

MAVERICK
FRAME
STUDIO

FIELD GUIDE / 2026 EDITION

The Site Plan Nobody Can Read

What the source drawing must contain, the difference between an illustrative masterplan and an accurate one, and the legibility test to run before you print.

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A site plan is an argument, not a picture

A photograph, and most renders, can only show what a person standing in one place would see. A site plan is the only image in the set that shows the whole scheme at once: what goes where, in what order it gets built, how you get in and out, and how it meets what is already there. That makes it a document. It is judged on whether it can be read, not on whether it is beautiful.

THE JOB	WHAT HAS TO BE UNAMBIGUOUS ON THE SHEET
Extent	Where the scheme starts and stops. The boundary, the land you control, and the land you do not.
Phasing	What is built first, what follows, and what the site looks like between phases — the state a neighbour actually experiences for years.
Access and movement	Vehicles in and out, service and refuse routes, pedestrian and cycle desire lines, where parking sits.
Context	The edge condition on every side. What the existing neighbours look onto once this is built.
Landscape strategy	Retained trees against new planting, open space, levels, drainage features that take up real area.

A plan that does four of these and skips phasing is the most common version, because phasing is the least attractive to draw and the first thing a consultee asks about.



Maverick Frame production render.

STEP 01

What the source drawing has to contain

Almost every failure in a site plan render is present in the material it was built from. The image cannot invent information that was never issued, and a studio that guesses will guess plausibly and wrongly.

ISSUE THIS	WHAT GOES WRONG WITHOUT IT
Topographical survey with levels	A flat plan of a sloping site. Retaining, steps and ramps appear from nowhere later, and the landscape reads as invented.
Site boundary, and land ownership	The scheme spills over land you do not control. Painful to explain in public consultation.
Access points and the adopted highway	Entrances drawn where they look best rather than where they are permitted.
Phasing lines and plot numbering	No phasing version can be produced without re-doing the plan. Ask for it at the start even if you only print phase one.
Tree survey and retained planting	Mature trees drawn as saplings, or removed trees still standing. The single quickest way to lose a consultee's trust.
North point and a true scale bar	The plan cannot be checked, and sun direction in any 3D view will be wrong.
Drainage, attenuation and easements	Ponds, swales and no-build strips occupy real area. Added late, they push buildings around.
Existing to be retained or demolished	Ambiguity here is read as a proposal to keep something you intend to knock down.
Parking counts and servicing routes	A plan with fewer spaces drawn than the schedule states is the detail a reviewer notices first.

Two lines that save a re-issue

Send the drawings **as issued**, with the current revision code named in your covering message. Then ask for that revision code to appear in the render filename and, if the sheet allows, on the sheet. A site plan render is only true against one revision of one drawing, and six months later nobody remembers which.

STEP 02

Illustrative or accurate? Two different products

Both are legitimate. Commissioning one while describing the other is what produces a plan that is beautiful, persuasive, and cannot be relied on by anybody.

	ILLUSTRATIVE MASTERPLAN	ACCURATE SITE PLAN
Built from	Sketch layouts, area schedules, intent.	The survey and the issued drawing set, to scale.
Footprints	Indicative. Positions may shift.	As drawn. Measurable off the sheet if a scale bar is printed.
Planting	Generous, atmospheric, at maturity.	As surveyed and as specified, at a stated year.
Good for	Early engagement, land pitches, brochures, board papers.	Submissions, consultation boards, technical coordination, anything anybody will measure.
The danger	It gets attached to a formal document and becomes a commitment nobody meant to make.	Used too early, it freezes a layout before the design is ready to be frozen.

Questions to put to your planning authority or adviser

We cannot tell you what any authority requires, and requirements differ by jurisdiction and change over time. Put these in writing and get the answers in writing before you commission.

- [ ] Must the plan be drawn to a stated scale, and which one?
- [ ] Is illustrative material treated as part of the approved documents?
- [ ] Are a north point and scale bar required on the image itself?
- [ ] Is phasing required to be shown, and in a prescribed way?
- [ ] What sheet size, file format and resolution does the portal accept?
- [ ] Must the image carry a title block, drawing number or revision?

STEP 03

Keying, labels, and the test before you print

01 **One key, in one place**

Not a key on the plan, a second in the corner and a third in the report. Every colour and hatch that appears on the sheet appears once in one list, in the same order every time the plan is reissued.

02 **Label what a stranger cannot infer**

Access points, phase boundaries, levels where they change, open space, anything retained. Do not label what is obvious from the drawing; each redundant label steals room from one that matters.

03 **Number plots, do not name them**

Marketing names change. Plot numbers tie the image to the schedule, and the schedule is what everything else is checked against.

04 **Check it in greyscale**

Plans get photocopied, faxed into committee packs and printed on office machines. If two phases are only distinguishable by colour, they become one phase the moment somebody prints in black and white.

05 **North point and scale bar, always**

A scale bar survives resizing. A written scale ratio does not, and a plan that has been scaled to fit a page now states a scale that is false.

The legibility test

Do this on paper, before sign-off. Judging a site plan on a screen at 200 per cent is how an unreadable board gets approved by everybody in the room.

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FINAL OUTPUT        _____________________  (A1 board / A3 report / screen)
PRINTED AT          ____ % of the size the file was made for
VIEWING DISTANCE    ____ m   (a board: how far back can people stand?)

MEASURE ON THE PRINT, NOT ON SCREEN
  Smallest label          ____ mm cap height
  Thinnest line           ____ mm
  Number of key entries   ____
  Distinguishable in greyscale?   yes / no

THE TEST  Pin it up. Stand at the viewing distance above.
          Read the key. Find phase two. Find the main access.
          Anything you cannot do in ten seconds is not on the sheet.

IF IT FAILS   fewer labels  /  bigger type  /  split into two sheets
              — not a smaller scale bar and more patience
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Splitting is usually the right answer. One sheet that shows the whole scheme legibly, and a second that carries the detail, beats one sheet that tries to do both and is read by nobody.

WORKING WITH A STUDIO

Cost, and how to brief it

Two things people ask us before anything else. Both answers are short.

COMMISSIONED WORK	FREELANCER	STUDIO
Single exterior still	$100 – 300	$250 – 600
Single interior still	$120 – 350	$300 – 700
Package, 5–8 views	$600 – 1,500	$1,500 – 4,000
Animation, per minute	$1,000 – 3,000	$3,000 – 8,000

Market ranges we are willing to publish. Turnaround and revision-round figures are deliberately not in this table: ours vary too much by project type to state as a benchmark, and an invented number here would be worse than none.

How to brief it — shorter is better

This is the opposite of what most people assume. Four things:

- What you need — **how many images, and of what**
- The plans and elevations, as they are
- A few reference images for mood and light
- One clear line on what the images are *for*

Inflating a small job into a fifty-page specification backfires: taken literally it comes out ugly, and it misleads the people doing the work. Tell them the intent and let the team that does this daily handle the detail.

The mistake that costs the most

The biggest failure we see is not choosing the wrong vendor. It is **timing**. People start looking only after the first supplier has already failed and the deadline is on fire, then choose in a panic.

Line up and vet rendering partners **before** you need one. One, ideally a few, briefed and ready to take work. It costs an afternoon now and saves a project later.

10+
YEARS RENDERING VISUAL STORYTELLING

350+
BRANDS & AGENCIES EMPOWERED GLOBALLY

95%
CLIENT SATISFACTION RATE

40%+
OF OUR COMMISSIONS NOW INCLUDE MOTION OR 360

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When the image has to hold up, talk to us

We are a CGI studio: architectural and product rendering, 3D modelling, animation, 360 tours and VR. Ten years, 350+ brands and agencies, and the kind of work that still looks right when somebody counts the windows.

Send us the plans and a line on what the images are for. You get a scope and a price, and no obligation to use either.

START HERE

maverickframe.com/contacts

SEE THE WORK

maverickframe.com/gallery

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Maverick Frame production render. · Cost ranges are market ranges as of 2026 and are not a quotation.