

Design Review Panel Supplementary Planning Document November 2018

Background

1. The purpose of this supplementary planning document is to provide detailed guidance as to the interpretation of Chapter 7 “Ensuring new development respects local distinctiveness” of the Sevenoaks District Local Plan which refer to the Design Review Panel Process.
2. Sevenoaks District Council has agreed to use design review as part of the planning application process through the establishment of a Sevenoaks Design Review Panel to be managed by an independent body, Design South East¹.
3. Design review is a tried and tested method of independently evaluating and improving the quality of developments by bringing proposals before a panel of experts from across the built environment professions. The Sevenoaks District Design Review Panel will consist of a pool of approximately 20 experienced practitioners in architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, heritage, engineering, ecology, sustainability and other relevant disciplines. From this pool five people will normally be selected to sit at each panel meeting.
4. The Council and Design South East are committed to ensuring that the Sevenoaks District design review process is of the highest possible quality in accordance with the ten principles of design review². Among other things this means having thorough processes for dealing with conflicts of interest and complaints.
5. The objectives of using design review are:
 - to ensure good quality design is embedded in all significant developments in the district,
 - to facilitate the planning application process by allowing planning officers to fully understand the design challenges posed by an application and resolving design issues at an early stage,
 - to provide the Council with an independent evaluation of the design quality of applications, ensuring that decisions can be made after a thorough process has been undertaken to improve their quality,
 - to provide reassurance to applicants that design issues will be discussed and decided in a consistent and constructive way.

Thresholds

6. All applications meeting one or more of the following criteria will be required to come before the Sevenoaks District Design Review Panel. This includes:
 - Residential developments of more than 50 new dwellings
 - Non-residential developments of more than 10,000 sq m of floor space (gross)

¹ Design South East is the trading name of North Kent Architecture Centre Ltd and is a not-for-profit agency providing independent design review services throughout the South East and East of England including London.

² Design Review Principles and Practice (RTPI, RIBA, Landscape Institute 2013).

- Mixed-use developments of an equivalent size (e.g. 25 dwellings and 5,000 sq m of floor space)
 - At the discretion of the Council, smaller developments which are otherwise significant (for example because of their complexity and/or sensitive location)
 - Residential proposals seeking approval using justification referring to Paragraph 79 of the NPPF where appropriate.
7. The Council may encourage larger or more complex schemes to come before the Sevenoaks District Design Review Panel on more than one occasion. Where a planning performance agreement (PPA) is entered into, the requirements for design review should be detailed in the agreement.

Process

8. The Council will alert those applicants, and prospective applicants, who are required to come to design review as early as possible in the pre-application or application process. They will also inform Design South East that they have done so. It is the responsibility of the applicant to contact Design South East and arrange a design review. A review meeting can normally be arranged within one calendar month.
9. Design South East will ask the applicant to complete a design review submission form and sign a contract. Applicants will be required to submit plans and drawings related to the scheme at least five working days prior to the review meeting.
10. The applicant and the Council will always be represented at the design review meeting. Other relevant statutory consultees, such as Kent County Council Highways or Historic England may also be invited. The panel will always undertake a site visit, unless they are reviewing the scheme for a second or subsequent time. At the design review meeting the Council will provide a short briefing on the planning background to the application and the applicant will be invited to present the scheme. The panel will then ask questions, discuss the scheme and give their opinions and recommendations. These will be summarised by the chair.
11. The opinions and recommendations of the panel will be published in a design review report which will be issued no less than ten working days after the review meeting. Copies of this report will be circulated to all those present at the review meeting.
12. Unless otherwise agreed by the applicants, for proposals which are at a pre-application stage, the design review process and report will remain confidential. However, applicants should be aware that pre-application design review reports may be subject to Freedom of Information requests, via an application under the Environmental Information Regulations. The review report will be available to the public online, whilst any application is being considered.

Payment

13. Fees for design review in Sevenoaks District will be set by Design South East in consultation with the Council. These will be published and will be available to prospective applicants. It is the responsibility of applicants to pay the fee for design review. Payment must be made by the applicant directly to Design South East. In some cases, Design South East may require payment of the fee in advance of the design review meeting. For the avoidance of doubt, design review fees are not included in any pre-application or PPA fees paid to the Council.

Response to design review recommendations:

14. Applicants will be expected to respond positively to the advice and recommendations of the design review panel. Applicants should provide a report detailing how they have responded to the design review report. The Council will view this as evidence that the applicant has undertaken a thorough design process. The Council will give the opinions and recommendations of the design review panel weight as a material consideration in planning decisions; weight will also be given to the applicant's responses to those opinions and recommendations.