

QUICK GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

*HOUNSLOW
DESIGN
REVIEW
PANEL*

2026

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01 DESIGN REVIEW

WHAT IS IT?

Design Review is a way to achieve design quality in our built environment. It is an independent and impartial evaluation process in which a panel of built environment experts assess the design of a proposal. The process is designed to improve the quality of buildings and places for the benefit of the public.

It is a process that is well established as way of improving the quality of design outcomes in the built environment, and is recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

‘Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions’.

‘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. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for Life’.

Guidance about Design Review can be found in ‘Design Review-Principles and Practice’ a joint publication by the Design Council, Landscape Institute, Royal Institute of British Architects, Royal Town Planning Institute.

02 HOUNSLOW DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

WHY DO WE NEED IT?

Hounslow is experiencing unprecedented levels of growth with increasing demand for development. It is vital that we achieve the highest standards of design in this new development to give everyone living and working in the borough a better quality environment. The independent Hounslow Design Review Panel (HDRP) has been established to support the Council in delivering design excellence, and offer the expertise of leading built environment professionals through a robust review process. The HDRP is managed by the Panel Manager who is part of the Planning Team. The Panel Members are all independent professionals.

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 establishing it as a leading issue. This 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. It doesn’t replace the design advice of Council officers but helps inform the planning process leading to better design outcomes, and gives greater confidence to decision makers to support innovative, high quality design. It embeds good design throughout the planning process. It operates in the public interest and always considers the best outcome for the whole community.

03 THE PANEL

WHO ARE THEY?

The HDRP panel members are a group of independent built environment experts with a range of professional skills with three Panel Chairs. The Governance of the HDRP is managed by an Advisory Board who are independent to the Council.

04 THE REVIEW PROCESS

WHAT SCHEMES DOES THE PANEL REVIEW?

Design Review is most effective when schemes are seen early in the design process at pre-application stage or before.

The panel reviews a limited number of schemes so we have 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

05 HOW TO APPLY

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: £5,498.64 + 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: £6,344.52 + 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: £2,961 + 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.

06 THE REVIEW SESSION

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Before the review

Once the fee is paid the Panel Manager will arrange the review. They will agree the date with the applicant, invite the attendees and advise the design team about the drawings and scheme information they need to provide.

The attendees for a Standard or Large Scale Review will be:

- Panel Manager;
- Planning Case Officer;
- Applicant (Client);
- Applicant (Design team);
- The Panel – Chair and 3 or 4 Panel members;
- Observers- as appropriate;

The design team will need to provide:

1. **Background scheme information two weeks in advance of the review.** A list of required information will be provided by the Panel Manager. This information will be sent to Panel Members in advance of the review meeting to familiarise themselves with the scheme. It will also give the Panel Members information about the client and design team in order to identify any conflicts of interest.

2. **Presentation Material for the review** that succinctly gives the panel the information it needs to make useful comments. As time is limited the presentation should preferably be limited to 16 slides. This should include diagrams, architectural drawings, visualisations. If a digital presentation is needed the design team should bring their own laptop and connecting cables and let the Panel Manager know in advance that they need a screen.

The Panel Manager will identify appropriate Panel Members for the scheme, and provide them with the background papers and agenda.

The design team will be given 30 minutes to set up their material in advance of the review.

At the review

The timing for the review is as follows:

Standard 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).

The Panel Manager will take notes of the discussion and from those will prepare the Panel's advice letter. The draft letter will be sent to the Chair of the review for comment and agreement. The Panel Manager will be responsible for sending the advice letter to the applicant and the case officer, and any other relevant person within 10 working days of the review.

08 CONFIDENTIALITY

WHAT INFORMATION IS PUBLIC?

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

08 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

HOW ARE THEY MANAGED?

The Council ensures that a robust process identifies conflicts of interest between panel members and the applicant team. Panel members and observers will identify conflicts of interest when they receive the agenda and scheme details prior to a panel review. The applicant team will also check the agenda and declare any associations with the Panel Chair and Panel Members to the Panel Manager.

It is important that Panel Members and the Chair are not contacted directly by the applicant for their views on a proposal as this would be compromise the Panel's independence.

