



# Masterplanning

Planning advice

PA2023-09

September 2023

# Purpose of this Planning Advice

The purpose of this planning advice is to provide all stakeholders, developers/landowners and residents with details of the masterplanning process, including guidance on their format and content, and a timeline of the process involved and how these overlaps with other procedural requirements (Proposal of Application Notice) and Aberdeenshire Council processes (pre-application). Details of sites requiring a masterplan as identified in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023 are listed in Appendix 3. It does not provide advice on Masterplan Consent Areas.

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## 1. Introduction

The aim of the masterplanning process is to promote good place-making, and ensure future developments are designed to the highest standard, encompassing social, environmental, and economic requirements to create the sustainable communities of the future. Successful masterplans set out a clear idea for the future, and demonstrate an integrated approach to community participation, site planning, sustainable transport, servicing, community facilities, design, ecology and landscaping. Successful places are sustainable and have a distinct identity.

An agreed masterplan does not allow for the provision of Masterplan Consent Areas. These can only be created through a separate process led by Aberdeenshire Council.

The use of Masterplans is promoted by National Planning Framework 4 Policy 14, Design Quality and Place. A Masterplan is expected to meet the principles of NPF4 and the Local Development Plan and any application expected to meet the detail in relevant policies. It is also seen as a mechanism that should be used by Local Development Plans to help support local living. The Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan 2020 defined a vision and strategy that advocates the development of *'sustainable mixed communities'*. The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023 used this framework to inform the allocation of appropriate sites for development and the policies promote masterplanning as an effective tool in the delivery of successful places.

The preparation of masterplans will be undertaken by developers/landowners, with guidance and assistance provided by Aberdeenshire Council. It is expected that they will be developed in accordance with guidance in [Planning Advice Note 83: Master Planning](#), the policy statements *Creating Places* and [Designing Streets: A Policy Statement for Scotland](#), which set the context for creating successful places, and the placemaking guidance set out in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (see Appendix 4: Resources).

In the design of a development, consideration must be given to the six qualities of successful places. Further guidance is provided in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. The six qualities that make a successful place are:

- Distinctive
- Welcoming
- Safe and pleasant
- Adaptable
- Easy to move around
- Resource efficient

Development should seek to achieve a high quality of design for developments across Aberdeenshire. Masterplans are a tool to aid in establishing the Design Principle for large scale or otherwise significant sites.

## **2. Masterplans**

In broad terms, a masterplan comprises of plans / site layouts, images and text describing how an area will be developed. Its scope can range from strategic planning at a regional scale to small scale groups of buildings. Where a Masterplan is taken forward this will provide more detailed guidance in plans, detailed governing principles such as building heights, spaces, movement, landscape type and predominant uses. It does not necessarily preclude a degree of flexibility in designs within the masterplan.

A masterplan may be required for one or more of the following reasons:

- The proposal is for a major housing or mixed-use development as defined by the Town and Country (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009.
- The settlement statement in the Local Development Plan 2023 requires it (for the full list of sites, see Appendix 3).
- The site has more than one developer/landowner.
- The site is in a sensitive location.
- The site is heavily constrained e.g. through infrastructure requirements or flood risk and would benefit from a masterplan approach.
- To secure access / public open space etc.

For sites allocated in the Local Development Plan, a masterplan must be written to reflect the whole of the allocation. Only if there is a previously agreed development framework and an overarching design statement for the whole allocation will masterplans be accepted for individual phase(s) of the site. Further guidance on preparing design statements is available in [Planning Advice Note 68: Design Statements](#).

All developers/landowners must be involved in the production of a masterplan, especially if the site is part of a single allocation, to ensure the whole site is delivered in a fair and timely manner. Where more than one developer or landowner is involved in the production of a masterplan, consideration should be given to access, active travel and biodiversity opportunities, open space provision and other green infrastructure, and if necessary, phasing.

When a masterplan has been agreed by Aberdeenshire Council it will be a material consideration in determining planning applications. Masterplans will be valid for five years from the date of Committee agreement, as its materiality will diminish as local development plans are replaced, unless planning permission for the development has been granted and

development has commenced, or the masterplan is updated accordingly in agreement with the Planning Service.

The materiality of masterplans that were agreed prior to the adoption of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023 will remain valid without a time limit. However, planning applications must keep to these masterplans to comply with paragraph P1.2 in the Local Development Plan. If an older masterplan is updated and accordingly agreed, they will then remain valid for five years.

The process to update a masterplan, including consultee and community engagement, should be proportionate to the level of change. The lead officer assigned to the masterplan will be able to advise.

Aberdeenshire Council lists the [agreed masterplans](#) on their website.

### **3. Content of a Masterplan**

The amount of information contained within a masterplan will be influenced by the scale and complexity of the development. The content set out in Appendix 1 provides the information that a masterplan should include.

In the most straightforward cases a well presented and more succinct version may be all that is required to convey the masterplan key principles.

Detailed supporting information, such as drainage and road infrastructure engineering appraisals, need not be included in full detail in the masterplan, but rather sit in the background to inform the finalised concise masterplan document.

The masterplan is not necessarily required to detail the specific solution to certain technical issues, but rather confirm that solutions exist, and that the finer detail shall come forward within future planning applications and supporting documents. This commitment to resolving constraints and addressing technical issues is what is required at the masterplan stage.

### **4. Masterplanning Process**

There are a number of key stages in the masterplan process, and it is essential that there is on-going dialogue between the developer/landowner, local communities, planning service and consultees throughout its development. A summary of the process and key points of engagement is provided in Appendix 2. The initial contact on preparing a masterplan should be sent to [planningonline@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:planningonline@aberdeenshire.gov.uk) with a site location plan and cover letter introducing the development, and the accompanying masterplan form. The

masterplan will be registered as an enquiry and only the finalised version of the masterplan will be published once it is agreed.

### **Lead Officer**

To aid the process of moving from initial conception towards implementation on the ground, a lead officer within Aberdeenshire Council will be identified to work directly with the landowner, developer, or client's planning team.

The lead officer will guide the applicant and the proposal through all stages of the process, from masterplanning to pre-application advice, and then, where possible, dealing with the planning application and subsequent condition compliance thereafter. The lead officer will be assigned once initial contact has been made with Aberdeenshire Council.

### **Pre-Screening Pack**

Once the proposed development is registered by the Planning Authority, the lead officer will prepare a pack of all the relevant information that is available to the Planning Authority. This should be provided within 20 working days. This will include planning history, constraints and any other relevant information held by other Council services. This is factual information, and it is not envisaged that there will be debate on this or a need to involve third parties. The provision of this information should assist the developer and aid the design process. Where appropriate the lead officer will work with other consultees and agencies to consolidate all the relevant information, and if necessary, a meeting will be arranged with key consultees and the developer to discuss any significant issue or constraint.

The developer will then need to undertake detailed surveys to establish the context, character, ecology, connectivity, constraints, and opportunities of the site. Specific issues/constraints/opportunities that may exist on the site should be identified at the earliest opportunity to inform the evolution of the masterplan.

### **Community Consultation**

Major application proposals require developers to carry out pre-application consultation (public engagement) with local communities. The aim is to include communities in the development process, encouraging improved trust and working relationships and, importantly, to provide an opportunity for community views to be reflected early in the

process. Therefore, carrying out this engagement is a key opportunity for people to get involved and have their say/influence development on the site.

Once in receipt of the pre-screening information, the developer is then encouraged to engage with the public. This is the opportune time to submit the statutory Proposal of Application Notice (POAN), where applicable, and carry out public engagement for both the masterplan and POAN.

Developers are encouraged to take cognisance of community actions plans / local place plans and any other locally available information as part of their analysis.

The lead officer, in conjunction with the [local planning area office](#), will be able to offer guidance on appropriate community engagement, and will have detailed knowledge of community action plans, local place plans, whether a place standard has been undertaken and local community council / association contact details.

It is recommended as best practice that more than one engagement event is held, and the lead officer will confirm at each stage whether further public engagement is required on a case-by-case basis. These would include discussion with the community at the outset to identify the key issues pertinent to a site which will inform the development of the draft masterplan. A further event/s would then seek views on the initial draft, with views informing the final approach. In determining the proposed level of consultation developers should take account of Scottish Government guidance in [Planning Advice Note 3/2010: Community engagement](#).

For some developments, developers will be encouraged to deliver public consultation using PAS's practical guide, SP=EED® (Successful Planning = Effective Engagement and Delivery), which has been published as [Planning Advice 2023-15 SP=EED](#).

Guidance is also available on the seven [National Standards for Community Engagement](#).

### **Draft Masterplan**

The developer can then commence production of the masterplan as a result of responses from the pre-screening and initial consultation. It may be that several iterations of the masterplan are produced, and it is likely that discussions with all parties will be required to achieve a quality outcome. It is particularly important that the lead officer dealing with the site are aware of the evolution of the masterplan during this process.

Developers are advised to engage in on-going discussions during the production of a draft masterplan. Local communities may be involved during this process. Developers, through

the lead officer, should liaise with the Council services involved, and external consultees such as the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA). This iterative approach is key to making sure all aspects of the proposal meet the requirements of the site whilst creating a high-quality development.

A workshop style approach may be of benefit in achieving this aim, but it needs to be agreed with all parties and programmed carefully to ensure maximum benefit from the time commitment involved. If required, the Lead Officer shall endeavour to arrange a meeting, in person or virtually, within the initial 20-day period of review of the draft masterplan.

Once the draft masterplan has been submitted, it shall be reviewed by consultees with any initial issues identified, and a response provided within 20 working days. Where necessary, a second round of public consultation and consultee engagement may be required.

### **Design Quality Audit**

Aberdeenshire Council encourage significant proposals to participate in the Aberdeenshire Design Review as part of any pre-application discussions. The term 'Significant Proposals' can refer to Major applications (as per the Hierarchy of Development), those sited in a sensitive area or civically important developments.

The review process consists of two distinct elements, a Design Quality Audit (DQA) and the Design Review Panel (DRP). It is expected that significant proposals will undergo a Design Quality Audit, which shall be carried out independently by the Planning Service and the Developer. A proposal would then be referred to the Design Review Panel if further advice or input is required.

### **Aberdeen City and Shire Design Review Panel**

This would be organised by the lead officer and undertaken at an appropriate time within the masterplanning process. The Panel comprises members from a variety of backgrounds in the public and private sectors who can give a valuable external view on the evolving masterplan, offering constructive and objective advice.

### **Finalised Masterplan**

Once the Planning Service and consultees are satisfied with details in the masterplan, it will then be presented to the next available relevant Area Committee(s) for agreement. Any supporting material, requested by the Planning Authority, will be made available to Members and may be appropriate to be included as appendices to the Committee Report. Once agreed by Members, the finalised masterplan will be published on the Council's

[website](#), and will be a significant material consideration in the determination of all future planning applications on the site.

### **Pre-Application Discussion**

Concurrent with the masterplan process, the more technical scrutiny and analysis of information, and supporting documents that informed the masterplan, which have been reviewed and considered by consultees, will also be captured in the end output as pre-application advice. The Planning Service will include this as a separate letter, which will confirm the masterplan process has ended, and inform you of the outcome and status of the masterplan.

## **5. Masterplan Format**

Masterplans should be concise, graphical in nature and provide details of the outcomes using a series of images and plans. They should include text, diagrams, graphics and summaries of analysis commensurate with the scale, complexity and sensitivity of the site. Masterplans documents should be easily read and clearly illustrate the key principles.

To achieve this in a consistent way, masterplans should be structured using the suggested template in Appendix 1. Key elements and outcomes should be explained with diagrams and/or maps. Sketches, photos, concept diagrams, photomontages etc. can all be used to illustrate the design development and the final outcome.

The masterplan must be available in electronic format, with any colour printed documents no larger than A3.

All studies, analysis and consultation exercises that have informed the masterplan should be available upon request by the Planning Authority.

## **Appendix 1: Masterplan Template**

The following provides a suggested masterplan format. However, it is not an exhaustive list. Text or bullet points should be short and describe the process undertaken to produce the concept. The masterplan should explain the design philosophy and proposals, and the role that stakeholders played in shaping the concept.

Illustrations will play a key role in getting the masterplan's message across. Illustrations must be easy to interpret, clearly related to the text.

If it is deemed necessary to include other detailed information, this should be discussed with the lead officer and be provided as appendices.

### **Front page:**

## **“Settlement name, site reference” Masterplan**



**Prepared by agent on behalf of applicant(s)/landowner(s)**

## 1. **Background Information**

- Name of development
- Brief
  - Applicant & Team
  - Site Details (including LDP allocation reference e.g. Ellon, OP1)
  - Location, site plan, description, ownership
- Purpose of the masterplan - outline Policy requirement and aspirations for the site based upon any information obtained from the Council and/or Community, identify any key constraints/challenges and how these have informed the layout.

2. **Site and Area Analysis** (concise paragraph(s) on each, supplemented with imagery where appropriate)

- **Viability**

This must consider the cost of delivering the development, overcoming any known constraints, and identifying that the full provision of affordable housing is achievable along with meeting any other contributions (obligations to healthcare, education etc) to demonstrate the general layout, open space, and density, and that the development is deliverable in the form promoted. References to any community plans influencing the development can also be added.

- **Context** (visual representation preferred)

This may include details the local area/settlement characteristics; location, surroundings etc., site description; planning history, habitats and natural environment, built and cultural heritage, ownership, land uses, vistas, microclimate, services; utilities, local amenity, public transport. This should identify any community assets that have been identified through engagement as having importance to the local population.

- **Identity** (visual representation preferred)

This may include the surrounding buildings, use of spaces, hard and soft landscaping, sense of place, placemaking. This should also include any amenity space that may be informally recognised as important to the local population, as raised in public engagement.

- **Connection** (visual representation preferred)

This may include internal and external connections such as pedestrian access, movement, desire lines, wheeling, accessible to all, removal of barriers, vehicular movement, access points, parking, buses, traffic measures etc.

- **Community involvement and Consultation**

Summary of events held, attendance, feedback and responses to feedback.

- **Place standard** – if the Council hold an existing one this shall be shared upon initial contact.

### 3. Proposed Development

- **Design Concept**

The site layout, as informed by any constraints, supporting documents, background information and consultation feedback (what has changed following public engagement/technical supporting documentation/evolution of design process). This should be a visual plan of the development.

- **Built Form**

This may include the layout in light detail to depict general densities or rough plot lines, depending on the scale and context of the site it may be appropriate to include indicative elevations and details on the scale, mix, materials, energy use and efficiency of proposed dwelling – or give commitments to delivering housing of a high standard utilising traditional design features/proportions and a high and varied standard of finishing materials. This may, depending on the scale and complexity of the masterplan, merge with the Design Concept above. To avoid duplication, discussion should be had on whether these elements should be separated or combined. Visual representation, noting indicative detailing on design detailing, is welcome.

- **Movement**

This may include identifying opportunities and connections to amenities within 20-minute neighbourhoods, active travel opportunities, accessibility, broad street hierarchy and key access points and movement routes to/from/through the site, commitments to dispersed visitor parking within the layout, design led traffic speed and security, indication of intended hard surfacing materials, and identification of access to public transport. This should generally be a separate image/heading, however depending on scale and complexity of the masterplan this may be merged in with the above topics.

- **Open Space**

This may include a landscape strategy, biodiversity, habitat enhancement, SUDS, public space, play, and intention to create a safe and accessible development. Note this should be commitments to deliver rather than give specific details (i.e. no need to stipulate specific plots that may have bat/bird boxes placed on them). This should

generally be a separate image/heading. However, depending on scale and complexity of the masterplan, this may be merged in with the above topics.

- **Phasing Delivery**

This may include key infrastructure delivery triggers, affordable housing provision and potential phasing, landscaping being established at an early stage, biodiversity protection during construction and subsequent enhancement, and open space provision and their long-term management. This may be best shown in a development timeline/table, which can also take account of the application program to set out a clear timeframe for development and possibly inform future Planning Processing Agreement.

- **Design Quality Audit** – where applicable capture the feedback and response/changes following this additional audit/review of the design layout.

#### 4. Summary of Commitments and Key Design Principles

This should include a summary of the foregoing, committing to resolving various constraints, making the most of opportunities, detailing intended phasing and delivery, mitigating biodiversity loss and providing enhancement, affordable housing, and a commitment to uphold design aspirations and comply with relevant policies in the local development plan.

The appropriate design concept Masterplan image should be inserted here.



It is not intended to have any additional information, such as technical supporting documents that have informed the Masterplan, included within the Masterplan, either in the main body or as an appendix.

## Appendix 2: Masterplan Process Map

	STAGE 1		STAGE 2			
	ENQUIRY / INITIAL CONTACT	PRE SCREENING PACK	DRAFT MASTERPLAN REVIEW	DESIGN QUALITY AUDIT DESIGN REVIEW	MASTERPLAN	COMMITTEE
<b>DEVELOPER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make contact at earliest opportunity</li> <li>Identify site / share opportunities and constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit Proposal of Application Notice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developer shares draft masterplan</li> <li>Submit Proposal of Application Notice if not already done</li> </ul>	<p>IF REQUIRED</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developer submits finalised masterplan</li> </ul>	
<b>ABERDEENSHIRE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Name lead officer</li> <li>Start preparing pre screening pack</li> <li>Log, register and designate ENQ number</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead officer shares pre-screening pack</li> <li>Arrange meeting if required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead officer reviews draft masterplan and provides feedback</li> <li>Further meetings with developer / consultees as required</li> <li>Internal review with masterplan working group</li> </ul>	<p>IF REQUIRED</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead officer prepares final report</li> <li>More detailed and specific pre-application discussions can now progress with lead officer and relevant consultees.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Masterplan taken to committee for agreement</li> <li>If masterplan agreed it will be placed on Aberdeenshire Council website</li> </ul>
<b>CONSULTEES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead officer makes contact as appropriate</li> <li>Prepare relevant information for pre screening pack</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide relevant information as part of pre-screening pack</li> <li>Arrange initial meeting if required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviews draft masterplan and provides feedback</li> </ul>	<p>IF REQUIRED</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuation of detailed discussions as part of ongoing pre-application discussion</li> </ul>
<b>COMMUNITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead officer makes contact with area office / community planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial community engagement event, as agreed with lead officer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further community engagement event on draft masterplan, as agreed with lead officer</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreed masterplan and committee report available on Aberdeenshire Council website</li> </ul>

## Appendix 3: Sites Requiring Masterplans

### Summary

Banff and Buchan	7
Buchan	9
Formartine	23
Garioch	12
Kincardine and Mearns	23
Marr	9
Total	83

### Banff and Buchan

Settlement	Allocation
Banff	OP1
Banff	OP2*
Cornhill	OP2
Cairnbulg/ Inverallochy	OP1*
Fraserburgh	OP1 and OP6
Fraserburgh	OP2, OP3, OP5 and R1
Macduff	CC1
New Aberdour	OP1
Rosehearty	OP1

### Buchan

Settlement	Allocation
Cruden Bay	OP1 and OP2
Fetterangus	OP1, OP2 and R1
Fetterangus	OP3*
Maud	OP1
Mintlaw	OP1 and OP5+
Mintlaw	OP2+
New Pitsligo	OP2
Peterhead	OP1
St Combs	OP1 and OP2
St Fergus	OP1

### Formartine

Settlement	Allocation
Balmedie	OP1 and OP2
Balmedie	OP3
Blackdog	OP1
Cumineston	OP1
Ellon	OP1**
Ellon	OP2
Ellon	OP4
Foveran	OP1 and OP2
Newburgh	OP1
Newburgh	OP2
Newburgh	OP3
Oldmeldrum	OP2 and OP6
Oldmeldrum	OP4
Oldmeldrum	OP5
Pitmedden	OP1
Pitmedden	OP2
Pitmedden	OP3
Potterton	OP1
Potterton	OP2
Tarves	OP1
Turriff	OP1
Turriff	OP2
Turriff	OP3

## Garioch

Settlement	Allocation
Blackburn	OP1
Cluny and Sauchen	OP1
Inverurie	OP3
Inverurie	OP5 <sup>+</sup>
Inverurie	OP6 <sup>+</sup>
Inverurie	OP11*
Inverurie	OP12*
Inverurie	OP15*
Inverurie	OP16*
Kemnay	OP3
Kintore	OP1 <sup>+</sup>
Kintore	OP2*
Kintore	OP3
Kintore	OP4 <sup>+</sup>
Newmachar	OP1 <sup>+</sup>
Newmachar	OP2
Newmachar	OP3 <sup>+</sup>
Westhill	OP3*

## Kincardine and Mearns

Settlement	Allocation
Blairs	OP1
Chapelton	OP1 <sup>+</sup>
Edzell Woods	OP1, OP2 and BUS
Fettrcairn	OP1
Gourdon	OP1
Inverbervie	OP1
Johnshaven	OP1
Laurencekirk	OP1, OP3 and R3 <sup>+</sup>
Laurencekirk	OP6
Laurencekirk	OP8 <sup>+</sup>
Luthermuir	OP1 and OP2
Marywell	BUS1 and BUS2
Marywell	OP1
Marywell	BUS1
Marywell	BUS2
Newtonhill	OP1

Newtonhill	OP3 and OP4
Portlethen	OP7
Roadside of Kinneff	OP1
St Cyrus	OP1
Stonehaven	OP1
Stonehaven	OP2, OP3, OP5 and OP6
Stonehaven	OP7

## Marr

Huntly to Pitcaple SGA	
Aboyne	OP1
Alford	OP4
Alford	OP5
Banchory	OP2 and OP3
Banchory	OP6
Huntly	OP1*
Huntly	OP2*
Inchmarlo	OP1
Inchmarlo	OP2
Kincardine O'Neil	OP1
Logie Coldstone	OP1

### \* Notes:

The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023 does not specifically state a masterplan is required, but the housing allocation either exceeds 2 hectares or proposes 50 or more homes, and a masterplan may be required under Policy P1 Layout, Siting and Design.

### + Notes:

A development framework for this site(s) has been agreed by Aberdeenshire Council.

## **Appendix 4: Resources**

### **Development Plan**

[Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023 - Aberdeenshire Council](#)

[Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan 2020](#)

### **Scottish Government**

[Creating Places: A policy statement on architecture and place for Scotland](#)

[Designing Streets: A Policy Statement for Scotland](#)

National Planning Framework 4

[Planning Advice Note 59: Improving Town Centres](#)

[Planning Advice Note: 65 Planning and Open Space](#)

[Planning Advice Note 67: Housing Quality](#)

[Planning Advice Note 68: Design Statements](#)

[Planning Advice Note 72: Housing in the Countryside](#)

[Planning Advice Note 75: Planning for Transport](#)

[Planning Advice Note 77: Designing Safer Places](#)

[Planning and Building Standards Advice Note 78: Inclusive Design](#)

[Planning Advice Note 83: Master Planning](#)

[Planning Advice Note 2/2010: Affordable Housing and Housing Land Audits](#)

[Planning Advice Note 3/2010 Community Engagement](#)