

TERMS OF REFERENCE

*HOUNSLOW
DESIGN
REVIEW
PANEL*

2025

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01 INTRODUCTION

Hounslow is experiencing unprecedented levels of growth with increasing demand for development. The Council wants to achieve the highest standards of design in new development to give everyone living and working in the borough a better quality environment. The independent Hounslow Design Review Panel (HDRP) supports the Council in delivering design excellence, and offers the expertise of leading built environment professionals through a robust review process.

Effective discussions between all those involved in the development process at the pre-application stage are a vital part of achieving high quality design. The HDRP contributes to that process and sends out a very clear message to the development industry that design quality matters to the Council. The panel complements Council services.

The HDRP is a key part of the Council's wider aspiration of raising the bar in design quality. The Local Plan 2015 clearly sets out the Council's ambition in Policy CC2 'We will retain, promote and support high quality urban design and architecture to create attractive, distinctive, and liveable places'. The Local Plan reviews for the Great West Corridor and the West of the Borough reinforce the approach in greater detail.

The Mayor of London in Good Growth by Design supports the use of design review (quality review) and says it can be 'a powerful way of ensuring that the design of new buildings enhances London's cityscape as well as meeting users' needs'. The Mayor has produced a London Quality Review Charter that consists of core principles and best practice guidance to review the quality of schemes during development. The Council agrees to the principles set out in the Charter and is a signatory to it.

02 PURPOSE

The aim of the HDRP is to provide expert impartial design advice and guidance on significant development proposals, regeneration programmes, policies, briefs and guidance matters, in order to raise the quality of design in Hounslow's built environment and establish it as a leading issue. The advice is for developers, design teams, planning officers and the Hounslow Planning Committee, identifying where improvements can be made, or supporting outstanding or exemplar designs.

Essentially, the HDRP is a critical friend to all parties. It helps inform the planning process leading to better design outcomes, and gives greater confidence to decision makers to support innovative, high quality design. It operates in the public interest and always considers the best outcome for the whole community.

03 THE APPROACH

The Council is managing the organisation of the independent HDRP. A recruitment process has led to a panel with a range of expertise. The list of panel members is available on the Council's website.

04 PRINCIPLES

Design Review is a well established way to achieve good design in the planning process. It is an independent and impartial evaluation process that should be operated to the highest standards to be respected and effective. To ensure consistency the RIBA, Landscape Institute, CABE and RTPI developed 10 principles of design review that the HDRP will adhere to.

These are set out below, with Hounslow's actions to meet the principles described below each principle

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 (The process for conflicts of interest is set out in the Terms of Reference and Panel Members are made aware of the process at their induction where they will be given further detail on their responsibilities and role in the process).

EXPERT

It is carried out by suitably trained people who are experienced in design and know how to criticise constructively. Review is usually most respected where it is carried out by professional peers of the project designers, because their standing and expertise will be acknowledged (There is a targeted recruitment and appointment process to attract experienced professionals)

MULTIDISCIPLINARY

It combines the different perspectives of architects, urban designers, urban and rural planners, landscape architects, engineers and other specialist experts to provide a complete, rounded assessment (There is a targeted recruitment and appointment process to ensure range of professionals are appointed)

ACCOUNTABLE

The 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. (The Terms of Reference define the role as being for the public good and in the public interest)

TRANSPARENT

The panel's remit, membership, governance processes and funding should always be in the public domain. (The Terms of Reference set out the panel process, and are on the Hounslow website. The Advisory Board is set up to oversee and monitor process)

PROPORTIONATE

It is used on projects whose significance, either at local or national level, warrants the investment needed to provide the service (The Terms of Reference set out the remit of the panel and a clear selection process for schemes)

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 (The Terms of Reference set out the panel process and the importance of pre application reviews)

ADVISORY

A design review panel does not make decisions, but it offers impartial advice for the people who do (The Terms of Reference set out the role and purpose of the panel and the relationship with decision makers)

OBJECTIVE

It appraises schemes according to reasoned, objective criteria rather than the individual stylistic tastes of Panel Members (Induction and training for Panel Members to explain the approach on criteria for review, and avoiding stylistic tastes)

ACCESSIBLE

Its findings and advice are clearly expressed in terms that design teams, decision makers and client can all understand and make use of (The Panel Manager is responsible with the Panel Chair for the text of the note/letter and ensures the tone and content is clear)

05 REMIT - TYPE OF SCHEMES

The start of the Pre application period is the best time for the review process to begin as designs have not been set and the panel is able to influence changes and improvements.

The HDRP reviews a limited number of schemes so there are established criteria to make sure that the most appropriate schemes are chosen. There are three main criteria for selecting schemes for review:

1) **the scale of development and its uses**, this includes:

- larger scale buildings and groups of buildings,
- Mayor referable schemes,
- infrastructure projects
- large public realm schemes

2) **by the site**, this includes:

- allocated sites and Council own sites
- developments affecting significant views and heritage assets or a major impact on their surroundings,

3) or by a **local issue, exceptional challenge or public benefit**:

- including council frameworks, masterplans, design codes and development briefs
- planning policy documents
- initiatives that have urban design implications,
- schemes involving major public investment or council-led regeneration schemes
- proposals likely to set a precedent
- recurring issues such as infill development

06 ROLES

The HDRP is managed by the Council's Planning Team, with independent governance provided through the Advisory Board.

The **Panel Manager** is responsible for the delivery of the panel process, including the selection of schemes, the review agenda, getting the materials for review, managing the review session and drafting the panel letter. They will produce the Annual Report and quarterly briefings and work with the Chairs of the Panel to provide a consistent evaluation of the Panel's work. The Panel Manager is part of the Planning Team and responsible to the Chief Planning Officer. The Director of Planning and Buildings, in consultation with the Lead Member, has final sign off on the appointment of Chair, and Panel Members.

All **Planning Officers** are involved in the design review process, either in briefing the panel on their planning application schemes, or attending for CPD, as the discussion itself can be a helpful way to learn about design quality. They all receive training on the panel process to make sure they can participate fully in the process.

In addition to contributing to reviews, **Panel Members** attend an induction session, and an annual meeting. They receive quarterly briefings on the panel's activities. Panel Members take responsibility for checking for conflicts of interest as set out in Section 11.

The **Panel Chair** is responsible for chairing the review sessions, checking the letter drafted by the Panel Manager and making comments. The Chair also attends Planning Committee and the Planning Development Presentation meetings whenever possible. There are three Panel Chairs (2025) who share the responsibilities.

The **Planning Committee** is given a training session on the HDRP to explain its role. The HDRP letter sits within the planner's committee report, to help with the assessment of a planning application. The HDRP comments are a material consideration and should be seen as an integral part of the evidence considered by the Committee.

The Developer attends the review session (if it's a Full Review or Design Workshop) and has an opportunity to make comments to the panel.

The Design Team prepares the material needed for a review session (set out in Review Process), and attends the review session. They present their scheme to the panel. They will liaise with the Panel Manager both before and after the review session.

The Advisory Board is responsible for overseeing the governance of the panel. The Board meets once a year. More details in Section 14.

07 PANEL MEMBERS AND CHAIR

The Hounslow panel is made up of diverse and nationally respected built environment professionals, from the fields of architecture, landscape architecture, heritage design, urban design, town planning, environmental sustainability, engineering and community planning. To ensure this range of professions is available the Council will recruit additional Panel Members to fill any gaps in expertise when necessary. This will be done through a bespoke process as a limited number are needed. Local knowledge and understanding of the local context will be welcomed.

Panel Members will receive a fee of £480 per day, £240 for half a day. The Panel Chair will receive £720 per day, £360 for half a day. The Chair will also be paid for half a day when they attend Planning committee. This is nil value with no commitment to work.

Panel members will be provided with these Terms of Reference to ensure that they have the information they need to fully participate in the panel process. All Panel Members will abide by the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life — selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

See more at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>.

08 REVIEW PROCESS

HDRP is usually held monthly unless demand requires more sessions to be arranged. They are held either at Hounslow House or at a suitable venue near the site of the scheme under discussion. They will usually be held on a Friday, but there will be some flexibility and other days can be considered.

The Review Agenda

The Panel Manager will decide which schemes are suitable for review with the Head of Development Management and agree the day and time of the panel meeting at least four weeks in advance. The Panel Manager will contact the scheme developer and design team to agree the date. Once the date is agreed the Panel will be selected to suit the scheme being reviewed and potential Panel Members will be emailed to ask if they are available.

The design teams are asked for project information on the scheme and its site, and on the team responsible for it, the information will be included in the agenda sent to the Panel. Ideally the agenda will be ready one week before the meeting date, to give Panel Members time to read the scheme information and to check for Conflicts of Interest (see section 11). If the review is for a Council Policy Document then the Panel Manager will liaise with the Policy team as above.

Materials

Once the agenda is agreed the design teams will be asked to produce presentation material. This will usually be drawings that show the aspirations of the scheme as well as the understanding of the context, brief and how the projects sits and relates within its surroundings. If a fly through is considered important to the scheme presentation arrangements can be made.

In the case of a Policy Document the Panel will be sent the full document in advance of the meeting, to give an opportunity for them to read it.

09 PANEL REVIEW TYPES

1. Standard Review

This is for reviews at pre-application stage. It will be held over a morning or afternoon, taking up to **3.5 hours** in total, depending on location of site visit and travel time to review venue.

Key elements:

- Chair and 3 Panel Members.
- Site Visit with Panel Manager, Planning Officer, Scheme Developer and Architect, and Panel Members
- Review session with presentations by design team.

In the case of some significant schemes it may be that multiple Standard Review will be needed. Whenever possible the same Panel Members will be used for the second and subsequent reviews.

Notes:

1. Schemes that include significant masterplans, 100+ homes or buildings that are over 6 storeys in height are not appropriate for a Standard Review, and should apply for a Large Scale Review (see below).

2. This type of review can also be utilised during the application stage, when the Chair's review would not allow for sufficient scope to review outstanding issues.

Fee: £5455 + VAT

2. Large Scale Review

This is for reviews at pre-application stage where the scheme proposes one or more of the following elements:

- significant masterplans

- 100+ homes
- buildings that are over 6 storeys in height

The review will be held over a morning or afternoon, taking up to **4.5 hours** in total, depending on location of site visit and travel time to review venue.

Key elements:

- Chair and 4 Panel Members.
- Site Visit with Panel Manager, Planning Officer, Scheme Developer and Architect, and Panel Members
- Review session with presentations by design team.

In the case of some significant schemes it may be that multiple Large Scale Reviews will be needed. Whenever possible the same Panel Members will be used for the second and subsequent reviews.

Fee: £6294 + VAT

3. Chair's Review

This is to review planning application schemes that have already been seen at pre-application stage, as well as minor schemes that meet the scheme criteria described in chapter 4. Usually **1 hour**.

Key elements:

- Chair and 1 Panel Member
- Letter is the formal comment of the HDRP on the planning application
- Design team is not present, only the planning officer presents.

Fee: £2937 + VAT

Once a review has been agreed with the Planning team the applicant can apply online and make the necessary payment. Payment is necessary before a review can be taken forward.

Full Design Review typical agenda

approx. **3.5 hours** in total

- Site visit 60 minutes
- Panel briefing 20 minutes (panel only)
- Chair introduction 5 minutes
- Project team presentation 30 minutes
- Stakeholder comments 10 minutes
- Panel questions and clarifications 10 minutes
- Panel discussion 60 minutes
- Panel de-brief 15 minutes (panel only)

Please note once a date has been agreed and fee is paid for a review any requested alterations to the date after this point will incur the following additional costs:

Date alternations requested **2-4 weeks** before the scheduled review: **£600+VAT**

Date Alterations requested **less than 2 weeks** before the scheduled review: **Full Fee**

10 MEETING ADVICE

Review letters are written by the Panel Manager from the notes made during the review session. The Panel Chair checks the letter and ask for amendments if required.

Review letters are sent to the design team and planning officer within 10 working days of all types of review. These are written in a clear and accessible language and reflect the key points made by the panel, offering advice and encouragement to all involved in the application or project. The letter will not include comments made in the briefing sessions held before and after the meeting itself.

The role of the HDRP is advisory but the comments carry weight in the planning process as set out in the NPPF.

11 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

For the panel process to be credible there has to be a procedure to manage potential conflicts of interest between Panel Members and schemes. A conflict arises if there is any suggestion that a Panel Member, either as an individual or a member of a group or organisation, might have a financial, commercial or professional interest in a project, its client or its site.

Panel Members are required to check panel meeting agendas to report any conflicts or perceived conflicts to the Panel Manager in good time, who will then decide if it is a conflict. The Panel Member will not attend panel if the Panel Manager confirms it is a conflict, and the conflict will be recorded. If uncertain the Panel Manager can discuss the conflict with the Panel Chair to reach agreement. If any potential conflict is revealed at the meeting itself the Panel Member must immediately report it to the Chair or Panel Manager. In some circumstances an association may not be considered a conflict but in the interests of transparency the relationship is recorded by the Panel Manager and mentioned by the Chair at the beginning of the review. It may also be noted in the advice letter.

If an observer is invited to the meeting they will be asked to check for conflicts of interest before the review.

12 CONFIDENTIALITY AND TRANSPARENCY

The HDRP is open and transparent regarding its processes and explains how it operates in the public interest. There will be circumstances where a pre-application review concerns commercially sensitive information and the developer/design team may request that the review letter is kept confidential. When the Panel Manager and Chair support the request the letter only goes to the design team and the planning officer and is not made publicly available. For reviews at application stage the review letter is published as part of the planners report and will be on the Council's website.

Panel Members will be provided with confidential information as part of their role in pre-application discussions and confidentiality also applies to them. They shall not disclose or use that information for their own benefit, nor disclose it to any third party. Any press and media queries should be redirected to Hounslow officers. Any observers to a HDRP review that is confidential will be asked to sign a confidentiality form.

Freedom of information and Data Protection

As a public authority, the Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). All requests made to the Council for information about the HDRP 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.

In order to facilitate the operation of the HDRP the Council needs to collect, store and process the personal information (data) of the Panel Members. During the recruitment process for a new member, contact information and certain professional details will be collected so that the member can be informed of HDRP sessions, particularly ones that fall in their area of expertise.

This data will be stored in a central database of the Council's network, where it is only accessible from relevant Hounslow Council accounts. The data will be used to contact members of

the Panel to inform them of the dates and locations of the HDRP sessions and make other communications relating to the running of the HDRP. The Council expects Panel Members receiving this data to take reasonable steps to ensure its security. This data will be held for as long as the Panel Members remains on the HDRP; after they have left, the information will be held for one year to allow for any post-membership communication that is required, before being securely disposed of in line with the Council's retention and disposal schedule.

13 DESIGN PANEL MANAGEMENT

When first appointed Panel Members are given the opportunity to get to know Hounslow through an Induction event. This includes a tour of key areas, plus presentations from Council officers. They are provided with the Terms of Reference that sets out the review process. They are made aware of the Conflicts of Interest process and the importance of Confidentiality.

There is an annual meeting to support the development of the Design Review programme. This provides panel training, gains feedback from the panel to identify priorities and issues, and reports on the ongoing evaluation of the process.

14 DESIGN PANEL GOVERNANCE

To ensure the Independence of the HDRP an Advisory Board has been set up. Its purpose is to review panel progress provided in the Annual Panel Report (a public document), review Monitoring and Evaluation, assess issues raised, review conflicts of interest, provide a forum for conflict resolution, reduce risks of poor external perception, advise on future direction or changes in programme.

The Advisory Board meets once a year and consists of two Panel Chairs and an Independent Advisor. There is an annual meeting for the HDRP, and the Board and Panel Members are invited. Chair of Planning and other key stakeholders are also be invited. In preparation for the meeting an Annual Report is written by HDRP Panel Manager. The meeting is noted by Panel Manager, or another member of the Planning team.

15 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Understanding the effectiveness and impact of the review process is critical to achieving the optimum impact. There is on-going evaluation of panel activities leading to an annual evaluation that is recorded in the Annual Report. The Report is considered by the Advisory Board. The Panel Manager chronicles panel activity and follows up on projects once they have passed the review stage, to understand how the proposal evolved. Users of the panel are asked for their comments so that a thorough understanding of the effectiveness of the panel can be made.

This information will help inform how the panel evolves and address any issues raised, and it will also be used to highlight the benefits of the panel to the wider community.

I agree to the above Terms of Reference

