

DESIGN REVIEW/URBAN DESIGN PANELS: GUIDANCE NOTES TO LIS MEMBERS

For some time Landscape Architects have been members of Urban Design/ Design Review Panels run by the Local Authorities concerned. The LIS will invite expressions of interest from Landscape Architects (LIS members) who may wish to assist with these Panels by adding to the pool of available members to ensure that landscape advice is always available.

The following description is a summary of the reasons for and operation of the Design Panels. All panels follow a similar format but can vary and are subject to review and alteration of procedures on a regular basis. It is best to check each local authority area website for any updates.

BACKGROUND

The Design Review process embraces the new Modernising of the Planning System, which places greater emphasis on addressing issues earlier in the process, particularly at pre-application stage. The Scottish Government is striving for high quality design in all new developments, which is apparent from publications such as Designing Places, Planning Advice Notes on Design Statements and Government emphasis on the importance of raising design awareness and improving skills and the design quality of new development proposals.

INTRODUCTION

In order to raise quality of design the Local Authorities have set up Design Review Panels to improve the quality of the built environment by securing and designing places and buildings that respect and contribute positively to their settings, promote aspiration, provide a sense of place, and use resources efficiently. The Panels consider a range of schemes that are significant because of their size, public interest, location or set new standards for the future.

The Design Review offers constructive and objective criticism at an early stage in the process, which should lead to a better output and a stronger working relationship between all those involved. The advice given will draw on professional knowledge and experience within a local context, offering the opportunity for comprehensive advice or criticism of development proposals. This process is most effective at the pre-application stage when there is still time for changes and discussions.

PANEL COMPOSITION

The review team is voluntary and chaired by Heads of Service and assisted by a Design Review Manager. Relevant Planning Case Officers also attend the Design Review.

The Panel consists of professionals from both the public and private sectors, chosen from areas of expertise relevant to each project. Panel Member backgrounds include relevant areas of knowledge such as Architecture, Urban Design, Landscape, Community Engagement, Planning and Infrastructure. Panel Members should have a thorough knowledge of the Local Authority area concerned. In the case of Aberdeen each Panel is composed of around six members, drawn from a larger pool. Panel Members should be able to offer up to six days annually to attend Panel meetings and associated site visits. It is for this reason that if any particular Landscape Member is not available for a particular meeting LIS has put forward its own pool of Members from which substitutes can be drawn.

APPOINTMENT

Panel Members will have a track record of achievement in one or more relevant professional fields, with the ability to offer objective, clear and independent advice. Prior to appointment Panel Members must confirm that they are aware of what is required of them, including any conflict of interest where they are involved in a submission. Membership is reviewed on a 2-3 year cycle and additional skills may be recruited in the future where necessary.

PROCEDURE

Early discussion with the Review Team will help determine if a review would be appropriate, referral is encouraged as early as possible, and sufficient information must be submitted to allow the Design Review Manager to determine whether a review is appropriate.

PANEL MEETINGS

Panel meetings are programmed well in advance, usually to coincide with Planning Committee cycles, and the agenda normally contains 1 to 3 proposals.

PROJECTS FOR REVIEW

The projects to be considered will be circulated to Panel members in advance and submissions will contain a brief with background information together with details of site visits if appropriate.

REVIEW MINUTES/REPORTS

Minutes of the meeting are normally taken by an Administrative Assistant, and then drafted to form a report. The draft report is then circulated to members of the relevant Design Review Panel for agreement before circulation and/or publication. The report will outline the Panel's views and offer constructive advice on how the scheme might be improved. Where the scheme is already in the planning system, reports will be displayed on the website. If however the review is at the pre application stage it will be subject to confidentiality procedures.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

With appropriate follow-up evaluation, reports can highlight 'best practice' examples, aiding the determining of planning applications covering similar issues in the future. Annual performance review determines whether advice given was acted upon and whether the scheme was better as a result. Also the result of the planning application process is communicated back to the Review Team.

PRESENTATION TO THE PANEL

It is essential the information presented is as comprehensive as possible in the time given to allow the panel to make beneficial comments.

Prior to the review, the following background information on the project must be submitted:

- Written scheme description, some of which will be included in the agenda to brief Panel Members prior to the meeting.
- Copies of drawings, which will be used during the review presentation along with copies in electronic format.
- Names and roles of those who will attend the review.

At the review, it will be the responsibility of the team promoting the proposal to provide a presentation lasting up to 15 minutes, using appropriate illustrative materials such as:

- Site and location plan within wider context;
- Views - including views of the project in context;
- Photographs - either aerial and/or site visits;
- Site analysis – constraints and opportunities;
- Plans, sections, elevations, sketch drawings and 3-dimensional drawings;
- Model(s) if appropriate;
- Materials – samples if appropriate.

Each review period will take approximately one hour divided as presentation by project team – 15 minutes; discussion – 40 minutes; feedback – 5 minutes

AFTER THE REVIEW

Developers and promoters of the proposals are encouraged to consider measures to accommodate the Panel's suggestions. The Panel's views are also included in the Planning Committee Reports, along with response to them and any changes made to scheme as a result.

BENEFITS

There are clear benefits to the Local Authority and potentially the developer concerned that is in receipt of professional landscape advice.

From a personal point of view participants can have a feeling of satisfaction in being able to help achieve good design and make a lasting contribution to local developments and the areas where they take place.

Panel membership provides experience of seeing and commenting on proposals from various sources and working with other professionals, and gives an insight into the policies and aspirations of the Local Authority. It is also invaluable on occasions where you may be required to consult on your own scheme.