

The Design Network

National Design Review Charter

The Design Network

The Design Network is the national body for design excellence. Place-based and not-for-profit, the Network supports design-led placemaking for the benefit of people, prosperity and planet through its six regional organisations:

Design South East, Design West, Design Midlands, Design Yorkshire, Design North East and Design North West.



1. Purpose of the Charter

This National Design Review Charter sets out the principles, scope and governance of the Design Review Process and serves as a model of best practice. The Charter aims to ensure that design review operates with transparency, consistency, independence and excellence across England.

2. Objectives of Design Review

- To support planning authorities, developers, and communities with the delivery of great places.
- To promote high-quality, sustainable design of the built and natural environment.
- To provide clear, impartial, and constructive advice at key stages of design development.
- To champion innovation and inclusive design that reflects local and national ambitions.
- To support quality and speed of housing delivery, infrastructure and growth.

3. Scope of Design Review

Design Review can be applied to all types and scales of development:

- Strategic site allocations, masterplans and frameworks
- Regeneration projects
- Major developments and infrastructure
- Public realm, civic, and heritage projects
- Housing, education, healthcare, employment and cultural facilities
- Architectural excellence and innovation
- Design policy and guidance documents

4. Core Principles

Design Review undertaken by The Design Network adheres to a set of key shared principles. Our service is:



INDEPENDENT

Operates free from vested interest.

Design Review is conducted by people who are separate from the scheme promoter and decision-maker, ensuring impartiality and avoidance of conflicts of interest.



REPRESENTATIVE & INCLUSIVE

Reflective of the communities the Panels serve.

Design Review Panels are comprised of the best established and emerging practitioners, recruited through an open and transparent process, to ensure diversity of lived experience.



EXPERT

Conducted by leading practitioners and thought leaders.

Design Review Panels are comprised of members who are recognised regionally, nationally and internationally for their expertise, innovation and best practice.



ALLIED & TIMELY

Embedded early in planning processes.

Informed by the local policy context, Design Review Panel feedback supports efficient design development and informed decision-making.



COLLABORATIVE

Promotes shared aspirations for good design.

Design Review enables a constructive dialogue, and is pragmatic, and solution-focused, working with both the planning authority and applicant teams for public benefit.



CONSISTENT & ACCOUNTABLE

Ensures consistent delivery standards and stakeholder management.

High-quality Design Review Reports provide a clear and concise set of recommendations and actions for improvement.



MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Draws on the combined perspectives of built and natural environment experts.

Design Review Panels include expertise in urban design, architecture, sustainability and the climate emergency, planning, landscape architecture, ecology, engineering, development economics, social inclusion, active travel and heritage.



REGULARLY EVALUATED

Seeks constant feedback to inform improvement.

Processes and panellists are reviewed and refreshed annually to build consistent best practice across England.



LOCAL

Rooted in essential local knowledge and understanding.

Design Review Panels bring an in-depth understanding of local context and planning policy, and offer a site visit to fully appreciate context.

5. Governance & Management

- The Design Network holds up-to-date records of all expert panellists.
- All panel members receive training and adhere to a code of conduct and a confidentiality agreement.
- Panel Chairs receive clear guidance and training, and meet together regularly to support consistency and share knowledge.
- Panel Terms of Reference are made available online for clients to view.

The Design Network will:

- Maintain records of reviews and recommendations.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Design Review process annually.
- Share best practice and learning nationally across the Network.

6. Engagement & Transparency

- Reports from Design Reviews will be shared with applicants and relevant authorities.
- We encourage Design Review Reports to be made publicly available on submission of a planning application.
- Stakeholder feedback on the Design Review process will be regularly gathered and evaluated to refine the service.

7. Review of Charter

The Charter shall be reviewed and updated biennially to reflect evolving standards, feedback and policy developments.



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