



Newham Design Panel

Annual Report

March 2021 – February 2022

Review Panel name	Newham Design Panel
Panel management (in-house, externally managed, one-off)	In-house
Contact name for panel	Ben Hull, Strategic Design Manager, London Borough of Newham
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Report produced by	Local Authority Officer (Ben Hull)

REVIEW TOTALS	
Reviews and follow up reviews	Number
Total number of reviews	28
Number of follow up / second reviews	8
Number of site visits	0
Type of Review	Number
Formal Review (4 panel members)	24
Chair's Workshop (1-2 panel members)	4
Departments that attended review sessions in any capacity	Number
Planning	28
Regeneration	0
Housing	5
Highways	0
Education	3

PROPOSALS	
Applicant type	Number
Private Developer	19
Local Authority	9
Joint Venture	0

Type of Proposal being reviewed	Number
Masterplan (mixed use)	7
Policy or strategic document	1
Residential (1-50 units)	0
Residential (50+ units)	11
Student Accommodation	4
Commercial	2
Community	2
Education	1
Public Realm	0
Stage of proposal	Number
Pre-application	27
Planning Application	0
Other	1

PANEL COMPOSITION	
Total panel members	Number
No. of different panel members used this year	30
Diversity of panel used this year	Per cent
Male / Female %	51/49
Black, Asian and ethnically diverse %	13
Expertise areas of panel used this year	Number of individuals at all sessions
Urban Design	4
Architecture	15
Landscape	4
Planning	3
Transport	0

Sustainability	2
Heritage/ Conservation	0
Development Delivery	1
Social Infrastructure	0

FEEDBACK	
Feedback collection process	<p>Surveys carried out after the design review process. Surveys are sent out to members of applicant teams approximately 3-6 months after the most recent design review panel meeting. Only 5 survey responses were received. Although a relatively low number this is consistent with other years where feedback has been sought from applicants.</p> <p>Surveys have also been sent to new Panel Members (appointed in September 2021). Feedback was previously sought from pre-existing panel members and Planning Officers for the 2020/21 Annual Report and it was not considered necessary to seek further feedback, given the recent feedback provided. 3 responses were received from Panel Members</p>
Applicants	Percentage
% agree that information/guidance provided prior to the review was sent out promptly	100
% agree that information/guidance provided prior to the review was useful	100
% agree that communication with the Council prior to the review was good	100
% that fully understood what was required of them during the review	100
% agree that the remote (MS Teams/Zoom) format was suitable for design review	60

% agree that the format of the review was good	80
% agree that the panel and their role was properly introduced	100
% agree that the time allocated to the presentation of the scheme was adequate	80
% agree that the time allocated to the discussion of the scheme was adequate	80
% agree that the Panel understood the scheme and issues fully	80
% agree that the Panel had a high level of relevant experience	80
% agree that the Panel were objective in their observations	80
% agree that the observations and discussions were relevant	100
% agree that the Panel report was useful	100
% agree that the Panel report was an accurate record of comments	100
% agree that the Panel report was received within sufficient time after the meeting	100
% agree that the Panel was useful in taking the scheme forward	100
% agree that the Panel is good value for money	60

<p>% would speak highly of the Panel if asked</p>	<p>80</p>
<p>% advocate the Panel to others without being asked</p>	<p>80</p>
<p>% would use the Panel for another future scheme</p>	<p>100</p>
<p>Specific comments / feedback:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [The panel's] focus on aesthetics rather than practicality of high railings around school site didn't take into account school concerns [about security] • [The panel should have] more appreciation of building user concerns and project costs • [The panel operates] on a similar level [to other design review panels] – perhaps better than average as not overly conservative/cautious in terms of development. • A little bit more guidance on what the presentation material should have included would have been helpful. • The format of the meeting was very good. The feedback on the day was very constructive, practical, clear and helpful. • There's always a tendency for panel reports to be more heavily caveated than the verbal feedback received on the day. This is understandable but also frustrating, especially when the scheme was generally received positively. It would be good for the advice to simply say that. • I thought Newham's design review panel was very constructive compared to others. • I liked the fact that we only needed to present to the chair the second time around, given that the scheme was relatively well received the first time around. This saved a lot of time and money and was much more proportionate. • [It would have been] useful to have more detail on the structure of the panel's response [prior to the review]. ie: intros, clarifications, questions, comments, chair summary. • One of the best [in comparison with other design review panels]. Balanced, fair and collaborative with no grandstanding. • <i>Suggested improvements:</i> More time to present and more time to comment. In person • The new chair managed the meeting extremely well. • [Knowing about] elements of the scheme [that] the panel would be interested in knowing about, if the site has already been seen by the panel [would have been helpful in preparing for the review]. • It compares well [to other design review panels] as it is well structured. Perhaps zoom / teams helps with this.

<p>Panel manager comments regarding applicant feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The small sample of responses makes it relatively difficult to draw conclusions from the responses, as one response can significantly skew the overall percentage agreeing/disagreeing with a particular statement. • However, the responses provide a general sense that applicants feel that the process is well managed, the comments by the DRP are objective and constructive and that they have helped improve the design of the schemes presented and streamlined the planning and pre-application process. • The panel members are generally involved in the development process in their professional lives – outside the work of the panel – and in my experience their comments consider all aspects of design including aesthetics, security (where relevant), cost and user concerns. • Detailed information about the presentation information required both during and before the review is provided in the form of a briefing note for applicants. However, this will be reviewed to determine if further or more detailed guidance is required. • As stated in the DRP Terms of Reference, it is the written DRP report rather than verbal comments made during the review that are the formal record of the DRP’s views about a proposal. The panel manager records the comments made during the review and drafts the report based on those comments. The draft is then shared with the Chair for final comments. If comments made during the review are caveated, this is usually because the chair considers it important to clarify the panel’s position and to provide clear guidance to the applicant. • More detail has been added to the guidance note issued to applicants prior to the review, in terms of the format of the meeting (questions, comments, summary etc.) • 2 hours is allowed for most schemes, with 40 minutes to present and the rest of the time for discussion. This is felt to be ample for most schemes. For larger or more complex proposals, more time is usually allowed.
<p>Panel members</p>	<p>Percentage</p>
<p>% agreed they were notified of the need to attend sufficiently in advance of the review meeting</p>	<p>100</p>
<p>% agreed that pre-meeting information from applicant was sent out promptly</p>	<p>100</p>
<p>% agreed that the pre-meeting information is useful</p>	<p>100</p>
<p>% agreed that they were adequately briefed by</p>	<p>100</p>

Planning Officers prior to the review	
% agreed that they fully understood what was required of them during the panel review	100
% agreed that the venue and presentation equipment (room, equipment, online meeting platform) were suitable for the review	100
% agreed that the format of the review was good	100
% agreed that the time allocated to the discussion of the scheme was adequate	100
% agreed they were given adequate opportunity to ask questions/make comments	100
% agreed that the panel had a high level of relevant experience	100
% agreed that the panel were objective in their observations	100
% agreed that the panel report was an accurate record of comments made on the day	66
% agreed they would speak highly of their experience on the panel when asked	66
% agreed they would advocate the panel to others without being asked	100
If you have attended any other reviews elsewhere previously (either as panel member or presenter), how	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have attended other reviews and would say that the Newham review is well managed and structured by comparison. My experience has been that Newham reviews fairly and is unbiased. It also seeks the best outcome in each project reviewed given its own specific constraints.

<p>does the Newham Design Panel compare?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have recently joined the UDL's EDRP and whilst there hasn't been the opportunity so far, there was a suggestion that new panel members could access mentoring sessions as they settle into the process. An idea that I think would be useful for Newham's DRP and future members that may join who many not have had any prior experience of a DRP. • Yes, Reading, Essex, Wandsworth. The [Newham] panel is more professional.
<p>What improvements do you feel could be made to the Newham Design Panel review process?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased diversity on the panel representative of the rich ethnic diversity of Newham residents.
<p>Any further comments?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teams reviews have been successful, however if in person reviews at Newham were possible then this could be more beneficial for the review panel to engage each other as a group and provide an efficient day for a number of reviews. • Would it be worth Newham / DRP panel seeing built schemes that have been through the process and any other exemplar developments in London. This needn't be a fee paid but more for Newham/DRP to consider good design and lessons to be learnt. • The panel should represent the gender mix and racial diversity of the borough by actively recruiting local residents.
<p>Panel manager comments regarding panel member feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The small sample of responses makes it relatively difficult to draw conclusions from the responses, as one response can significantly skew the overall percentage agreeing/disagreeing with a particular statement. • However, the responses provide a general sense that new panel members feel positive about the review process. This reflects the views of other, longer standing panel members who provided feedback in 2021. • One panel member was unable to agree that the panel report was an accurate record of comments made on the day as they didn't receive the report. Panel reports are drafted by the panel manager, sent to the Chair for comments before being sent out to applicants and other panel members. One this occasion the report wasn't sent out to the panel members, but reminders are now in place to ensure this happens. • The suggestion for mentoring of new panel members is an interesting idea and will be offered when future recruitment to the panel takes place. Following the last round of recruitment to the panel, new panel members were invited to attend reviews as observers. • During the last round of recruitment to the panel, the Council actively sought to increase the ethnic diversity of the panel through targeted recruitment. The panel has a 50/50 gender split and 14% of panel members are from a Black or Minority Ethnic background. While this is far from being representative of the demographic make of Newham's population, it represents a significant increase compared to previous panel membership, and the intention is to build on this in future recruitment to the

	<p>panel. The lack of diversity in the architecture and wider built environment professions, however, remains a significant challenge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The intention for some time has been to revert to face to face reviews for first reviews and continue with online reviews for subsequent. This has been frustrated by continuing restrictions on attendees within Newham Dockside meeting rooms and the fact that the meeting room previously used for design reviews with a magnetic wall (WG.06) is no longer available as it has been transformed into an office. Occasional reviews have taken place at applicants' offices but at the time of writing, reviews are mostly still taking place online. This is will be subject to continual review as the situation changes. • The suggestion for DRP members to visit built schemes that have been through the review process is welcomed and could be beneficial for both officers and DRP members. However in light of the current lack of resourcing in the Planning team, this may not be able to take place in the short term. • Regarding the suggestion to actively recruit local residents to the DRP: The advert for recruitment of new panel members went out publicly and Newham residents were free to apply. Some of the applicants were Newham residents and were assessed objectively against the selection criteria. One of the newly appointed panel members is a local resident. However it is considered that changing the selection criteria to favour Newham residents would limit the pool of expertise available. One of the key requirements of the DRP as set out in its terms of reference is that should be Expert (i.e. made up of leaders in the field of architecture and the built environment). Another of the key requirements set out in the terms of reference is that the panel should be Independent. A high proportion of Newham residents on the panel could either impact on the independence (or perception of independence) of the panel or result in conflicts of interest. There are also other ways for local residents to engage in the planning process.
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<p>Issues Arising and Actions</p>
<p>NEW DRP CHAIR</p> <p>The new chair, Toby Johnson, has been in the role for approximately 1 year (at the time of writing) and, from an officer perspective the panel is considered to be working well. Positive feedback from applicants (see above) has also been received.</p> <p>Toby is an architect and director at Haworth Tompkins Architects. Due to Haworth Tompkins' involvement in a number of large schemes in Newham currently in planning/pre-planning, including Silvertown Quays and Custom House regeneration, Toby has had a conflict of interest for these schemes as well as other schemes where Newham is the applicant.</p> <p>In these cases, the vice chairs have been able to cover the reviews successfully, with each of the three vice chair carrying out at least 1 review as chair. In the case of Silvertown Quays, another Panel member (Richard Partington), not formally selected as a vice chair, has been chairing these reviews. This was to maintain as much</p>

continuity in the reviews of this project as possible; the scheme has been evolving since 2018 and it was considered preferable to ask one of the original panel members to act as chair.

REVIEW FORMAT

Since the easing of government restrictions relating to Covid-19, it had been the intention to adopt a hybrid system for reviews where most first reviews will take place in person with a site visit beforehand and presentations made using physical models and pin-ups. Follow up reviews and Chairs workshops would take place online to benefit from greater flexibility and convenience and once panel members already have a good understanding of the site and scheme from the initial review and site visit.

This approach was suggested in the 2020/21 Annual Report in response to feedback received.

In order to manage this hybrid system effectively, it would be necessary to have two days per month set aside for design review – one for site visits and in-person reviews and one for remote reviews.

However, this has been frustrated by continuing restrictions on attendees within Newham Dockside meeting rooms and the fact that the meeting room previously used for design reviews with a magnetic wall (WG.06) is no longer available as it has been transformed into an office. Occasional reviews have taken place at applicants' offices but at the time of writing, reviews are mostly still taking place online. This is will be subject to continual review as the situation changes.

PANEL COMPOSITION

New recruitment to the panel took place in September 2021. This established a pool of 35 panel members of which 51% are male and 49% are female, with 13% being from a Black, Asian or ethnically diverse background.

Of panel members used at reviews between March 2021 and February 2022 54% were male and 46% were female and 7% were from a Black, Asian or ethnically diverse background.

The intent, when selecting a panel to review proposals is to match, as far as possible, the particular expertise of panel members to the proposals under review. For instance, for a large masterplan it would be appropriate to select architects, urban designers, landscape architects, sustainability experts etc. For smaller projects, such as an individual building on an infill site, it may not always be necessary to include a landscape architect, or for the review of a piece of transport infrastructure a panel member with expertise in transport/street design etc. might be selected.

At the same time, the intention is to try to ensure a diverse panel in terms of gender and ethnicity. This is not always possible due to availability or panel member specialism, but has been largely achieved since September 2021 when new panel

members were appointed. While the figure of 7% of panel members (per review) from a Black, Asian or ethnically diverse background for the year as a whole is low, since September the figure is higher, at 16%.

In accordance with the Newham DRP Terms of Reference, the panel membership will be reviewed (but not necessarily changed) bi-annually. The last review took place in summer 2021 and therefore the panel membership will be reviewed again in the summer of 2023. However, recruiting new panel members is resource intensive, in terms of targeted advertising, selection, induction and enrolment as a supplier on Fusion (including IR35 checks). The continuity and consistency of panel members is also considered to be one of the strengths of the panel. Therefore the need for new recruitment to the panel will be kept under review.

The majority of panel members within the pool, and those used for reviews have been architects, followed by urban designers and landscape architects. Panel members with a specialism in sustainability, development economics and planning have been used to a lesser extent. This is because the majority of proposals are for new buildings. Architects on the panel tend to be able to comment on various other aspects of the design of a scheme, in addition to architecture, such as urban design, sustainability, landscape and viability.

REGISTERING PANEL MEMBERS AS SUPPLIERS

Despite appointing new panel members in September 2021, at the time of writing (September 2022), a number of these panel members are still not registered as suppliers on the Council's system, Fusion. The process of adding a panel members as a supplier involves a number of steps as follows:

- Panel members registers as a supplier;
- Panel manager completes an HMRC test to establish role is outside IR35;
- Panel manager completes CEST form for approval by divisional director, confirming panel member role is outside IR35;
- Procurement team adds panel member as 'Spend Authorised' on Fusion;
- Panel manager confirms pro-class category;
- Procurement team adds panel member to approved supplier list.

As this process is not intuitive (as reported by numerous panel members who have struggled to register on Fusion) and is convoluted, the process is resource intensive. As the point of contact for panel members, the panel manager has to act as an intermediary between panel members and the procurement team in trying to resolve any issues and delays in registration as a supplier. This adds further time and resource to the process

Due to the resources involved both in recruitment to the panel and registering panel members as suppliers, as well as the limited resources of the Council's Urban Design and Conservation team, it would be preferable to avoid further recruitment in 2023, while the panel is considered to be operating well, unless absolutely necessary. This will be reviewed in the summer of 2023 in accordance with the Terms of Reference.

