

CAMBRIDGE CITY DESIGN AND CONSERVATION PANEL

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND CONSTITUTION

Latest revision February 2014

1. PURPOSE OF THE PANEL

The Panel exists to support the City Council in delivering the Government and the Council's design and conservation objectives (as represented in the National Planning Policy Framework at paragraph 62 and the Cambridge Local Plan). The purpose of the panel should be to help secure the highest possible design quality of buildings and spaces, and to preserve and enhance the historic environment.

The Panel has 3 specific roles:

- a) to provide a forum for pre-application presentation of, briefing for, and expert advice on, major or otherwise significant development proposals;
- b) to provide formal comments on submitted applications;
- c) to comment from time to time on policies and guidance related to Design and Conservation and as noted in Section 5 below.

The Panel's work will complement and support in-house officer expertise.

2. MAKE UP OF THE PANEL

The Panel will generally be made up of 4-6 persons at meetings, from a pool of 10-20. They will comprise individuals with skills in architecture, planning, urban design, landscape design, and the historic environment. Skills in sustainability, environmental services, sustainability and public art are also desirable.

The following bodies will be invited to nominate one or more members:-

- the Royal Institute of British Architects
- the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
- the Royal Town Planning Institute
- the Institute of Historic Building Conservation
- the Landscape Institute
- Cambridge Past Present and Future *
- English Heritage *
- University of Cambridge School of Architecture

*Panel members from these organisations should declare an interest if their organisations position on an application prevents the panel member taking an objective view.

Other members will be co-opted by the Executive Councillor for Planning and Climate Change on the basis of their relevant skills and knowledge, in order to ensure a sufficient pool of expertise.

The City Council's Design and Historic Environment Champions may attend.

Other Council Members are entitled to attend Panel meetings as observers.

Sub-Panels may be set up to consider applications of particular specialist interest, for example a sub group may be required to consider matters related to master plans submitted as part of large scale urban extensions or for changes affecting a conservation area. Where relevant, specialist groups may be invited to Panel, or to give advice prior to a meeting.

Panel members are required to send their apologies to the Chairperson or Historic Environment Manager when they are unable or do not wish to attend. Panel members unable to attend, but wishing to make comments on an item should submit brief notes at least 1 day in advance. In the interests of consistency, panel members are requested to make every effort to attend any second review of a scheme that they have previously taken part in reviewing.

3. CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

The chair and vice-chair will be appointed, by invitation, on behalf of the City Council by the Executive Councillor for Planning and Climate Change. The term of chairmanship will normally be for 2 years. The chair will be paid an honorarium, to reflect the commitment involved.

4. THE MEETINGS

The City Council will arrange the Panel meetings, which will normally be every four weeks, and held at the Guildhall. Meetings will be scheduled annually (in June, when Committee dates have been agreed following the Council elections), one year in advance. Dates will be changed only in exceptional circumstances. Additional meetings, and meetings on site may also be arranged as necessary.

The meeting dates will be set to allow for comments to be submitted to the case officer in good time to be included in the main report to the following Planning Committee meeting.

Agendas will normally be produced by the City Council, in agreement with the Chair where necessary, and will be circulated by email. Agendas will identify the timing for discussions, and the proposals to be considered at each meeting. Panel Members may request that applications are brought before them, and any reasonable requests will be met.

The draft minutes will be produced by Council officers and approved by the Chair(or vice-chair in their absence) before being circulated to other members. A vote to approve the minutes will be taken at the subsequent meeting.

At least three members must be in attendance before the panel may have a quorum. Any decisions made when there are fewer than three members present will be subject to ratification at the next meeting.

5. MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

The Panel will normally be asked to comment on the following:

- Major new developments, and other proposals which are considered to have impacts or raise issues warranting advice from the Panel.
- Proposals with major impacts on designated heritage assets (Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments).
- Statutory development briefs/design guidance

The Panel may also be asked to comment on other applications at the discretion of the Director of Environment.

The evaluation of schemes by the Panel should include the following criteria:

- response to context,
- movement and access,
- layout,
- scale and massing,
- open space/landscape,
- detailed design (elevations and materials).

6. DECISION MAKING

Panel members should consider proposals on the basis of sound design principles and policy guidance. They should identify, with detailed critical observations, the positive and negative features of schemes. Panel members will be provided with guidance on the relevant planning policies.

Where feasible, the Panel are encouraged to reach a consensus view (as suggested by CABE) in terms of :

“green light: a good scheme, or one which is acceptable subject to minor improvements;
amber light: in need of significant improvements to make it acceptable, but not a matter of starting from scratch;
red light: the scheme is fundamentally flawed and a fresh start is needed”

Panel views shall be expressed to the Planning Committee without using jargon or complex terms, and should be clear and to the point. If Panel members are unable to agree, the advice should clearly reflect the basis of the disagreement and the issues involved. Issues or points which the Panel consider particularly significant may be highlighted in bold. A “Red”, “Amber” or “Green” verdict (or “RAG rating”) shall be recorded as appropriate for the proposal or project being considered.

7. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Panel members should declare interests and these will be published in the form of a web-based general declaration of interests. In addition, any specific declarations from members should be made and recorded at each meeting.

8. AGENDAS AND PRESENTATIONS

Pre-application presentations are encouraged, to enable the Panel to contribute at an early stage of a proposal. However priority will be given, in drawing up agendas, to current applications. This is essential to enable the Council to meet Government targets for speed of decision-making. The scheduling of pre-application presentations will be at the Chair's discretion.

Proposals may normally be presented a maximum of 2 times to the Panel. Any further presentation(s) will be at the Chair's discretion, and dependent on the Chair being satisfied that the scheme has undergone a fundamental re-think meriting further input from the Panel.

Presentation information, addressing the evaluation criteria at section 5) above, must be provided 7 days before the meeting, to enable prior circulation to, and briefing of Panel members. Paper copies of key drawings sufficient to make comparisons between different aspects of a scheme or to assess the importance of changes to the design, are still required. Models are encouraged. Planning case officers will be present to help assist panel with factual information related to proposals being considered.

Presentations not received by this deadline will be postponed to the next meeting. The length of the presentation will be at the Chair's discretion, with a maximum of twenty minutes. The architect will then answer any questions and be asked to leave the meeting before discussion on the merit of the scheme takes place.

Desk-review sessions will be held for smaller-scale proposals, where members meet with officers but the applicant is not present. Such desk review could take place at a regular panel meeting if time permits.

9. REPORTING OF DECISIONS

The City Council officers will report the Panel's advice to the relevant case officer, who will in turn ensure that Panel's comments are attached in full to any relevant committee report.

The Panel chair, or a representative where appropriate, may be invited to attend the City's Planning Committee to inform the Committee of the Panel's discussions in relation to applications considered.

Feedback on the outcome of planning decisions will be given to Panel members. The Council will arrange an annual day of site visits, to enable Panel members to review outcomes of applications considered.