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The Design Review Panel
www.designreviewpanel.co.uk



Plymouth Hoe, Plymouth, Devon



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“The Design Review Panel provides an opportunity for developers and local authorities alike to have access to some of the best built environment practitioners in the region. Working together proactively and passionately we can raise the quality of urban living and conserve and enhance the places that make our counties the best **in the country.**” - Andy Robbins 2014 - Development Manager, Exeter City Council

Foreword



“Good design builds communities, creates quality of life, and makes places better for people to live, work and play in. I want to make sure we’re doing all we can to recognise the importance of architecture and reap the benefits of good design.” - Ed Vaizey MP

I am very proud to live in the South West, one of the most beautiful regions in the country. It is characterised by fantastic countryside landscapes, breath-taking coast lines, small villages, bustling towns and major cities. The South West has a wonderful architectural heritage, in terms of both historic buildings and places as well as cutting edge, award winning contemporary architecture and urban design.

There are however also some less successfully designed buildings and places which represent an exciting opportunity for regeneration.

When undertaking future development it is important that we design buildings and places with a focus on the potential long term social and environmental benefits, and not just short term economic gain.

The Design Review Panel aims to provide collaborative help to design professionals and their clients during the design stage of major & significant developments by way of constructive, multidisciplinary peer review.

Positive engagement with the Devon & Somerset Design Review Panel

can help applicants achieve a planning approval whilst maximising a development's economic, social and environmental added value created through good design.

Jonathan Braddick - Architect
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"At East Devon District Council we are always striving to improve the design and form of developments within the district to protect and enhance the outstanding place that is East Devon. The Design Review Panel has proved to be an excellent means of gathering the necessary skills from the various place-making expertise that exist locally to ensure that every aspect of the design is considered. The panel have then been able to provide constructive advice and suggest viable solutions that have enabled us and the developers we work with to secure developments of the highest quality." - Ed Freeman, 2015 - Service Lead Planning, East Devon District Council

Introduction

“Having sat on The Design Review Panel since its inception I have seen first-hand the value of professional peer led review ... the process is an excellent way of delivering design quality in the South West, an outcome limited not only to the applications, but by engagement with the work, officers and panel members too”- Graham Devine , Design Review Panel Vice Chair, Architect & Director at LHC (Lacey Hickie & Caley Ltd) Plymouth & Exeter, RIBA Plymouth Branch Chair 2014—2016



In October 2013 eleven local authorities across Devon and Somerset joined forces to support a new local, independent and multidisciplinary design review panel working across the two counties. Extremely well attended launch events were held in Plymouth, Exeter and Taunton at the end of 2013.

A key aspect of The Design Review Panel that distinguishes it from some other panels across the country, is its multidisciplinary and independent nature.

The Panel operates upon the principles set out within the 2013 publication 'Design Review: Principles and Practice' produced by CABE at the Design Council, the Landscape Institute, the RTPI and the RIBA.

Since its launch, the Panel has received excellent feedback from applicants, and design teams submitting schemes for review.

The Panel's fast growing extremely positive reputation is no doubt largely due to the panel's multidisciplinary and independent nature as well as its focus on the importance of context and the importance of 'P.L.A.C.E', (bringing together Planning, Landscape, Architecture, Conservation and Engineering).

The Design Review Panel seeks to be considered as a positive, constructive and useful part of the design stage rather than part of the decision making stage. It is therefore an excellent tool for design teams to engage with as part of the Planning process pre-application stage. By engaging at an

early stage, design teams, and therefore applicants, can help to reduce the uncertainty and therefore risk at the decision making stage.

The Panel continues to catch the imagination of design team construction industry professionals across the region, with the pool of available panel members doubling in the twelve months since launch.

All design professionals working in the built environment are passionate about the subject and the Design Review Panel offers an opportunity to positively contribute to, and or, benefit from, peer review, as well as to help contribute the high quality of the built environment in the South West.



“Design Review assists developers and architects to gain support for high quality schemes, as well as providing expert advice to Planning Committee members and Council officers when making the key decisions affecting the Borough. I am convinced that the result will be a raising of the quality of new developments in the Taunton Deane area. The Design Review Panel will meet my aspirations in providing a speedy, professional and cost effective Design Review service for the area.” -
Tim Burton 2014 - Assistant Director Planning and Environment, Taunton Deane Borough Council & West Somerset Council

Design / Place Review

Design Review (or Place Review) is an accepted and well respected peer review system that is proven to improve the design quality of new developments before they are submitted for planning approval.

The Design Review Panel exists to offer constructive comments on significant schemes, aiding their improvement, but not to fundamentally redesign them. It advises and empowers the decision makers on how to improve design quality, so as to meet the needs of their communities and customers, supports decision makers in approving well designed schemes and supports decision makers in resisting poorly designed schemes.

Design Review/Place Review services are delivered through a presentation to a panel of multidisciplinary built environment experts and provides constructive and impartial advice to applicants and their design teams to help and improve the quality of their proposals.

The Design Review Panel provides an

excellent way for applicants, design teams and local authorities to engage with the design of significant proposals during the pre-application stage of the planning process, with a view to helping the applicant to expediently produce proposals that will be acceptable to the local authority.

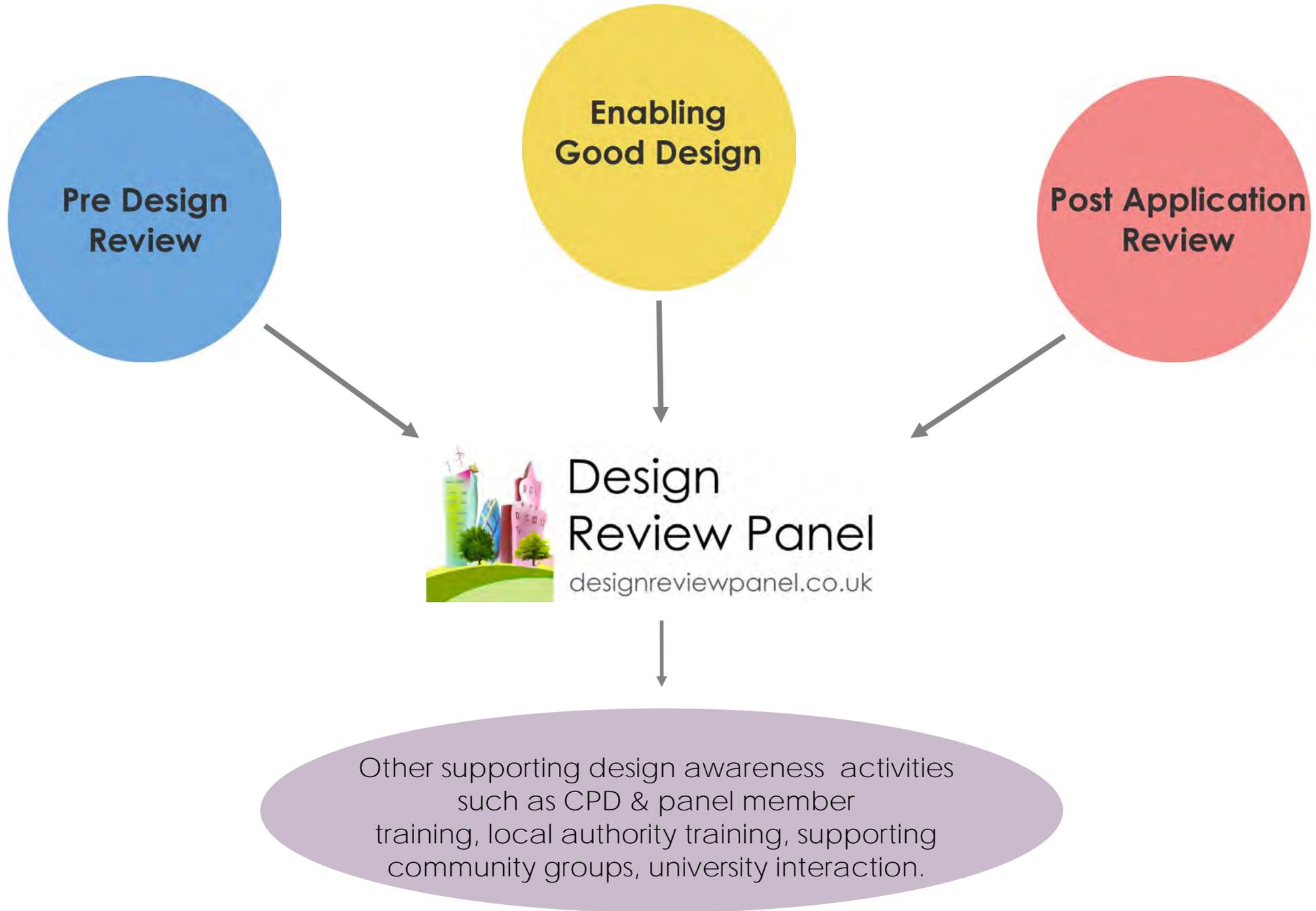
The Devon and Somerset Design Review Panel is currently comprised of around 60 experienced and respected multidisciplinary construction professionals. The Panel provides a wide range of expertise across disciplines including: architecture, ecology, conservation, urban design, planning, landscape design, engineering, sustainability, arboriculture, surveying and transport planning.

11 local authorities across Devon and Somerset currently support the Devon & Somerset Design Review Panel, including; Devon County Council, East Devon District Council, Exeter City Council, Mid Devon District Council, North Devon Council, North Somerset Council, Plymouth City Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, Teign-

bridge District Council, Torridge District Council and West Somerset Council.

Since its launch in December 2013 the Devon and Somerset Design Review Panel has reviewed schemes which represent over an estimated £300m worth of investment across Devon and Somerset.

“Working with fellow design professionals on the Devon & Somerset Review Panel offers the opportunity for participants to share ideas & best practice methodology whilst considering a variety of project types” - Tony Pollintine – Director, Grainge Architects Exeter, Design Review Panel Member



Aims

The Design Review Panel may be engaged pre-planning to advise applicants and local authorities on aspects such as design team engagement and strategic approach. Since its launch The Design Review Panel has been successfully appointed to provide pre-design strategic advice in regards to large scale master planning projects.

The Panel is able to act as an independent multidisciplinary judge in regard to built environment competitions and procurement.

During the design development stage the panel is available as a very useful tool, providing a critical friend. It provides independent feedback at a very early stage of a project's design development and can help to reduce the risk of an unexpected decision once a planning application is submitted.

The Panel offers a post planning application review to local authorities

to comment on applicants responses to pre-application guidance, which helps to inform the decision making stage.

The Design Review Panel also carries out and supports other design awareness activities including; CPD events, panel member training, engagement with community groups and engagement with university students through schools of architecture and design.

Since its launch The Design Review Panel continues to aim to:

- Provide high quality, independent, multidisciplinary peer review as part of the design stage of significant built environment schemes across the south west
- Review proposals during the early stages of the design process, acting as part of the de-

sign team and not the decision making process.

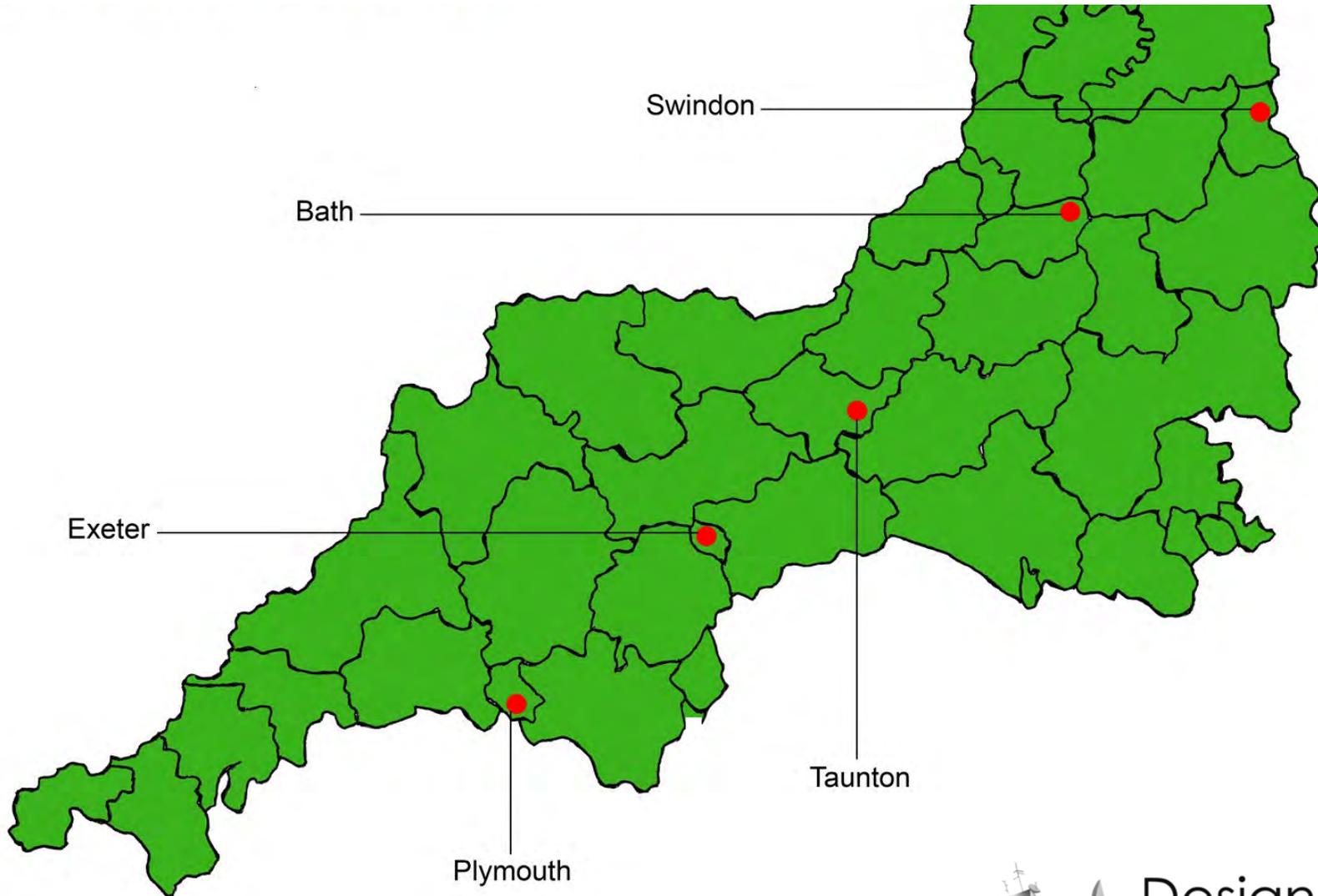
- Promote the benefits of independent and multidisciplinary design review
- Deliver a positive economic impact on Devon and Somerset through aiding in the creation of well designed buildings and places.
- Promote the economic value of good design
- Provide other forms of support in regard to the design of the built environment across the South West.

“The Design Review Panel provides a valuable opportunity for independent evaluation of development schemes, particularly during their evolution. A particular strength of the Panel is access to multidisciplinary professionals. We have found the panel process of great benefit for both the developer and ourselves as Local Planning Authority.” - Jenny Clifford, 2015 - Head of Planning and Regeneration, Mid Devon District Council.



The Victorian Clock Tower on Lowman Green, Tiverton, Mid Devon

Design Review Panel Locations



Panel Meeting Locations (red)
Supporting Local Authorities (Green)



Design
Review Panel

designreviewpanel.co.uk



“Plymouth City Council is very pleased with the service now provided by The Design Review Panel. After a period of time when both developers and planning officers were getting used to the new arrangements, the design review process has now become an established and well regarded part of the negotiation process for many planning proposals in Plymouth. The cost of design review is now factored into all large scale major development proposals at the pre application stage and is regularly included as part of planning performance agreements. This is a testament to the value now given by both the Council and developers to the Design Review Panel.” – Peter Ford, 2015, Planning & Development Manager, Plymouth City Council

Design Review Services

The Panel is a fantastic knowledge resource that can be used to provide independent expert input where a specific mix of skills is required .

Since its launch, The Design Review Panel has reviewed an extremely wide range of scheme typologies, from NPPF paragraph 55 single dwellings to large mixed use urban regeneration proposals.

Panel Meetings:

Consist of a formal presentation from the project team to a panel of six appropriately chosen multidisciplinary experts. Local authority representatives are invited to attend the presentation and feedback part of the session, however are excluded from the panels private discussions so as to ensure the panels independence and impartiality. A formal feedback report is provided in due course after a Design Review Panel meeting.

Desktop Reviews:

This service allows smaller schemes, and schemes that require review outside of the pre-set available dates to also benefit from a design review consultation. Desktop reviews are carried out remotely and formal written feedback provided as with a full Design Review Panel meeting.

Other Review Services:

The Design Review Panel offers a variety of other services including on-site workshops, advice to community groups, advise with the procurement of design teams, work with students and universities.

Benefits of Design Review:

- Provide the framework for a collaborative and constructive approach to planning between applicants, design teams and local authorities.
- Help Local Authorities support and approve unconventional challenging Planning Applications
- Provide local authorities with independent multidisciplinary expertise
- Help Local Authorities resist poorly designed planning applications
- Help community groups with neighbourhood planning
- Help Universities and students engage with real world projects and experienced, active industry professionals
- Reduce the risk of an unexpected decision for applicants during the Planning process
- Provide design teams with a critical friend



“North Devon Council has supported the use of design review for many years. We have found that it has enabled us to reach agreement with developers over some schemes that could otherwise have become contentious and confrontational. We are delighted that through The Design Review Panel high quality design review arrangements are now available locally, on a regular basis and at reasonable cost. We are pleased with results to date and look forward to working with The Design Review Panel **in the future.**” – Graham Townsend 2015 - Planning Delivery Team Leader, North Devon District Council

Breakdown of the schemes reviewed since launch of the Design Review Panel to 1st April 2018

Description	
Total number of review sessions carried out	205
Approximate total cost of schemes reviewed	£1.1b
Total Local Authorities engaged with	18
Approximate total number of others engaged with in promoting design review	220
Total number of separate design review panel days	76
Total number of special events and supporting engagements	10



“As well as being a member of the Design Review Panel I have experienced the benefits of Design Review from the designer’s perspective. As far as I can see there are only benefits to the Design Review system: As a designer / applicant you get the expert and unbiased opinions of respected colleagues, which helps to crystallize thinking and generally to improve the project.

Client’s benefit from a less adversarial system of discussing the very tricky issue of design quality with the Local Authority, and Local Authorities benefit from having expert designers to help them in this very subjective area where they rarely have any in house expertise. The costs (to the applicant) are easily outweighed by the benefits. It is the quality of the outcome that is important, and anything that helps improve quality of design should be welcomed – **good design is important because it improves people’s lives at many levels.**

Local Authorities which haven’t already embraced Design Review should do so without hesitation, and I would encourage Design Review to be included for **much smaller schemes as well as those currently coming in for review.”** - Christopher Mackenzie, RIBA, Director Designscape Architects Bath, Design Review Panel Member

Pool of Panel Members & Testimonials

The Design Review Panel is formed from a pool of around 80 multidisciplinary experienced construction industry professionals who volunteer to sit on the Panel.

The break down of expertise is currently as follows:

- RIBA/Architects incl Conservation: 38
- RICS/Chartered Surveyors: 3
- RTPI incl conservation: 4
- Landscape Architects: 13
- Urban Designers: 6
- Highways & Transport Planners: 5
- Civil Engineers: 1
- Ecologists/Marine Biologist: 5
- Sustainability Consultants: 2
- Arboriculturalist: 2

Applications to join the panel are welcome from all sectors of the design community of the built environment.

Please refer to www.designreviewpanel.co.uk for more details on eligibility and how to apply.

“During my involvement with the Design Review Panel I have been able to appreciate the value of a collaborative approach with professionals from a variety of disciplines discussing the overall quality of submitted designs. My experience of panel meeting discussions has been of positive and productive exchanges where panel members are able to share professional opinions, experience and suggestions. This often results in the panel being able to provide applicants and their design teams with positive feedback and advice to help improve the quality of schemes or find creative solutions to complex design challenges. As an ecologist I am particularly pleased that our profession is represented within the panel and able to provide feedback on those schemes which demonstrate excellent ecological design or where possible provide suggestions to raise the quality of Green Infrastructure and maximise opportunities for biodiversity enhancement



here in the South West.” - Adam Bratt (MCIEEM) – Senior Ecologist at Blackdown Environmental, Honiton, Design Review Panel Member



“I found the experience of participating in a number of Design Review Panels in Devon and Somerset interesting and challenging. The former in that it provided an opportunity to review a range of projects and approaches and in particular the range of design scope provided by landowners and developers. Glibly these can be characterised as the good, the bad and the ugly. The best results appear to come from situations where the land owner has retained a degree of design control and is prepared to take a hit on land values in order to secure a clear vision. The challenge was the privileged oversight that panel members have of projects ... it is extremely rewarding when the panel advice is reflected in further iterations of schemes.” - David Lobban, MRTPI, Director at PCL Planning Ltd, Design Review Panel Member



“The Design Review Panel supports the dialogue between Councils and the project team, allowing a constructive yet frank exchange by providing independent expert advice. Our aim is to capture early opportunities to add value, inspire lateral thinking, look at the bigger picture and encourage aspiration and ambition for good, sustainable design quality. The Design Review Panel has achieved a lot over the last year promoting not only excellence in prestige projects but also giving detailed thought to excellence in ‘every day’ developments.” - Cora Kwiatkowski, RIBA, Senior Associate for Stride Treglown Limited, Design Review Panel Member



“The Design

Review

Panel is run on a similar basis to other review panels in that projects

are submitted for review as part of the planning consultation process, often where the council has insufficient resource in-house to make judgements on design issues. The independent team of professionals forming the review panel participates in a day of presentations conducted by design teams engaged by the client/developer relating to each scheme. The discussion be-

tween the development team and the review panel is often enlightening and expands the parameters against which the scheme design is evaluated. As a review panel participant this process is extremely interesting both from the point of view of understanding the constraints which the design team are working under, and from a wider perspective with exposure to design questions within the fellow members of the panel. As an exercise in communication there is no better procedure than to assist in a panel meeting. The design development is potentially a wide ranging process, which route is adopted depends on a series of fac-

tors and local criteria, but there is no right course of action. Through experience of successful schemes which are based on well thought through policy one can evaluate design as being better or less well considered. Whilst taste is a criteria, functionality and user satisfaction is rated much more highly. Overall the design panel members have a unified wish to see well-connected, coherent and intelligible design of which we

can all be proud.” - Jane Fowles,
Chartered Landscape Architect & Urban
Designer, Director Novell Tullett, Bristol , De-
sign Review Panel Member.



“As an architect who has, trained, worked and lived in the South West for more than 30 years, I am keen, both personally and professionally, to be directly involved in and actively promote good design within the region with the aim of achieving; better buildings, communities and places. The Design Review Panel, (DRP), provides me with an ideal opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way, as part of an impartial multi-disciplinary panel and to constructive share my accumulated practical knowledge and experience of urban design, architecture and locally distinctive character of place. Through **the panel members’ collective and careful process of; listening, assessing** and evaluating the information provided by applicants, before offering; constructive feedback, reflective comment and, if appropriate, advice and direction – the panel is able assist and empower applicants in enhancing local design quality. I strongly support the Design Review Panel and would encourage applicants of all types, scopes and scales of projects to become involved at as early a stage in the design development process as possible, in order to gain the maximum benefit both for themselves and to help create through good design a better environment for the **wider community in which we; live, work and enjoy.**” - John Wilde, RIBA, RIBA Councillor, RIBA South West Regional Chair (2016—2018), RIBA Exeter Branch Chair 2014-2016, Devon & Somerset Design Review Panel Member.

Case Studies

North Grays Farm	-	Paragraph 55 house	-	East Devon District Council
Farleigh Meadows	-	257 new homes	-	Mid Devon District Council
Vision Bretonside	-	Mixed use leisure	-	Plymouth City Council
Steiner School	-	New school	-	Exeter City Council
Kingston Road	-	New build apartments	-	Taunton Deane Borough Council
Petroc College	-	New campus buildings	-	North Devon District Council

North Grays Farm – Membury

An Exceptional and Innovative New Country House (NPPF Para 55)
East Devon District Council
14/0088/FUL

Award-winning architects Sadler Brown designed a striking and innovative new country house proposed at North Grays Farm in Membury.

The project was promoted under the National Planning Policy Framework Paragraph 55, which imposes strict requirements for new country houses which are extremely demanding.

The requirements of this national planning policy is for bespoke new houses in the countryside to only be granted planning permission where they are of “exceptional quality or innovative nature of the design” and requires that:

“Such a design should:

- be truly outstanding or innovative, helping to raise standards of design more generally in ru-



- reflect the highest standards in architecture;
- significantly enhance its immediate setting; and
- be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.”

In order to obtain some professional objectivity on the quality of the design and its appropriate response to its immediate setting the local authority referred the project to The Design Review Panel, who advised:-

“... the proposals are truly innovative for the reasons of its sustainable and energy generation credentials, building management system, pro-

posed construction and physical form. It was felt that the proposals could represent a design that is exceptional and that demonstrates creativity subject to further development in accordance with the comments contained within this report.”

This advice was relied upon within the case officer's report, which states:-

“It is clear that the scheme has been driven from the outset by a desire/need to consider its ecological impact with the aim to demonstrate the significant enhancement of the site. This has been recognised by the Design Review Panel which considered the application.”

The application was approved on the 4th November 2014 following approval by the Planning Committee.

The planning consultant for the project, James Ellis, Associate Planner at Rural Solutions Ltd, (www.ruralsolutions.co.uk) has said:-

“The Project Team’s view of the review process undertaken with the Design Review Panel, in relation to a ‘new country house’ was a very favourable one. The team has presented to review panels across the country and we were struck by the positive approach taken by the Panel, which set it apart from some of the others we have visited. Individual members of the Panel challenged our ideas and were passionate about their subject area, allowing healthy debate about the benefits of different approaches. We would be pleased to recommend the [Devon & Somerset] Design Review Panel to other projects team considering third party review.”



Images provided by Sadler Brown Architecture - www.sadlerbrown.co.uk



Farleigh Meadows, Tiverton

A New Residential Development of
257 Houses
Mid Devon District Council
14/01047/MARM

This scheme proposed 257 new houses, public open space, the creation of new vehicular accesses and associated works on a site at Farleigh Meadows, Tiverton. The site is located on the north-western outskirts of Tiverton town centre.

The applicant engaged with The Design Review Panel as part of their design development stage.

The Taylor Wimpey supporting planning application documentation states:-

“In April 2014 a meeting with the Design Review Panel was held to discuss the early proposals. Feedback at this meeting, in addition to comments received at the public consultation event and Design Review Panel all helped shape the initial concepts into a more detailed,



well-rounded submitted scheme.”

Having amended the scheme as appropriate, in response to the comments made by the Panel, a planning application was submitted and was approved in January 2015. Input from the Devon and Somerset Design Review Panel was instrumental in helping the applicant produce

a proposal that was acceptable to the local authority.

Simon Trafford, Area Planning Officer, Mid Devon District Council said:

“The Design and Review Panel process provides an opportunity for LPA’s to seek a specialised review of



development proposals at the pre and/or planning application stage with a focussed overview of architectural, urban design, landscape design, heritage and transportation matters.

This specialised input has proven to be of value in terms of shaping and place-making with regards to an

important scheme on the edge of Tiverton, which is locally known as Farleigh Meadows Phase 2. The site has been allocated by the LPA as a housing site for over 10 years, and outline planning permission for up to 300 dwellings was issued at the start of 2013. The site was subsequently sold by the land owner to a house builder who has successfully progressed a scheme through the more detailed reserved matters stages with a start on site now imminent.

However this would not necessarily have been the case without input from the Panel. The outline consent was presented with an indicative block plan which was loosely termed a masterplan at a scale of 1:2500. The first scheme the applicant submitted took on the indicative layout on the block masterplan drawing, without examining the finer detail in terms of how it would integrate into the existing context and against the basic urban design principles which have now become generic principles in assessing devel-

opments.

As a result the scheme was based on a grid base plan, showing little quality in character and legibility of place, diversity in terms of development type, general ease of movement through the development **and connectivity with it's surroundings.** Without input from **the Panel the LPA's job in terms of persuading and guiding the applicants team to a more acceptable scheme would have been made even harder."**

Approval of the reserved matters application was granted on the 21st January 2015.

Vision Bretonside – Plymouth

Leisure Complex Including Cinema
Plymouth City Council - 15/00159/
FUL

Rob Heard, Planning Officer, Plymouth City Council

“The Design Panel Review provided articulate comments that both the Planning Officer and the applicants found useful during the period leading up to the submission of a formal planning application. These included detailed comments on the building design, layout of the site and landscaping. Discussion and debate at the meetings was informative and the concluding written comments were comprehensive, providing a thorough assessment of the pro-



posed development in relation to **design issues.”**

The project Architect Richard Wagenhauser, Associate Director at Corstorphine + Wright Architects made the following comments on engaging with the Devon and Somerset Design Review Panel:

“As part of the pre-consultation pro-

cess prior to submitting a planning application for our Drake Circus Leisure development, we had the opportunity to present our proposals on two separate occasions to the Devon & Somerset Design Review Panel. We found this process to be extremely helpful in developing and consolidating our ideas, in particular given that the panel brought valuable local knowledge, insight & per-

spective to the table. The feedback we received was concise, encouraging where appropriate, yet honest where it was felt that further consideration was required. This allowed us to revisit & develop our proposals which ultimately led to the enhancement of our scheme. We are confident that this process has contributed to delivering a higher quality development which would stand as an asset to the City of Plymouth. We would encourage others to **welcome a similar opportunity for their developments.**”

Planning approval was granted on the 14th May 2015.



Image provided by Corstorphine + Wright Architects
www.corstorphine-wright.com



Construction & Refurbishment of Exeter's new Steiner Academy
Exeter City Council—13/5108/03

The project, on Cowley Bridge Road, will see Willmott Dixon construct a 4,707 m² two-storey facility alongside delivering a full refurbishment to Thomas Hall, the grade II listed building that was formerly a university hall of residence. The project will include construction of a separate hall and kitchen, six kindergarten classrooms, new car parks and landscaping of the grounds.

The project combines the heritage of the beautiful Thomas Hall built in the 1630s, with the modern vision of a new state-of-the-art school building. The site covers almost 13 acres of existing ground with more than 200 trees and lots of wildlife.

Laura Davies, RIBA, Design Manager at Willmott Dixon Construction Limited
www.willmott Dixongroup.co.uk has

said:

“We met with The Devon and Somerset Design Review Panel prior to the planning application submission for the new Steiner Academy in Exeter. The meeting was recommended by Exeter City Council Planning Department as part of the planning application consultations due to the high-profile project and the extensive refurbishment works required to the Grade 2-listed Thomas Hall to house the new Academy.

The presentation to the panel was made by me, on behalf of Willmott Dixon Construction; our Architects, AHR; and our Planning Consultant, Jones Lang LaSalle. The presentation was received well and was also **observed by the project's Planning and Heritage Officers** from Exeter City Council.

We found the Panel to be most professional and very forthcoming on ideas to better the scheme that **didn't impact on the project's budget,**

which we found very refreshing.

We were in much debate with Exeter City Council about the architecture of the new academy buildings and the positioning of these new buildings in order not to impose on the heritage of the Thomas Hall site. There was good debate between the meeting members on this **subject and the Panel's recommendations** informed the final planning application design.

The historical knowledge of the site from the Panel Members was also welcomed, which we passed back to our Client who was most grateful to learn the history of the impressive landscape at Thomas Hall.

We successfully received planning approval in March 2014.

We would certainly recommend **the Panel's input on design and we look forward to working with the Panel again on future projects in the region.”**



Image provided by Willmott Dixon Construction Ltd— www.willmottdixon.co.uk

Kingston Road – Taunton

Block of 40 New Apartments
Taunton Deane Borough Council
38/13/0420

Architect, Jonathan Scanlan, Director of Reed + Holland Associates Ltd, provided the following thoughts on the Devon and Somerset Design Review Panel:-

“Reed Holland Associates were appointed by our client, No1 Kingston Road Limited, to prepare a planning application for the demolition of a former snooker hall and nightclub opposite the entrance to Taunton Railway Station and its replacement with a new block of forty one and two bedroom apartments.



Our client sought pre-application advice from Taunton Deane Borough Council and at a meeting the principal planning officer it was suggested that the scheme might be one that was appropriate to take to the recently formed Design Review Panel.

The design proposals represented a major application for a five storey block of flats of a contemporary design. Given the prominence of the site and the scale of the proposals it was considered that to have the honest views of a peer group would only serve to assist the consideration of the application at planning committee.

We took the view that this represented a chance to get feedback from the panel who were comprised of not just architects but, urban designers, landscape architects, energy specialists of some standing. To have all this input in one condensed sitting we therefore saw as an opportunity rather than a



threat.

Consequently we submitted as comprehensive a package as we were able to the panel in advance of meeting. Our Panel interview took **place at Exeter City Council's offices**. On the day we came prepared and were accompanied by a representative of our client. The Panel members were friendly and welcoming and our concerns that this might be a daunting experience were instantly put at rest.

We were given the opportunity to present our scheme and the Panel then took it in turns to question us and provide their own input. This in-

volved a degree of exchange and debate that was helpful and in some instances challenged our own thinking in a positive way.

The feedback that we received was all very helpful and whilst generally positive we were encouraged to re-think and re-examine some aspects of our design proposals. To our surprise one aspect of the feedback was in fact to consider their merits of increasing the scale of the proposal by adding to the frontage.

Within a very short space of time we were provided with a written **summary of the panel's conclusions and** this was comprehensive and fully



reflected the discussions with the panel and the conclusions that they arrived at on the day.

This feedback was invaluable and in conjunction with our client we modified the design and used the Design Review Panel report as an agenda at our follow up meeting with the principal planning officer.

The amended design was fed back to the Design Review Panel and the **planning officer's report to Committee** contained a helpful summary of the views and opinions of the Design Review Panel. In this instance the planning officer concurred with the views of the Design Review Panel and his recommendation was for approval.

We attended the Planning Committee meeting and when it came to the vote the Committee voted overwhelmingly in favour and the application was approved.

It is our honest opinion that the feed-

back of the Design Review Panel played a significant role in persuading the members of the Committee that the scheme that might otherwise have challenged the views of some of the Committee members was acceptable in terms of its design.

This experience has demonstrated to us the worth of the Design Review Panel and the contribution that it can make towards the success of a **planning application.**"

Approval was granted on the 5th November 2014.



Images provided by Reed + Holland Associates Ltd, Architects and Interior Designers
www.reed-holland.co.uk

Petroc College
Replacement Teaching Blocks
North Devon District Council - 57308

Peregrine Mears, Director at Peregrine Mears Architects Ltd said:

“We opted to use the services of the Devon Design Review Panel earlier this year for a £7.6m education project we are working on. That decision was made on the suggestion of the planning officer during the pre-application process. A key part of our choosing to go through the DRP process was to hopefully have some independent verification to inform and justify the scheme to avoid local councillors meddling with the design and / or delaying the planning decision. So it was something of a gamble as we had not used a DRP before. However we **needn't have worried as it proved to be a painless process.** Panel members were very enthusiastic about our approach and the way we had developed the proposals. That made for a relaxed atmosphere



and encouraged positive dialogue on both sides. The scheme has definitely improved as a result and the planning application process has been easier. All in all we found the experience to be enjoyable and of real benefit so we would certainly **recommend it.”**

Approval was granted on 3rd July 2014.





Images provided by Peregrine Mears Architects Ltd—
www.mearsarchitects.com



“Our role on the Design Review Panel has very much been that of a mediator between the applicants, who are very much guided by their Client’s ambitions, and the local authority whose role is to verify that any scheme will eventually benefit the community at large. The DRP’s opinion then assists both parties by explaining the issues of the design in meeting the holistic needs and supporting the Planning Officers and their Committees in making a viable adjudication of any application. I believe that in general we have been successful in promoting good design, meeting a valid balance between developers and the Planning Authorities. – Richard White, RIBA, Director Mitchell Architects Plymouth, Design Review Panel Member

Panel Member Testimonial



“My name is
Jonathan
Vernon-Smith.
I am the Ur-
ban Design
Director at Ur-
ban Design
Box in Bristol. I
am an RIBA
Architect and
have been
practising Ar-

chitecture with a strong focus on Urban Design and Masterplanning for over 15 years. I have presented schemes to a number of design review panels since their introduction, including CABE, DCfW and the Cornwall Design Review Panel. Outside my office role, I have been a visiting tutor / critic for MAUD course in both UWE and Cardiff Universities for the past 10 years.

I have been a member of The Design Review Panel since August 2014. The projects to be reviewed during these sessions have included masterplanning, architectural and residential design projects including the now approved Brestonside Bus Station redevelopment and District Centre proposals in Plymouth.

During each of the sessions the Panel members have included a mix of relevant disciplines and backgrounds which I felt was appropriate for the schemes to be reviewed; they had the potential to add value to the process through Design Review. The structure of the review session I feel is excellent. Presentations are received for each project well ahead of the Review day to enable panel members to sufficiently absorb sometime complicated projects and processes and best add value. The Panel has also had the opportunity to conduct a structured site visit of one of the larger schemes to be reviewed which further contributes to effective analysis and discussion of the design with both applicants and LPA. During the review sessions themselves, there is a good amount of time for the applicant to present the scheme in a relaxed environment. After the initial presentation, the largest part of the review is given over to questions and suggestions from the Panel which often takes the form of a constructive two-way discussion between applicants, LPA and the Panel. During this time, comments from the Panel I feel are constructive, helpful and seem to be generally well-received and useful. Jonathan Braddick is an effective Chair who constructively manages the

debate and puts all parties at ease. The positive environment and informal friendly discussion I feel is credit to Jonathan’s ability to impartially and enthusiastically engage in each Review.

The sessions are concluded with a **verbal summary of the Panel’s comments** which follow a short panel-only period where comments are ordered and clarified to inform structured feedback to the applicant and LPA. This feedback is then written up and presented in written form.

Overall I am pleased to be part of the Design Review Panel. As above, I have had varying experiences before with national panels and am aware that this is reflected amongst some of my key clients. I feel that the Design Review Panel chaired by Jonathan is a positive and constructive experience for all and I would have no hesitation in **encouraging clients and LPAs to take part”**.

Jonathan Vernon-Smith, Architect & Urban Design Director at Urban Design Box in Bristol, Design Review Panel Member

The Future ...

Following the great success and large amount of enthusiasm that The Design Review Panel continues to receive, the aim is to maintain and continue to expand the positive impact of The Design Review Panel.

We are fortunate to be operating within a time where good planning and sustainable design is accepted as indivisible from good design.

However in, what is still, a difficult financial environment we need to work harder than ever to promote the importance of good design and demonstrate the medium and long term financial benefits that it can result in.

We will continue to strive to work with local authorities and other institutes to demonstrate the added value that good design results in. These benefits being: social, cultur-

al, environmental and therefore financial.

The feedback received, from applicants and design teams presenting to the panel to date is extremely positive. Those who have used the Panel see it as a critical friend and a very useful part of the design team.

Decision makers continue to be extremely enthusiastic about the Design Review Panel.

The Panel has laid excellent foundations since its launch, developing strong relationships with local authorities, statutory consultees, and education institutions.

The Panel will continue to provide constructive support and guidance for those delivering projects with the aim of raising the standard of design quality in the built environment across the South West.

The Design Review Panel will also continue to help to ease the planning process for those applicants and design teams who choose to engage with the Panel.

The Design Review Panel will continue to offer flexible services in support of our aims across the region.

Local authorities, schools of architecture, community groups and other organisations that wish to use the services of The Design Review Panel are invited to contact:

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