

Dundee Design Review Panel: A Proposal for Collaborative Development

1. Purpose

Dundee Civic Trust proposes the establishment of a Dundee Design Review Panel to support high-quality, sustainable and design-led development across the city. Dundee is a UNESCO City of Design, yet it lacks a formal mechanism for independent and multidisciplinary review of the design of planning applications. This document sets out an initial concept, based on the successful Edinburgh Urban Design Panel model, as a starting point for the collaborative development of such a panel along with Dundee City Council, the Dundee Institute of Architects, UNESCO City of Design Dundee, local universities, professional bodies and community representatives.

The intention is to present a proposed framework that can be shaped collectively to strengthen Dundee's design governance which is in line with National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and its Six Qualities of Successful Places.

2. Why Dundee Needs a Design Review Panel

Dundee is at a pivotal moment. Major development proposals are emerging across the city, including the Waterfront, large edge-of-city housing expansions, the eastern and western growth corridor, the Kingsway corridor, the Eden Project area and the proposed Dundee FC stadium at Camperdown. These projects will shape Dundee's character, sustainability and liveability for decades. They also carry significant public interest and demand careful consideration of design quality, movement and transport, landscape and visual impact, heritage context and climate resilience.

NPF4 places strong emphasis on design-led planning, compact urban growth, climate adaptation and placemaking. Many UK cities, including Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and others,— already operate design review panels that help to deliver these ambitions. Dundee, as the UK's only UNESCO City of Design, stands apart in that it does **not** have any independent mechanism for proper design review. Establishing one would bring the city into line with national best practice and would provide a governance tool that reflects its status while supporting better outcomes for residents, businesses and visitors.

3. What a Design Review Panel Does

A Design Review Panel provides independent, expert advice at the pre-application stage. The complementary work of the Panel may actually save a considerable amount of time for planning officers in the examining of proposed applications before they are lodged, to encourage good and consistent design; and this may reduce the need for lengthy discussions with officials. Its purpose is constructive: to help design teams strengthen proposals early in the planning process, reduce planning risk and improve the quality of development across the city. The process offers a positive, collaborative forum where architects, planners, developers and specialists can explore design issues openly and transparently.

- Significant proposals affecting sensitive heritage areas
- Projects with significant public interest
- Planning policy and guidance with substantial design implications

4.4 Review Process

The review process would be constructive, transparent and focused on improving design outcomes. Reviews should take place early enough in the design process (e.g. end of RIBA stage 2) to allow for a meaningful discussion and for the integration of feedback before proposals become fixed. Developers would submit material in advance of a meeting, with a concise presentation of the design concept and sustainability strategy. The panel would then discuss the proposals, identify key issues and agree constructive advice.

Following the meeting, a written report by the Panel or one of its members or the Secretariat would be issued—on an informed-basis for the next stage of engagement by the- Reports would be published once a planning application is lodged, ensuring clarity for applicants, planners and the public.

4.5 Developer Response Requirement

To ensure that this process leads to meaningful improvement developers would be expected to demonstrate how they have responded to the panel's comments **before** submitting a planning application. This may take the form of a **Design Review Response Statement** outlining how the panel's advice has been addressed.

Where comments have not been taken forward, developers should provide a clear justification. This accountability will ensure that the panel's advice is taken seriously, as well as encouraging thoughtful design development.

5. Benefits for Dundee

A Design Review Panel would raise the standard of design across the city, support sustainable and climate-resilient development, reinforce Dundee's identity as a UNESCO City of Design, reduce planning risk for developers, and improve public trust in planning decisions. It would help deliver NPF4's design-led ambitions and strengthen collaboration between the Council, the development sector, professional bodies and the wider community. It would also help Dundee compete with other cities for investment by demonstrating a clear commitment to design quality. Ultimately, a Dundee Design Review Panel can enhance our city and encourage further economic growth by making it more valuable and attractive place for business, visitors and residents alike.

6. Next Steps

Dundee Civic Trust invites Dundee City Council and partners to explore this concept collaboratively, with a small working party to refine the concept and add detail to it. It might be followed by a pilot, looking at city centre and major sites before full implementation.

This proposal is offered as a constructive contribution to that process: a framework to build upon.