

GANSW ADVISORY NOTE

Making Government a Better Client

Related advisory notes: Overview: Master planning process

Strategic frameworks

Strategic frameworks are the foundation for orderly, well-integrated and coordinated development of the built environment.

The need for a strategic framework is often triggered by impending change or transformative opportunities such as significant changes in land use or ownership, or major growth or changes in infrastructure.

Through wide consideration and understanding of context and opportunity, well-considered strategic frameworks can guide the long-term efficiency and sustainability, as well as the character and identity, of our cities, towns, public places, and buildings.

What is a strategic framework?

A strategic framework is a statement of aims and objectives for the physical regeneration of large areas of land, parts of an urban area or for complex projects.

Strategic frameworks provide vital background information for master planning and high-level decision-making. As a minimum, a strategic framework should encompass an analysis of baseline information, urban design analysis, character studies and context reports, and an outline of the business case (including a proposed delivery strategy) or the case for change. This information is the basis for developing a shared vision that communicates the collective aspirations of all stakeholders.

Ideally a strategic framework should be in place before embarking on a lengthier master planning process.

Why would I develop a strategic framework for my project?

A strategic framework can help you to:

- define the case for change, and develop a strategic business case
- understand the physical context for change
- highlight baseline information, benefits and issues
- identify themes related to the overall vision for your project or site
- explore options for addressing those themes
- identify key projects, locations or types of intervention that will be essential to achieving your objectives

- highlight what may need to change in the structure of a place
- explore how different spatial arrangements may benefit or hinder a proposal
- identify the work required to support effective processes and coordinated and integrated outcomes.

How would I use a strategic framework?

Strategic frameworks are primarily used during the early stages of a new process, undertaking, or transformation. They communicate information in terms of broad ideas rather than focusing on details that don't need to be resolved at this stage.

A strategic framework can be a master plan in itself, or an input into subsequent design processes. The main applications are:

Further master planning

The strategic framework can be part of the project brief for a master planning project team or development partner, as a basis for evaluating the feasibility of a project.

Delivery without a master plan

A strategic framework alone may be sufficient to control the scale and direction of a project. For example, a landowner might use a strategic framework as the basis for land subdivision, or as a development brief, and this may be more effective than preparing a master plan.

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Coordinating existing plans

For large development areas, whole towns, cities or subregions, a strategic framework may need to be prepared as the over-arching document for multiple existing and future master plans. The strategic framework can define the overall structure and priorities.

Supporting specific initiatives

Strategic frameworks can be used to support sector-specific initiatives as a way of coordinating certain approaches across large areas. For example, a strategic framework for green infrastructure can show how a living network of green spaces, water and environmental systems can be protected, enhanced, managed, and used to deliver critical environmental services. Strategic frameworks can operate at a scale that is suitable for considering what changes might be needed to make low-carbon and renewable energy technologies viable.

Evaluating proposals

When a vision and guiding principles have been developed for a project or site, a strategic framework can provide supporting criteria that can be used to evaluate the merit of various proposals. This may help with implementing specific projects, or with testing, evaluating or supporting projects with specific priorities, without the need for a master plan, or prior to a master plan being prepared.

Preparing a strategic framework**1 Map the requirements**

Map the locations of existing services and facilities, applying an understanding of place – particularly the social and economic context. Identify and explore:

- what change is needed to support the vision
- the most suitable locations for proposed facilities
- triggers and thresholds for viability of new facilities (e.g. number of new homes to support a school)
- future demands and planned investment
- physical infrastructure requirements that may depend on detailed technical studies.

A summary and analysis of previous relevant investigations should also be undertaken at this stage.

2 Categorise and overlay data

A strategic framework is prepared from a series of thematic plans such as landscape; energy, waste, and water infrastructure; movement patterns and structure; public realm; and social infrastructure. These are combined and compared. The way this data is categorised is as important as the data itself. Data can include, for example:

- distribution and types of employment
- settlement patterns, e.g. the layout of streets, housing and open spaces

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- direction of travel between settlements and areas for work
- numbers of people
- how movement patterns have shifted over time
- different modes of transport used
- environmental, social and economic data.

3 Work with a broad set of stakeholders, openly and inclusively, to agree on the strategy

Having mapped the data associated with a place, all involved (a broad set of stakeholders) need to agree on the type of strategic framework that will best serve everyone's interests. Determine whether the framework needs to act as:

- a brief for further master planning
- a tool to support delivery without a master plan
- a strategy that coordinates existing plans
- a strategy to support specific initiatives
- a strategic tool for evaluation
- a combination of the above.

If you need to coordinate and support existing plans and activities, a higher-level document that consolidates existing proposals into an agreed framework may be an option. This might be the case where:

- a wider program of medium- to long-term investment lacks clear objectives
- there is significant disagreement among stakeholders about the objectives for the project in question
- there are, or are likely to be,

competing proposals for significant change in a single place, or across settlements that have close functional relationships.

You can save time and avoid redundant work by making sure processes are compatible with their broader context and are supported by key stakeholders.

4 Generate scenarios and options

Determine and agree on the ways in which specific challenges, preferred outcomes or aspirations could be dealt with spatially. Agree on what is essential to meeting the vision for your project or site, and what outcomes could be achieved through a variety of different approaches.

When a number of variables cannot be sufficiently resolved, you may need to develop several scenarios in order to clarify assumptions, identify other required work and enable meaningful progress. These scenarios can give rise to different design options and offer a basis for comparison. We recommend generating a small number of realistic, desirable options for further testing.

For each aspiration and each preferred outcome, refer to the data you have assembled and ask:

- What interventions would contribute to achieving it?
- Are there any "big ideas" that would help to address multiple issues?
- What must be avoided at all costs?
- What is fundamental or essential to protect or maintain?

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5 Test options and finalise the framework

- Explore the viability of each of the options against the vision and objectives for your project or site.
- Assess each option against critical issues such as infrastructure, movement, property markets and planning, and against the established and agreed quality outcomes.
- Options should also be tested against smaller or individual projects, problems or issues.

The framework will primarily be used for communicating information about the project and should be expressed in terms of broad ideas rather than focusing on details that could be distracting. The framework can also be useful in the early stages of a project to inform business case development.

How can GANSW help?

GANSW can help in the planning and delivery of projects by providing a range of design-related services, including providing specific advice on strategic frameworks and whether they are appropriate for your project.

Further information

For more information see Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW (GANSW 2017) available on the GANSW website: ga.nsw.gov.au

Government Architect NSW

GANSW provides design leadership in architecture, urban design and landscape architecture. In this role, GANSW works across government, the private sector and the community to establish policy and practice guides for achieving good design. GANSW provides strategic advice across design, planning and development to support good policy, programs, projects and places.

Contact GANSW

GANSW makes every effort to keep its advice up to date. From time to time we will release new versions of these advisory notes. For further advice, or if you think there is information missing, please contact GANSW.

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