

**RICHMOND DESIGN PANEL**  
TERMS OF REFERENCE  
2008 - 2009

**1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Council commissioned a Planning Outcomes Study in July 2004 to critically appraise a number of recently completed developments in the Borough. A group, co-ordinated by an external urban design expert and including local architects and representatives of local amenity groups undertook the review and recommended the establishment of an 'expert' Design Panel to assist the Council in the assessment of major proposals and design policies. This concept is widely endorsed by Government and professional organisations to raise awareness of good contemporary and well mannered new buildings in local contexts.
- 1.2 The following terms of reference were agreed by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Panel Chair and Council officers in May 2008 following experience of the operation of the Panel since its inception.

**2 Terms of reference**

2.1 Terms of reference are as follows;

- To consider emerging development proposals and to make recommendations on urban design, architecture and sustainability matters;
- To advise on initiatives to improve the quality of urban design and architecture in the Borough;
- To promote the national design quality agenda and maintain an overview of urban design and architecture issues and to make recommendations for action where appropriate;
- To monitor the effectiveness of Local Development Framework policies in practice, in achieving high quality urban design and architecture in the Borough and co-ordinate subsequent outcome studies.
- To receive presentations from applicants and/or officers and provide written comments on proposals/policies.

2.2 Comments will be used to guide applicants and officers in relation to specialist design matters. Recommendations would be provided in written form and reported to the Planning Committee (when dealing with planning applications), the applicants at pre-application stage and in the case of policy matters the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Cabinet Member for Environment as appropriate.

2.3 It is recognised that the proposed frequency (4-6 meetings a year) could preclude consideration of some major planning applications. It will be for the Urban Design and Conservation Manager to consider whether additional meetings should be established to consider particularly contentious or complex schemes. The Government targets for determining planning applications would preclude any significant delay in the determination of applications. In many cases consideration at the pre-application stage will provide the appropriate input and this will be encouraged as the earlier in the process that specialist advice is given, the greater benefit to the resulting scheme or planning application. Schemes on which major concerns have been expressed by the Panel may be referred again, subject to timing and in consultation with the Development Control Manager.

2.4 Schemes referred to the Panel will be limited to significant proposals, particularly those where there will be an impact on the character of the Borough and the public's enjoyment of it. The significance of projects will generally be measured by the complexity or size of the proposals, their potential impact and the characteristics of the site. There will be instances where the panel will consider exceptional or controversial cases. The applications to be considered will be determined by the Urban Design and Conservation Manager/Development Control Manager in consultation with the Chair of the Panel.

2.5 Other business may include commenting on emerging Local Development Framework policies and Supplementary Planning Documents as well as key environmental improvement schemes, where appropriate.

### **3 Membership and organisation**

3.1 The membership of the panel will comprise:

- Architects, urban designers, landscape architects, engineers, artists and other design related professionals with a local interest or recognised expertise in their field
- The Cabinet Member for Environment (or alternative Member nominee) in an observer 'Design Champion' capacity

3.2 Membership of the Panel will be for a 2 year period (renewable). Upto 7 Panel members will be invited to each meeting by the Urban Design and Conservation Manager to provide a suitable mix of professions at each meeting. Meeting dates and attendance will be agreed at the start of each year. Specialist Panel members could be invited to attend specific presentations where their expert local advice would be particularly relevant, and where continuity on reviewing a scheme that has been presented to the Panel on a previous occasion would be helpful.

3.3 Panel members will be expected to express their own impartial design views during the meeting, independent from other groups and abide by confidentiality (see clause 5.1). The Design Panel's view on each scheme will be as contained in the minutes of the meeting, signed off by the Chair.

3.4 The Chair will be selected from the Panel members to serve for a period of 12 months (renewable).

3.5 Case officers or other relevant Council staff will attend as appropriate to provide factual information on specific cases. The Urban Design and Conservation Manager will attend and minute all meetings.

3.6 The Panel will meet 4-6 times a year (subject to demand).

#### **4 Conflicts of interest**

4.1 Panel members should inform the Urban Design and Conservation Manager of a direct or indirect interest in a project that is going to be discussed at a Design Panel. A list of projects to be discussed at each meeting will be circulated to all the panel members before the panel meeting takes place. Such interests will be declared to the chairman and recorded in the panel minutes. In the case of a direct interest the panel member concerned will leave the room during the panel's discussion of the project and will take no part in the forming of the panel's views. Where the Panel chair is required to declare a direct interest and leave the room, the Urban Design and Conservation Manager will nominate an alternative panel member as interim chair for the agenda item in question.

4.2 The Cabinet Member for Environment (or alternative Member nominee) attends the panel in an observer capacity to provide factual background if necessary and will be governed by the Council's Member Code of Conduct and Protocol for Planning and Development Control.

4.3 Membership of the Panel is voluntary and unpaid and does not preclude any professional interest being undertaken by individuals within the Borough, or subsequent views being expressed in public forums, such as at Planning Committee.

#### **5 Confidentiality**

5.1 Pre-application schemes will be brought to the panel in confidence. The minutes will not be made public until such date that the project is submitted for determination to the Council. Discussions at the meeting will be summarised by the Chair and agreed in the minutes as the reflection of the views expressed by panel members at the meeting.

5.2 Meetings to be held in closed session.