

Masterplan protocol and guidance

March 2025

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Masterplans are an essential tool in planning proposals for development with the local communities. Creating a masterplan for strategic and major sites requires a comprehensive set of criteria to ensure that development is sustainable, cohesive, and aligns with the values of the local community and the development plan.
- 1.2. To ensure that development results in well-designed, high quality, sustainable and well-connected environments, the council is committed to ensuring that key sites undergo the masterplan process.
- 1.3. Planning Practice Guidance on Design sets out the many benefits to following a masterplan approach. These include the formation of a collaborative approach between developers, the local community and the planning authority, establishing a vision and design expectations at an early stage in the planning process, and understanding infrastructure requirements.
- 1.4. The purpose of this document is to provide a protocol and guidance on the requirements and stages to be undertaken when preparing a masterplan. The document relates to sites where it has been identified a masterplan is required in a site allocation policy within the West Suffolk Local Plan 2041 or on any site where a masterplan is required by virtue of the site's size, location or proposed mix of uses.
- 1.5. All consultation and engagement referred to in this protocol should be undertaken in accordance with the council's adopted [Statement of Community Involvement\(SCI\)](#).
- 1.6. For large and /or complex developments, the council supports the preparation of Planning Performance Agreements (PPA) as part of the masterplan process. A PPA is voluntary agreement between the council and developers or site promoters that sets out a clear framework for managing the planning process. It sets out key milestones, responsibilities, and timelines to ensure a collaborative and efficient approach to decision-taking. As part of the masterplan process, the council encourages developers or site promoters to engage with the council at earliest stage to discuss and agree on a PPA. This agreement will form an integral part of the masterplan process, starting from its inception, and will help to ensure transparency, effective communication, and timely progression of the development.

Transitional Arrangements

- 1.7. A transitional arrangement for guidance used in the preparation of masterplans will remain in place until the adoption of the West Suffolk Local Plan 2041 in 2025:

1. Masterplans commenced in liaison with the local planning authority before the publication of this protocol will continue to follow the [April 2019 Masterplan Protocol](#)

2. Masterplans which commence after the publication of this protocol must comply with this updated Protocol and Guidance.

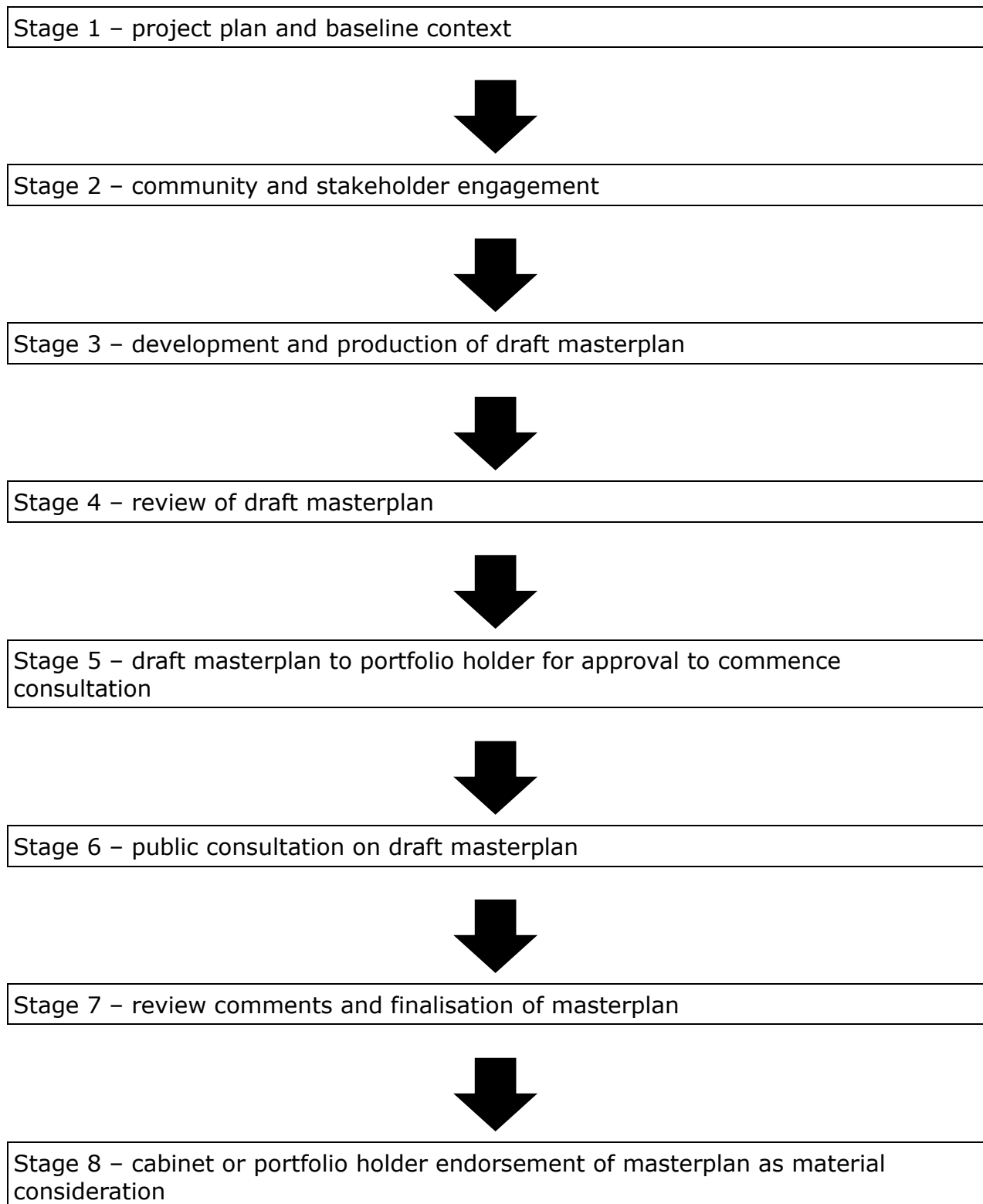
Definition of a masterplan

- 1.8. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides the following definition of a masterplan:

"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. 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)."

- 1.9. Once a masterplan is approved, and in accordance with the processes outlined in Figure 1, it will become a material consideration in determining planning application(s) on the site it relates to. Where appropriate, West Suffolk Council may adopt approved masterplans as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), or any subsequent document, in line with the Town and Country Planning (Local Plan) (England) Regulations 2012. This ensures masterplans are aligned with statutory regulations and provide additional weight in planning decisions.
- 1.10. This protocol sets out further detail to assist in the preparation of masterplans, setting out a number of distinct stages that are set out in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Stages in a masterplan process



2. Stage 1 – Project plan and baseline context

- 2.1. A project plan will need to be prepared by the site promoter or developer, in consultation with the council, outlining the key stages as set out in Figure 1 of this protocol and guidance. This should be a live document and updated as required through the masterplan preparation with key dates agreed between all parties.
- 2.2. Following the agreement of the project plan, the first stage in the masterplan process is for a detailed site specific and surrounding context assessment to be undertaken. This exercise needs to identify constraints and opportunities, local context and character, allocation policy requirements and key considerations.
- 2.3. Further information is set out in the masterplan policy of the West Suffolk Local Plan 2041 and its accompanying appendix, which outlines the detailed requirements for masterplans.

3. Stage 2 – Community and stakeholder engagement

- 3.1. During the preparation of a masterplan, community engagement with local residents, business owners and other stakeholders is required to ensure these bodies are involved in the design development from the early stages through to formal public consultation.
- 3.2. Site promoters will be responsible for undertaking agreed forms of consultation which must be in accordance with the council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
- 3.3. The key principles that should be followed for all types of masterplan engagement are set out below:
 - The site promoter or developer is responsible for all community engagement up to the preparation of the consultation draft masterplan.
 - The scope, type and location and timings of any engagement must be agreed in advance with the local planning authority (LPA) through the preparation of an engagement plan which should accord with the Council's SCI. This will ensure effective coordination and ensure that the LPA can support engagement at the appropriate times.
 - Any consultation materials should be agreed with the LPA in advance.
 - The advertising of any engagement events should be jointly branded as West Suffolk Council and the site promoter and target the key audience and stakeholders.
 - The purpose of each engagement activity should be made clear in terms of opportunities for feedback and how this will be used in the preparation of the masterplan.
 - The accessibility of all engagement must be a key consideration both through written communication and the location of any physical events (see also Appendix A).
 - Any physical events should be held in close proximity to the local community affected by the proposals and the venue cost should be covered by the site promoter.

What the local planning authority will do to support the masterplan engagement process:

- Provide support in terms of identifying the statutory bodies that should be consulted at both early stages in the process and during the draft masterplan consultation.
- Host the draft masterplan consultation on the council's public consultation portal, collate feedback and provide this to the site promoter.
- Provide staff support at engagement events as appropriate.

Engagement events

- 3.4. As a minimum two community engagement events and one stakeholder engagement event should take place to inform the masterplan.

- 3.5. The first engagement events should take place after the baseline stage to ensure local residents, business owners and other stakeholders are involved in design development. The second community engagement event should be linked to the draft masterplan consultation (see stage 6).
- 3.6. The community events should be held at a public venue, while the stakeholder event can either be held in person or virtually.
- 3.7. A register of attendees should be kept for each event.

Community engagement

- 3.8. It is anticipated that the community events will take the form of an exhibition or workshop at a publicly accessible venue such as a village hall or community centre. The community consultation events should be designed to reflect the existing facilities and diverse population of the local area, ensuring that all voices are heard. Inclusive events will ensure that the outcomes reflect the needs and expectations of the entire community, fostering a sense of belonging and delivering better results for everyone.
- 3.9. Care must be taken to ensure that the scope and purpose of public engagement is clearly expressed in order to avoid confusion or 'consultation fatigue' within the local community. The framework for engaging stakeholders throughout the masterplan process should be agreed and set out in the engagement plan.

Stakeholder engagement

- 3.10. Engagement with key stakeholders will be essential from the baseline stage onwards and beyond to ensure the masterplan is policy compliant. An early workshop with stakeholders will help set the parameters for design and help inform the preparation of the draft masterplan.

Record of engagement

- 3.11. The approaches taken to community engagement should be set out in the draft masterplan to demonstrate design development is in line with community and stakeholder involvement.

4. Stage 3 – Development and production of draft masterplan

- 4.1. Following the first community and stakeholder engagement sessions and the assessment of outcomes, the site promoter or developer will commence the preparation of the masterplan document. The draft masterplan must align with the provisions of the Council's adopted Local Plan. Prior to the adoption of the West Suffolk Local Plan 2041, and where a masterplan relates to a site allocation within it, the masterplan should accord with the provisions of the allocation policy as modified. Where the development site is located within a designated neighbourhood area, the masterplan must be consistent with and support the objectives of Made Neighbourhood Plans and those plans at an advanced stage of preparation.
- 4.2. This stage of the process will require further communication with the council as necessary.

Document format and detail

- 4.3. The masterplan should consist of a host document which provides the vision, principles and design development of a site. The masterplan document should include a location plan, baseline information, constraints, opportunity mapping and series of parameter plans and an illustrative masterplan, which conveys the requirements set out below. Refer to Appendix A of this document for further information.
- 4.4. The draft masterplan should be prepared to reflect on the latest National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), including:
- Section 2: Achieving sustainable development
 - Section 3: Plan-making
 - Section 8: Promoting healthy and safe communities, and
 - Section 12: Achieving well-designed places
- 4.5. This will ensure that the draft masterplan meets national standards and support the needs of the local area.
- 4.6. Suffolk Design is a collaboration between all District Councils and the County Council in Suffolk. It aims to ensure the delivery of well-designed places that meet the needs of residents, benefit visitors, and protect the environment.
- 4.7. There is a central hub of national, regional, and local design resources at [Home | Suffolk Design | England](#) that will be useful tools during the masterplan preparation process.
- 4.8. The [National Planning Policy Framework](#), [National Design Guide](#) and West Suffolk local plan policies will also be an essential tool in establishing what is appropriate and required at the masterplan stage, for example in terms of sustainability measures, biodiversity and areas required for sustainable drainage systems (SuDs).

- 4.9. The masterplan document should be produced in accordance with the council's corporate accessibility and style guidelines which can be viewed at Appendix A. Based on a proportionate approach according to the size and complexity of the site, it is expected that, where appropriate, a masterplan would include the following:

Vision and principles

- A masterplan should be accompanied by a clear and definitive vision for the site. This can be portrayed as a clear vision statement outlining what the masterplan will set out to achieve for the site and surrounding community.
- A series of principles should be presented as part of the masterplan approach. The principles should provide definitive topic-based approaches which can be carried through the design process ensuring core values and approaches are maintained and delivered. These can be focused on sustainability targets, environmental goals, or design quality aspirations.

Land use and layout

- Provide a balanced mix of residential, commercial, recreational, and green spaces to reflect local needs and policy requirements.
- Logical transitions between different land uses, ensuring coordination and coherence.
- Diverse housing types to accommodate various income levels and demographics.
- Spaces for community facilities and services to reflect local needs and policy requirements.

Movement and accessibility

- Prioritise pedestrian and cycle routes, ensuring safe and convenient movement for all users and ensuring appropriate walking distances to public transport infrastructure.
- Promotion of sustainable transportation options, such as pedestrian pathways, cycling paths, and public transit connectivity.
- Provide efficient public transport solutions, integrated with the wider transport network.
- Ensure vehicular access without compromising pedestrian safety and comfort.

Green and blue infrastructure

- Green infrastructure approach to steer site design, ensuring existing corridors and habitats steer layout. Opportunities for wider connectivity should be demonstrated as part of the design process.
- Designate areas for public spaces, open spaces, play, and other communal spaces in line with local need and policy.
- Water conservation and sustainable drainage systems to be integrated and fully considered at the masterplan stage.

Context and character

- Identify and integrate local heritage assets and historically significant sites.
- Reflect the local settlement pattern, architectural style, materials, and cultural elements in the design.

Sustainability, resilience and climate change

- Consideration and integration of green and renewable energy sources.
- Design principles and measures to be taken to minimise climate change risks.

Infrastructure and facilities

- Adequate provision for essential facilities such as schools, healthcare, and community centres to be considered as part of the local need and policy requirements.
- Clear planning for utilities, including water, electricity, fibreoptic, and waste management.

Phasing and implementation

- Plans to provide a clear phasing proposal for development taking into consideration landownership and build out rates.
- Periodic review mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of the masterplan and make necessary adjustments. Ensure that the masterplan can adapt to future changes, including technological advancements, demographic shifts, and unforeseen challenges.

5. Stage 4 - Review of draft masterplan

- 5.1. The draft masterplan will be reviewed by the council on at least one occasion. The milestones and estimated dates for this should be set out in the project plan, setting out clear expectations of response times so that work can be programmed effectively.
- 5.2. In some cases, it may be necessary to refer the masterplan to the Suffolk Design Review Panel, depending on the nature of the issues and matters that arise.

6. Stage 5 - Draft masterplan to portfolio holder for approval to commence consultation

- 6.1. Following the review by the council, amendments will be made to reflect feedback received before the draft masterplan is finalised. Once finalised, the draft masterplan will be considered by the Planning Cabinet Portfolio Holder for agreement that the public consultation can commence. On occasions, it may be required for the consultation to be considered by cabinet which should be built into the timeframe.
- 6.2. Draft consultation materials should also be provided by the site promoter or developer to the local planning authority for agreement at this stage, with sufficient time built into the work programme for sign off.

7. Stage 6 - Public consultation on draft masterplan

- 7.1. Once agreed by the portfolio holder, the draft masterplan will be published for public consultation on the council's consultation portal in accordance with the council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
- 7.2. It is anticipated the masterplan should be consulted on for a **minimum of six weeks**, or longer if the consultation falls over bank holidays or a holiday period, and that this should incorporate a range of methods to respond to ensure participation and feedback is maximised.
- 7.3. The site promoter or developer will be responsible for the design, production and printing of any consultation materials such as banners, leaflets and exhibition boards. As above, these should be agreed with the local planning authority (LPA).
- 7.4. The consultation materials should clearly set out the purpose of the engagement and how comments received will be used to refine the final masterplan.
- 7.5. The consultation event should be well advertised (methods to be agreed between the site promoter and the council) and a press release will be issued by the LPA.
- 7.6. The use of a feedback form, to mirror the one used online, should be used to capture written comments wherever possible.
- 7.7. It will be the local planning authority's responsibility to collate and analyse any feedback received on the draft masterplan.

8. Stage 7 – Review comments and finalisation of masterplan

- 8.1. Following public consultation on draft masterplan, the council will provide the site promoter or developer with copies of all comments received. The site promoter or developer will work with the council to make the necessary amendments required to the masterplan within the agreed timescale within the project plan.
- 8.2. Changes should be shown in an updated 'tracked changes' version of the masterplan as follows:
 - Additions to the masterplan – show as bold text
 - Deletions to masterplan – show as strikethrough text
- 8.3. A 'clean' and final version of the masterplan should also be provided at this stage.

9. Stage 8 – Cabinet or portfolio holder endorsement of masterplan as a material consideration

- 9.1. Depending on the complexity of the masterplan, officers will determine whether the masterplan should be endorsed by cabinet or the portfolio holder.
- 9.2. On receipt of the final masterplan officers will prepare a report to seek formal endorsement of the masterplan as a material consideration in the taking of planning decisions.
- 9.3. Briefings will take place with the Portfolio Holder, Ward Members, Cabinet and Town and Parish Councils as required throughout the process.

Appendix A: Corporate accessibility and style guidelines

We have a duty to make sure all our communications work both electronically and on paper. As the masterplans will be available online, they must be created to be readable on all digital devices, including mobile phones and tablets.

The below guidance applies to the preparation of all masterplans to ensure that they adhere to corporate accessibility and style guidelines.

Corporate font

Verdana 11pt minimum, black.
All text must be this size (or equivalent).

Headings

Format headings and insert a formatted table of contents where appropriate.

Heading styles:

- Heading 1: the title of the document - Verdana 20pt or bigger, bold no underline.
- Heading 2: Verdana 16pt, bold, no underline.
- Heading 3: Verdana 14pt, bold, no underline.
- Heading 4: Verdana 12pt, bold, no underline.
- Heading 5: Verdana 11pt, bold, no underline.

Underline

Avoid underlining anything. Underline represents a link and hyperlinks are underlined automatically.

Columns

Although a common design feature, they are difficult to scroll through on a mobile device and for people with a visual impairment to follow.

Left align all text and headings

Full justification stretches words and spaces and people with dyslexia tend to see 'rivers of white' rather than the words; people with visual impairments find it much easier to follow text that is completely left aligned. The only exceptions to this are:

- Tables, where it would look neater to right align or centre the information.
- West Suffolk Council logo which is generally right aligned.
- Other logos and images.

Coloured text or text on a coloured background

Make sure the contrast between the text and the background is sufficient.

Bullet points and numbered lists

Bullet points are preferred to numbering, but either one is acceptable providing it is consistent throughout the document. The use of Latin numbering is not appropriate.

Tables

Ensure tables are simple with a description in the surrounding text and alt text to describe the contents.

Links

Make links meaningful and consistent. In a document designed to be printed, use URLs; otherwise, use text for a link.

Logo

As a minimum it will be expected that the West Suffolk Council logo is included at appropriate locations throughout the masterplan. It is expected that this will appear on the front and rear covers, however there may be opportunities for appropriate usage at other locations within the masterplan document.

Images and plans

A person may not be able to see non-text content in a document if they are using a screen reader or have a visual impairment. If the text in an image or plan is important, it also needs to be explained in words. If a chart or graph is needed to help explain something, it also needs to be written in text so those who cannot see it can still get to the content.

Images must have alternative text (alt text) attached to them – this describes what is in the image (for example, 'West Suffolk Council logo') and appears when you hover over them on a webpage.

Make sure images are not too big. On websites, the file size must be less than 1Mb. In documents, although they can be bigger, the bigger they are, the longer it will take to download, especially on a phone.

Place images to the right of text so they don't disrupt the beginning of lines and are easier to see.

Abbreviations

Always write words and phrases in full. You can use an acronym or abbreviation of a title, but you must write it in full the first time you use it (on every page), with the abbreviation in brackets afterwards – for example, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018, then DPA further down the page.

It is okay to use nationally recognised abbreviations, such as NHS, BBC, UK, MP.

Document properties

Before conversion to PDF, complete the document properties with the document title, subject or description (summary of what the document is about), company and author (company name).

Screen readers

Check that the masterplan is coherent when used with screen readers:

- In Word, select 'review' from the toolbar at the top then 'read aloud'.
- In Adobe Reader, select 'view' from the top navigation bar and read aloud

The council will provide an appropriate paragraph that should be included within the inside cover to provide guidance for document users who wish to request copies of the masterplan in alternative formats (for example languages, braille and so on). Costs associated with the provision of alternative formats will be borne by the council.