



**Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel
Independent Advisory Group Draft Meeting Notes and Recommendations**

Date and Time: Tuesday, 19 September 2023, 15:00-16:30 (Hybrid Meeting)

Attendance:

Independent Advisory Group Members:

- 1) Esther Kurland (EK) – Independent Design Review Expert/ Joint Chair of the GCDRP IAG
- 2) Robin Nicholson (Chair) (RN) – Independent Design Review Expert/ Joint Chair of the GCDRP IAG
- 3) Maggie Baddeley (MB) – Planner and Chartered Surveyor/ GCDRP Chair
- 4) Simon Carne (SC) – Urban Designer and Architect / GCDRP Vice Chair
- 5) Russell Brown (RB) – Architect / GCDRP Chair
- 6) Jane Green (JG) – Built and Natural Environment Team Manager
- 7) Trovine Monteiro (TM) – Built Environment Team Leader
- 8) Cllr Tumi Hawkins (TH) – Lead Member for Planning (South Cambridgeshire District Council)
- 9) Cllr Katie Thornburrow (KT) – Lead Member for Planning (Cambridge City Council)
- 10) Cllr Martin Smart (MS) – Planning Committee Chair (Cambridge City Council)
- 11) Cllr Martin Cahn (MC) – Planning Committee Chair (South Cambridgeshire District Council)

Apologies

- 1) Heather Jones – Deputy Director Planning and Building Quality

Observers

- 1) Joanne Preston – Principal Urban Designer / Design Review Panel Manager
- 2) Bonnie Kwok – Principal Urban Designer / Design Review Panel Manager
- 3) Katie Roberts – Executive Assistant / Panel Support Officer
- 4) Shaheeda Montgomery – Apprentice Planner

Meeting Notes

1. Robin Nicholson chaired the first IAG meeting. He and Esther both felt that the set-up process and operating framework for the new GCDRP was exemplary including the Independent Advisor Group to oversee the panels work.
2. It was good to see the extensive use of the 4Cs (Community, Connectivity, Character and Climate) which were originally developed to help structure conversation on city extensions and new settlements.
3. It was felt that the 4Cs framework should not be rigidly applied and that any panel members should be able to talk about any of the 4Cs in addition to their specialist 'C' as there clearly are some overlapping issues (for example Character includes Architecture and Landscape). A more holistic approach is to be encouraged to talk about the overall scheme at the start. Each panel member should be able to make comments that build on those of other panel members.
4. The 'Questions' section of the meeting should be limited to 'questions of fact relating to issues that will be discussed at the review' only and should not be used by applicants or panel members to make comments on the proposals.
5. Chairs should be able to express their own style but should guide the conversation. They should set out the order for the members to speak (based on the importance of the issues being discussed) but step back to hear other panel members view on the 4 Cs (used flexibly- see point 3) and should sum up and provide a synopsis of the conversation at the end. The Chairs should be able to build on others comments alongside the synopsis. Chairs/Officers to observe good examples of other panels being chaired.
6. In addition to a private briefing session with planning officers before the review of the scheme with applicants, a 'wash-up' session for planning officers post the review was suggested, to give immediate feedback/next steps to Panel Members to ensure issues raised by the planning officers have been addressed. No new issues should be raised.
7. The officers should update the design review panel on the outcomes of planning applications once they have been determined reporting every quarter.
8. With David Prichard resigning as Vice Chair, there wasn't a need felt to replace him, with chairing of panels spread between the 2 Chairs as well as Vice Chair.
9. The Committee Chairs and lead members felt that the DRP report was very useful in helping planning committee members in the decision-making process. It would be good for the Planning Committee to have a briefing on the 4Cs and how they are used by the panel in making comments on schemes. This could be extended to the wider to other stakeholders. The planning committee would like to know what changes have been made by the applicant following input from the DRP, stated in the design and access statement and planning officer report. Drawing numbers should be clearly labelled for comparison purposes.
10. Schemes should be reviewed at the earliest opportunity. Sometimes there is too much information to consider. GCSP advice to applicants is to bring complex schemes twice to the panel, at an early concept as well as detailed stage. However, this should not be a mere formality where the design hasn't changed, and schemes haven't addressed issues raised in the first round. Otherwise, it can become a token gesture.
11. Schemes within the administrative boundary of the local planning authority should be brought to the design review panel/s established by the local planning authority for that purpose. The council could set out policies to ensure that this happens, together with more promotion about the panel with applicants, agents and the wider public.
12. There was an acknowledgement of the expansion of the design review service to other local planning authorities and the incorporation of the disability panel expert within the GCDRP. However, it was important to ensure that the panels focus wasn't diluted, and the panel wasn't

there to conduct a disability audit of the scheme, but to provide strategic, expert and independent overview of schemes. Recruitment for the disability expert would need to be carried out.

13. Energy, Water Efficiency issues and Biodiversity issues keep coming up in planning applications which would need to be retrofitted if built as submitted. Lead members for planning would like to see experts from these areas to join our DRP to get the best buildings for the future. However, the requirements to address climate change would need to be backed up by policy.
14. There is a need to establish a way to deal with the growing pressure to increase height in Greater Cambridge, referring to the council's policy position, briefing note to the panel where it doesn't exist and looking at appeal cases. The panel needs to keep its independence and not blur its views with that of the Local authority.
15. There is difficulty in specialist panel members availability to cover climate. In addition to recruitment of panel members to cover climate, a suggestion was made to see whether some panel members had dual expertise that could fulfil this function. Any Membership should also look for expertise that include more women, people from BAME background and with disabilities.
16. An annual meeting of both the GCDRP and The CQP would be helpful as there are overlapping areas common to both panels.

Recommendations

1. The 4 'C' should be applied more flexibly as a means of structuring the review to ensure that the discussion is not limited by this framework.
2. The 'Questions' section of the meeting should be limited to 'questions of facts relating to issues that will be discussed at the review' only.
3. In addition to a private briefing session with planning officers before the review of the scheme with applicants, there should also be an informal private session between the planning officers and panel after each review to reflect on the review. No new issues should be raised. This discussion should not be recorded as part of the panel report.
4. The chairing could be more effective: to order the conversation, step back, include all views, apply the 4 Cs flexibly and summarise at the end. Chairs/Officers to observe good examples of how other panels are being chaired.
5. GCDRP managers should update the DRP about the outcomes of planning applications after they have been completed.
6. Applicants/ Planning officers should explain how schemes have evolved after GCDRP's input within the DAS/planning officer report. Drawing reference numbers should be included in the DRP meeting reports.
7. With David Prichard resigning as Vice Chair, there wasn't a need felt to replace him, with chairing of panels spread between the 2 Chairs as well as Vice Chair.
8. There was an acknowledgement of the expansion of the design review service to other local planning authorities and the incorporation of the disability panel expert within the GCDRP.
9. The panel membership should be extended to include sustainability experts, biodiversity and accessibility experts. Membership should also include more women, people from BAME background and with disabilities.
10. An annual meeting of both the GCDRP and of the QP would be helpful as there are overlapping areas common to both panels.