CITY OF YORK COUNCIL

Masterplanning and garden villages

Non-statutory planning guidance

Approved 7 July 2026



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Introduction

The aim of this Planning Guidance Note is to add further detail to our expectations for masterplanning sites which is required by the strategic policies in the City of York Local Plan.

The guidance is intended to signpost to best practice. It has been developed in conjunction with officers across the Council and should be read alongside other local and national planning policy.

Garden Villages

Three sites are identified within the Local Plan for new 'garden village' development with the intention that they deliver exemplar new sustainable communities. In total these sites will deliver 5,532 new homes for York, over a third of the total new homes to be delivered by the Plan.

Policies SS9 (Site ST7: Land East of Metcalfe Lane), SS12 (Site ST14: Land West of Wigginton Road) and SS13 (Site ST15: Land West of Elvington Lane) provide detail on the specific requirements for the sites and establish the use of garden village principles when planning for them.

The original garden villages, places like Saltaire near Bradford and New Earswick in York, were self-contained communities with good quality housing, access to greenspace, and provision of community activities and facilities. While there is no formal definition of a garden village, these qualities are still relevant and should form part of the planning of any good residential development.

The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) have identified the following principles[1] as key to designing successful garden villages:

- **Holistically planned** - a masterplan for the site should be developed which is comprehensive enough to guide investment but flexible enough to respond to changes over the lifetime of the development. Policies across the entire Local Plan are relevant but of particular importance are policies SS9: Land East of Metcalfe Lane, SS12: Land West of Wigginton Road, and SS13: Land West of Elvington Lane, also D1: Placemaking, D2: Landscape and setting and GI6: New open space provision;

- **Small in scale –** the scale of the three new garden village settlements in York has been determined as part of the Local Plan process and responds to the evidence base that underpins the Plan. Settlements are of a scale appropriate to the character and setting of the historic city. They should reflect the requirements of policy D1: Placemaking by taking account of York's special qualities, making a positive design contribution to the city, and ensuring that the development is appropriate for its neighbouring context. The Heritage

[1] https://www.tcpa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/TCPA_Guide_-_Understanding_Garden_Villages_Jan_2018.pdf

Topic Paper pulls together evidence relating to York's historic environment and how it can be used to develop an understanding of the city's special qualities and characteristics, including its strong urban form, compactness, and landscape and setting.

- **Planned for healthy living** – new communities should be planned to encourage active forms of transport and high quality urban and natural environments**.** The Local Plan (policy HW7) requires Health Impact Assessments for all strategic sites and further guidance on these can be found on our website;

- **Provision for a vibrant social life –** Social and cultural vibrancy should be a key characteristic of garden villages. Policies SS9, SS12 and SS13 all require the provision of community facilities, and policy D3: Cultural provision supports the delivery of new cultural facilities and cultural engagement. Further information on our ambitions for cultural provision in the city can be found in our Culture Strategy;

- **Designed with high-quality materials and attention to detail –** New garden villages should be designed to be sensitive to local character whilst creating places which are distinctive and recognisable. A palette of local recognisable materials, designs and landscaping should be utilised and the requirements of policies D1: Placemaking and D2: Landscape and Setting should be fully integrated in the scheme, and the Heritage Topic Paper referenced where it relates to the significance of York's architectural character.

- **Designed to provide affordable homes close to employment –** Garden villages should provide a mix of housing suitable for all members of the community. This is reinforced in policy H3: Housing Mix Policy. H10: Affordable Housing outlines the levels of affordable housing provision required on the sites, and further information is provided within this SPD. While it is not anticipated that the sites will include significant employment provision, as sites are sustainably located in proximity to existing employment opportunities, a proportion of homes could be designed for flexible working;

- **Provision of services for day-to-day needs within walking distance of homes –** New local centres should be planned to be centrally located and provide appropriate facilities for the community. Good access for pedestrians and cyclists should always be incorporated. Policy R1: Retail hierarchy and Sequential Approach notes that an impact assessment is not required for strategic sites where the new retail provision is designed solely to serve the day to day shopping needs of site residents, while policy T1: Sustainable access requires safe and appropriate links to local services, including existing services, via walking and sustainable means of travel;

- **Land ownership and long-term stewardship -** Early consideration of how long term stewardship of the assets provided on the development will be managed on behalf of the community in perpetuity.

Masterplanning

In the introduction to the Strategic Housing sites policies, the Plan notes that each site has its own policy which covers relevant planning principles and details issues that must be addressed as part of the development of the site including access, ecology, and green infrastructure. These matters should generally be covered through a masterplan.

Masterplanning provides an opportunity to embed high quality design into new developments which meet the needs of the city and results in well designed, high quality, sustainable and well-connected environments. By outlining principles and requirements for development, a masterplan guides development and helps ensure sites are delivered in a comprehensive and well-planned manner.

The masterplan should set out how key considerations including site-specific requirements will be integrated into the overall design and delivery of the development.

When is a Masterplan required?

As set out in the Strategic Sites section of the Local Plan (Para 3.45), we expect all our strategic sites to be covered through an approved masterplan. The only instances where masterplanning would not be required are where the planning application relates to minor changes to an approved scheme. We recognise that other sites may come forward with a masterplanned approach and this guidance would still be relevant in such instances.

Where a site allocation is brought forward in a piecemeal way then the initial developer should use best endeavours to agree a masterplan for the entirety of the site with the other landowners/ developers. We would expect that where the applicant has a two thirds control of a site allocation then they will provide a more detailed masterplan of the entire site; where they have control of a lesser proportion of a site then a concept plan would be expected for the entire site, with more detail provided on the land within their control.

Masterplanning is a staged and iterative process commencing at project inception and progressing through visioning, concept and framework plans, with increasing levels of detail incorporated at each stage. We encourage early engagement from developers to identify potential constraints and to determine the appropriate scope and extent of masterplanning required. The Masterplanning process you undertake should be proportionate and reflect the scale and complexity of your site.

Typically, we would expect masterplanning to follow the following stages:

- Visioning for project inception
- Concept masterplan to support pre-application submission
- Detailed masterplan with outline planning application
- Detailed design for reserved matters submission

What is a good Masterplan?

A successful Masterplan will set out how to create and sustain an excellent place to live, work and play, and will determine the overall quality of the place and its inherent sustainability as a development. It should demonstrate a good level of understanding of the site and its wider surroundings; provide a holistic vision for the development of the site; properly plan for key infrastructure (including green infrastructure) in a coordinated way across ownerships; and it should have been through a stakeholder engagement process.

What should a Masterplan include?

While a number of considerations should be incorporated into masterplanning new communities, as a minimum we consider that a masterplan should:

- Set out the vision and objectives for the site;
- Establish the extent and distribution of land uses and infrastructure;
- Identify suitable transport linkages and movement hierarchy;
- Establish core design concepts for the sites, which will be based on the principles set out within each individual site policy i.e. green infrastructure, drainage and SUDS, location and development type, sustainability, and phasing and delivery of the site.

Based on the minimum requirements, and the individual requirements of each strategic site, it is expected that a masterplan would include the following:

Vision and Objectives

- Align with the agreed vision, principles, and objectives of the garden village principles outlined above.
- Demonstrate how the masterplan delivers distinctive character and sense of place.
- Plan for Green Infrastructure to be integral to the design and quality of the development.

Land Use and infrastructure requirements

- Provide a clear spatial framework showing land uses and densities.

- Include a mix of uses (housing, employment, community facilities) supported by evidence.
- Define fixed elements vs flexible areas for future adaptability.
- Identify critical infrastructure requirements (transport, utilities, schools, health facilities).
- Ensure digital connectivity and future-proofed utilities.

Transport linkages and movement hierarchy

- Set out phasing and delivery strategy for infrastructure and development.
- Plan for modal shift targets: prioritise walking, cycling, and public transport.
- Translate intended movement hierarchy on plan into instinctively understood street/route design types that also support greened streets, placemaking and natural wayfinding.

Core design concepts:

Sustainability and Resilience

- Embed sustainability objectives:
    - Energy efficiency and low-carbon design
    - Water management and flood resilience
    - Biodiversity and green infrastructure
- Provide green spaces and public realm that are inclusive and adaptable.
- Situate open space away from roads so it is safer for children – importance of open space to health and environment.
- Street trees.
- Enable local food growing, play areas, and social spaces.
- Ensure the development is fully integrated in the surrounding areas in terms of transport and highways linkages to existing services and facilities.

Community and Health

- Design for healthier lifestyles and active travel including accessibility for all, and inclusive environment considerations.
- Facilitate community interaction and social cohesion.
- Reference NHS Healthy New Town principles and guidance for children and young people.

Delivery and Stewardship

- Demonstrate viability and deliverability of proposals.
- Include long-term stewardship arrangements for community assets.
- Commit to design review processes and use of design codes.

Design Quality Tools

- Apply recognised frameworks for designing neighbourhoods and homes, high quality infrastructure and locally developed design guides and design codes.

- Incorporate local distinctiveness and heritage considerations.
- Engage with Quality Review Panels for independent design advice.

More ideas & recommendations

- We recommend that you use the Homes England Masterplan checklist to test your masterplan.
- Providing evidence of previous iterations of your masterplan can help to show how decisions have been made.
- Early engagement both with local communities, other stakeholders and the Local Planning Authority can help in development of an effective masterplan.
- We recommend that you review the available guidance for masterplanning and design as a starting point when masterplanning strategic sites. The following websites provide useful information:

Homes England guidance for masterplanning and design in relation to garden communities
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/garden-communities/masterplanning

TCPA guidance on masterplanning
https://www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/guide-3-design-and-masterplanning/