpose of Development Frameworks

Development frameworks are high level documents setting out the Council's strategic approach to development. They will be used to create excellent places to live, work and enjoy that respond to the unique site circumstances. The framework must ensure certainty over key outcomes yet remain adaptable to allow innovation in design and delivery.

As a minimum full development frameworks should include:

- A vision for the new place
- Site and context analysis e.g. surrounding landscape, heritage, contamination, flood risk, important views, etc
- Density and character
- Movement structure e.g. walking, cycling, public transport, vehicle circulation
- Infrastructure strategy
- Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS) Strategy
- A framework for landscape, spaces and public realm
- Land use and developable areas
- Building heights
- Layout Principles
- Delivery and phasing

In addition, developers/applicants are strongly encouraged to demonstrate how they will incorporate other place making and sustainable living objectives in the new Local Plan by incorporating:

- LiveWell initiatives across the development
- Opportunities for community involvement in the long-term management and stewardship of the new development
- Achieving a significant modal shift to active and sustainable modes of travel

The level of detail will reflect the scale of the site and development.

Stage 2

Developer/promoter: submits a development framework

Council: Documents are publicly available in accordance with consultation procedures (see below)

Consultation procedure

- Prior to the development framework being publicly available, the developer/promoter and the Council will agree the number, dates and location of public exhibitions.

- The developer/promoter is responsible for the exhibitions. They will direct attendees to submit any comments via the Council's website.
- Engagement with relevant stakeholders to be led by the site developer/promotor. This should include statutory bodies, service providers and Essex Highways.
- The Council to produce site notices and neighbour notifications (the extent of notification area to be agreed) advising of public exhibition dates and locations and how to submit comments on the development framework.
- The Council will consult Local Ward Members, the Cabinet Member for Greener Chelmsford, local neighbourhood groups, Parish/Town Councils etc.

Design Review process

Design Review process to occur prior to the submission of a planning application. The following sites will be subject to a Design Review to be reported to the Chelmsford Policy Board:

- SGS3a – East Chelmsford (Manor Farm), 3b – East Chelmsford – Land North of Maldon Road (Employment), 3c – East Chelmsford – Land South of Maldon Road & 3d – East Chelmsford – Land North of Maldon Road (Residential)
- SGS7 – 7a - Great Leighs – Land at Moulsham Hall, 7b – Great Leighs – Land East of London Road, 7c – Great Leighs – Land North and South of Banters Lane
- SGS6 – Land North of Broomfield
- SGS10 – North of South Woodham Ferrers

Developer: Amendments made to development framework following consultation, design review, and discussions with the Council and relevant stakeholders

Council:

- Representations are summarised and main issues identified
- Consultation report published detailing;
 - Level of responses
 - Type of comments received
 - Amendments made to reflect community involvement
- Development framework and consultation report to be considered by Chelmsford Policy Board before Cabinet approval
- Development framework to be approved at Cabinet as Council approved guidance

In most circumstances only one public consultation will be necessary. However, if significant changes are required following the first consultation, it is likely that a second consultation is needed to ensure the public have the opportunity to comment. The Council will make an assessment on a site by site basis.

Stage 3

Council:

- Consultation report published detailing:
 - Level of responses
 - Type of comments received
 - Amendments made to the masterplan to reflect - community involvement
- Masterplan and consultation report to be considered by Chelmsford Policy Board before Cabinet approval
- Masterplan to be approved at Cabinet as Council approved guidance

Route 2: Masterplan/Development Framework

Estimated duration: 13 weeks

Stage 0

Developer/promoter: notifies the Council of intention to submit a masterplan/development framework

Council: produces a development framework of its own outlining information requirements and evidence expectations. The framework is proportionate to the scale and nature of the development. Council confirms supporting evidence required to be supplied by the site promotor/developer including if any existing Local Plan evidence/material can be used.

Steps

- At this stage the developer/promoter and the Council enter into a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA).
- The PPA will agree the scope, timescale, consultation and engagement approach and fee of the masterplan/development framework process.
- The PPA will cover all the stages of the masterplan/development framework. It will not include any subsequent pre-application discussions/planning applications following approval of a masterplan/development framework.

Stage 1

Developer: prepares masterplan/development framework containing the information listed below. This document should be concise and focused.

Council: provides early feedback on draft content to ensure alignment with allocation policy and PPA, and advises on any statutory consultees that must be involved at this stage.

Purpose of a faster process

This process ensures that key placemaking principles are established in advance of planning applications for smaller sites, expected to be delivered in the early years of the plan period, without unnecessary delay. It provides proportionate guidance aligned with the scale and complexity of the site while maintaining design quality and policy compliance.

As a minimum a masterplan/development framework should include:

- A short statement of vision for the development and any key placemaking principles
- An annotated plan showing boundaries, constraints, and opportunities
- A high-level plan showing movement and access for the site
- A block plan showing intended layout of uses and land mix
- Location and type of drainage features
- A plan to show required infrastructure and delivery phases if required
- Proposed density and character

Additionally

Briefly outline where relevant the incorporation of sustainable construction methods, energy efficiency and accordance with the Council's Making Places Supplementary Planning Document within the masterplan/development framework as a whole.

Stage 2

Developer/promoter: submits a development framework for public and targeted consultation

Council: publishes documents in accordance with consultation procedures.

Consultation procedure

- Prior to the masterplan/development framework being publicly available, the developer/promoter and the Council will agree the number, dates and location of public exhibitions.
- The developer/promoter is responsible for the exhibitions. They will direct attendees to submit any comments via the Council's website.
- Engagement with relevant stakeholders to be led by the site developer/promotor. This should include statutory bodies, service providers and Essex Highways.
- The Council to produce site notices and neighbour notifications (the extent of notification area to be agreed) advising of public exhibition dates and locations and how to submit comments on the development framework.
- The Council will consult Local Ward Members, the Cabinet Member for Greener Chelmsford, local neighbourhood groups, Parish/Town Councils etc.

The level of consultation required will be agreed within the PPA at stage 0 and will be proportionate to the scale and complexity of development.

In most circumstances only one public consultation will be necessary. However, if significant changes are required following the first consultation, it is likely that a second consultation is needed to ensure the public have the opportunity to comment. The Council will make an assessment on a site by site basis.

Stage 3

Developer: Submits final masterplan/development framework, and outline or full application with the approved masterplan as supporting material.

Council: The Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Greener Chelmsford approves the masterplan/development framework as Council guidance.

Considers the approved masterplan as a material consideration in decision-making.

Route 3: Planning/Site Brief

Estimated duration: 8 weeks

Stage 0

Developer/promoter: notifies the Council of intent to develop a site.

Council: The council and developer/promoter enter into a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA). The PPA will agree the scope, timescale and cost of the planning/site brief.

Stage 1

The council produces a planning/site brief according to the PPA and constraints and opportunities of the site.

Stage 2

The developer incorporates the planning/site brief into future planning applications.

The Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Greener Chelmsford approves the planning/site brief as Council guidance.

3. Status of masterplans/development frameworks/planning briefs

- 3.1 The requirement to undertake the masterplans are set out relevant site allocation policies within the Local Plan which also contain the masterplanning principles to be addressed. Therefore, approved masterplans will be a significant material consideration alongside the Local Plan to ensure Strategic Growth Sites and Growth Sites deliver the Spatial Strategy.
- 3.2 Approved masterplans/development frameworks/planning briefs will be approved as Council guidance and be significant material considerations in decision-making but will not form part of the statutory development plan. They will not be subject to Independent Examination.
- 3.3 Approved masterplans/development frameworks/planning briefs will form part of planning application submissions and be a key reference document. However, these documents and the processes do not override statutory requirements of the planning application process, specifically consultation to statutory consultees and members of the public.