

1.2

URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORKS

1.2.1 The right tool for the job

1.2.2 Developing a framework

1.2.3 What to include

An urban design framework is the bridge between policy and implementation.

A framework describes and illustrates how planning and design policies, and principles, should be implemented in an area where there is a need to control, guide and promote change. They can help deliver change across a wide area by coordinating more detailed development briefs and masterplans for separate sites.

Frameworks can give the confidence to residents and investors that public and other private funds are being harnessed to a common goal.

1.2.1 The right tool for the job

Frameworks 009 010

There are different types of framework plan. Their content will depend on the specific circumstances of each site. Frameworks are strategic plans which are produced by (or adopted by) local authorities. They can transcend land ownership and may embrace components with different timescales.

Frameworks can cover a range of scales from a whole town to a particular site. It is important to explain in each case what the particular document is intended to achieve, and how much assessment and analysis has gone in to its preparation.

Frameworks sit above masterplans, design codes and site briefs. A framework sets out key principles, allowing flexibility for subsequent masterplans to develop ideas in three-dimensional form and with greater precision.

Masterplans

A masterplan is a detailed, three-dimensional plan which sets out the intended layout of an area. It presents proposals for buildings, spaces, movement and land use in three-dimensional, and matches all of these to an implementation strategy.

A masterplan is usually commissioned by the person or organisation controlling the land intended for development. Further guidance on preparing and using masterplans can be found in CABE's 'Creating successful masterplans: a guide for clients'.¹

Design codes

A design code is a set of illustrated design rules and requirements for the physical development of a site or area. The graphic and written components of the code are detailed and precise. They build on a design vision such as a masterplan. It is not normally possible to produce a design code without a masterplan first being in place. However, in some circumstances a design code can express general design guidance (on matters such as building heights) across a wider area and be attached to an urban design framework. Further guidance on design codes is provided in section 3.4 and in the CLG practice guide.²

Site briefs

A site brief sets out the specific requirements for each site within a framework, masterplan or code. The brief can highlight specific opportunities and constraints for the identified area.

1.2.2 Developing a framework

Responsibilities and skills

It is usually the responsibility of the local authority to produce an urban design framework. However, consultants for the landowner or developer (including government agencies) may work with the local authority to produce the document jointly.

The skills required will usually include planning, urban design, highway engineering, economic development, property, ecology and resources. Strong and inclusive leadership are the key to success. It is important to identify and collaborate with stakeholders at the right time, ideally with adequate time and resources. Community involvement is required in the preparation of the framework, preferably through collaborative design workshops (see section 1.5).

Type of framework	Status	Purpose	Level of detail
<p>Area development framework</p> <p>Scale may be town-wide, growth area or a regeneration strategy. Will cover multiple land ownerships and timescales</p>	Local authority initiative, often in association with redevelopment agency or housing market renewal partners	Brings together an agreed set of prioritised projects for an area, often broken down into themes and indicating responsibilities and potential sources of funding or partners. May constitute or form part of an area action plan or supplementary planning document	Indicative strategy identifying a range of projects that are to be developed in more detail in terms of design, technical viability, economic viability and community involvement
<p>Urban design framework</p> <p>Neighbourhood scale or may just cover a number of inter-related sites</p>	Area action plan or supplementary planning document; or a proposal by an agency, landowner or developer, in some cases adopted by the local planning authority	Sets out a vision and proposals for an urban extension or new neighbourhood centre, district or neighbourhood regeneration; or the promotion of a centre or area and its opportunity sites. Requires development briefs or masterplans to be subsequently prepared	Indicative strategy for a specified area or site, involving urban design concepts and informed by preliminary technical appraisals and viability testing
<p>Development brief</p> <p>For a large or small site which is typically in a single ownership or control</p> <p>N.B. This is not the same as a site brief</p>	<p>Likely to be adopted as a supplementary planning document</p> <p>In some cases a proposal by an agency, landowner or developer which is then adopted by the local planning authority</p>	Sets out a vision and specific requirements for development of a site. On large sites a development brief may be similar to an urban design framework. Should set out exactly what is required in order to be granted a planning consent	Specific selected requirements for development proposals on the identified site with reference to relevant development plan policies

Table 1.2 Types of framework

Start collaboration with the brief

Cooperation and coordination between a local authority, its departments and any relevant outside agencies are essential if the urban design framework is to be implemented successfully. The first steps are to write the brief for the job of preparing the framework, to identify the skills necessary for the core client and working teams, and to then decide the roles of the participants.

A brief for the work of preparing an urban design framework should:

- State the context, issues and objectives, and vision
- Define the area
- Explain how the framework will fit into the planning system, and what status it will have
- Explain how the framework will relate to other plans and initiatives, and in particular its role in coordinating them
- Identify the main stakeholders
- Set out the contents of the framework
- Set out the process to be followed in preparing the framework
- List the outputs that the framework is to achieve

Stages in the preparation process

These are likely to include:

- Refine the brief
- Gather information
- Undertake appraisals
- Involve local communities
- Formulate options
- Carry out technical and financial testing
- Select the preferred option
- Refine the preferred option
- Prepare final outputs

An urban design framework will typically consider some or all of the elements set out in the following sections.

1.2.3 What to include**Appreciating the context**

- **Archaeology and heritage**

A study of past uses of the land may reveal patterns which can inform frameworks and masterplans today. Places which grew incrementally often reveal local conditions that can influence development today.

- **Public realm and the open space network**

Review what is required of the network of streets, squares, parkland and incidental open spaces which form the public realm.

- **National, regional and local policy**

Identify current and up and coming policies which may impact on likely development.

Creating the structure

- **Neighbourhood structure and centres**

Subdivide large urban extensions into neighbourhoods based on walking distance and centres for convenience shopping and services.

- **Land use and mix**

Identify the optimum locations for the different land uses required. This may include residential, employment, schools, health and community facilities, shopping and services, leisure, sports and recreation, and other open spaces. Be prepared to designate mixed-use areas where this can generate vitality. Consider residential densities and capacity, and the potential mix of tenures.

- **Character areas**

Subdivide sites into areas of different character, where appropriate. If the characteristics are stated clearly, they can influence subsequent design decisions. Characteristics may relate to such matters as materials, built form, density, building typology or landscape character.

- **Energy, resources and waste**

Land use will have a fundamental effect on energy and resource consumption and waste management.

- **Density and mix**

Estimate the likely development densities, so that technical and financial consideration can be given to the opportunities and constraints identified by the brief.

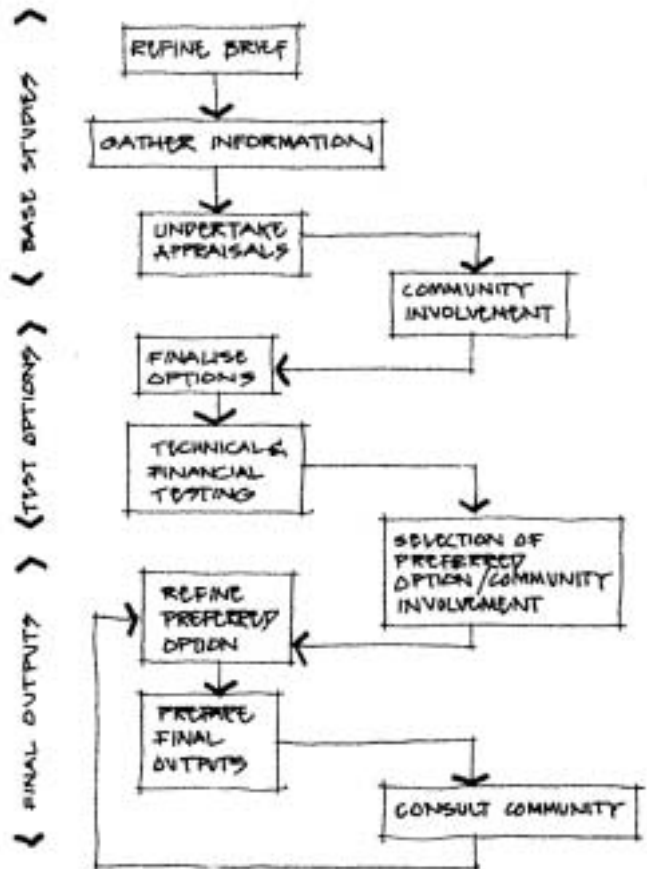
- **Retained landscape**
Trees, hedgerows, species-rich grassland, water features and all actively used habitats should be considered for retention.
- **New landscape**
New planting should be seen potentially as part of the public realm. It may also connect isolated elements of the retained landscape and create possible habitat corridors.
- **Surface drainage strategy**
Urbanisation increases the rate of water run-off, which can be potentially damaging to water courses and contribute to flooding. Depending on the size of the site, consider design initiatives which:
 - Increase the permeability of ground materials
 - Create a series of water courses which matches the street hierarchy, using features such as swales, streams and rills
 - Create balancing lakes to attenuate the flow of rain water from the site, and create new habitats and amenities

Always try to expose water courses in a way that expresses the natural topography.

- **Habitat conservation and creation**
Development should seek not just to conserve existing assets but to create new habitats. Previously developed sites often contain a greater diversity of species and habitats than greenfield sites which have been used for intensive agriculture.
- **Aspect and prospect**
Define important views out of the site (prospect) and the places from where there are the most important views into the site (aspect). Mark these on the plan and indicate what design response is required.
- **Legibility**
Consider how a framework can aid legibility (the quality of a place being welcoming, understood easily by its users, easy for visitors to orientate themselves, and presenting a clear image to the wider world) by identifying potential landmarks, nodal points, edges, gateways and thresholds on the plan.

Making the connections

- **Access strategy**
An access strategy will show how new infrastructure can release land by providing vehicular access, including that for servicing and emergency services.



Typical programme for an urban design framework showing three rounds of community involvement

It is preferable for drainage and utilities to follow street corridors; this may influence the position of access points.

- **Route structure and place hierarchy**
Establish a clear hierarchy of movement routes, with the best connected routes at the top of the hierarchy and the least well-connected at the bottom. Locate major public spaces at the intersection of the most important routes.
- **Walking and cycling**
Establish the principal pedestrian and cycle routes, taking account of walking distances to the main amenities and public transport stops.

009

Regional strategy for design quality Renaissance Towns and Cities Programme

The Yorkshire Forward Renaissance Towns and Cities Programme (RTCP) was launched in 2001. Since then the RTCP has worked with local communities across 15 programmes in 27 towns and the city of Leeds. Each programme incorporates a 25-year vision for the renaissance of the particular town.

An initiative for Yorkshire & Humber, the RTCP aims to ensure that towns and cities are places where people want to invest, work and live. Together with communities, partners and stakeholders, the RTCP ensures that towns are strong and competitive by being well designed, well managed, connected and accessible for people. The multi-disciplinary Renaissance Towns and Cities Team use the expertise of an international panel of experts who work with

'town teams' (locally based community groups representing amenity, business and political interest), local authorities and other interested parties to re-think the purpose and physical form of their towns and develop a shared vision for the future.

The towns – home to nearly a fifth of the region's population – have all completed their visions and masterplans. Implementation plans are now in place that include a portfolio of prioritised projects with delivery mechanisms and timescales to realise the vision of each town. These projects are now at various stages from development to completion.

Yorkshire Forward will next invest around £170m into the RTCP over a four-year period. The initiative is now embedded within its integrated corporate planning framework.



Yorkshire Forward Renaissance Towns and Cities Programme has helped to establish partnerships between local authorities to establish visions and deliver new infrastructure in towns and cities such as Barnsley Transport Interchange.

010

Creating a responsive development framework Ashford Local Development Framework (LDF)

The Ashford Local Development Framework, a spatial planning strategy for the town and its surroundings, has delivered a range of benefits. It has set out a clear plan for development, including the identification of key locations, transport infrastructure requirements, environmental infrastructure and the housing and population densities necessary to sustain viable levels of social and commercial infrastructure. It has also proposed a logical programme for development.

The benefits will be shortened negotiation, better products as a result of negotiation between different stakeholders, greater understanding by key local decision makers and an ability to make informed comments on planning applications for major development and reduced uncertainty due to political support. As a result, the development industry has embraced the principles of the framework on key sites.

The Framework is informed by spatial considerations alongside related technical studies on transport, water environment (supply, waste and flooding) and the economy. These were all focused around the aspect of 'capacity' i.e. extent of growth possible within acceptable environmental, economic and social limits.

The framework was developed at various scales. For example, the overall development framework, a strategic design code for major strategic sites, a town centre framework and key transport corridor frameworks. Each level was informed by design workshops involving key stakeholders from all sectors – political, service providers, local people and groups and developers.

The application of the framework is now feeding into the Borough's Local Development Framework, core strategies and plans for:

- Taming the ring road and creating two-way streets
- Site planning at the larger scale
- Setting design parameters in more specific studies for corridors and the town centre

'The key lesson learnt is the ability to achieve consensus on really very large challenges and the trust this engenders.' Richard Alderton, the Strategic Planning Manager at Ashford Borough Council, on the benefits of a town-wide spatial strategy for the growth area (identified in the Regional Planning Guidance (RPG9)).



The Ashford Local Development Framework bridges policy and spatial planning and sets a clear vision for the future that will inform planning applications, major developments and reduce political uncertainty.

011

Gaining political support for a framework Yeovil Urban Development Framework

The Yeovil Urban Development Framework was commissioned to find physical solutions to deliver the aspirations of the 'Yeovil Vision', a strategic agenda for the future vitality and prosperity of the town. Regular (monthly) series of press releases, launches, member briefings and community events ensured that from start to finish the scope and purpose of the framework was clear to the local community, politicians, and the local property market.

This was further enhanced by the strength of the 'Yeovil Vision' campaign itself. Presentations and briefings were highly graphic and were tailored to the various audiences, avoiding jargon.

Regular contact was maintained throughout with policy focus groups covering public services, transportation and highways, civic design and public art, landscape, recreation and the draft Local Development Framework. This minimised policy conflicts and helped forge closer ties and a common point of reference for various policy areas. It also informed the phasing programme, with information on investment programmes and policy priorities in the key areas. An additional property and investment focus group ensured the feasibility of the proposals and paved the way for public/private partnerships and land assembly.

A strong custodianship at officer level was essential for garnering political support and penetrating local networks.



The Yeovil Urban Development Framework established a promotional tool for future investment in the town centre.

- **Public transport**

Identify public transport opportunities. Consider optimum routes that will serve new development without causing delays to services that also serve other neighbourhoods.

- **Car parking**

Assess what parking provision would be appropriate, given the location and intended uses on the site, and consider how this can be accommodated in the built form. (See English Partnerships' 'Car Parking: what works where').³

Detailing the place

- **Plot and building type**

Consider how plots can best be subdivided, and how this will relate to the building types used.

- **Implementation and delivery**

- **Management and maintenance strategy**

Consider how the development might be managed and maintained, and how the design should take account of this (see also chapter 5).

- **Technical and financial realism**

Frameworks of all kinds depend on a good understanding of local conditions: not only physical, social and environmental conditions, but also the economic and market conditions that will determine what types of development are likely to be viable. Also consider if the framework lends itself to a logical phasing plan (see also section 3.4, Parceling land and phasing).

- **Sustainability appraisals**

Specific regulations set out what sort of environmental assessments will be needed in the case of a particular plan, framework or development proposal. A sustainability appraisal assesses activities, projects, programmes, plans and policies according to social, economic and environmental criteria. The appraisal may involve identifying sustainable development indicators (SDI) so that the long-term effects of the plan or proposal can be monitored. Its broad analysis may be presented in the form of a checklist. It should be an integral part of the process of formulating an urban design framework, and the brief and team should reflect this.

- **Using the framework as a promotional tool** 011

An urban design framework can serve as a promotional or marketing tool, perhaps for an area that is likely to be developed in several phases and by several developers. The framework's vision can communicate the wider intentions for the area, highlighting its full potential. If this is to be one of the framework's roles, that should be made clear in the brief from the outset. The full programme should also set out the tasks that should be carried out to communicate and promote the vision. If the role of the framework is principally or solely as an aspirational and marketing tool, all parties should be aware of that from the start, to avoid raising false expectations (see also chapter 3, Delivering Quality and Adding Value).

KEY MESSAGES FOR SECTION 1.2

1. **Urban design frameworks provide a spatial expression to urban design policies. They can coordinate more detailed site briefs, codes and masterplans.**
2. **Cooperation and coordination between a local authority, its departments and outside agencies**

- is essential if the urban design framework is to be implemented successfully.
3. **Frameworks can give confidence to residents and investors that public and private funds are being harnessed to a common goal.**

REFERENCES

1. Creating Successful Masterplans: A Guide for Clients. 2004. CABE
2. Preparing Design Codes: A Practice Manual. 2006. CLG
3. Car Parking: What works where. 2006. English Partnerships Design for Homes