



Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel

Report July 2023 – June 2025

Confidential

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For further information, please contact the Design Review Panel inbox:

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1. Introduction and purpose of the report

The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel (GCDRP) is a joint panel established in 2022 to support South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) and Cambridge City Council (CCC) in achieving high quality design in new developments. The Panel follows a strong design review process in line with the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth based on its' four core principles: Community, Connectivity, Climate and Character. It is governed according to the Terms of Reference (TOR - Appendix E), managed by Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP), and overseen by the Independent Advisory Group (IAG). The IAG ensures the effectiveness and accountability of the Panel in public interest and, in consultation with the Joint Director of Planning & Economic Development, makes recommendations to adjust working practices in accordance with these terms of reference.

This report has been prepared by the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSP). The purpose of this report is to produce an overview of the panel's activity and impact since July 2023. The final report is a public document that provides a summary of GCDRP activity over the period of 2 years, the impact of the GCDRP through planning and build-out processes, feedback from officers, chairs and panel members and applicants, and finances. The report will conclude with IAG's recommendations for the development of GCDRP, which will advise on improvements and the future direction of the panel.

2. Changes in the GCDRP Membership Since 2023

The panel currently consists of 52 members, including 2 Chairs and 1 Vice Chair. The members are diverse and nationally respected built and natural environment professionals from fields ranging from architecture and urban design to sustainability and transport planning. A biography for each panel member is published on the GCDRP website. As of July 2024, the Disability and Inclusive Access specialism that used to be provided by the Cambridge Disability Panel has been incorporated into the GCDRP to ensure that accessibility is assessed as part of the overall quality of proposed schemes at the same time.

Since June 2023, two members have stepped down: Anne Cooper (character) and Stephen Platt (character & community). The panel has also welcomed 10 new members – 4 representing climate, and 6 representing disability and access. They are Anna Pamphilon, Kat Scott, Louise Wille, Shikha Bharadwaj representing sustainability and Jasmine O'Garro, Jo Williams, Karen Ross, Stephen Dering, Tahmina Begum, Teri Okoro representing accessibility. You can find further details about them on the [Greater Cambridge Shared Planning website](#)

In accordance with the terms of reference, the panel members and chairs are appointed for a period of 3 years and refreshed thereafter following an open recruitment and interview process. The IAG would like to thank the outgoing chairs and Russell Brown, Maggie Baddeley and vice chair Simon Carne for their contribution to the panel over the past three and a half years and who will continue as members of the panel. As of September 2025, two new chairs have been appointed: Chris Jones, Architect/Director at BCR Infinity Architects, Eleanor Fawcett, Head of Design, Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation with Russell Brown, Founding Partner at Hawkins Brown as the Vice Chair. All other panel members whose membership was coming to an end have also renewed their membership for a further three years.

We would like to thank Bonnie Kwok for all her work to promote and run the panel over the years, who will be stepping down as the design review Panel Manager. Anna Jeffery and Tom Davies will be the panel managers moving forward.

Since early 2022, following their appointment, panel members were invited to complete an anonymised online equality, diversity and inclusion survey. This includes the 11 new members appointed in July 2024. 47 out of 52 panel members responded in total. A comprehensive summary of responses is included within Appendix F. It shows a balanced representation between male (49%) and female (51%) respondents. There is notable representation from 'White Other' (17%), 'Asian Indian' (6%), and other minority groups (6%). Among respondents who reported having a disability (9%), responses included physical (20%), learning (20%) and other types (60%). These findings offer an opportunity to recognise levels of representation within the panel and ensure that they are maintained and fostered in future composition of the panel.

3. GCDRP Activity (July 2023 – June 2025)

3.1 Number and frequency of meetings

GCDRP meetings follow an established schedule and take place on the second and fourth Thursday of the month. Between 1 July 2023 – 30 June 2025, the panel have held 16 full reviews and 6 subsequent reviews; a total of 22. The previous report covering a shorter period between January 2022 – June 2023 has had 23 full reviews and 4 subsequent reviews; a total of 27. As such, the number of reviews appears slightly lower since the 2023 report, with an overall annual average of 14 across both review periods. However, there have been a noticeable increase in the number of subsequent reviews although no requests for a Chair's review to date. There have been no external requests for design review by neighbouring authorities.

Year	Period	Number of full reviews	Number of subsequent reviews	Number of Chair's reviews	Total number of reviews
2023	Q3	2	2	0	4
2023	Q4	2	0	0	2
2024	Q1	2	0	0	2
2024	Q2	1	1	0	2
2024	Q3	1	0	0	1
2024	Q4	4	0	0	4
2025	Q1	2	1	0	3
2025	Q2	2	2	0	4
Total	-	16	6	0	22

Table 1. Summary of the number of reviews carried out between July 2023 – June 2025.

This table (above) shows how many there were of the 3 different types of review panel, by quarter for the 2 year period from quarter 3 of 2023 to quarter 2 of 2025 with total figures for each quarter.

3.2 Type of schemes reviewed

The GCDRP have had 22 reviews from July 2023 to June 2025 (including those reviewed twice). The Schemes reviewed were in the list as follows, arranged by scheme name, council area, application reference number, panel date, type of use and status.

230 Newmarket Road, CCC, Review 2 – ref 24/03088/FUL

Date of Panel: 10/08/23

Type: Retail/office

Application status (October 2025): Application Approved

The Beehive Centre, CCC: Review 2 & 3 – ref 23/03204/OUT

Date of Panels: 24/08/23 and 23/05/24

Type: Research and Development / Office

Application status (October 2025): Application called in by Secretary of State, awaiting decision

Westbrook Centre, CCC – ref 24/00622/FUL

Date of Panel: 14/09/23

Type: Research and Development

Application status (October 2025): Application Approved

Clarendon House, CCC – ref 24/00889/FUL

Date of Panel: 28/09/23

Type: Office

Application status (October 2025): Application Approved

137-143 Histon Road, CCC – ref 24/01354/FUL

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Date of Panel: 14/12/23

Type: Residential

Application status (October 2025): Application Approved

Franklin Building, Great Abington, SCDC – ref 24/02507/FUL

Date of Panel: 14/12/23

Type: Research and Development

Application status (October 2025): Application Approved

Design Code for Cambridge Neighbourhoods of Arbury Kings Hedges and parts of West Chesterton

Date of Panel: 25/01/24

Type: Design Code

Status (October 2025): National Pilot Design Code Project – adopted as an SPD by CCC in April 2025

Sawston Village College, SCDC – ref 24/04406/FUL

Date of Panel: 14/03/24

Type: Education

Application status (October 2025): Application Approved

Mercers Row, CCC – ref 24/03964/FUL

Date of Panel: 27/06/24

Type: Mid-tech / Light Industrial

Application status (October 2025): Application Approved

The Paddocks, 347 Cherry Hinton Rd, CCC – ref 24/04859/FUL

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Date of Panel: 25/07/24

Type: Research and Development / Office

Application status (October 2025): Application Approved

Mines Park, Weston Colville, SCDC – ref 24/00192/FUL

Date of Panel: 10/10/24

Type: Residential

Application status (October 2025): Application

Details redacted as not in the public domain yet

Date of Panel: 24/10/24

Type: Mixed-use / Research and Development / Residential

Application status (October 2025): Pre-application

Bury Farm, Meldreth, SCDC – ref 25/00566/OUT

Date of Panel: 14/11/24

Type: Residential

Application status (October 2025): Application Approved

Details redacted as not in the public domain yet

Date of Panel: 28/11/24

Type: Residential

Application status (October 2025): Pre-application

Details redacted as not in the public domain yet

Date of Panels: 09/01/25 and 24/04/25

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Type: Redevelopment / Retail and Leisure

Application status (October 2025): Pre-application

Christ's College, CCC – ref 25/02161/FUL

Date of Panel: 13/02/25

Type: Education

Application status (October 2025): undetermined

Details redacted as not in the public domain yet

Date of Panel: 23/01/25

Type: Research and Development / Office

Application status (October 2025): Pre-application

Details redacted as not in the public domain yet

Date of Panel: 08/05/25

Type: Office

Application status (October 2025): Pre-application

Details redacted as not in the public domain yet

Date of Panel: 22/05/2025

Type: Student Accommodation

Application status (October 2025): Pre-application

Details redacted as not in the public domain yet

Date of Panel: 26/06/2025

Type: Public Realm / Offices / Leisure

Application status (October 2025): Pre-application

Type of schemes reviewed

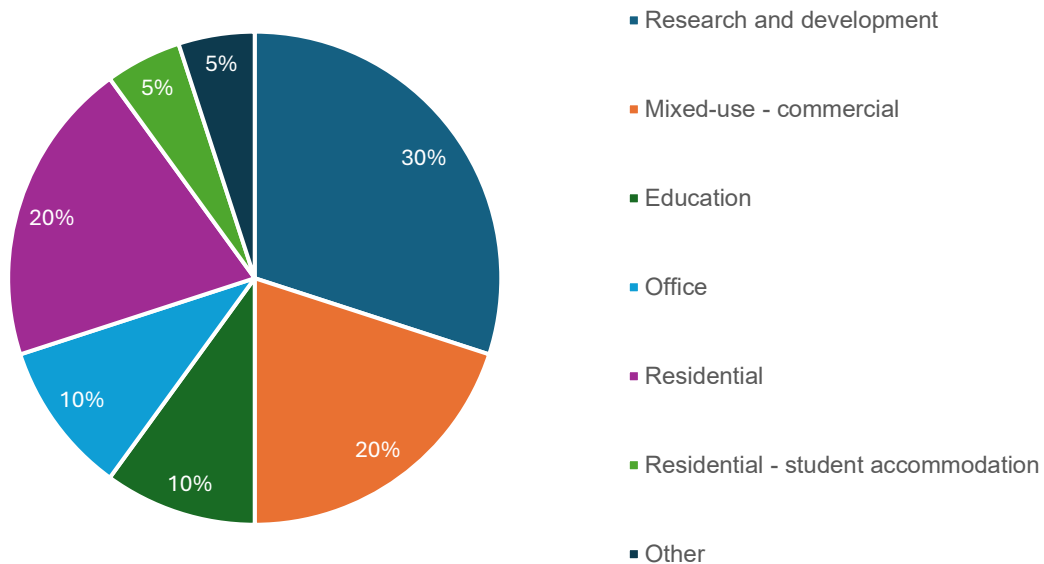


Figure 1. Chart showing types of schemes reviewed.

The pie chart (above) shows the proportion of schemes reviewed by the panel by use: research and development (30%), mixed-use commercial (20%), education (10%), office (10%), residential (20%), residential - student accommodation (5%) and other.

City vs SCDC

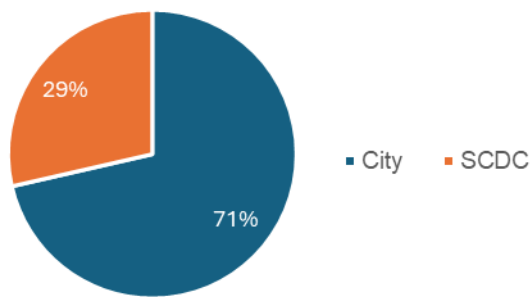


Figure 2. Proportion of schemes reviewed within Cambridge City and SCDC boundaries within the Reporting period.

The pie chart (above) shows the proportion of schemes reviewed by the panel by area (Cambridge City – 71%), South Cambridgeshire District – 29%)

Planning Application outcomes

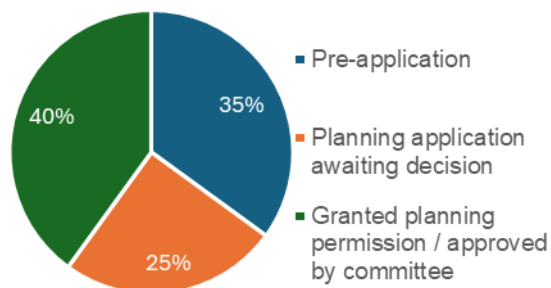


Figure 3. Application outcomes for the schemes reviewed within the reporting period.

The pie chart (above) shows the proportion of planning outcomes of these schemes reviewed by the panel – pre-application (35%), planning application awaiting decision (25%), and granted planning permission / approved by committee (40%).

3.3 Impact on the planning process

There has been a good balance of varied types of applications brought to the panel for review, ranging from commercial to residential schemes. Research and development, mixed-use commercial and residential projects stand out as the most frequent.

About a third of the reviewed schemes belong to SCDC; this is consistent with the proportion of SCDC schemes reviewed between 2021 – 2023.

8 (40%) submitted applications that were reviewed by the panel are either granted planning permission or approved by committee, 4 (25%) are awaiting decisions and 7 (35%) are at pre-application stage.

There are a mix of projects that come to the panel. These include highly resolved schemes which the panel is supportive of, with further advice used to progress projects from good to exceptional. It also looks at projects at an early design stage where the panel's recommendations have led to significant improvements to the design process. The following are some of the recurring themes emerging from the panel's comments that can be viewed in Appendix D:

- Improved connectivity of the scheme and integration with the wider surroundings
- Promote active travel by reducing car parking, increasing cycle parking and related people/cycle friendly and safe infrastructure.
- Importance of landscape, trees, biodiversity, its long-term management, and improvement of the public realm.
- Reduction of height and massing, resulting in more context-responsive design.
- Projects should focus on architectural expressions that have a distinct identity, are refined, simplified and coherent.
- Enhanced amenities for new communities, including high-quality convivial spaces in workplace campuses.
- Strengthening recommendations for refurbishment, demolition and recycling of aging buildings in terms of sustainability.



Figure 4. Left: Clarendon House (ref. 24/00889/FUL); Right: Bury Farm, Meldreth (ref. 25/00566/OUT)



Figure 5. Left: Mercers Row (ref. 24/03694/FUL); Right: 137-143 Histon Road (ref. 24/01354/FUL)



Figure 6. (left) Franklin building (ref.24/02507/FUL); Right: Design Code for Cambridge Neighbourhoods

3.4 Reflections on completed projects

Since the previous report in 2023, two schemes have been completed on site. Rangeford Villages completed Phase 1 of its retirement village 'Strawberry Fields', which provides fully accessible one and three-bedroom contemporary apartments and bungalows. The GCDRP's feedback has resulted in a number of revisions made to the scheme at an application stage, including improvements to accessibility of communal facilities, better links across the site responding to desire lines and ease of access, reduction of units and increase in typology sizes to provide better access to natural light and layout adjustments to maximise the amenity open space in the heart of the masterplan.



Figure 7. Strawberry Fields (Phase 1 - 22/04303/REM); reviewed in 2022, completed in July 2025. Image source: [Strawberry Fields £96m complex set to open in Cambridge](#)

Phase 1 of the Dales Manor Business Park in Sawston, known as the South Cambridge Science Centre, was completed in April 2025. The scheme was subject to two DRP reviews, which have resulted in a number of improvements including enhanced soft

landscaping with reduced car park footprint, layout has been adjusted to improve the relationship to the Green Belt edge, use of locally inspired materials to better integrate the building into the village context and increased sustainability credentials.



Figure 8. Dales Manor Business Park, Sawston (22/03363/FUL); completed on 29 April 2025. Reviewed by the panel twice in 2022. Image source: [Gallery | South Cambridge Science Centre](#)

Appendix D includes a detailed assessment of the impact the GCDRP has had on these completed schemes at an application stage.

3.5 Resources

Appendix C illustrates the panel's fees and expenses from 8 June 2023 to 26 June 2025. The panel generated a gross fee of £ redacted in this review period. With panel payment, expenses and outgoing accounted, the GCDRP service has recovered a net fee of £ redacted, which pays for GCSP officer time, administration of the panel as well

as training and development. For the previous review period between January 2022 to June 2023, the total fee recovered was £ redacted. The decrease in fee is primarily due to fewer reviews since the last review period, and the use of more members per review, including additional disability specialist added to the panel for every review since its introduction in July 2024.

The recommendation is to increase the first design review and subsequent design review by £500 to recover the additional cost of the panel member, attendance of disability officer and to account for increase in general inflation. However, the cost of the chair's review will only rise by inflation. Hence, the first design review would cost £5000 + VAT, the subsequent review would cost £4500 + VAT, and the chairs review would be £2560 and will be applied from April 2026 onwards.

4. Survey Feedback

After each review, applicants, panel members and officers are asked to complete a short online survey to understand their experience of using the Panel and where improvements could be made. Below is a summary of responses received for development proposals referring to GCDRP between July 2023 and June 2025. Full survey responses can be found in Appendix B. In addition, the chairs of the IAG also attended a few reviews in 2024/25 and provided feedback which is included in this report. There were some common overlapping themes that are captured as recommendations for improving the panel in section 5.

Extract from applicant survey results

Would you use the Design Review Panel again for future projects?



Extract from officer survey results

Overall quality of customer service received



How helpful did you find the design review process in the development, assessment and determination of the scheme?



Figure 9: Extract from Applicant and Officer Surveys

This is a series of bar charts showing survey responses from applicants and council officers to questions about: whether applicants would use the service again (100% replied yes); are officers satisfied with the customer service (67% are extremely satisfied); how helpful did officers find the design review process in the development, assessment and determination of schemes (50% of officers found it very helpful).

4.1 Officer Surveys

There were two rounds of survey responses from planning case officers; the first survey was conducted after each review and received 3 responses. The second survey was conducted as part of the review process for this report and received 11 responses. These responses indicate that case officers have either found the design review process helpful or very helpful and in one case satisfactory in the development, assessment, and determination of schemes. The clarity of the panel's comments in the written report was rated as very good or good and in one case satisfactory by case officers. All the case officers agreed that the panels' written reports were provided within the agreed time scales i.e. 10 working days and all the case officers felt that there was sufficient opportunity for them, as case officer, to brief the panel in writing in advance and / or verbally at the meeting.

Officer feedback made the following key suggestions for improvements:

- There were suggestions to increase the time for the design team presentation and the panel discussion, encouraging the applicant to put forward their scheme for review twice: at an early/late stage of the pre-app process and for the panel report to have a shorter, condensed, bullet pointed summary.
- There were some officers who had specific feedback on the design review, such as focusing the panel comments on issues concerning planning committee members such as sustainability, viability, landscape etc. These comments are best raised in feedback session at the end of the review.
- There was a suggestion to supply briefing packs to panel members digitally, providing them with the option to request hard copies, rather than paper print outs of briefing packs being the default.
- Greater encouragement of public art and cultural placemaking opportunities as part of early design conversations by panel members and to be raised by case officer and urban designer in briefing note.
- Recommend that case officers and urban designers advise applicants, during the pre-application stage, to include within the DAS a clear and structured response

to the DRP feedback. This should directly address each of the points raised, outlining the changes made in response or, where applicable, providing a clear justification for why certain changes have not been implemented.

4.2 Applicants

The applicant survey has received 7 responses out of 22 reviews between July 2023 to June 2025. The review process was generally described as well explained and well managed. Panel members were seen as skilled and professional, and the hybrid format was appreciated for flexibility. Most participants indicated they would use the DRP again for the same or future projects, which is viewed as a valuable part of the planning process, contributing positively to scheme development. Feedback was consistently described as relevant, constructive, and aligned with the final written reports. Many teams reported they intend to revise their schemes based on the panel's advice. The DRP was seen as providing a critical "pause and reflect" moment in the design process. Some suggested that larger or more complex schemes would benefit from longer presentation slots to better explain design rationale. Suggestions for improvement were made by a few and included:

- Receiving pre-session questions or focus areas from the panel to better tailor presentations.
- Providing recordings of sessions for internal review and continuity.
- Reducing the administrative burden and costs placed on applicants (e.g. venue, catering).
- Addressing occasional inconsistencies between DRP feedback and planning officer advice.

Most of the points raised above require clarification rather than amendments to the GCDRP process. The panel always focuses on the 4 Cs in accordance with the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth and the applicants' design teams are always encouraged to integrate key topics of sustainability and climate into the design of the schemes. Recordings of meetings are unavailable for confidentiality reasons, as many schemes under review are at a pre-application stage and not in the public domain. As

for the venue and catering, GCSPS provide this most of the time unless the applicant decides to host the panel at their venue. Due to logistical reasons, it is only in these instances that the applicant provides catering.

The final point relates to a single response for a specific scheme. In most instances there is consistency between officer and panel comments which are advisory. Occasionally, officer comments may be different to those of the panel. Where these inconsistencies occur, planning case officers should update/clarify the position of the local planning authority as the decision-making body.

4.3 Chairs and panel members surveys

Process: Were you given sufficient opportunity to comment



Documentation: Was Info Clear and helpful



Logistics: Was travel and site visit well organised



Figure 10: Extract from Chair's and Panel Member's Surveys

This is a bar chart showing survey responses from panel chairs and panel members about the panel process, panel documentation and travel logistics.

Of the 22 responses received from Panel members, 90% Agreed or strongly agreed that the documentation was clear and helpful. 82% strongly agreed that the logistics of the GCDRP sessions, including travel and site visits, were well organised; panelists have commented positively on the coordination, communication and hospitality provided. 82%

strongly agreed or agreed that the chair provided sufficient opportunity to comment. Overall, the experience was described as constructive and professionally rewarding. Several panellists expressed enthusiasm for continued involvement and praised the diversity and quality of the panel composition. Their observations and suggestions for improvement are summarised as follows:

- There is room for enhancing accessibility and clarity of the briefing materials which were otherwise considered informative.
- There were instances where, engaging with projects earlier in their development process could maximise the panel's influence and be beneficial to the scheme.
- There were calls for clearer and more complete applicant presentations, ideally shared well in advance of the session.
- One chair proposed including a summary of key panel recommendations in DRP reports, using the "four Cs" framework.
- Some site visits were overcrowded, and there were accessibility challenges, particularly for wheelchair users. One panellist felt excluded from part of the site visit due to arriving separately, and another suggested confirming terrain and footwear needs in advance.

Moving forward, improvements to the review process could include:

- A request for applicants to provide accessible formats for members with visual impairments.
- Officer and planning agent training could help to encourage early engagement with the GCDRP in the design process.
- GCDRP website can be updated to provide a guidance note for the applicant teams outlining submission format and length.
- Panel managers should contact the planning agent before the meeting to ensure the site or building is accessible for all members including those with disabilities. Panel managers contact members, after confirming with planning agents, before the visit advising about suitable PPE, footwear, and clothing. Visits are usually unaccompanied but sometimes the applicant team / agent is required to attend the visit for access / security reasons but should be restricted to 3 people.

4.4 Independent Advisory Group Chairs observations

The chairs of the independent advisory group (IAG) also attended a few reviews in 2024/25 and had the following observations to make:

- The panel whilst recognising their respective specialism within the 4Cs of Climate, Connectivity, Community and Character, should be able to comment across the other Cs.
- The chairs should play a role in ensuring that the program runs on time. The Chairs should provide a summary at the end but should not stray into the planning or the decision-making process. While summarising the panel's comments, the chair should not add additional points reflecting their own thoughts, if these were not brought up earlier in the discussion.
- There should be a closed session at the end of every review between planning officers and panel members to provide feedback on how the review has gone. This will ensure that any issues with process or outputs of the panel are addressed in a timely way.
- The presentation of 30 minutes given for the design team to present was short whilst the time for questions was too long, covering questions but also comments. There were too many panel members representing the 4Cs.

It is recommended that the above comments are taken onboard. The typical agenda for design review within the terms of reference should be updated to increase the panel's presentation time from 30 minutes to 1 hour and include 15 minutes at the end of the session for closed discussion with planning officers. An hour for panel discussion was felt to be sufficient. The dual skills of design review members should be used to cover the 4Cs so that members are restricted to no more than 6 including the chair and disability specialist.

5. Summary of Recommendation as agreed by the IAG on 30 November 2025

- 5.1. Thank the previous chairs Russell Brown, Maggie Baddeley and vice chair Simon Carne for their contribution to the panel over the past three and a half years and welcome the incoming Co-Chairs Chris Jones, Architect/Director at BCR Infinity Architects, Eleanor Fawcett, Head of Design, Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation and Vice-Chair Russell Brown, Founding Partner at Hawkins Brown. Welcome the 11 new members to the GCDRP: 4 representing climate and 7 representing disability and access.
- 5.2. Propose the fee for design review, subsequent review and chairs review to be increased to £5000 + VAT, £4500 + VAT, and £2560 respectively from 1 April 2026 onwards.
- 5.3. The panel whilst recognising their respective specialism within the 4Cs of Climate, Connectivity, Community and Character, should be able to comment across the other Cs. The panel should include and integrate public art considerations within the scope of their discussion/comment.
- 5.4. The Chair should ensure that the program for the day runs on time. He/she should ensure that questions from members to applicants are focused, relate to facts only and are kept to 10 minutes as per the terms of reference. The chair's summary at the end should not add additional points, not raised in the earlier panel discussion. A shorter summary, succinctly setting out the panel's key recommendations, based on the 4Cs, should be included in the report.
- 5.5. The typical agenda within the terms of reference (TOR) will be updated to increase the presentation time for project/design teams to 45 minutes, adding 15 minutes for

closed discussion between panel members and planning officers. Generally, limit the review panel to 6 members including disability specialist and chair.

5.6. Applicants will be advised to include within the design and access statement, how the submitted planning application addresses the issues raised by the design review panel and provide justification where these haven't been addressed.

5.7. Occasionally, where there are inconsistencies between the Design Review Panel's and the officer's comments, the planning case officer should clarify the Local planning authority's position as the decision-making body.

5.8. GCSPS will communicate and update guidance for applicants on the Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel's webpages providing clarity on timely submission of briefing and presentation material outlining its format and length, meeting accessibility requirements, encouraging early engagement and bringing the scheme ideally twice.

5.9. All briefing information will be provided digitally to panel members, except when a hard copy is requested.

5.10. The Panel manager will need to co-ordinate with applicants, who will need to ensure that the site or building is accessible for all members including those with disability, advise on suitable PPE for site visits, planning the route in advance. Site visits are usually accompanied by applicants but where they are required, their numbers should be restricted to 3 people.