KENSINGTON & CHELSEA QUALITY REVIEW PANEL

Terms of reference 2026

FRAME PROJECTS

In partnership with
Royal Borough of Kensington
and Chelsea

020 8164 9980
office@frame-projects.co.uk
www.frame-projects.co.uk

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1. INTRODUCTION

Frame Projects is a design focused project management consultancy. We are leading experts in design and community review - providing independent expert advice to clients, design teams, and planning authorities on development proposals.

Design review is a valuable means not only of testing the quality of development proposals going through the planning process, but also of influencing them for the better.

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework states that: '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.... In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.' (NPPF section 12, para 138).

We have substantial experience of setting up and managing review panels. We manage multi-disciplinary design review panels on behalf of thirteen London planning authorities: Barking and Dagenham; Barnet; Brent; Bromley; Camden; Ealing; Greenwich; Haringey; Havering; Kensington and Chelsea; Redbridge; Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation; and Waltham Forest.

Outside of London we manage design review panels for: Ebbsfleet; Epping Forest; Folkestone & Hythe; Reading; Somerset; Suffolk; Thanet; and Watford.

Frame Projects has been Secretariat to the HS2 Independent Design Panel since 2015. This has been set up at the request of the Department for Transport to help ensure that, through great design, HS2 delivers real economic, social and environmental benefits for the whole country.

Building on our experience of design review, Frame Projects is helping to pioneer community review - allowing people to share local expertise with developers and planning authorities. We currently manage community review groups on behalf of six planning authorities.

This terms of reference describes the design review service that we offer to local planning authorities. These services can be provided either on a one-off basis, or as part of ongoing collaborative working with a council.

Design review panel site visit © Frame Projects

2. PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN REVIEW

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.

Expert – the advice is delivered by suitably trained people who are experienced in design, who know how to criticise constructively and whose standing and expertise is widely acknowledged.

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

Accountable – the design 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.

Transparent – the panel's remit, membership, governance processes and funding should always be in the public domain.

Proportionate – it is used on projects whose significance, either at local or national level, warrants the investment needed to provide the service.

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.

Advisory – a design review panel does not make decisions, but it offers impartial advice for the people who do.

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

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

Design Review: Principles and Practice
Design Council CABE / Landscape Institute / RTPI / RIBA (2013)

Design review panel site visit © Frame Projects

3. PANEL COMPOSITION

The panels managed by Frame Projects bring together professional experts from a variety of fields. Members are chosen to provide a broad range of expertise which may include:

- architecture
- civil / structural engineering
- community engagement
- heritage / townscape
- inclusive design
- industrial / workspace design
- landscape architecture
- sustainability / ecology
- urban design / town planning

Many of those appointed to Frame Projects' panels have expertise and experience in more than one of these areas. The composition of each panel is chosen as far as possible to suit the scheme being reviewed, as well as considering gender balance and diversity.

Membership of each of our panels is reviewed regularly, to ensure that we can provide a variety of expertise, and to bring fresh perspectives of new panel members into the process.

Design review meeting © Frame Projects

Design review panel site visit © Frame Projects

4. ROLE OF THE PANEL

The panels that we manage provide independent and impartial advice on development proposals, at the request of planning officers, and play an advisory role in the planning process.

Reviews can be arranged for schemes from RIBA Stage 2 (concept design) onwards, providing advice to the applicant and the planning authority.

It is for the planning officers and the planning committee to decide what weight to place on the panel's comments, balanced with other planning considerations. Applicants should consult planning officers following a review to agree how to respond to the panel's advice.

If any points made by the panel require clarification, it is the responsibility of the applicant and their design team to draw this to the attention of the chair of the panel (if during the meeting) or the panel manager at Frame Projects (if the report requires clarification).

5. PANEL REMIT

The design and quality review panels provide independent, objective, expert advice on development proposals. They provide advice to scheme promoters and the planning authority as a 'critical friend' to support delivery of high-quality design.

Generally, schemes are referred to the panel by planning officers at an early stage to identify and consider the key assumptions of the proposed design. The independent advice given by the panel is likely to be most effective when given before a scheme becomes too fixed. Early engagement with the panel should reduce the risk of delay at application stage by ensuring that designs reach an acceptable standard. The panel's advice may assist the local planning authority in in negotiating design improvements and may support decision-making, including refusal of planning permission where design quality is not of an acceptably high standard.

The panel considers significant development proposals. Significance may fall into the following categories.

Significance related to size or use, for example:

- large buildings or groups of buildings
- infrastructure projects such as bridges or transport hubs
- large public realm proposals
- masterplans, design codes or design guidance.

Significance related to site, for example:

- proposals affecting sensitive views
- developments with a major impact on their context
- schemes involving significant public investment.

Projects may also be referred to the panel by the planning authority at their discretion, for example where they require advice on:

- building typologies, such as single aspect dwellings
- sustainability and design for climate change adaptation and mitigation
- proposals likely to establish a precedent for future development
- developments out of keeping with their context
- schemes with significant impacts on the quality of everyday life
- landscape / public space design.

When a proposal is at a pre-application stage, the report is not made public and is only shared with the local authority, the applicant and design team, and panel members who attended the review meeting.

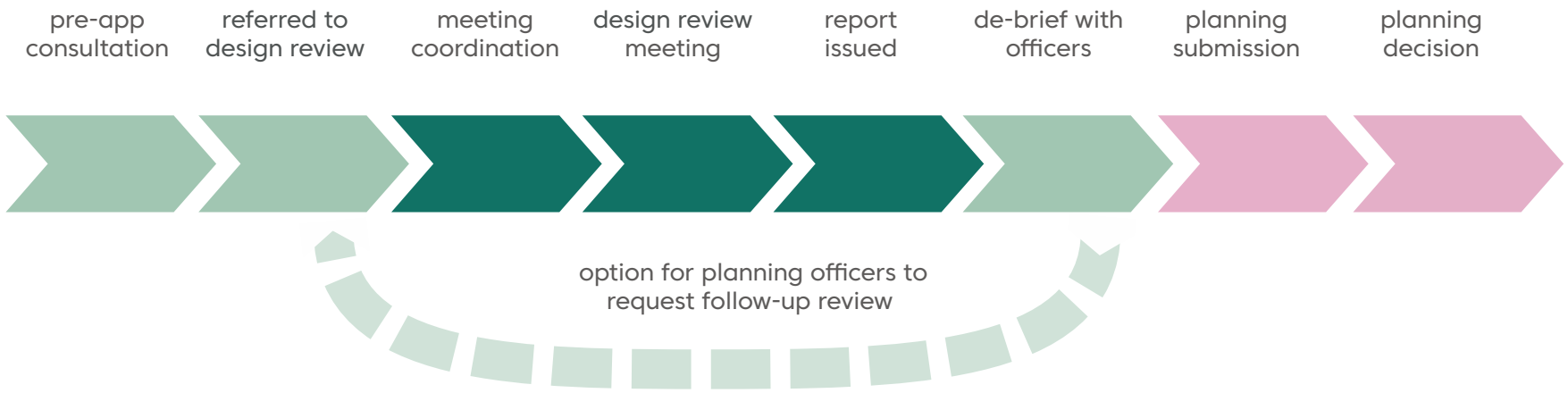
If the proposal is reviewed at an application stage, the report will be a public document and may be published on the local authority's website. Where the final review of a scheme takes place at a pre-application stage, the report of this meeting may also be made public once an application is submitted.

A diagram showing the role of design review in the planning process is shown on the following page.

DESIGN REVIEW IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

- Local authority pre-app process
- Design review
- Planning submission

Design review advice is most effective when it is well-integrated into the local planning authority process. It is for planning officers to decide which schemes would benefit from the panel's advice, and refer them for a review. Frame Projects then takes responsibility for arranging the meeting, liaising with both the planning authority and applicant. A report on the panel's comments is issued to all those attending, to inform continuing pre-application discussions. Officers may refer the scheme back to the panel for a follow up review, at the next stage of design development. Once the scheme is submitted for planning approval, the panel's analysis of design quality is intended to support the committee in its decision making.



6. INDEPENDENCE & PROBITY

The design and quality review panels are an independent and impartial service provided by Frame Projects, an external consultancy.

The processes for managing the panel, appointing members, including the selection of the chair, and the administration of meetings are agreed in partnership with the relevant planning authority.

Panel members shall keep confidential all information acquired in the course of their role on the panel, with the exception of reports that are in the public domain.

Further details are provided in the confidentiality procedure included in Section 13.

7. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

As a public authority, the local planning authority is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). All requests made to the planning authority for information with regard to the design review panel 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.

Design review panel site visit © Frame Projects

8. TYPES OF REVIEW

Three types of review are offered, to suit the scheme being referred to the panel:

Full review - chair plus four panel members, typically 90 minutes.

Intermediate review - chair plus two panel members, typically 75 minutes.

Chair's review - chair plus one panel member, typically 60 minutes.

FULL REVIEWS

For schemes with significant impact, requiring a broad range of panel expertise, a full review can be arranged to provide advice on the quality of proposals.

In addition to planning officers, other relevant stakeholders, for example Historic England, may be invited to attend and asked to give their views as background to the review meeting.

Full reviews usually take place at a stage when an applicant and design team have decided their preferred option for development of a site, and have sufficient drawings and models to inform a comprehensive discussion.

In advance of the full review, panel members attend a 15 minute briefing with planning officers on the policy context, and issues arising from pre-application discussions.

At the start of the full review, planning officers will summarise their panel briefing. The scheme will then be presented by a member of the design team, normally the lead architect, following a brief introduction by the applicant.

Presentations may be made with drawings and / or pdf or PowerPoint and models, as appropriate. At least one paper copy of the presentation should be provided, for ease of reference during the panel discussion.

Time allocated for full reviews will depend on the scale of the project but a typical full review will last 90 minutes: 10 minutes introductions and briefing by planning officers; 25 minutes presentation; 55 minutes discussion and summing up by the chair.

Large projects, for example schemes with several development plots, may be split into smaller elements, to ensure that each component receives adequate time for discussion.

Design review panel site visit © Frame Projects

INTERMEDIATE REVIEWS

Intermediate reviews can be arranged for projects with localised impact that require a range of panel expertise. This type of review can also be appropriate at an early design stage, for example to provide advice on development strategy, or to provide focused advice, for example on a design code.

Planning officers will be invited, but other stakeholders will not normally attend. However, the planning case officer may brief the panel on any comments made by other stakeholders.

In advance of the review, panel members attend a 15 minute briefing with planning officers on the policy context, and issues arising from pre-application discussions.

At the start of the intermediate review, planning officers will summarise their panel briefing. The scheme will then be presented by a member of the design team, normally the lead architect, following a brief introduction by the applicant.

Presentations may be made with drawings and/or pdf or PowerPoint and models, as appropriate. At least one paper copy of the presentation should be provided, for ease of reference during the panel discussion.

A typical intermediate review will last 75 minutes: 10 minutes introductions and briefing by planning officers; 20 minutes presentation; 45 minutes discussion and summing up by the chair.

CHAIR'S REVIEWS

For smaller developments, or for some previously reviewed schemes, a chair's review may be arranged to provide advice on the quality of proposals.

Planning officers will be invited, but other stakeholders will not normally attend. However, the planning case officer may brief the panel on any comments made by other stakeholders.

For schemes that are the subject of a current planning application, the presentation should be based on the submitted drawings and documents, either as paper copies or as a pdf or PowerPoint. At least one paper copy of the presentation should be provided, for ease of reference during the panel discussion.

In advance of the review, panel members attend a 15 minute briefing with planning officers on the policy context, and issues arising from pre-application discussions.

At the start of the chair's review, planning officers will summarise their panel briefing. The scheme will then be presented by a member of the design team, normally the lead architect, following a brief introduction by the applicant.

A typical chair's review will last 60 minutes: 10 minutes introductions and briefing by planning officers; 15 minutes presentation; 35 minutes discussion and summing up by the chair.

RETURNING SCHEMES

Planning officers may determine that more than one review is required at pre-application stage. For example, a first review may take place at a strategic design stage, with a further review once more detailed designs are available.

For masterplan scale schemes including several development plots, we recommend a discussion between the planning authority, applicant and panel manager to agree how best to structure the review process. Different types of review may be appropriate at different stages in the evolution of the project. Bespoke full day reviews can be offered for large scale / complex schemes.

ONLINE OR IN-PERSON REVIEWS

The planning case officer will determine if the scheme being referred to the panel will require an online or in-person review.

Generally, first reviews are held in-person and include a site visit. Schemes returning to the panel for a second or subsequent review may be invited to a meeting held by video conference.

An additional 20 minutes will be allowed at online meetings for a virtual site visit.

Design review panel site visit © Frame Projects

9. SITE VISITS

Wherever possible, a site visit will be arranged for review meetings (unless a site visit has already taken place before an earlier review of the scheme). All panel members participating in the review are required to attend.

Unless informed otherwise, Frame Projects assumes consent for photographs taken on site or at review meetings to be used on its website and in other publications.

Panel members, representatives of the local planning authority and members of the applicant team should maintain care and awareness of potential hazards for themselves and other attendees during site visits. All those involved should take appropriate action to alert the party of potential risks so that the visit can be paused or terminated if necessary. It is the responsibility of applicant teams to notify Frame Projects in advance of a review meeting if PPE is required on site.

Design review panel site visit © Frame Projects

10. REVIEW AGENDAS

Agendas will be issued to panel members in advance of the review.

For each meeting, a detailed agenda will be provided that includes notes on the planning context, details of the scheme(s) to be considered, applicant and consultant team.

Information provided by the planning case officer will include relevant planning history and planning policies that officers consider essential for assessing the scheme. Advice may be specifically sought on design quality assessed against these policies.

A scheme description provided by the design team will set out factual information about the project. Selected plans and images of the project will also be provided to help to give a sense of the scope and nature of the project under review.

Where a scheme returns for a second or subsequent review, the report of the previous review will be provided with the agenda.

11. PANEL REPORTS

During the review meeting the panel manager will take notes of the discussion - these form the basis of panel reports. Reports will be drafted by Frame Projects, agreed with the chair, and issued within 10 working days.

At pre-application stage, reports will provide clear, independent advice on ways in which the quality of development proposals could be improved, referring where appropriate to specific planning policies in relation to expectations of high quality design.

The panel has an advisory role in the planning process, and the project team should consult planning officers following a review to agree how to respond to points raised in the report.

Once planning applications are submitted, the report may provide guidance to the planning authority in determining the application. This may include suggesting planning conditions or refusal of planning permission if the design quality is not of an acceptably high standard.

Panel reports may be included in committee reports on planning application schemes – in which case planning officers will place these in the context of other planning matters, which the panel's advice neither replaces nor overrules.

If the proposal is reviewed at an application stage the report will be a public document kept within the proposal's case file and published on the planning authority's website. Where the final review of a scheme takes place at a pre-application stage, the report of this meeting may also be made public once an application is submitted.

Design review panel site visit © Frame Projects

12. PANEL CHARGES

Information about individual panel fees are outlined on our website: www.frame-projects.co.uk/panels.

Applicants are referred to the design and quality review panels by the planning authority as an external service and fees are paid by the applicant to Frame Projects for delivering this service.

If required, the cost of venue hire and transport from the nearest convenient station to the site visit would be in addition to the meeting fee. However, where possible we will book meeting rooms at council offices.

Payment should be made in advance of the review, and the review may be cancelled if payment is not received five days before the meeting. Full details will be provided when an invitation to the design review panel is confirmed.

Where a scheduled review is subsequently cancelled or postponed by the applicant, an administrative charge will be applied.

Design review panel site visit © Frame Projects

13. CONFIDENTIALITY

The panels managed by Frame Projects provide a constructive and reliable forum for applicants and their design teams to seek guidance at an early stage, when the panel's advice can have the most impact. It is therefore essential that appropriate levels of confidentiality are maintained. The following procedure shall apply.

1. Panel meetings are only to be attended by panel members, planning officers, and officers from stakeholder organisations involved in the project, for example statutory consultees, as well as the applicant and their design team. If any additional individual is to attend, it should be approved by the panel manager.

2. At all times panel members shall keep strictly confidential all information acquired during the course of their role on the panel and shall not use that information for their own benefit, nor disclose it to any third party (with the exception of reports that are in the public domain – see points 5 and 6).

3. The panel's advice is provided in the form of a report written by the panel manager, containing key points arrived at in discussion by the panel. If any applicant, architect or agent approaches a panel member for advice on a scheme subject to review (before, during or after), they should decline to comment and refer the inquiry to the panel manager.

4. Following the meeting, the panel manager will write a draft report, circulate it to the chair for comments and then make any amendments. The final report will then be distributed to all those who attended the meeting, and copied to those invited who sent apologies.

5. If the proposal is at a pre-application stage, the report is not made public and is only shared with the planning authority, the applicant and design team, and any other stakeholder bodies that the planning authority has consulted on the project.

6. If the proposal is reviewed at an application stage, the report will be a public document kept within the proposal's case file and may be published on the planning authority's website. Where the final review of a scheme takes place at a pre-application stage, the report of this meeting may also be made public once an application is submitted.

7. If a panel member wishes to share any panel report with a third party, they must seek approval from the panel manager, who will confirm whether or not the report is public.

14. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

To ensure the integrity and impartiality of advice given by the panels managed by Frame Projects, potential conflicts of interest will be checked before each review meeting. The following process will apply.

1. All panel members will be required to declare any conflicts of interest.

2. Panel members are notified of the schemes coming before the panel at least a week in advance. It is expected that at this time panel members should declare any possible interest in a project to the panel manager.

3. The panel manager, in collaboration with the panel chair and planning authority staff, will determine if the conflict of interest requires the panel member to step down from the meeting, or if a declaration of interest would be sufficient.

4. In general, a panel member should not attend a review meeting if they have:

    - a financial, commercial or professional interest in a project that will be reviewed, its client and / or its site;

    - a financial, commercial or professional interest in a project, its client and / or a site that is adjacent to the project that will be reviewed or upon which the project being reviewed will have a material impact;

    - a personal relationship with an individual or group involved in the project, or a related project, where that relationship prevents the panel member from being objective.

5. Specific examples include: current work with the client for the project being reviewed; current design work on a neighbouring site; previous involvement in a procurement process to appoint a design team for the project.

6. Personal interests that should be declared, but which would not normally prevent a panel member participating in a review, might include current work with a member of the consultant team for a project that will be reviewed. In this situation, the interest will be noted at the beginning of the review, discussed with the presenting design teams and formally recorded in the review report.

7. If, subsequent to a review of a scheme in which a panel member has participated, they are approached by any applicant, architect or agent to ascertain a potential interest in contributing to the project team for that scheme, they must decline. Professional work in a scheme previously reviewed by a panel member is not permitted, either directly by the panel member or by any organisation that employs them, or that they own.

8. Panel members are not restricted from professionally working on projects within the area. However, if such a scheme comes up for review, that panel member should not be involved and must declare a conflict of interest.

9. Councillors and council employees are not eligible to be members of their own authority's panel.

The table on the following page provides a guide to assessing whether or not a panel member has a conflict of interest.

Current commercial situation

If the panel member is currently working...

for the client on a different project.	🔴
through a direct appointment to a member of the presenting team.	🔴
with a member of the presenting team, but not appointed by them.	🟠
on the site in a competing bid, or has a business connection to the site.	🔴
on a neighbouring site where the two projects have a bearing on each other.	🔴
in the near vicinity, if the projects impact each other.	🟠
for the local authority on another project.	🟢

Past commercial situation

If the panel member has had previous involvement...

with the project (same client and brief).	🔴
with the site (different client and brief).	🟠
on a neighbouring site where the two projects have a bearing on each other.	🟠
with the client.	🟢
with a consultant on the project.	🟢

Future commercial situation

If the panel member is...

involved in a procurement process for the client or the site.	🔴

Familial situation

If the panel member...

has a familial relationship with the client, consultants or site owners.	🔴

Informal situation

If the panel member...

is a friend of a member of the applicant team.	🟢

Formal situation

If the panel member...

presents their own scheme to other panel members.	🟠
previously worked for a company that is part of the presenting team, more than one year ago.	🟠
holds an elected position, or is a member of a society, that is impacted by the project – whether paid or unpaid.	🔴
has a home or business directly affected by a project.	🔴

Key

Conflict of interest - meaning the panel member must be stood down from the review.	🔴
Declaration of interest - there is the potential for others to incorrectly perceive that a conflict exists. A declaration should be made at the start of the review meeting, and included in the meeting report.	🟠
No conflict of interest - either real or perceived, and the panel member is free to take part in the review.	🟢

APPENDIX: LONDON DESIGN REVIEW CHARTER

The London-based panels managed by Frame Projects are run in accordance with the London Design Review Charter.

High quality – delivered in a manner that accords with the Design Council CABE / Landscape Institute / RTPI / RIBA guide, which calls for reviews to be independent, expert, multidisciplinary, accountable, transparent, proportionate, timely, advisory, objective and available.

Representative and inclusive – reflecting London's diverse population and seeking to promote inclusive buildings and places.

Based on clear review objectives – which provide terms of reference available to all parties, making clear the outcomes, priorities, challenges and objectives of the review, applicable to the given place and project constraints.

Allied to the decision making process – with the outputs of the design review being made available to the appropriate decision makers, with commitments sought that review outcomes will be taken into account by decision makers as part of a wider design management process.

Even handed, independent – informed by an understanding of the reality of the project, the views of the client, local authority, community and other relevant stakeholders, but providing independent advice.

Proportionate – recognising the need for different review formats and costs for larger or smaller schemes.

Consistent – with the same standards of delivery. On occasions when other reviews have taken place (including by other panels), panellists should be made aware of the previous advice.

Collaborative – with other quality review users and providers to promote best practice London wide, to maintain consistent standards, and if appropriate share resources such as a pool of panellists.

Regularly evaluated – with the aim of building a consistent process to monitor and evaluate the success of design review across London.

About the charter

The charter has been developed by the Greater London Authority (GLA) with input from those running and using panels, as well as from reviewers. Signatories agree to the principles that the charter sets out, and to provide or use design review in a manner that is consistent with its contents.

Full details of the London Charter for Design Review are available via the following link.

www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/ggbd_london_design_review_charter_jan22.pdf

Design review panel site visit © Frame Projects