The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel: Quick Guide for Applicants

Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel – what is it?

The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel (GCDRP) supports the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSPS), for Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. The Panel is set up to raise the quality of development by identifying where designs can be improved to achieve the best possible outcomes in accordance with the local plans for the two councils. It is managed by GCSPS and overseen by an Independent Advisory Group

The GCDRP offers multi-disciplinary, independent advice from built and natural environment professionals through a robust Design Review process consistent with the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth. The GCDRP is a critical friend to all parties. In operates in the public interest and the advice is for developers, planning officers and the planning committee. It helps inform the planning process and gives greater confidence to decision makers to support innovative, high quality design.

Design review is a well-established and effective way of enhancing the quality of the built environment that is recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). In Greater Cambridge, Design Review has helped to deliver high quality award-winning developments.

The Panel Members - who are they?

The Panel is made up of 2 Chairs, 2 Vice Chairs and 41 Panel Members, with a balance of skills that address the themes of Community, Character, Connectivity and Climate in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth. The members are diverse and nationally respected professionals from the fields of architecture, urban design, planning, landscape architecture, public realm, sustainability, highway engineers, transport planning, conservation, biodiversity and active travel. At each Review meeting there will be a mix of Panel Members from the Cambridge area and beyond who understand the region, its context and are committed to delivering the high aspirations stated in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth.

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The Review Process - what does the Panel review?

Schemes benefit from being brought for review early in the pre-application process when designs have yet not been fixed. This allows the Panel to be most effective in influencing the design and suggesting improvements. Schemes are encouraged to be brought to design review at least twice. All schemes being reviewed by the panel should be registered as a pre-application/application and have the agreement of the Case Officer.

GCSPS benefits from 2 Design Review Panels:

1. The Cambridgeshire Quality Panel is administered by Cambridgeshire County Council and it is governed by its own terms of reference. Within the Greater Cambridge area, it reviews strategic scale allocations within the adopted local plans, infrastructure projects and all new schools and extensions. In Cambridge City, the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel reviews sites that are generally covered by the City Fringes Joint Development Control Committee. The Cambridgeshire Quality Panel may also review policies, guidance and documents that have strategic and spatial implications at a sub-regional scale.

2. The GCDRP is set up to review major or significant planning and pre-planning applications for sites within the Greater Cambridge area, that fall outside of the remit of the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel. The GCDRP may also review any policies, guidance and documents that relate to these sites. Occasionally, the GCDRP may also review projects from outside of the GCSPS area in agreement with the Local Planning Authority.

The GCDRP will review schemes that meet the following 3 criteria:

1. The **scale, size and use** of development, including:

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- larger scale buildings and groups of buildings generally over 1000m2 (gross) or where there is a site area of more than 0.5 hectares
- large public realm schemes
- housing schemes generally over 10 or more dwellings or a site area of more than 0.5 hectares

 2. The **site** is particularly sensitive, irrespective of their scale, size and use. For example:

- developments affecting significant views and heritage assets or have a major impact on their surroundings

3. The proposals are significant because of a local issue, specific impact exceptional challenge, or public benefit, including:

- design policies and guidance including, frameworks, masterplans, design codes and development briefs
- design for climate adaptation and mitigation
- schemes involving major public investment or council-led regeneration
- proposals that are unique and likely to set a precedent

Types of Review

There are three types of Review that could be selected as set out below. The Panel Manager will decide which Review is most suitable for a given proposal.

Full Design Review

A Full Design Review is for a first review of the scheme, ideally at pre-application stage. It includes a site visit and a Review by the Chair and 3-4 Panel Members. It will be attended by the planning officer and other key stakeholders such as officers from the County Council and Historic England.
Fee: £4000 + VAT

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Subsequent Design Review

A Subsequent Design Review is used for second and subsequent reviews, or less complex schemes that do not need a site visit. A design workshop usually takes 2 hours per review.
Fee: £3500 + VAT

Chair's Review

The Chair's Review will be used for a limited number of schemes with the agreement of senior officers within GCSPS. It provides a desktop review and advice on schemes that have already been to a Full Review and Subsequent Review at pre-application stage. In exceptional cases it may also be used for smaller, less complex schemes. The Review will usually 1 hour and be conducted by the Chair plus 1 Panel Member. The design team is not present; the presentation is delivered by a planning officer.
Fee: £2000 + VAT

The Review Session - how does it operate?

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

The attendees for a Full Panel Review will be:
- Panel Manager and Panel Support Officer
- Planning Case Officer and other specialist Officers
- Applicant (Client and Design Team)
- The Panel – Chair and 3 or 4 Panel members
- Observers – Councillors and other Members of the planning team (at the discretion of the Panel Manager)

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Two weeks in advance of the review, the design team will need to provide background information about the scheme. A list of required information will be provided by the Panel Manager. The submitted information will be shared with Panel Members before the Review meeting so that they can familiarise themselves with the scheme. It will also give the Panel Members information about the client and design team to identify any conflicts of interest. Planning Officers will also be required to brief the Panel on key issues relating to the scheme.

A first Full Design Review of a scheme takes around 3 hours in total and the format is generally:

- Site visit, 60 minutes (Panel Manager, Planning Officer, Panel Members and the applicant's design team)*
- Panel briefing by Planning Officer, 15 minutes (Panel and officers only)
- Chair introductions and notice of any conflict of interest, 5 minutes
- Project team presentation, 30 minutes
- Panel questions and clarifications, 10 minutes
- Panel discussion following the structure of the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter with a summary from the Chair, 60 minutes

Following the meeting, the Panel Chair will write the Review letter. The Panel Manager issues the Review letter to the design team, planning officer and other stakeholders (who attended the meeting) within 10 working days of the Review.

*For online Review meetings, the applicant's design team will be required to prepare and present a virtual site visit as part of the presentation.

Transparency and confidentiality - what information is public?

The Design Review is open and transparent regarding its processes and explains how it operates in the public interest. Information about the Panel and its membership is to be published on the GCSP website, including:

- Terms of Reference

https://www.greatercambridgeplanning.org/design-heritage-and-environment/greater-cambridge-design-review-panel/

- Quick Guide for applicants

- Information about the Panel chairs and members

- Information about the Independent Advisory Group members

- Annual Report and minutes of the annual meeting with information on the impact of the Panel

- The Review letters and planning outcome of schemes reviewed will be published once a planning application has been made public.

There will be circumstances where a pre-application Review concerns commercially sensitive information. For this reason, the letter is only sent to the applicant's 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 planner's report and will be made available on the GCSP website.

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