



# SUFFOLK DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

Terms of reference 2024

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

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Cover image: Suffolk Design Review Panel site visit © Frame Projects



# 1. INTRODUCTION

Frame Projects is a project management consultancy, expert in design and community review. Design review is a valuable means not only of testing the quality of development proposals going through the planning process, but also of influencing it for the better.

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework states that: Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development.... In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.' (NPPF section 12, para 138).

We have substantial experience of setting up and managing review panels. We manage multi-disciplinary design review panels on behalf of twelve London planning authorities: Barking and Dagenham; Brent; Bromley; Camden; Ealing; Greenwich; Haringey; Havering; Kensington and Chelsea; Redbridge; London Legacy Development Corporation; and Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation.

Outside of London we manage design review panels for: Ebbsfleet; Epping Forest; Watford; Folkestone & Hythe; Somerset; Thanet; and three proposed Garden Towns in Essex, Kent and Somerset.

Frame Projects is also Secretariat to the HS2 Independent Design Panel, which has been set up at the request of the Department for Transport to help ensure that, through great design, HS2 delivers real economic, social and environmental benefits for the whole country.

Building on our experience of design review, Frame Projects is helping to pioneer community review - allowing people to share local expertise with developers and planning authorities. We manage community review groups for the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation; the London Legacy Development Corporation; Dacorum Borough Council; the Old Kent Road Opportunity Area (working with Southwark Council); the Isle of Dogs and South Poplar Opportunity Area (working with Tower Hamlets Council); Ealing Council; and Brent Council.

This terms of reference describes the Independent Design Review service that we offer on behalf of local planning authorities. These services can be provided either on a one-off basis, or as part of ongoing collaborative working with a Council.



Epping Quality Review Panel site visit © Frame Projects

## 2. PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN REVIEW

**Independent** – it is conducted by people who are unconnected with the scheme’s promoters and decision makers, and it ensures that conflicts of interest do not arise.

**Expert** – the advice is delivered by suitably trained people who are experienced in design, who know how to criticise constructively and whose standing and expertise is widely acknowledged.

**Multidisciplinary** – the advice combines the different perspectives of architects, urban designers, town planners, landscape architects, engineers and other specialist experts to provide a complete, rounded assessment.

**Accountable** – the design review panel and its advice must be clearly seen to work for the benefit of the public. This should be ingrained within the panel’s terms of reference.

**Transparent** – the panel’s remit, membership, governance processes and funding should always be in the public domain.

**Proportionate** – it is used on projects whose significance, either at local or national level, warrants the investment needed to provide the service.

**Timely** – it takes place as early as possible in the design process, because this can avoid a great deal of wasted time. It also costs less to make changes at an early stage.

**Advisory** – a design review panel does not make decisions, but it offers impartial advice for the people who do.

**Objective** – it appraises schemes according to reasoned, objective criteria rather than the stylistic tastes of individual panel members.

**Accessible** – its findings and advice are clearly expressed in terms that design teams, decision makers and clients can all understand and make use of.

*Design Review: Principles and Practice*  
Design Council CABE / Landscape Institute / RTPI / RIBA (2013)



Epping Forest District Quality Review Panel site visit © Frame Projects

# 3. PANEL COMPOSITION

The panel brings together leading professionals from a variety of fields. Independent Design Review Panel members are chosen to provide a broad range of expertise which may include:

- architecture
- urban design / town planning
- landscape architecture
- heritage / townscape
- industrial / workspace design
- sustainability / ecology
- civil / structural engineering
- community engagement
- Inclusive design

Many of those appointed to Frame’s panels have expertise and experience in more than one of these areas. The composition of each panel meeting is chosen as far as possible to suit the scheme being reviewed, as well as considering gender balance, diversity, and panel continuity for returning schemes.

Panel membership is reviewed regularly (at least once a year), to ensure that Frame Projects can provide all the necessary expertise, and to bring the fresh perspectives of new panel members into the process.



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Kensington and Chelsea Quality Review Panel site visit © Frame Projects

## 4. PANEL REMIT

The Design Review Panel provides independent, objective, expert advice on development proposals. It provides advice to scheme promoters and the planning authority as a 'critical friend' to support delivery of high quality design.

Generally, schemes are referred to the panel by planning officers at an early stage to identify and consider the key assumptions of the proposed design. The independent advice given by the panel is likely to be most effective when given before a scheme becomes too fixed. Early engagement with the panel should reduce the risk of delay at application stage by ensuring that designs reach an acceptable standard. The panel's advice may assist the local planning authority in negotiating design improvements and may support decision-making, including refusal of planning permission where design quality is not of an acceptably high standard.

The panel considers significant development proposals. Significance may fall into the following categories.

Significance related to size or use, for example:

- large buildings or groups of buildings
- infrastructure projects such as bridges or transport hubs
- large public realm proposals
- masterplans, design codes or design guidance

Significance related to site, for example:

- proposals affecting sensitive views
- developments with a major impact on their context
- schemes involving significant public investment

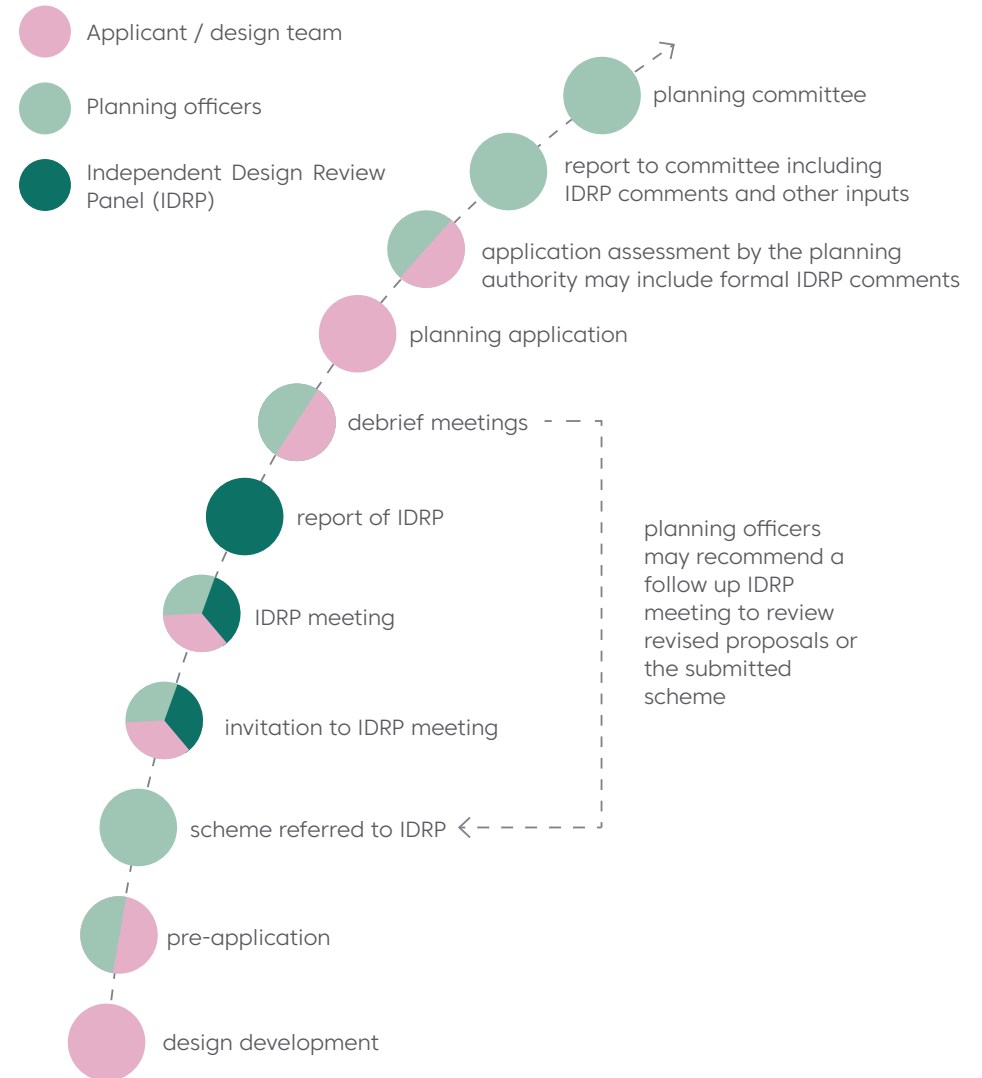
Projects may also be referred to the panel by the planning authority at their discretion, for example where they require advice on:

- building typologies, such as single aspect dwellings
- sustainability and design for climate change adaptation and mitigation
- proposals likely to establish a precedent for future development
- developments out of keeping with their context
- schemes with significant impacts on the quality of everyday life
- landscape / public space design.

When a proposal is at a pre-application stage, the report is not made public and is only shared with the Council, the applicant and design team, and panel members who attended the review meeting.

If the proposal is reviewed at an application stage, the report will be a public document and may be published on the Council's website. Where the final review of a scheme takes place at a pre-application stage, the report of this meeting may also be made public once an application is submitted.

A diagram showing the role of the Independent Design Review Panel in the planning process is shown opposite.





## 5. ROLE OF THE DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

The Independent Design Review Panel provides independent and impartial advice on development proposals, at the request of planning officers, and plays an advisory role in the planning process.

Reviews can be arranged for schemes from RIBA Stage 2 (concept design) onwards, providing advice to the applicant and the planning authority.

It is for the planning officers and the planning committee to decide what weight to place on the panel's comments, balanced with other planning considerations. Applicants should consult planning officers following a review to agree how to respond to the panel's advice.

If any points made by the Independent Design Review Panel require clarification, it is the responsibility of the applicant and their design team to draw this to the attention of the chair of the panel (if during the meeting) or the panel manager, Frame Projects, (if the report requires clarification).



## 6. INDEPENDENCE CONFIDENCE & PROBITY

The Independent Design Review Panel is an independent and impartial service provided by Frame Projects, an external consultancy.

The processes for managing the Independent Design Review Panel, appointing members, including the selection of the chair, and the administration of meetings are agreed in partnership with the planning authority.

Panel members shall keep confidential all information acquired in the course of their role on the panel, with the exception of reports that are in the public domain.

Further details are provided in the confidentiality procedure included at Appendix A.



## 7. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Independent Design Review Panel is intended to provide a constructive forum for applicants, their project teams, and planning officers seeking advice and guidance on development proposals.

In order to ensure the panel's independence and professionalism, it is essential that members avoid any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may arise in relation to schemes considered during the meetings that they attend. Minimising the potential for conflicts of interest will be important to the impartiality of the Independent Design Review Panel.

Panel members are asked to ensure that any possible conflicts of interest are identified at an early stage, and that appropriate action is taken to resolve them.

Meeting agendas provided in advance of reviews will include sufficient project information to allow any potential conflicts of interest to be identified and declared.

In cases where there is a conflict, a panel member may be asked to step down from a review. In other cases, a declaration of interest may be sufficient. If in doubt, panel members should contact Frame Projects to discuss this.

Further details on the process for managing conflicts of interest are provided in Appendix B.

## 8. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

As a public authority, the planning authority is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). All requests made to the planning authority for information with regard to the Independent Design Review Panel will be handled according to the provisions of the Act. Legal advice may be required on a case by case basis to establish whether any exemptions apply under the Act.



Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel site visit © Frame Projects

# 9. TYPES OF REVIEW

Two types of review are offered:

- a formal review - for schemes with greater impact
- a chair's review - for schemes with more localised impact, or for some previously reviewed schemes

## FORMAL REVIEWS

The chair and four panel members attend a formal review.

In addition to planning officers, other relevant stakeholders, for example Historic England, may be invited to attend and asked to give their views as background to the review meeting.

Formal reviews usually take place at a stage when an applicant and design team have decided their preferred option for development of a site, and have sufficient drawings and models to inform a comprehensive discussion.

In advance of the formal review, panel members attend a 15 minute briefing with planning officers on the policy context, and issues arising from pre-application discussions.

At the start of the formal review, planning officers will summarise their panel briefing. The scheme will then be presented by a member of the design

team, normally the lead architect, following a brief introduction by the applicant.

Presentations may be made with drawings and / or pdf or PowerPoint and models, as appropriate. At least one paper copy of the presentation should be provided, for ease of reference during the panel discussion.

Time allocated for formal reviews will depend on the scale of the project but a typical formal review will last 90 minutes: 10 minutes introductions and briefing by planning officers; 25 minutes presentation; 55 minutes discussion and summing up by the chair.

Large projects, for example schemes with several development plots, may be split into smaller elements, to ensure that each component receives adequate time for discussion.

## CHAIR'S REVIEWS

The chair and one panel member attend chair's reviews.

In the case of smaller development proposals, or schemes previously presented at a formal review, a chair's review may be arranged to provide advice on the quality of proposals.

Planning officers will be invited, but other

stakeholders will not normally attend. However, the planning case officer may brief the panel on any comments made by other stakeholders.

For schemes that are the subject of a current planning application, the presentation should be based on the submitted drawings and documents. At least one paper copy of the presentation should be provided, for ease of reference during the panel discussion.

In advance of the review, panel members attend a 15 minute briefing with planning officers on the policy context, and issues arising from pre-application discussions.

At the start of the chair's review, planning officers will summarise their panel briefing. The scheme will then be presented by a member of the design team, normally the lead architect, following a brief introduction by the applicant.

A typical chair's review will last 60 minutes: 10 minutes introductions and briefing by planning officers; 15 minutes presentation; 35 minutes discussion and summing up by the chair.





Brent Quality Review Panel site visit © Frame Projects

## 10. SITE VISITS

Wherever possible, a site visit will be arranged for formal and chair's reviews (unless a site visit has already taken place before an earlier review of the scheme). All panel members participating in the review are required to attend. Unless informed otherwise, Frame Projects assumes consent for photographs taken on site or at review meetings to be used on its website and in other publications.

Panel members, representatives of the local planning authority and members of the applicant team should maintain care and awareness of potential hazards for themselves and other attendees during site visits. All those involved should take appropriate action to alert the party of potential risks so that the visit can be paused or terminated if necessary. It is the responsibility of applicant teams to notify Frame Projects in advance of a review meeting if PPE is required on site.



Harlow and Gilston Quality Review Panel site visit © Frame Projects

## 11. REVIEW AGENDAS

Agendas will be issued to panel members in advance of each review.

For formal and chair's reviews, a detailed agenda will be provided that includes notes on the planning context, details of the scheme(s) to be considered, applicant and consultant team.

Information provided by the planning case officer will include relevant planning history and planning policies that officers consider essential for assessing the scheme. Advice may be specifically sought on design quality assessed against these policies.

A scheme description provided by the design team will set out factual information about the project. Selected plans and images of the project will also be provided to help to give a sense of the scope and nature of the project under review.

Where a scheme returns for a second or subsequent review, the report of the previous review will be provided with the agenda.

## 12. PANEL REPORTS

During the Independent Design Review Panel meeting the panel manager will take notes of the discussion - these form the basis of panel reports. Reports will be drafted by Frame Projects, agreed with the chair, and issued within 10 working days.

At pre-application stage, reports will provide clear, independent advice on ways in which the quality of development proposals could be improved, referring where appropriate to specific planning policies in relation to expectations of high quality design.

The Independent Design Review Panel has an advisory role in the planning process, and the project team should consult planning officers following a review to agree how to respond to points raised in the report.

Once planning applications are submitted, the report may provide guidance to the planning authority in determining the application. This may include suggesting planning conditions or refusal of planning permission if the design quality is not of an acceptably high standard.

Independent Design Review Panel reports may be included in committee reports on planning application schemes – in which case planning officers will place these in the context of other planning matters, which the panel's advice neither replaces nor overrules.

If the proposal is reviewed at an application stage the report will be a public document kept within the proposal's case file and published on the planning authority's website. Where the final review of a scheme takes place at a pre-application stage, the report of this meeting may also be made public once an application is submitted.



Kensington and Chelsea Quality Review Panel site visit © Frame Projects

# 13. PANEL CHARGES

Current charges for Independent Design Review Panel meetings are:

- £5,750 + VAT in person formal review
- £4,640 + VAT online formal review
- £3,300 + VAT chair's review

Applicants are referred to the Independent Design Review Panel by the planning authority as an external service and fees are paid by the applicant to Frame Projects for delivering this service.

The cost of venue hire, and transport from the nearest convenient station to the site visit would be in addition to the charges above, if required. However, where possible we will book meeting rooms at Council offices.

Payment should be made in advance of the review, and the review may be cancelled if payment is not received five days before the meeting. Full details will be provided when an invitation to the Independent Design Review Panel is confirmed.

Where a scheduled review is subsequently cancelled or postponed by the applicant, an administrative charge will be applied:

- 50% of full cost : less than two weeks before scheduled review
- £725 + VAT : between two and four weeks before scheduled review



LLDC Quality Review Panel site visit © Frame Projects



# APPENDIX A

## Procedure regarding confidentiality

The Independent Design Review Panel provides a constructive and reliable forum for applicants and their design teams to seek guidance at an early stage, when the panel's advice can have the most impact. It is therefore essential that appropriate levels of confidentiality are maintained. The following procedure shall apply.

1. Panel meetings are only to be attended by panel members, planning officers, and officers from stakeholder organisations involved in the project, for example statutory consultees, as well as the applicant and their design team. If any additional individual is to attend, it should be approved by the panel manager.
2. At all times panel members shall keep strictly confidential all information acquired during the course of their role on the panel and shall not use that information for their own benefit, nor disclose it to any third party (with the exception of reports that are in the public domain – see points 5 and 6).
3. The panel's advice is provided in the form of a report written by the panel manager, containing key points arrived at in discussion by the panel. If any applicant, architect or agent approaches a panel member for advice on a scheme subject to review (before, during or after), they should decline to comment and refer the inquiry to the panel manager.
4. Following the meeting, the panel manager will write a draft report, circulate it to the chair for comments and then make any amendments. The final report will then be distributed to all those who attended the meeting, and copied to those invited who sent apologies.
5. If the proposal is at a pre-application stage, the report is not made public and is only shared with the planning authority, the applicant and design team, and any other stakeholder bodies that the Council has consulted on the project.
6. If the proposal is reviewed at an application stage, the report will be a public document kept within the proposal's case file and may be published on the planning authority's website. Where the final review of a scheme takes place at a pre-application stage, the report of this meeting may also be made public once an application is submitted.
7. If a panel member wishes to share any Independent Design Review Panel report with a third party, they must seek approval from the panel manager, who will confirm whether or not the report is public.



## APPENDIX B

### Procedure regarding conflicts of interest

To ensure the integrity and impartiality of advice given by the Independent Design Review Panel, potential conflicts of interest will be checked before each review meeting. The following process will apply.

1. All panel members will be required to declare any conflicts of interest.
2. Panel members are notified of the schemes coming before the panel at least a week in advance. It is expected that at this time panel members should declare any possible interest in a project to the panel manager.
3. The panel manager, in collaboration with the panel chair and planning authority staff, will determine if the conflict of interest requires the panel member to step down from the meeting, or if a declaration of interest would be sufficient.
4. In general, a panel member should not attend a review meeting if they have:
  - a financial, commercial or professional interest in a project that will be reviewed, its client and / or its site;
  - a financial, commercial or professional interest in a project, its client and / or a site that is adjacent to the project that will be reviewed or upon which the project being reviewed will have a material impact;
  - a personal relationship with an individual or group involved in the project, or a related project, where that relationship prevents the panel member from being objective.
5. Specific examples include: current work with the client for the project being reviewed; current design work on a neighbouring site; previous involvement in a procurement process to appoint a design team for the project.
6. Personal interests that should be declared, but which would not normally prevent a panel member participating in a review, might include current work with a member of the consultant team for a project that will be reviewed. In this situation, the interest will be noted at the beginning of the review, discussed with the presenting design teams and formally recorded in the review report.
7. If, subsequent to a review of a scheme in which a panel member has participated, they are approached by any applicant, architect or agent to ascertain a potential interest in contributing to the project team for that scheme, they must decline. Professional work in a scheme previously reviewed by a panel member is not permitted, either directly by the panel member or by any organisation that employs them, or that they own.
8. Panel members are not restricted from professionally working on projects within the area. However, if such a scheme comes up for review, that panel member should not be involved and must declare a conflict of interest.
9. Councillors and council employees are not eligible to be members of their own authority's panel.

