



Chelmsford Policy Board

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Masterplan Procedure Review

Report by:

Director of Sustainable Communities

Officer Contact:

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Purpose

To present the updated Masterplan Procedure and seek the Board's approval to recommend to Cabinet to approve and publish the document as presented in Appendix 1.

Recommendations

That the Board approve the updated Masterplan Procedure and recommend to Cabinet to approve and publish the document as presented in Appendix 1.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report outlines the changes and rationale for updating the Masterplan Procedure. The Updated Masterplan Procedure (November 2025) is appended as Appendix 1.

2. Background

- 2.1. Masterplans are a development management tool to ensure well-designed, high quality, sustainable developments. Masterplans are currently required by Chelmsford City Council (CCC) for certain sites to provide more detail on the priorities and principles for development prior to relevant outline and full planning applications. The term is considered generic within planning, in the context of this report it covers a range of processes from strategic frameworks to planning key principles of development.
- 2.2. There is not a legal requirement for masterplans or a masterplan procedure within national policy or guidance. However, masterplans are referenced within the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (NPPF) in Chapters: 5 – Delivering a sufficient supply of homes and 11 – Making effective use of land.
- 2.3. It is at the discretion of the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to request masterplans and to curate a procedure for developers and site promoters. Chelmsford City Council chooses to require masterplans to ensure high-quality development that is in line with site specific policies or the wider spatial strategy. Section 1 of the updated procedure provides further context to the rationale for masterplanning.

3. Main changes and rationale

- 3.1. CCC has used a masterplan procedure from 2018 and it has only been updated once, in March of 2019. Since, the procedure has remained unchanged despite increased government housing targets and greater emphasis on a five-year housing land supply. Updating the masterplan procedure assists in trying to avoid the consequences of failing to meet both housing targets and five-year supply demands.
- 3.2. The current procedure requires developers and promoters to agree significant detail for the scheme with the Council, consult with the public via targeted engagement and one or more formal public consultations, and present a final masterplan for consideration by Chelmsford Policy Board and Cabinet approval.
- 3.3. The Updated Masterplan Procedure seeks to use the same level of detail, consultation and sign-off from the previous procedure (2019) only for large and complex sites. Where the proposed development is smaller in scale and particularly deliverable two other routes will be utilised. In total there would be three routes. The aim of the two additional routes is to add proportionality and flexibility to the procedure which is currently restricted with one lengthy route.
- 3.4. The three masterplan routes are as follows and can be found in section 2 of the updated procedure in Appendix 1:

- 1) For large and technical schemes, a Strategic Development Framework which is like-for-like with the current procedure
 - 2) For less strategic sites with less scope for master planning a Masterplan/Development Framework with proportionate detail to the proposed development
 - 3) Lastly for small, unconstrained and deliverable sites a Site Brief is prepared by the Council for the developer, identifying constraints and opportunities.
- 3.5. Additionally, within sections 1.7-1.10 of the updated procedure, three sites are listed that require bespoke masterplanning techniques. These sites will follow the 'Strategic Development Framework' but may require, for example, governance boards within the masterplan process because of their complexity and scale.
- 3.6. Route 1 is unchanged from the existing Masterplan procedure apart from a name change to 'Strategic Development Framework'. It retains a high degree of public consultation and Policy Board consideration and Cabinet approval.
- 3.7. Route 2 retains one round of public consultation like route 1 but, would have Director sign off in consultation with the Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford and requires focused not comprehensive detail. The required detail is listed after stage one of route 2 in the appended procedure.
- 3.8. Route 3 would not require public consultation and would utilise delegated decision making to be proportionate to the scale of development and save time.
- 3.9. Additionally, timeframes for each route have been added. This decision reflects both the need to accelerate delivery and in response to feedback from developers who prefer a degree of certainty. The timeframes can be found at the header for each masterplan route within the updated procedure.
- 3.10. The procedure is underpinned by the Council selecting the masterplan route for each site on a case-by-case basis within the emerging Local Plan and reserving the right to change the masterplan route for each site. Within the emerging Local Plan site specific masterplan requirements are set out within each respective site policy.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. The updated Masterplan Procedure addresses the need to accelerate housing delivery while maintaining a focus on quality and key masterplanning principles. The updated procedure gives flexibility proportionate to the scale and complexity of the proposed development.

4.2. The draft Masterplan Procedure attached at Appendix 1 is recommended to be published for use within Development Management and in line with the Local Plan Review.

List of appendices:

Appendix 1 – 2025 Updated Masterplan Procedure

Background Documents:

[Masterplan procedure update 2019](#)

[National Planning Policy Framework - GOV.UK](#)

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional:

The Masterplan Procedure would be applicable to allocated sites and planning applications.

Financial:

Each masterplan route requires a fee to be paid to the Council. This is agreed upon at the Planning Performance Agreement stage for options 1 & 2 and is set by the Council for option 3.

Potential impact on climate change and the environment:

None.

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030:

None.

Personnel:

There are no personnel issues arising from this report.

Risk Management:

None.

Equality and Diversity:

An Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the Council's emerging Local Plan.

Health and Safety:

There are no Health and Safety concerns arising from this report.

Digital:

There are no digital issues arising from this report.

Other:

None.

Consultees:

CCC – Development Management

CCC – Economic Development and Implementation Team

Our Chelmsford, Our Plan:

The above report relates to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:

Promoting sustainable and environmentally responsible growth to stimulate a vibrant, balanced economy, a fairer society and provide more homes of all types.

Creating a distinctive sense of place, making the area more attractive, promoting its green credentials, ensuring that people and communities are safe.

Bringing people together and working in partnership to encourage healthy, active lives, building stronger, more resilient communities so that people feel proud to live, work and study in the area.

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

Adopted Local Plan 2013-2036, Pre-Submission Local Plan 2022-2036, Statement of Community Involvement (2020) and Statement of Community Involvement – Consultation Draft (September 2025 update).

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

1) Strategic Development Framework Process (Strategic Masterplan): Estimated duration 9 – 12 Months	
Stage 0	
Developer	Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developer/promoter notifies the Council that they would like to enter into the strategic development framework process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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

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

Council

- Enquiry is registered by the Council. 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	Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developer/promoter submits a development framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents are publicly available in accordance with consultation procedures (see below)
Consultation procedure	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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	Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amendments made to development framework following consultation, design review, and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representations are summarised and main issues identified
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation report published detailing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Level of responses - Type of comments received

discussions with the Council and relevant stakeholders	- 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation report published detailing; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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

2) Masterplan/Development Framework	
Estimated duration: 13 weeks	
Stage 0	
Developer	Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developer/promoter notifies the Council of intention to submit a masterplan/development framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepares masterplan/development framework containing the information listed below This document should be concise and focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides early feedback on draft content to ensure alignment with allocation policy and PPA. Council advises on any statutory consultees that must be involved at this stage.
Purpose of a faster process:	
<p>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.</p>	

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

Council

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

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

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	Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submits final masterplan/development framework. Submits outline or full application with the approved masterplan as supporting material. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approves masterplan/development framework via Cabinet Member and Director approval. Considers the approved masterplan as a material consideration in decision-making.

3) Planning/Site Brief	
Estimated duration: 8 weeks	
Stage 0	
Developer	Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The developer/promoter notifies the Council of intent to develop a site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	
Council	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council produces a planning/site brief according to the PPA and constraints and opportunities of the site. 	
Stage 2	
Developer	Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The developer incorporates the planning/site brief into future planning applications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council approves the planning/site brief as guidance via delegated decision.

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.