

Bournemouth Design Panel Framework, May 2014

Background

The National Planning Policy Framework requires local planning authorities to have local design review arrangements in place to provide assessment and support to ensure high standards of design. While Bournemouth Borough Council has access to the services provided by the South West Design Review Panel this is only used for the largest schemes and the panel charges developers a considerable fee.

This paper sets out proposals for a design panel for Bournemouth. The intention is to set up a panel which is easy to run and fits in with planning application response times. These are initial suggestions and it is likely that further adjustments will be made once the panel is in operation.

Area covered

It is envisaged that the panel will initially serve Bournemouth but this will be reviewed and there is potential to integrate the service with adjoining local authorities in the future.

Number and type of schemes reviewed

Subject to availability any major scheme can be reviewed (i.e. 10+ dwellings/ 0.5ha+/ 1,000+ sq m commercial floor space). Smaller schemes which are particularly sensitive, contentious, complex, unusual or innovative may also be reviewed subject to availability. Looking at the past four years an average of 30 major applications has been received annually. The panel would have the capacity to review about 15 schemes each year.

Urban design staff will continue to be consulted by case officers in the usual way and are able to provide detailed, ongoing advice on schemes whether or not they are reviewed by the panel.

The South West Design Review Panel or CABE will still be used for very large and complex schemes i.e. hundreds of units on a mixed use site and any proposals of national importance.

Charging

Bournemouth Borough Council will offer the service as part of the pre-application/ Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) service. The applicant will therefore pay for the review as part of the charge for the wider PPA package. If design review alone is required the charge would be in the region of £100 to £200.

Stage of review

The earlier the review the greater the scope to improve the scheme. Proposals reviewed by the panel will consist of:

- schemes at the pre application stage (preferable)
- some planning applications
- council projects e.g. highways schemes and public realm improvements

- policy documents and strategies (these will need to be presented in a condensed format or could be reviewed remotely, by emailing willing panel members draft documents for comment).

Timing and frequency of meetings

Ad hoc meetings will be set up initially as and when required to fit in with development management response times, Planning Board dates and timetables of council led projects. It is anticipated that this will result in approximately one meeting every two months but the frequency will depend on demand and staff time constraints. Once trialled it is anticipated that dependent on demand regularly bimonthly dates will be fixed.

Format of meetings

Panel members will be invited to visit the sites in their own time if possible before the meeting. Each meeting will last about half a day. The number of schemes reviewed per meeting will depend on their size and complexity but would normally be two or three.

The coordinator will start the meeting off and invite the panel members to elect a chair. The chair will be responsible for time keeping, ensuring that all the issues are covered and that all the panel members' opinions are heard. The chair will also agree and sign off the panel report.

For each review the format will be:

- presentation by client and design team (up to 15 mins)
- planning context from local authority (up to 5 mins)
- panel questions and comments (up to 20 mins)
- closed panel discussion (up to 20 mins)
- voting (optional - this approach has been used by CABE, using a green, amber or red voting system to summarise the panel's views)

A list of design considerations should be referred to ensuring that all the relevant issues are covered (e.g. massing, accessibility, materials, detailing, sustainability, landscape etc).

Developers and design teams should be advised of the format and given guidance on what to present prior to meetings.

Expertise of panel members

Areas of expertise should include:

- planning
- architecture
- landscape architecture
- heritage
- urban design
- transport/ highways
- sustainability
- public art

- access for all
- engineering
- financial viability

The coordinator will select the most relevant panel members for each meeting depending on the nature and location of the schemes to be reviewed.

Panel members will need to be good critics as well as respected experts in their field. It is also important to aim for a panel membership which reflects the diversity of the communities served as far as possible.

Number of panel members

Approximately 15 panel members should be appointed of which three or four will be invited to each meeting. The elected ward members of schemes being considered will be invited to attend as observers.

Selection of panel members

Advertising for panel members is better practice than inviting individuals to sit on the panel. Panel members may live or work in Bournemouth or could be based beyond the Borough if they are willing to travel for meetings. A call for panel members will be put out via the following:

- Solent Urban Design Group
- RTPI South West Branch
- Dorset RIBA
- Landscape Institute South West Branch
- Bournemouth Council Website
- Bournemouth Civic Society
- The Department of Architecture and Design at Arts University Bournemouth

Potential panel members should submit a CV and a short letter explaining why they would like to be on the panel and what they would bring to it. Relevant planning and design staff will meet to select the panel members, possibly with input from the South West Design Review Panel or CABE. The selection process will ensure that a good geographical spread is achieved as well as a mix of skills and backgrounds.

Training panel members

A meeting of the full panel is suggested to explain to members how the panel works, the format of meetings, issues to consider when reviewing schemes and the need to declare conflicts of interest. Panel members will need to sign a code of conduct and confidentiality paper.

Facilities required

Each meeting will take place in a Council meeting room. The room should be able to accommodate about 12 people. Use of projectors will be avoided but pin up space should be provided. Applicants may also show the panel images on a laptop. Catering will be provided for panel members.

Staff time

A member of the Design and Heritage team will act as coordinator. The coordinator will be responsible for setting up panel meetings as and when required with the help of admin support. Once the framework has been set up the resources for organising a panel meeting shouldn't be too time consuming. The coordinator will need to

- liaise with development management colleagues over schemes to be reviewed
- organise the agenda and identify panel members to be invited
- attend on the day to ensure the meeting runs smoothly
- write up the Panel's recommendations in consultation with the chair

A junior member of support staff will

- book the meeting room and catering
- invite the panel members, developer, design team, case officer and ward members
- send out reminders and circulate finished reports

It is estimated that this will equate to approximately half a day of admin support time and 1.5 days of the coordinator's time per meeting. The case officer for each scheme will also attend the review for their scheme (approximately one hour) and will answer background questions if necessary.

Costs to Bournemouth Borough Council

It is hoped that panel members will be willing to attend voluntarily without payment or reimbursement of travel expenses to avoid extra cost and administration time. Sitting on the panel will offer the advantages of CPD, networking and prestige. The main costs to the Council will therefore be:

- officer time to set up the panel and organise meetings and write up the panel's advice as and when required - see above
- catering

Conflicts of interest

Panel members will be asked to declare any conflict of interest in advance of each meeting. The coordinator will decide whether to simply record the conflict or chose a replacement panel member.

Publicity

A simple website will be set up with a couple of pages of information including the purpose of the panel, the type of scheme reviewed, how the process works, what to present at a meeting and contact details. A press release should also be produced when the panel is launched.

Project Plan

Task	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept
Agree framework						
Framework to go to Planning Board for information						
Write advert for panel members						
Advertise for panel members						
Meet to select panel members						
Contact successful and unsuccessful panel members						
Induction meeting for successful panel members						
Set up simple website						
Panel open for business						