

Topic 4: Place-making

Plan on a page

Vision for Place-making: To minimise carbon emissions by guiding new development to locations that offer the best opportunity for active travel, for use of public transport and for minimal use of private motor vehicles. To capitalise upon a local community's assets, inspiration and potential and create high quality, sustainable and resilient places that people want to live, work and play in and promote people's health, happiness and well-being.

What is this topic about?

As part of our aspiration to make Leeds zero carbon by 2030 we want to ensure that we guide development to the most sustainable places and to ensure that all new development is designed to high standards.

Where are we now?

Our existing Local Plan has strong policies to encourage development in sustainable locations and to support high standards of design. However, these policies pre-date the climate emergency declaration and the well-being impacts of Covid-19. We feel that now is the right time to consider refreshing our Plan to ensure it is suitably ambitious.

The proposed policy areas



Where do we want to get to

• We want to embed the 20-minute neighbourhood concept into planning policy

• We want to ensure that new development is sustainably located.

• We want to ensure that planning policy ensures the highest design standards are being achieved in Leeds

Have your say

We need your views on whether you think our aspirations for the Local Plan Update are correct. Do you agree that the topic of Place-making should be considered? If so, what would you like to see new policies contain?

LEEDS LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

REGULATION 18 CONSULTATION TOPIC PAPER

PLACE MAKING

BACKGROUND TO THE TOPIC

This topic area seeks to explore the policies that guide sustainable patterns of development in Leeds by engaging with concepts such as the 20 minute neighbourhood as well as focus on creating high quality and resilient buildings and spaces designed for carbon reduction and the promotion of people's health, happiness and well-being.

This paper looks at both strategic place-making (spatial patterns of growth, location of development) as well as place making in reference to detailed design considerations at a site, development and building level:

- i. Spatial criteria – strategic infrastructure; reusing land; walkable neighbourhoods, resource efficiency in land-use, reducing emissions, minimising flood risk, improving local services and job opportunities, accessible and safe routes of travel by sustainable transport, mixed-use development, mixed communities, social cohesion, regeneration, neighbourly urban design, safe public spaces, green spaces, digitally connected.
- ii. Place/Site/building criteria - Minimise waste (create space for composting), reduce pollution, sustainable construction, sustainable drainage, energy efficiency, conserve & enhance biodiversity, smart infrastructure and connectivity, walkable communities, green and blue infrastructure (hedges, community gardens, green walls/roofs, ponds), solar gain and tree planting for urban cooling and carbon capture.

Taking these aspects together we propose the following objective:

Objective: to minimise carbon emissions by guiding new development to locations that offer the best opportunity for active travel, for use of public transport and for minimal use of private motor vehicles and to capitalize upon a local community's assets, inspiration and potential and create high quality, sustainable and resilient places that people want to live, work and play in and promote people's health, happiness and well-being.

Policy Topic Areas

Strategic Place-making

Background

The intention of the Local Plan Update is to adopt new planning policy that takes Leeds toward carbon neutrality by 2030. For place-making this means guiding new development to locations that offer the best opportunity for active travel (by foot or cycle) and by public transport so that travel by car is greatly reduced. Seeking the “best opportunity” expresses the desire to optimise carbon reduction through control of the location of new development, use of appropriate density, efficient use of land and the creation of cohesive neighbourhoods.

It has been long considered that the most sustainable urban form is one of concentration of uses, particularly around centres so that people can be closer to work and other services and make use of public transport. Place making at the strategic level is about creating places that support people to live, work and enjoy the environment (incorporating both urban and natural aspects). Done well, place making minimises the environmental footprint of development; it brings environmental, economic and social elements of planning together and allows communities to flourish.

The purpose of the planning system (as expressed through the National Planning Policy Framework – NPPF) is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF sets out three objectives that broadly contribute to the wider factors that influence sustainable and healthy places:

- a) An economic objective to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being; and
- c) an environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

Furthermore, the NPPF specifically sets out that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which promote social

interaction, safe and accessible spaces and promote healthy lifestyles. It also acknowledges that planning policies and decisions play a key role in the provision of social, recreational and cultural services that meet community needs and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community.

All development plans produced in Leeds, as part of the Local Plan, have sought to provide a framework for sustainable and healthy communities, having regard to quality of life and to protect and enhance the environment. This is achieved through a strategic and spatial approach and a suite of policies relating to the overall scale and distribution of development, location, layout and fabric of places. Primarily, (through the Core Strategy (CS)) the greatest levels of development are directed to the existing main urban area (including the City Centre) and major settlements to minimise travel by private car, as sustainable locations which currently provide the greatest amount of services and facilities.

Impact of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on both people and the economy, impacting on the way people work, travel and shop. It's shown a rise in the number of people cycling and resulted in cleaner air quieter streets. However, it's also shown widening inequality for those who have easy access to green space, shops and services, and those who are disconnected from these important facilities. In addition, Covid-19 has generated contradictory views that people need larger homes, space and greater distances to stay safe, and less reliance on centrally located offices given the ability of most people to now work from home. The lockdown restrictions have reminded us all that place making is more important than ever in creating better spaces for everybody.

Twenty minute Neighbourhoods

The 20-minute neighbourhood concept has become a focus for a new vision of locational growth. The purpose of the concept is to ensure that neighbourhoods support strong communities and local economies, recognising that easy and safe walking and cycle access to services and facilities is good for health, and that physical activity and less reliance on the private car reduces air pollution. This approach to local growth and place making around service centres and hubs is gathering support across the world and is an easily understood way of planning for the way places change.

The concept of locating development in sustainable locations is nothing new in Leeds and the accessibility standards set out the Core Strategy go a long way in setting out the criteria for sustainable development. The concept is further explored in the recently published consultation document Leeds Local Transport Strategy which sets out the Council's ambition for Leeds to be a city where you don't need to own a car, where everyone has access to affordable zero carbon transport options.

Whilst beyond the role of Planning, it is important to note the Government's role in actively pursuing funding opportunities, including the recently launched Active Travel Fund which presents real opportunity to create a lasting change to how people move around towns and cities by enabling and installing infrastructure that supports safe cycling and walking with the aim to create safe, healthy spaces where communities can connect and walking and cycling is the easiest most attractive option of movement.

For Leeds to meet its objective of minimising carbon emissions it is considered that spatial growth needs to continue to follow a pattern of concentration particularly around the City and town centres, but with a reflection on the impacts of Covid-19 which highlighted the continued need to promote walkable neighbourhoods.

Role of towns and local centres

The city centre provides high levels of accessibility. It is the centre of the public transport network; it has a high density population within and in adjoining neighbourhoods that offers opportunity for people to walk or cycle to work and in terms of city centre employment, Leeds has a thriving legal, media and financial services sector with a large amount of office floor space. Whilst the role of the City Centre may evolve, feedback from local businesses suggests that it will still have a crucial role to play in the provision of office space, allowing for home working with more flexibility for "collaboration space".

Leeds also has 60 town and local centres designated in the Local Plan. These serve as hubs for local residents to access local shops and services. They can form the base for rolling out the concept of walkable neighbourhoods, whereby residents can access all the facilities that they need within a short walk of 15-20 minutes.

The role of Green and Blue Infrastructure

The importance of integrating the natural environment with the urban environment is a key part of creating successful places, not only in ensuring that places of wildlife and nature conservation value are protected but that new development creates new opportunities to deliver enhanced or new green infrastructure ensuring that the benefits of green and blue infrastructure are integral to healthy spaces.

Current Policy

The current Leeds Local Plan has sought to provide a framework for sustainable and healthy communities, having regard to quality of life and to protect and enhance the environment. This is achieved through a strategic and spatial approach and a suite of policies relating to the overall scale and distribution of development, location, layout and fabric of places.

Core Strategy policy is structured around a Settlement Hierarchy of City Centre, Main Urban Area, Major Settlements and Smaller Settlements; through this, new

development is channelled toward the urban areas, to avoid travel by private car, as sustainable locations because these places have access to a range of services via public transport and walking. Policy SP1 of the Core Strategy is the principal policy which guides development toward previously developed land, town centre uses to centres and economic development towards identified and suitable locations. It also expects regard to be given to the character of place and the role of infrastructure including waterways, and protection of European environmental designations.

The existing Site Allocations Plan already provides for a range of housing and employment allocations and these “in principle” locations for development will not be amended through the Local Plan Update. However, Policy H2 sets locational criteria for non-allocated (i.e. windfall) housing sites. It expects new development to be of a scale appropriate to the capacity of local infrastructure and is to be read alongside Policy T2 which sets accessibility requirements for new development with particular standards set out in Table 1 of Appendix 3 of the Core Strategy. Additional criteria are applicable to green field sites concerning their intrinsic environmental value.

For new employment uses, Policy EC1 sets out preferential locational criteria to guide the making of allocations for general employment land. These follow Policy SP1 in giving priority to urban areas of the settlement hierarchy, to regeneration areas, to existing employment areas and to complement housing in major urban extensions. Policy EC2 sets out locations for offices, which focusses on the City Centre and town centres, in accordance with national policy recognising office as a town centre use.

Rational for an Enhanced Policy Framework

For Leeds to meet its objective of minimising carbon emissions it is considered that spatial growth, in line with the emerging Leeds Transport Strategy, should continue to follow a pattern of concentration particularly around the City and town centres and with less development in relatively unsustainable locations, and promote walkable neighbourhoods. It is also considered that this should also apply to the location of general employment in appropriate locations. In this context, consideration needs to be given to how best to successfully integrate the 20-minute neighbourhood concept into the Leeds Local Plan and to guide the determination of planning applications

The role of the Local Plan Update is to consider how the Council’s ambition for Leeds to be a city where you don’t need to own a car, where everyone has access to affordable zero carbon transport options can be addressed and supported through planning policy.

There is also an opportunity to ensure that the key principles of sustainable development and strategic place making, supporting the Climate Emergency targets and ambitions aligned with health and well-being and inclusive growth are further highlighted, front and centre in the Local Plan.

Future Policy Options

Focused on strategic place making the focus of the consultation is to consider a policy framework which either alters policies SP1 and H2, or introduces a new strategic policy on this topic. It is not considered necessary to alter policies relating to the making of allocations (SP6, SP7, SP10, H7, EC1 and EC2). It is considered that the review of these policies would be best to take place when new allocations are required.

Consultation Questions

Does Leeds need a local policy definition of sustainability?

What does a '20-minute neighbourhood' mean to you? Do you agree that Leeds should aim to create 20 minute neighbourhoods?

How might planning policy support living in a City where you do not need to own a car?

How would you prioritise the users of residential streets? (Pedestrians, cyclists, cars, buses)

Should Leeds introduce a presumption against car dependent development?

HIGH QUALITY, RESILIENT AND HEALTHY PLACES

Background

The vision for Leeds is to have a strong policy framework that ensures planning policy and decisions achieve healthy, inclusive, safe, resilient and adaptable places (spaces and buildings); that Leeds is designed to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all, reflecting the 17 interlinked Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The evidence needed on a policy for high quality and sustainable places is qualitative however the many reports on climate mitigation and adaptation return to quality of place being central to achieving well designed places that respond to the impacts of climate change through mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions and minimising embodied energy) and adaptation (such as rising temperatures and increased risk of flooding).

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published the National Design Guide – Planning practice guidance for beautiful, enduring and successful places in October 2019. This makes clear that creating high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. The guide illustrates how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice.

In August 2020 the Government published a White Paper Consultation on Planning Reform which introduces discussions on a radical transformation of the planning system including recognition that *“there is not enough focus on design, and little incentive for high quality new homes and places: There is insufficient incentive within the process to bring forward proposals that are beautiful and which will enhance the environment, health, and character of local areas”*. It further identifies that the planning system needs a new focus on design and sustainability, with a greater focus on ‘place making’ and ‘creation of beautiful places’.

The MHCLG have followed this with publishing (29th January 2021) their consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The text has been revised to implement policy changes in response to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission “Living with Beauty” report¹. The consultation is also seeking views on the draft National Model Design Code, which provides detailed guidance on the production of design codes, guides and policies to promote successful design. The government believes *“that design codes are important because they provide a framework for creating healthy, environmentally responsive, sustainable and distinctive places, with a consistent and high-quality standard of design. This can*

¹ Living with beauty: Report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission – an Independent report on how to promote and increase the use of high-quality design for new build homes and neighbourhoods. Published 30 January 2020 (MHCLG)

provide greater certainty for communities about the design of development and bring conversations about design to the start of the planning process, rather than the end”.

There is also much research on the relationship between planning and good design and health benefits (Healthy by Design, NHS England, 2018) that share the benefits of addressing climate change (mitigation and adaptation) through improvements to the layout and form of buildings and spaces and better use of resources that has clear physiological and psychological health benefits. This is reflected locally in the Leeds 2014 Director of Public Health Report “Planning a Healthy City: housing growth in Leeds” which considered the detailed ways that Leeds could plan a healthy city around housing growth reflecting on the need to connect the public health benefits of good urban design and planning to people, place and the planning process.

Leeds Local Plan has sought to provide a framework for sustainable and healthy communities, having regard to quality of life and to protect and enhance the environment. As covered in the first part of this paper, this is achieved through a strategic and spatial approach and policies relating to the overall scale, distribution and location of development. Further, as will be covered in this second part of the paper, all development proposals are subject to a suite of specific and more detailed place making policies on the layout and fabric of places (covering design, housing, employment, natural environment, green space/public open spaces, transport) to achieve a layout, design and fabric efficiency which both mitigates climate change and addresses impacts, such as flooding but also has clear physiological and psychological benefits on health and well-being.

To that end, planning for sustainable place making is embedded within Leeds Local Plan as part of an integrated approach. The detailed design principles of place making reflects the origins between health and planning in the ‘Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909’ (and subsequent re-writes) when urban planning was being advanced to mitigate the consequences of the industrial age to provide healthy living spaces and environments. In this context, well designed places have layouts, forms and mix of uses that:

- reduce the requirements on resources (land, energy and water) - assisting in increasing the ability for Co2 absorption, sustaining natural ecosystems and minimising flood risk and potential for flooding and reducing overheating and pollution;
- take advantage of topography and layout - achieving passive solar gain, retaining and planting new trees for shade and urban heating and carbon capture and other biodiversity opportunities such as hedgerows, green walls/roofs and ponds;
- are fit for purpose and are adaptable - providing and linking to sustainable transport, walking and cycling and promotion of walkable developments and 15/20-minute neighbourhoods where daily needs are met locally – critical not only for a low carbon and healthy future but also for resilient places in light of the pandemic.

Place making integrates all of these policy strands but this paper focuses only on design and quality. For more detail on the other topics of this Local Plan Update please refer to the other background documents on Carbon Reduction, Flood Risk, Green Infrastructure and Sustainable Infrastructure.

Current Policy

Leeds' current Core Strategy Policy P10 and Saved UDP policy GP5 set out the requirements of all development to consider normal development management considerations and design principles. These are well established and well used policies and are supplemented by detailed design guidance in the Neighbourhoods for Living and Building for Today Tomorrow Sustainable Construction Supplementary Planning guides.

The reasoning for Policy P10 is set out in the supporting text of the Core Strategy at paragraph 5.3.41 and is worth repeating here:

“Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and essential in creating places in which current and future generations can enjoy a high quality of life which is fulfilling and healthy. Good design goes beyond aesthetic considerations and should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the built environment. Design can also assist in tackling the most cross cutting issues of sustainable development such as climate change, car dependence, community cohesion and health and wellbeing. The vast majority of people who live and work in the Leeds City Region do so in an urban environment. Their quality of life depends heavily upon the quality of their environment. In order to continue its economic success in a sustainable manner, and in order to achieve its aim of being the Best City in the UK by 2030, Leeds must build upon and retain the high quality of its built, historic and natural environment”.

In line with the NPPF the determination of planning applications needs to be considered against the Development Plan and all development control considerations. As such Saved Policy GP5 (UDP, 2006) sets out a high level and general policy against which all development is to be assessed. This provides the relevant policy hooks to other parts of the Local plan on matters such as acceptable provision of vehicular access, surface and foul water sewer disposal, car parking, greenspace, landscape and detailed design considerations.

The Core Strategy further sets out detailed policies as to the mix, type (older peoples accommodation; Gypsy and Traveller accommodation) density, affordability and space standards of new homes, alongside greenspace and green and blue infrastructure, connectivity and accessibility which when read together help to inform and shape 'place making'.

Rational for an enhanced Policy Framework

Policy P10 whilst embedding strong place making principles lacks strategic weight and there are clear opportunities to strengthen and heighten the signposting to other

technical implementation policies that have a clear cross over (i.e. green space; green infrastructure (green and blue); accessibility; space standards, energy and resources). Current policy also lacks explicit referencing to health and well-being and climate emergency.

It is not proposed that this Local Plan Update considers the current Core Strategy Policies on mix, type (older peoples accommodation; Gypsy and Traveller accommodation) density, affordability and space standards of new homes. However please refer to the separate topic papers on Carbon Reduction, Flood Risk, Green Infrastructure and Sustainable Infrastructure which all integrate into good 'place making'.

Future Policy Options

Local Plan Update options include rewriting policy P10 to provide the relevant signposting to other (existing and proposed) Leeds Local Plan technical implementation policies and provide heightened references to "health and well-being", "climate change" and "high quality place making" or introducing a new strategic policy to provide a stronger hook for design and place making upfront in the Local Plan, whilst also championing the importance of 20-minute neighbourhoods, linked with the opportunity to relook at Policy SP1 and H2 and T2 under Strategic Place-making. There is also the opportunity to integrate Saved Policy GP5, thus helping to simplify the Local Plan and the number of policies.

The Local Plan Update provides the opportunity to ensure that the principles of place making are front and centre in the Local Plan and underpin all the thematic/technical policies.

Consultation Questions

The Council's well established and well used Neighbourhoods for Living and Building for Today Tomorrow Sustainable Construction Supplementary Planning guides can also be refreshed as part of the LPU. Should these (or alternative document/policy) introduce the need for a Sustainable Development Assessment /checklist to ensure consideration of health and well-being and climate change issues are fully addressed in all development proposals?