MAYOR OF LONDON

LONDON DESIGN REVIEW CHARTER

GOOD GROWTH BY DESIGN

This Charter aims to provide a basis for the consistent delivery of design review to provide independent expert advice on design and place making issues. This supports design management processes which aim to deliver high quality project outcomes.

By providing a benchmark, the Charter supports consistency of experience for applicants, promoters and panellists and ensures that design review processes are as useful as possible, and contribute to the delivery of good design and the creation and maintenance of high quality places.

Well-run panels covering local areas currently operate in London, and the charter has been developed with input from those running and using panels, as well as from reviewers.

Signatories agree to the principles that it sets out, and agree to provide or use design review in a manner that is consistent with its contents.

LONDON DESIGN REVIEW CHARTER

We confirm that our review process is:

High quality delivered in a manner that accords with the Design Council CABE / Landscape Institute / RTPI / RIBA guide, which calls for reviews to be independent, expert, multidisciplinary, accountable, transparent, proportionate, timely, advisory, objective and available.

Representative and inclusive reflecting London's diverse population and seeking to promote inclusive buildings and places.

Based on clear review objectives which provide terms of reference available to all parties, making clear the outcomes, priorities, challenges and objectives of the review, applicable to the given place and project constraints.

Allied to the decision making process with the outputs of the design review being made available to the appropriate decision makers, with commitments sought that review outcomes will be taken into account by decision makers as part of a wider design management process.

Even handed, independent informed by an understanding of the reality of the project, the views of the client, local authority, community and other relevant stakeholders, but providing independent advice.

Proportionate recognising the need for different review formats and costs for larger or smaller schemes.

Consistent with the same standards of delivery. On occasions when other reviews have taken place (including by other panels), panellists should be made aware of the previous advice.

Collaborative with other design review users and providers to promote best practice London wide, to maintain consistent standards, and if appropriate share resources such as a pool of panellists.

Regularly evaluated with the aim of building a consistent process to monitor and evaluate the success of design review across London.

These principles will form part of the terms of reference for all participants (be they review providers, a local authority, a funder, a developer or client, or panellists).

Sadiq Khan Mayor of London	Signature of Chief Planner	Kingston Placemaking Panel Helen Goodwin - Design South East Panel name Panel manager	Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Area covered

ABOUT DESIGN REVIEW

The core of a review is a discussion ‘in the round’ of a given project, by expert multi-disciplinary panellists acting as ‘critical friends’, aiming to provide commentary, guidance and advice to help the project best serve its aims, the place it is situated in, the wider community, as well as to add value.

A review of this kind can be carried out at different stages in the design process.

Design review typically takes place during pre-application consultation as part of the planning process, or with regards to a ‘place’ (such as an opportunity area), advising both the applicant and the local authority.

Project review can take place from a strategic design stage onwards, advising a client organisation on the quality of its development proposals. Project reviews will include infrastructure investments that are not subject to the planning process.

WHY IS DESIGN REVIEW IMPORTANT?

With any proposal, it is key to not just invest, but to create places of high quality and lasting value, where people want to live, work, shop and relax, now and into the future.

Design review can support the development of scheme proposals, lead to the adjustment and refinement of schemes so that they are better able to create and maintain high quality places, and add value for the investment proposed.

Design review can also support the rejection of poorly designed and inappropriate schemes, which could damage the quality and character of a neighbourhood and the way in which it functions.

The review process is most valuable when it helps to realise the full potential of a given project and informs the development of the scheme, rather than being seen as a hurdle to jump. Best practice for design review entails the decision maker and the scheme promoter taking due regard the guidance of a review, engaging with the opportunity that an independent, informed 'critical friend' can contribute.

Over time, lessons learned from design review can also lead to raising standards of development in a client organisation, or a local planning authority.

However, design review looks at a scheme at a moment in time, and cannot be replace good design quality management processes throughout a projects' development and delivery.

This Charter consists of core principles for high quality design review, which applies to all signatories. This is accompanied by best practice guidance, illustrating how design review can be delivered in accordance with its principles, taking into account the wide variety of panel structures in existence.

The Charter builds on the requirement set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that 'Local planning authorities should have local design review arrangements in place to provide assessment and support to ensure high standards of design' (NPPF, paragraph 62).

The Charter also incorporates the widely accepted best practice document 'Design Review: Principles and Practice' (Design Council CABE / Landscape Institute / RTPI / RIBA, 2013).

The London Design Review Charter asks for a commitment to design review, in accordance with the policy and guidance above – but widens this to include project review providing independent expert advice to client organisations whose projects may not be considered as part of the planning process. It also takes account of the most up to date best practice in design review, and changes due to new delivery and funding methods.

BEST PRACTICE FOR DESIGN REVIEW

There are many models of design review, administered and funded in different ways across London, related to planning decisions and places (design review), and to internal investment decisions (project review).

Panels are run in a variety of ways – within local authorities and development corporations, by external providers, and as shared services across boroughs – all these structures can deliver excellent design review.

This guidance has been compiled with input from a range of review providers and users across London. The intention is the best practice guidelines below are applicable to all types of review.

These guidelines should inform terms of reference adopted for each design review process.

The establishment of review panels and their operation should follow good practice principles, reflecting the Principles and Practice guidance set by Design Council CABE, the Landscape Institute, the RTPI and the RIBA.

Selection of projects to review

- Criteria for selection of schemes for review should be adopted that take into account not only the monetary value of investment, but also the impact of the development.

- The impact of development is not necessarily only related to scale, but may also relate to other factors including: significance of use; sensitivity of the site context; or setting a precedent for future development.

Role of review in a wider design quality management process

Reviews are by their nature a snapshot, and should form part of a wider design quality management process, and cannot replace client or local authority design officer resources.

Timing and confidentiality

- Reviews are to be conducted at the earliest possible substantive stage in design development, before the scheme becomes 'fixed' in terms of its overall place making impact.

- At an early design stage, before a scheme is in the public domain (for example through submission of a planning application), the panel's advice will normally remain confidential – to allow an open and honest discussion.

- However, there should be a presumption that the panel's advice is made public at the earliest appropriate moment – for example, when investment in a scheme is announced, or a scheme is submitted for planning approval.

Structure of the review session itself

- Reviews should broadly follow the structure of:
  - presentation of scheme / document / strategy to be reviewed
  - clarification questions
  - panel discussion
  - summing up by panel chair.

- The discussion part of any review should have the most time devoted to it, and the review should not be run in a question and answer format.
- It should be carried out in open session with those responsible for the project present to hear the panel's views first hand.

- Observers (for example Councillors) and officers should not speak, unless clarification is sought.

Scope of review discussion

- The role of design review is to question the quality issues beyond quantifiable areas, such as policy compliance.

- Reviews should be tailored to the specific issues of the scheme. However, it is important to the project promoter to provide clarity on what topics might be covered, and so an agreed scope for discussion should be considered for inclusion within the terms of reference, aiming to cover a range of issues around the big picture of the project.

- A common range of areas for consideration for a review are:
  - how the project relates to the community it serves, both its immediate occupants, and beyond the scheme's 'red line' boundary
  - how the project is connected – physically, socially, and to existing neighbouring assets
  - how sustainability issues are addressed – from energy use, to local climate, healthy living, flexibility over time
  - the character of the project – how the project looks and feels in its environment, how the design works, its massing, appropriate materials and proportions, its landscaping and public space setting.

- Panellists should embrace the interests of all significant stakeholders.

- Panellists should be aware of the commercial and practical reality of the delivery of the project.

Recording of comments, and role of the review in subsequent decision making processes

- Notes of comments should be taken, and recorded within the decision making process.

- A report of the meeting should be checked and approved by the chair of the meeting as an accurate record of the discussion.

- The role of the review in advising a decision should be set out in terms of reference, and best practice should be regarded as reviews whose recommendations are seen by decision makers and officers as an integral part of the evidence on which to make a decision.

Site visits

- For site specific projects, a visit should be arranged before reviews (unless a site visit has already taken place before an earlier review of the scheme).

- Ideally, all panellists participating in the review should attend.

- In the case of very small schemes, or detailed design issues (such as advice on discharge of planning conditions), it may be appropriate for a review to take place without a site visit, but with illustration of the context through, for example, photographs, models and drawings.

Taking care with multiple reviews

- When projects have a series of reviews, the aim should be to use the same panellists; if this is not possible, the recommendations of previous reviews should inform subsequent reviews.

Panel governance and recruitment

- Robust panel governance arrangements should be put in place to maintain the independence of the panel's advice and quality of service provided. This is possible when the service is provided within a local authority

- Design review services work best when the panel infrastructure is in place and can be understood as consistent over time by those presenting, rather than convened on a review-by-review basis. This also has the advantage of embedding knowledge within the organisation.

- The quality of advice given by a panel will depend in large part on its membership. Recruitment should be based on agreed selection criteria, undertaken through an open process, with assessment of performance on an annual basis.

Panel composition and independence

- Panellists should be independent of the project development team, decision making organisation, and local planning authority.

- Panellists should be made aware of the best practice set out in this guidance, as well as the Design Council CABE, Landscape Institute, RTPI and RIBA guidance.

- Panellists should adhere to the Nolan Principles of Public Life

- Panels should be representative of the diversity of London's population. This is to ensure panellists are informed by relevant lived experiences pertinent to designing the built environment for diverse communities. It is important to ensure a representative panel is established at the recruitment stage, with clear objectives for representation and diversity captured in the panel's Terms of Reference. There is also a need to ensure there is a representative panel for each review.

- Within reason, the panel should include a range of knowledge and skills appropriate to the project under review (beyond architectural design expertise, for example, sustainability, transport, heritage, development economics, inclusive access, community engagement).

- Non-participating observers can attend a review, and, in the case of a review contributing to a planning application, many panels find the attendance of the local ward members is beneficial to the objective of the review.

Panel management

- The need to avoid conflicts of interest should be addressed, for example by providing information in advance of the review that allows panellists to identify any potential conflicts.

- Whether payments for reviews are made by the client or the planning authority, this should not compromise the integrity of the panel's advice. Arrangements to avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest should be

set out in the panel's terms of reference.

- It is considered best practice to pay a modest day rate to panellists, in recognition of the essential role that they play in the review process and the time away from their core work, and to maintain the quality of the reviewers.

Development and evaluation

- All panellists and chairs should undertake training or induction to ensure that the terms of reference, scope and role of review is understood and delivered in practice.

- Panels should be willing to share best practice and develop a shared approach to monitoring and evaluation with the aim of improving London wide design review processes.

- Those receiving the panel's advice should play their part by providing feedback on the impact of the review process on continuing design development.

- Panel managers should put in place simple, but sufficient, record keeping of reviews to aid self-evaluation

- Panel managers should plan regular assessment and evaluation of their processes to monitor adherence to the Charters' principles.

Issues Specific To Project Review (On Behalf Of A Client / Funding Decision)

- Reviews should be part of wider client design management processes – and should not be seen as a complete solution to achieving design quality outcomes.

- The scale of review at early stages can be modest – for example, a

workshop meeting could provide independent advice on briefing and procurement processes.

- How the relationship between review recommendations and project sign off is established is key to the impact of the review process, and should be part of a wider strategy of managing design quality.

Issues Specific To Design Review (As Part Of The Planning Process)

- The local planning authority should be made fully aware of and be content with the appointment of a specific review service provider that may be preferred by the design / development team before any reviews proceed. The review provider should be a signatory to this Charter.

- Pre-application reviews before an application is submitted remain confidential with the applicant and the planning authority.

- Once an application has been submitted, the panel's comments on the submission should be made public to ensure transparency.

- The panel plays an advisory role in the planning process, and its impact on the quality of development proposals depends on the advocacy of planning officers during pre-application negotiations, and on the panel's views being communicated effectively to the planning committee.

- A 'debrief meeting' between the applicant and planning case officer and design officer is essential, to allow decisions to be made about how to respond to the panel's advice.

- Reports of reviews should be posted on the Planning Portal (or similar digital record) and any committee report and its recommendations should include details of the outcomes of the review process, noting any consequential response by the applicants.

- The review should take account of policy related constraints, and be clear that the role of design review is to question the quality issues beyond quantifiable areas of policy compliance.