Oxford Design Review Panel

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERVICE

Design Review Panels promote high quality design to help create better buildings, streets and public spaces in the city. Oxford City Council in partnership with Design South East deliver the Oxford Design Review Panel (ODRP).

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) reinforces the role of Design Review in ensuring high standards of design. ODRP operates under the nationally accepted Design Review Principles and Practice guidance document, published by Cabe.

Oxford City Council will encourage all major development proposals to be assessed by ODRP before a planning application is submitted, a fee is charged for the service (see review types and fees).

About Design Review

Design Review is a cost-effective and efficient way to improve quality and create well-designed places through the planning process. The ODRP undertakes design reviews of proposed developments to provide independent, impartial advice on the design of new buildings, landscapes and public spaces.

Each ODRP meeting panel will:
- Be multi-disciplinary
- Conducted by expert practitioners with current experience in design and development, a record of good design in their own projects, and the skills to appraise schemes objectively
- Offer feedback that will lead to the improvement of schemes, but does not redesign them
- Give decision makers confidence and information to support innovative, high quality design that meets the needs of communities and clients

What schemes can be proposed for design advice/ review?

The following types of scheme are recommended for ODRP review:

- 10 houses or more
- 1,000 sq. m or more
- 0.25 Ha or more if residential
- 1.0 Ha or more if commercial

Plus all other proposed developments that are deemed to be sensitive, in terms of design, heritage, public interest or impact on a locality.

Who can propose the Design Review?

Oxford City Planning officers have a key role in nominating both major and sensitive schemes for review as most will go before the Panel while still at the pre-application stage, schemes can also be nominated after a planning application has been submitted. Applicants need to discuss the scheme with the planning officer to identify if it is ready to present and suitable to go forward for a design review or workshop. Nominations can also be made by elected Councillors at the pre-application stage when they become aware of them through pre-application consultation or when an application is submitted.

Not **all schemes** proposed will be reviewed. An applicant, Oxford City Council or Design South East may conclude that a nominated scheme does not require a review.

TYPES OF REVIEWS & FEES

A fee* is charged to cover the costs of operating the design review service

- Design Workshop   **(£6,250** +VAT**)**
- Full Design Review   **(£6,250** +VAT**)**
- Design Review – Full day   **(£8,000** +VAT**)**
- Desktop review   **(£4,000** +VAT**)**

* Cancellation terms apply if a booked scheme is cancelled < 14 days before the agreed review date.

Design Workshop - An informal, interactive discussion with the Panel on a scheme's early stage design strategies. Workshops help to establish design priorities early on in the process, ensuring that good design is considered from the start help to maximise the scheme's potential. They may also help to avoid time being spent on costly amendments later on. Workshops usually involve two panel members (including one Chair) and are an informal, roundtable discussion on design.

Full Design Review - The detailed evaluation of the design quality of a scheme. Reviews help to resolve complex design issues, as well as providing an opportunity to discuss detailed design options, such as materiality, detailing and elevation treatments. Impartial, expert advice is given from a range of professional fields, often offering technical design support that may not be available within the design team. Design reviews can help to identify the appropriate stage at which to make a formal planning application, as well as helping to reduce risk in the planning application process. Reviews usually involve 4-6 panel members (including one chair).

Desktop Review - This is a small-scale design review, where the design quality of a scheme is assessed. In most cases it is used at the planning application stage when a project has been reviewed before. Information from previous reviews is made available. Desktop reviews provide reassurance on the design principles and approach and help to acknowledge good design in development proposals. Desktop reviews involve three panel members (including one chair) and a Panel advisor only. Representatives of the architect/applicant and the local planning authority do not normally attend. Review letters can be appended to design and access statements to show the milestones of scheme progression at the planning application stage.

Standard Process for reviews:

1. Prior to the review, the architect/applicant completes a project submission document and attends a briefing with a Design South East Design Advisor (see overleaf page 5).

2. It is the responsibility of the developer or architect of a proposal to provide a written scheme description of the project to be reviewed, along with two key images (2 A1 Boards if in person).

3. The first review of a scheme will be preceded by a site visit. Subsequent reviews will not include a site visit. Online reviews will require a virtual tour of the site.

4. The scheme is presented by the architect/applicant and this is followed by a panel discussion. Key stakeholders may also be invited to share their views.

5. Following the review, a Design Advisor will compose a report summarising the discussion. This will be issued within 10 working days of the review.

DESIGN REVIEW MEETING

Structure of the Design Review meetings
Meetings are chaired by the Oxford Design Review Panel Chairs. As most proposals will be reviewed at pre-application stage, the meetings are not open to the public. Each development proposal needs to be presented by a representative of the developer, or the client, normally this will be the architect.

Site visits
Design Review/ workshops are preceded by a site visit. The ODRP chair, panel members, the presenting team, representatives from Oxford City Council, Design South East and relevant stakeholders attend the site visit. These are currently held online where the application team are required to present the site virtually and using relevant images. For smaller proposals, a site visit may not occur prior to the review; however this will only be in exceptional circumstances. If no site visit occurs, proper site contextual information is needed in the briefing information. In general, site visits are not required for second reviews, unless major contextual or other changes have occurred since the last review.

Timings of the Design Review
A design review lasts approximately ninety minutes, excluding the site visit and briefing meeting.

In standard reviews, the presentation to the Panel should be approximately thirty minutes and include illustrative material which must be sufficiently clear and visible to enable the Panel to understand the proposal properly and include the necessary level of detail. It is recommended that a physical model of the proposal within its context is provided.

Following the presentation, the Chair asks the planning authority for their thoughts, gives the Panel a brief opportunity to ask questions of clarification, and then devotes the main part of the 60 minute review to a discussion of the proposal.

Observers
The planning case officer should be present to provide a statement of how well the proposal satisfies the relevant planning and regeneration policy context. Other expert bodies with specialist interests such as heritage or the natural environment will be invited to ODRP meetings where appropriate.

ODRP Mentoring Programme
The programme aims to guide early career professionals (mentees) through the design review process and offer them a cross-disciplinary understanding of design and planning whilst strengthening their knowledge of Oxford and its history. Developed by DSE and OCC to support mentees in their term as part of the ODRP.

THE ODRP REPORT
The aim of the ODRP Report is to assist and encourage the potential developer or applicant to achieve and maintain high quality design when the proposal is built. In addition, the report for a scheme will be conveyed to the Planning Committee through the planning case officer's report on the proposal.

Advice makes clear whether the Panel supports the proposal or finds fundamental flaws. The Panel may take the opportunity to make comments to the City Council in relation to design matters of wider relevance than the specific proposal. The report is likely to contain appropriate praise as well as criticism. The Design South East Design advisors can offer clarification on the contents of the report if requested. The panel's formal Design Review report is not a minutes of the panel meeting.

DESIGN REVIEW MEETING ATTENDEES

ODRP Panel members

The Oxford Design Review Panel draws from experts who have delivered high quality design, which includes working in sensitive and historic environments, such as Oxford. ODRP Panel members cover a wide range of disciplines, including architecture, town planning, sustainability, landscape architecture and other relevant professions and all operate under Design South East Terms of Reference and BEE handbook.

The Panel will engage with the City Council as local planning authority, Oxfordshire County Council as highway authority, and statutory agencies as observers including Historic England, Natural England, the Environment Agency and others where appropriate.

Meetings of the Panel

ODRP meetings take place for a morning or afternoon session on alternate Thursdays, online if necessary. Face to face review meetings will be delivered in Oxford at an agreed venue often close to the application site. Larger and/or more complex schemes may take up to a full day to review.

If a second review is booked, all Panel members where possible will remain the same. In order to achieve quorum, the review should be attended by at least the chair and two other Panel members.

Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest

To ensure a professional and reliable forum for discussion at meetings, it is important that appropriate levels of confidentiality are maintained, particularly for proposals at pre-application stage. **Panel members are expected to adhere to the Panel's protocol on confidentiality. Panel members who are, or have been, personally or professionally involved with a particular proposal under discussion, or who may otherwise be considered to have a conflict of interest, are requested to notify the Design South East Design advisor in writing in advance of the review.**

Where a conflict of interest arises at the Panel meeting, any Panel members who have declared a prejudicial interest in a particular item will leave the meeting when it is being considered, and will not take part in the Panel's discussions on the proposal concerned.

Where the developer requests the review as part of a pre-application discussion the report may remain **confidential**, unless otherwise agreed. When considering schemes that have already been submitted for planning approval, the panel's report will become publicly available.

Accountability and Transparency

The Panel's report is included on the Council's website as a public document once a proposal is registered as a valid planning application.

The matter of accountability and public scrutiny is met through the City Council being open about the work the ODRP does and through it reporting on the advice it receives from the Panel. This is principally met through the officer's report to the Planning Committee, when the proposal comes before the City Council for determination.

The Panel is established to give impartial advice to all parties. The City Council ensures that through inviting Design South East to act as the Panel's facilitator and organiser that the ODRP should be seen to be free and independent from both the developer and itself.

SCHEME OUTLINE INFORMATION FOR THE REVIEW

For each proposal considered by the Panel the project team should provide a brief design statement setting out:

- The purpose of the proposal
- An urban design analysis of the site and its context, to include any significant master plans or other area initiatives that affect the proposal
- The principles underlying the architectural design
- An outline of the design process, to include other design options that were pursued
- The broad details of the development form: layout (urban structure and urban grain), landscape, density and mix, scale (height and massing) and appearance (materials and an indication of key details)
- The implications of the development for urban and environmental sustainability
- The programme of the development
- If a follow-up review, a statement on how the Panel's previous comments have been addressed.

The above list should be used as guidance for the representatives of the developer team. This scheme description will form part of the agenda papers for a Design Review, which will be sent out to panellists in advance to help preparation and enable panellists to declare any conflicts of interest. However, detailed scheme designs will not be circulated prior to the meeting.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Oxford City Council responsibilities

- Act as the Panel Sponsor
- Identify projects for review – through pre application process or at validation of new planning applications.
- Assist with the understanding of the scheme
- Make the necessary funding arrangements, including levying fees from the scheme promoters.

The City Council is not involved in managing the Panel or taking any part in the preparation of the Panel's Design Review Report.

Design South East responsibilities

- Liaise with Oxford City Council to identify projects for review
- Liaise with scheme promoters, developers or applicants
- Form an understanding of the scheme through briefings, drawings and site visits
- Manage the Panel in its entirety, including selecting and briefing individual panellists
- Manage the Panel meeting process
- Write up the Panel's comments and advice, and carry out any follow up work required

The Design Advisor meets with the design team prior to the day of the Review to develop an understanding of the project, and provides guidance to the applicant team on the format of their presentation.

The Design Advisor briefs the panel members immediately prior to a Design Review, including summarising any background planning or regeneration information and providing an overview of relevant previous Design South East Design Reviews.

DESIGN REVIEW PRINCIPLES

The Oxford Design Review Panel operates under the nationally accepted Key Design Review Principles, published by Cabe

Design Review is focused on outcomes for people. It explores how a building or place can better meet the needs of the people who will use it and of everyone who will be affected by it. It does this by constructively endeavouring to improve the quality of architecture, urban design, landscape and highway design.

For Design Review to succeed, it must be carried out using a robust and defensible process. It must also offer consistently high standards in the quality of its advice which were defined by the Design Council, the Landscape Institute, the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Royal Town Planning Institute in the "Ten Principles of Design Review". These standards are summarised in the following ten principles:

TEN PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN REVIEW:

Independent: the panel members are independent and their report is compiled through the design review. The members are unconnected with the scheme's promoters and decision makers, and where a potential conflict arises the individual member stands down and an alternate is appointed. For example a member of the panel would not be precluded from working in the locality (i.e. Oxford), but would not join a panel reviewing the member's designs.

Expert: the review is undertaken by leading designers who have an acknowledged standing and expertise.

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

Accountable: the panel and its advice must be clearly seen to work for the benefit of the public. The panel reports will be published and publicly available where the scheme is the subject of a planning application.

Transparent: the panel's remit, membership, governance processes and funding are in the public domain (Oxford City Council website).

Proportionate: Design Review will be used for major projects and projects whose significance warrants the investment needed to provide the service.

Timely: it should take place as early as possible in the design process, because this can avoid wasted time. It also costs less to make changes at an early stage.

Advisory: the panel does not take planning decisions, but it offers impartial advice for the Local Planning Authority, who does Oxford City Council.

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

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