

Why Design Review?

1. High quality planning and design is strongly encouraged in North Hertfordshire to protect and enhance the District's townscape, landscape, environmental and heritage value and create sustainable places.
2. Design Review is a tried and tested method of promoting good design and is a cost-effective and efficient way to improve quality. It can support a collaborative design process and speed up decision-making on planning applications.
3. It offers independent, impartial advice on the design of new buildings, landscapes and public spaces. Design Review is now an essential part of the planning process.
4. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2023), places great emphasis on the importance of securing design quality in new development. It says that '*Development that is not well designed should be refused*' (para 139). The new wording contrasts to the 2012 version of NPPF which simply required that '*Permission should be refused for development of poor design*' (para 64). This means that the test now is the achievement of good design and not just the avoidance of bad design. In addition, NPPF requires all planning decisions to have regard to the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code to improve design quality.
5. NPPF paragraph 138 reinforces the important of using Design Review:

'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...For assessing proposals there is a range of tools including workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for a Healthy Life. These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes, and are particularly important for significant projects such as large scale housing and mixed use developments. In assessing applications planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.'

6. In the context of such a strong national planning policy framework supporting good quality design, and to complement the use of policies in the adopted Local Plan to secure design quality (notably Policy SP9 Design & Sustainability), this Protocol confirms the Council's Design Review arrangements as advised in NPPF.

How will Design Review be provided?

7. The Council has partnered with Design South East as our preferred provider for design review services. Design South East is an independent not-for-profit organisation working across the wider south east, delivering expert design advice, facilitation and training for local authorities, the development sector and communities.
8. NHDC has chosen to work with Design South East due to their strong track record in delivering design review services to local authorities with a strong and extensive range of panel design experts.
9. If you propose to make large scale new developments in North Hertfordshire, you can get advice from the Design Review panel. The Panel is made up of professionals who have expertise in:
 - architecture
 - urban design
 - landscape
 - heritage
 - transport
 - sustainability
10. The Panel's recommendations help improve the design quality of new developments. We expect developers to use the panel at pre-application stage before applying for planning permission as this will help to secure the greatest improvement to design quality. The panel can continue offering design advice after an application too.

What schemes will require Design Review?

11. We require design reviews for the following:
 - developments which incorporate 100 or more new homes;
 - developments which exceed 10,000 square metres of development floor space; and
 - developments which are in important or sensitive locations or are very complex.
12. We also recommend design review for schemes between 50-100 where appropriate and deemed necessary¹.
13. The Council require the use of Design Review for its Strategic Housing sites. These are the sites of 500 homes and above that are allocated in the Council's adopted Local Plan.

¹ E.g., where design issues are unresolved

14. Planning and designing such large developments is very complex and requires an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to ensure well-designed and sustainable developments.

North Hertfordshire Design Panel

15. The Council has a specific North Hertfordshire panel of experts co-ordinated and provided by Design South East. This panel will provide advice and support regarding the masterplanning and design of proposals subject to Design Review. The panel will provide the appropriate blend of design skills relevant to the integrated masterplanning of large sites. This will also include local knowledge and consistency of advice to protect against the dilution of quality throughout the planning process.

Who can nominate a scheme for Design Review?

15. North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) Officers have a key role to play in nominating strategic, significant and sensitive schemes (which have unresolved design issues and where an improvement to design quality is required) for review.

16. Most schemes will go before the Panel while still at the pre-application stage, schemes can also be nominated after a planning application has been submitted.

17. Applicants will need to discuss the scheme with the planning officer to identify if it is ready to present to, and suitable to go forward for, a design review.

18. Nominations can also be made by elected Councillors at the pre-application stage when they become aware of them or when an application is submitted. Not all schemes proposed will be reviewed. An applicant, NHDC or Design SE may conclude that a nominated scheme does not require a review.

Types of Review

- Full Day Design Review or Workshop (including a site visit). This is required for a strategic site.
- Half Day Design Review or Workshop (50-500 homes) including a site visit.
- Desktop Review of a scheme that has already been reviewed.

19. Design South East will provide costs for staff and panel time during and after the sessions and the production of a report. The costs are paid by the applicant to Design South East. All costs are exclusive of VAT.

20. The attendance of key Council & project team officers at a pre-application Design Review session will need to be funded through a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) or pre-application fee.

Structure of Design Review SE Meetings

21. The key masterplan/design documentation that articulates the design proposals is provided to the panel in advance of the design review meeting.
22. Meetings are chaired by Design South East and last 1 hour and 30 minutes. The meetings are not open to the public.
23. Meetings are preceded by a site visit with the Panel chair, panel members, the developer's presenting team, representatives from North Hertfordshire District Council and relevant stakeholders.
24. Each development proposal is presented by a representative of the developer, or the client, normally this is the masterplanner/urban designer or architect. These are limited to 30 minutes. Following the presentation the Chair asks the planning authority for their thoughts, gives the Panel a brief opportunity to ask clarification and any questions and then gives the main 60 minute part of the review to a discussion of the proposal.
25. The relevant planning officer should be present to provide a statement of how well the proposal satisfies the relevant planning policy context. Other expert bodies with specialist advice may be invited where appropriate.

The Design Review SE Panel Report

26. Following the site visit and Design Review meetings or workshop a report is provided by Design South East. This advice clarifies where design proposals are supported and where there are flaws that require further design resolution and improvement. The report is likely to contain appropriate praise as well as criticism.
27. 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.

Contact

28. After liaison with the relevant planning officer at the Council, if an applicant would like to progress the Design Review process please contact the North Hertfordshire Design Review Panel Manager **Helen Quinn**, heleng@designsoutheast.org.
29. You'll need to send Design South East the following:
 - the signed contract
 - completed forms
 - scheme drawings

30. The contract will be between you and Design South East.

31. Once you've done this, Design South East will confirm the date of their review at a mutually convenient time. We'll contact the invitees and Design South East will contact you to make sure the panel have all the information they need. We will also liaise with Design South East to arrange site visits.

Updates

- *February 2024*
 - *updated NPPF references to December 2023 version and associated changes to text (paras 4 & 5);*
 - *updated reference to Design South East being the **preferred** provider of design review services (para 7)*
 - *updated contact email address for Design South East (para 28)*