



Local Government Design Review User Guide



Acknowledgement of Country

The Government Architect Western Australia acknowledges the Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of Western Australia. We pay our respects to the Ancestors and Elders, both past and present, and the ongoing connection between people, land, waters and community. We acknowledge those who continue to share knowledge, their traditions and culture to support our journey for reconciliation. In particular, we recognise land and cultural heritage as places that hold great significance for Aboriginal people.



Department of Planning,
Lands and Heritage



WAPC

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Published by the
Government Architect Western Australia

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Published May 2026

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This document is available in
alternative formats on application to
the Department of Planning, Lands
and Heritage Communications
Branch.

Contents

Foreword	4	04 / Guidance for Panel Chairs	28
01 / About this guide	6	Before the review	32
What is design review?	8	During the review	33
The 10 Design Principles	11	After the review	36
The pillars for design review	12	05 / Guidance for Local Government Officers	38
02 / The design review process	14	Coordination and support roles	42
When does design review occur?	16	Before the review	42
What to expect on the day of a design review	18	During the review	44
03 / Guidance for Panel Members	20	After the review	44
Before the review	23	Planning and assessment roles	46
During the review	24	Before the review	46
After the review	26	During the review	47
How to identify and declare conflicts of interest	27	After the review	47
		Resources	49

Foreword



Emma Williamson
Government Architect

Design review plays an important role in supporting better planning and design outcomes across Western Australia.

When undertaken well, design review strengthens the quality of development, improves confidence in decision-making and supports proposals to respond positively to their context, community and Country.

Local governments are central to this process. Design review provides access to independent, expert and multidisciplinary advice at a point in the planning pathway where it can meaningfully influence outcomes — before pivotal decisions are made and positions are fixed. Used consistently and proportionately, design review benefits proponents, planners, elected members and the wider community by clarifying expectations, reducing uncertainty and improving design quality early.

The Local Government Design Review User Guide has been developed to support Local Government Officers, design review Panel Members and Chairs in delivering design review in a way that is clear, consistent and practical. It is intended to sit alongside the Western Australian Planning Commission's Local Government Design Review Manual, translating its principles into role-specific, day-to-day guidance for those coordinating, participating in and using design review advice.

Together with the Design Review eLearning, the Guide responds directly to feedback from local governments and industry about variability in design review practice and the need for greater clarity and shared understanding.

Design review is not a decision-making process. It is advisory, independent and collaborative. Good design rarely emerges from a single viewpoint; it is shaped through respectful dialogue, professional judgement and a willingness to test ideas. Effective design review creates the conditions for this conversation — supporting proponents to improve their proposals, assisting officers in their assessment role, and providing decision-makers with clear, well-reasoned advice.

I encourage all participants to approach design review as a constructive and proportionate process, grounded in integrity and mutual respect, with the shared aim of delivering enduring value for local communities and the built environment.



01/ About this guide

“I think it’s greatly beneficial for projects to have input from design review Panel Members. I’ve seen many developments enhanced by going through this process.”

– Fiona Mullen, City of South Perth



About this guide

We have developed this guide to help with consistency in design reviews across local government jurisdictions by equipping Panel Members, Chairs and Local Government Officers with the tools you need for best practice.

This guide is designed to accompany the [Local Government Design Review Manual](#) (the Manual), together forming a comprehensive set of resources for participants involved in design review, helping you to navigate the process effectively.

It is also supported by the [Design Review eLearning](#) we have created with the Western Australian Planning Commission. This can be accessed through the Western Australian Local Government Association's eLearning Hub.

Panel Members, Chairs, Local Government Officers and administrative staff all have important roles to play in delivering the design review process to achieve good outcomes in our built environment.

For Panel Members and Chairs, this guide outlines your duties and responsibilities at each stage in the design review process, enabling you to collaborate effectively, and to contribute your expertise with confidence and clarity.

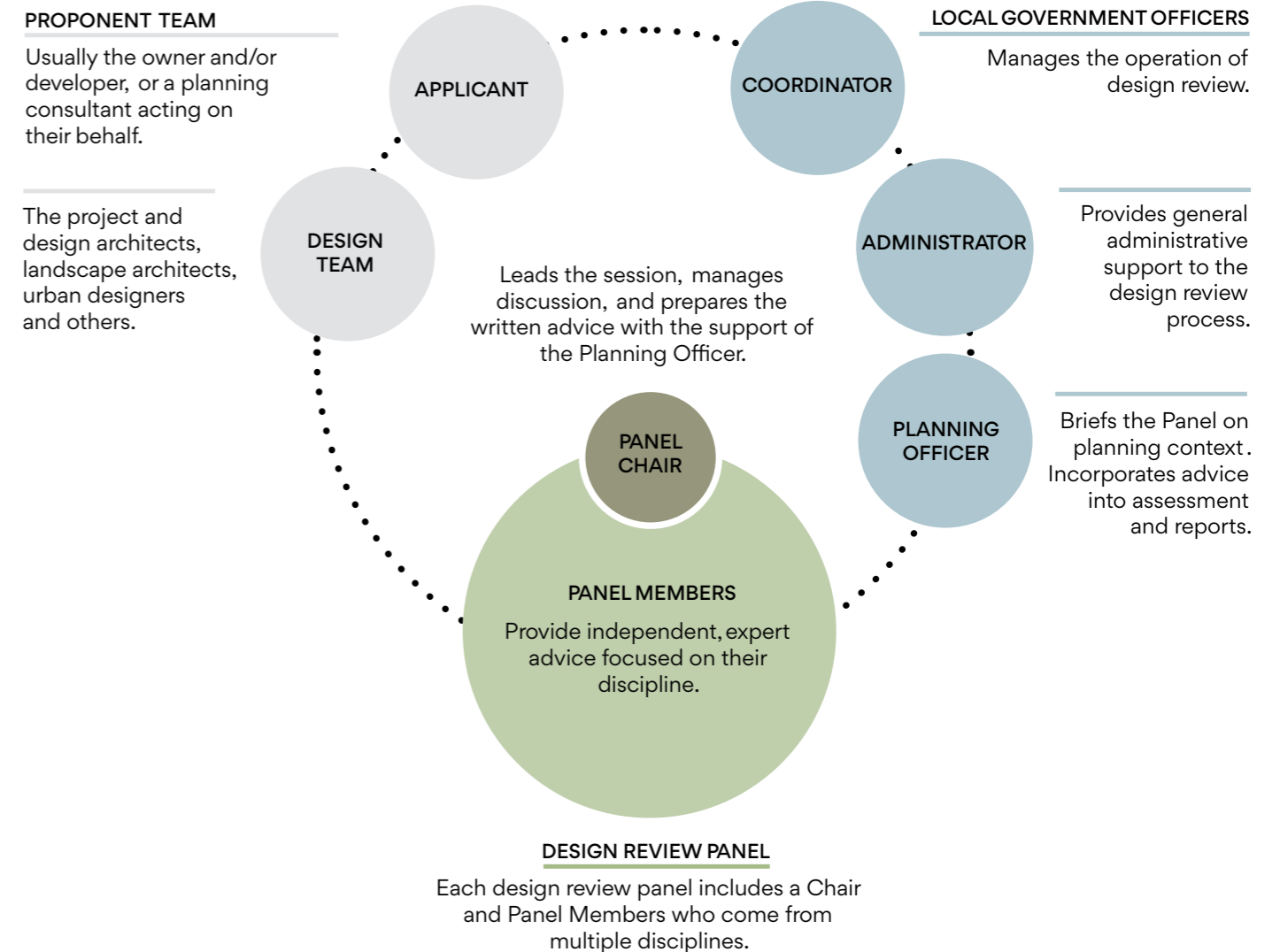
For Local Government Officers, this guide provides support for your crucial role in managing the design review process, ensuring it aligns with local planning objectives and is consistent and transparent. This includes guidance for those coordinating the process as well as those providing planning assessment and recommendations to decision-makers.

What is design review?

Design review is a formal, peer-to-peer process to provide support for projects in achieving good design, as outlined in [State Planning Policy 7.0 Design of the Built Environment](#) (SPP 7.0). Its intent is to improve a project's design quality through constructive, multidisciplinary feedback during the design and planning stages, before a decision-maker's determination.

The process brings together a panel of experienced reviewers, with expertise in architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, sustainability, heritage, and other built environment disciplines. The Panel provides consensus advice to local government Planning Officers, who incorporate this in planning assessments and recommendations to decision-makers.

Design review benefits each group involved in the process, from proponents and design teams to decision-makers and the wider community. Its positive impacts are far-reaching because the benefits of good design extend beyond an individual site to the whole neighbourhood.



Organisational chart of design review.

How do we define good design?

Good design is about more than just appearance and style. It is the rigorous, considered response to a project's context to deliver functional, sustainable and site-responsive spaces that serve all users and the broader community.

Good design endeavours to reconcile multiple concurrent and often competing objectives that vary according to the circumstances of each proposal. A well-designed place is adaptable, cost effective, enriching for users, and adds value by improving local neighbourhoods.

By carefully balancing various needs, spaces that are practical, beautiful and meaningful can be created, leaving a positive legacy for future generations.

How do we measure good design?

In Western Australia, State Planning Policy 7.0 Design of the Built Environment (SPP 7.0) outlines 10 Design Principles that guide and support the delivery of good design through qualitative evaluation.

The Design Principles form the basis for design review presentations, discussion and feedback. They work together to describe good design outcomes that not only meet the objectives of SPP 7.0 but align with government priorities and community expectations.

The principles are interconnected and their relative significance will vary from project to project, depending on the context.

The 10 Design Principles

To learn about the principles in more detail, refer to SPP 7.0 and associated planning policies.



Context and character

Good design responds to and enhances the distinctive characteristics of a local area, contributing to a sense of place.



Landscape quality

Good design recognises that together landscape and buildings operate as an integrated and sustainable system, within a broader ecological context.



Built form and scale

Good design ensures that the massing and height of development is appropriate to its setting and successfully negotiates between existing built form and the intended future character of the local area.



Functionality and build quality

Good design meets the needs of users efficiently and effectively, balancing functional requirements to perform well and deliver optimum benefit over the full life-cycle.



Sustainability

Good design optimises the sustainability of the built environment, delivering positive environmental, social and economic outcomes.



Amenity

Good design provides successful places that offer a variety of uses and activities while optimising internal and external amenity for occupants, visitors and neighbours, providing environments that are comfortable, productive and healthy.



Legibility

Good design results in buildings and places that are legible, with clear connections and easily identifiable elements to help people find their way around.



Safety

Good design optimises safety and security, minimising the risk of personal harm and supporting safe behaviour and use.



Community

Good design responds to local community needs as well as the wider social context, providing environments that support a diverse range of people and facilitate social interaction.



Aesthetics

Good design is the product of a skilled, judicious design process that results in attractive and inviting buildings and places that engage the senses.

The pillars for design review

While every local government and every project is different, ensuring the pillars of design review are at the core of the process promotes consistency. This in turn gives proponents more clarity and instils the community with confidence in the integrity and quality of the design review process.

Independent

It is conducted by individuals not connected with the proposal's promoters or decision-makers, ensuring conflicts of interest are avoided or managed appropriately.

Expert

It is carried out by suitably qualified experts in design who can critique constructively. Review is most respected when conducted by professional peers of the proposal design team, as their expertise is understood and accepted.

Multidisciplinary

It combines perspectives of architects, urban designers, planners, landscape architects, and other specialist design experts to provide a comprehensive evaluation tailored to the specifics of a proposal.

Transparent

The Panel's remit, membership, governance processes, and funding are in the public domain.

Accountable

The Panel and its advice must clearly benefit the public.

Proportionate

It is used on proposals whose significance warrants the investment needed to provide the service.

Advisory

The Panel does not make decisions, rather it offers impartial expert advice on design to proponents and decision-makers to inform the development of the design, assessment and decisions.

Consistent

The advice received across subsequent design review sessions for the same project is consistent. Panel Members remain the same across sessions or, when this is not possible, are well-briefed and respectful of previous advice.

Objective

It appraises proposals according to reasoned and objective measures, considering the principles of SPP 7.0, rather than the individual taste and subjective preferences of Panel Members.

Timely

It takes place early in the design process, to offer the best time and cost benefits for proponents.

Accessible

The advice arising from design review is clearly expressed in terms that design teams, decision-makers and the public can understand and use.

Consistency is key

Consistency in design review is essential for ensuring a fair, efficient, and credible process. When consistent standards and criteria are applied across panels, local governments, and individual reviews, it gives proponents greater certainty, helping them understand what's expected and how to best respond to feedback.

Confidentiality

It is important that everyone involved in the design review process maintains confidentiality. This not only supports the integrity of the process but also helps to realise the greatest benefit to proponents by encouraging open dialogue, exploration of ideas, and a collaborative dynamic during review sessions.

You should avoid discussing the design review sessions, proposal, or reports outside of the review setting. This includes discussions with other Panel Members, the proponent team or anyone not associated with the proposal.

Proponent material remains confidential until a Development Approval application is lodged for determination. The Design Review Panel's final report will become a public document and included in the Responsible Authority Report (RAR). This is prepared by the Planning Officer for the decision-maker's consideration. Interim reports issued prior to this are confidential and should not form part of the RAR.



02/ The design review process

“A design review, when it’s run effectively, can benefit all of the people involved in the process. Importantly, it can provide a tremendous amount of benefit to the community.”

– Dominic Snellgrove, Panel Member and Chair



The design review process

Design review takes place across multiple points in the design of a proposal, with each review building on the one before it. As such, it is most effective when the review and its report follow a structured process.

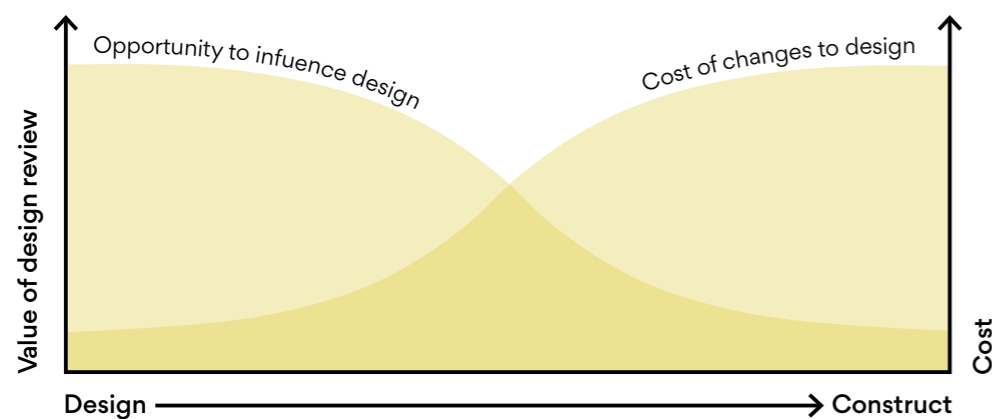
When does design review occur?

Design review works best when it begins early, before a proposal is lodged for Development Approval (DA), and prior to significant investment in planning and design activity. This is when the design is most flexible and ideas can evolve, meaning that advice is most useful and impactful.

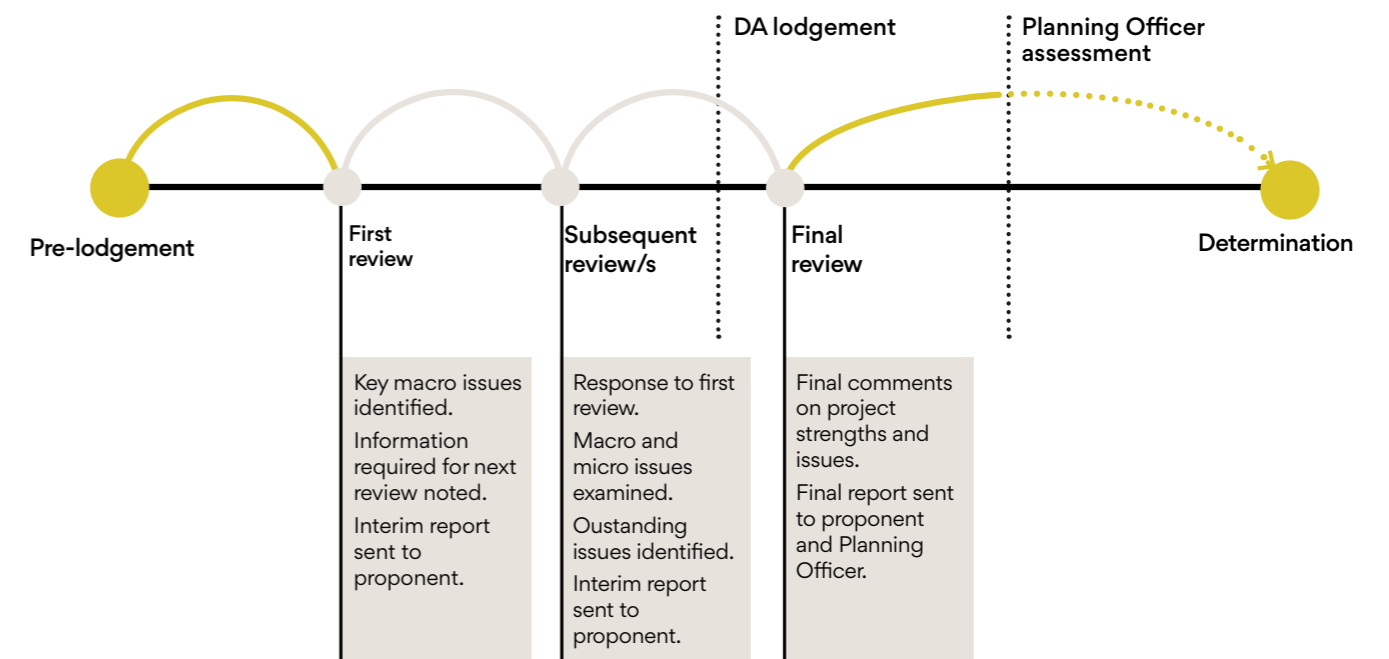
The design review process offers the most value when it is iterative and typically consists of two or three reviews, concluding before or shortly after DA lodgement.

After each review, an interim report is issued to help guide the proposal during its design development. The final design review report is used to inform a planning assessment and recommendation to decision-makers, such as the local government's elected members or a Development Assessment Panel (DAP).

Design review can continue past the time of DA lodgement, but it will always conclude before the decision-maker's determination.



When design review is most valuable.



A typical design review process.



What to expect on the day of a design review

On the day of a design review, the process is structured into three distinct parts for each proposal being considered: the pre-review, the review session, and the post-review discussion.

Having a clear understanding of the process and your role within it is crucial to supporting the efficiency and quality of design review. You will learn more about your role in the following chapters. You can also find important useful information in the Manual / Part 2 / Guidance for effective design review.

Reviewing multiple proposals in one day

In some instances, a local government will hold design reviews for multiple proposals in one day. In such cases, the Panel might change for each proposal, or the same Panel might review each proposal in succession.

No matter the number of proposals, it is important that there is a pre-review and post-review for each proposal.

Pre-review

10–15 minutes

The pre-review is a short discussion between the Panel, together with Planning Officers. The purpose of this session is to align the Panel on priorities and clarify the scope of the review, ensuring a consistent, coherent and collaborative approach once the review session begins.

During the pre-review:

- The Planning Officer provides a summary of key planning considerations and context, identifying where the proposal departs from strategic planning intentions.
- The Chair outlines how the session will run, seeks to understand key issues from Panel Members and establishes focus areas.
- Panel Members share early impressions, clarify any questions and resolve any early differences of opinion, managed by the Chair.

Review session

40–55 minutes

The review session is the main part in the process. Its purpose is to explore the proposal in detail and provide constructive, expert advice.

During the review session:

- The proponent team joins the meeting.
- The Chair begins with an Acknowledgement of Country and introductions.
- The proponent's design team presents the proposal to the Panel.
- Panel Members ask clarifying questions, before moving into a discussion led by the Chair.
- The Panel provides constructive advice to the proponent team, in alignment with SPP 7.0 Design Principles.
- The Chair provides a summary of the advice, and may invite the Planning Officer to share any further comments or respond to queries on procedural steps.
- The Chair asks the proponent team if they have any questions or closing comments.
- The Chair closes the review session and the proponent team leaves the meeting.

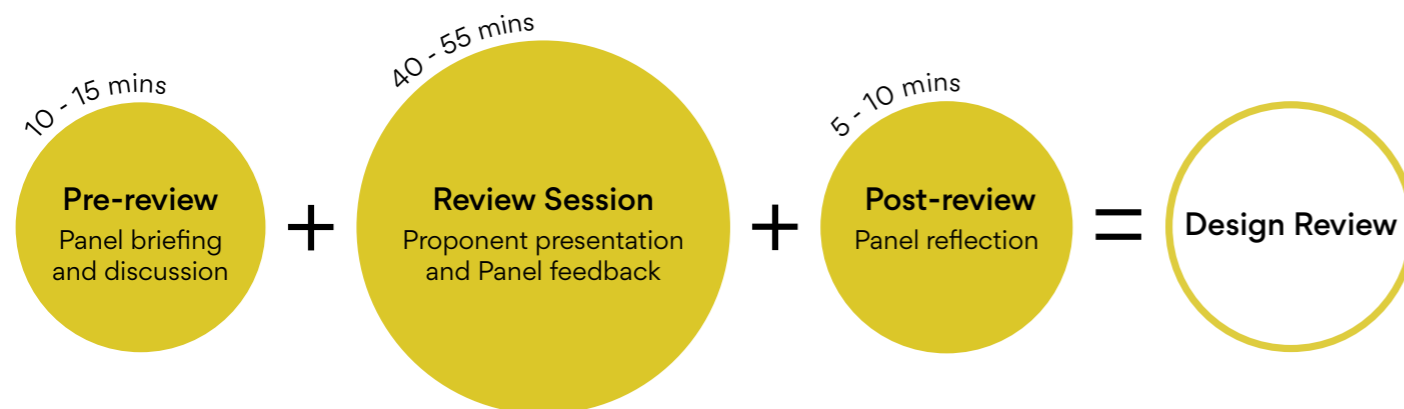
Post-review discussion

5–10 minutes


The post-review discussion is a short, concluding debrief led by the Chair with the Panel Members and Local Government Officers, to confirm key advice outcomes for reporting. Its purpose is to help to ensure that the written advice issued in interim or final reports reflects the design review accurately.

During the post-review discussion:

- The Chair and Planning Officer record the Panel's recommendations.
- The Planning Officer may ask the Chair follow-up questions for clarity.
- The Chair closes the post-review discussion.



The structure of a review.



03/ Guidance for Panel Members

*“I almost always visit the
site and have a look and get a sense
of the context.*

*The first thing you talk about in review
is the built form and community context.”*

– Anthony Duckworth, Panel Member

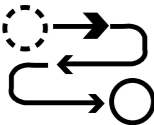


Guidance for Panel Members

Panel Members play a critical role in design review, providing independent, fair and expert advice to support projects to achieve the benchmark of good design relative to the 10 Design Principles in SPP 7.0.

As a Panel Member, you contribute not only your technical expertise but also your judgement, clarity, and ability to reflect on proposals within a consistent, shared framework.

Panel Members don't work in isolation. Each member brings their own professional perspective. However, the goal is to provide consistent, considered advice as a group, with the Chair playing an important role in ensuring the key issues and concerns raised by the Panel are synthesised.



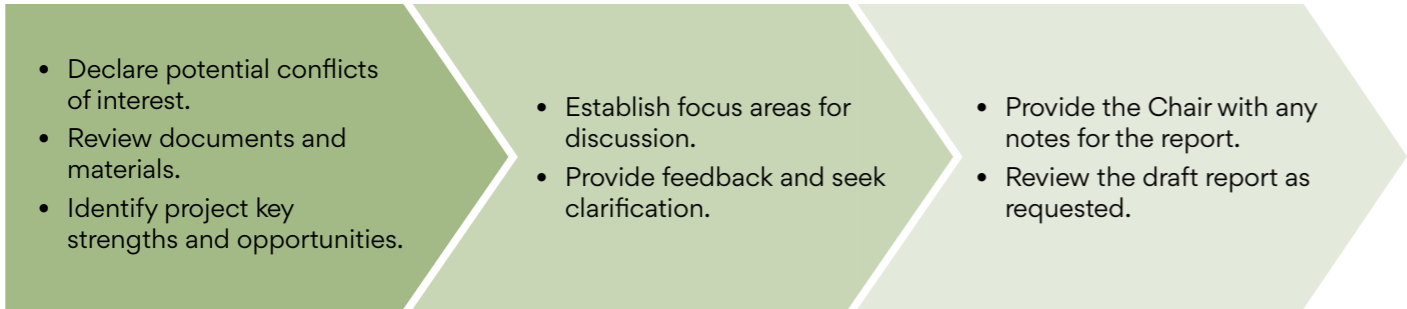
Before the Review



During the Review



After the Review



Key roles for Panel Members.

Before the review

For Panel Members, the design review process starts when a Local Government Officer (typically the Design Review Coordinator) contacts you to seek your availability for review. They will also assess whether there are any potential conflicts of interest for you, based on information you provide in relation to the site, project or proponent team.

Once the Panel has been established, you will receive the presentation pack, relevant technical reports and a summary of key issues prepared by the Planning Officer. This information will be provided to you at least seven days prior to the review.

Ensure you review the supplied documents early to allow time for any requests for additional information if needed. Good preparation is not only crucial to the efficiency and effectiveness of the process, but also helps Panel Members provide clear, meaningful advice that reflects the proposal's context and stage.

Tips for review preparation

- If it is the first review, make sure you take time to understand the site and broader context.
- Align your advice with the SPP 7.0 Design Principles, rather than planning matters.
- Order your thoughts from macro to micro.
- Note the positive attributes of a project as well as the areas of concern.
- Identify areas where you seek clarification and prepare your focus questions to ask the Planning Officer or proponent.
- If a project is returning for a second or third review, check the proposal against previous feedback and identify whether you think issues that were raised have been addressed.

Availability

Confirming your availability is a small step, but it is essential to a well-run design review process. Being clear from the outset also supports the Local Government Officers organising the session and ensures the right expertise is in the room. If something changes, let the coordinator know as soon as possible.

During the review

On the day of a design review, the process is structured into three distinct parts: the pre-review, the review session, and the post-review discussion.

Pre-review

Held prior to the proponent and observers entering, the pre-review supports consistency in design review, and sets the tone for a thoughtful, organised, and constructive dialogue with the proponent. It is critical for understanding Panel Members' views, clarifying who will lead certain topics, and reaching consensus on key aspects of the proposal where possible.

The Chair guides the pre-review, which usually runs for 10–15 minutes and has two distinct parts.

- 1 First, the Planning Officer will provide a briefing to the Panel Members, summarising the planning context and key planning considerations. This is an opportunity for you to clarify any points on planning matters and raise any focus questions with the Planning Officer directly.
- 2 The Panel Members will then discuss the proposal, with the Chair helping to define the approach to be taken during the review session. With the proponents and observers not yet present, this is a good opportunity to share initial impressions, resolve any early differences of opinion and agree on key issues.

Any significant issue you intend to raise in the review should be flagged during the pre-review. However, it is important to keep commentary to a high level, reserving more detailed comments for the review session where the proponent will be present.

Review session

When the review session commences, the proponent joins and presents their proposal to the Panel. The Chair guides the session and provides structure, while Panel Members provide constructive feedback to support the design in meeting the principles and objectives of SPP 7.0. A typical review session runs for 50 minutes in total, with additional time allowances provided for more complex projects.

The review session is where your preparation and expertise come together. It's important to follow the Chair's lead, stay aligned as a Panel, and use direct, simple communication to offer clear advice.

Post-review discussion

Once the proponent team has left the room, the Panel and Chair briefly discuss how feedback will be captured in the report. This post-review discussion usually takes 5–10 minutes and is an opportunity to clarify any terms, technical points and key issues to be identified in the report. It is also a time to reflect on the review – what worked well and how the next review might be approached.

Working together as a panel

Panel Members don't work in isolation. You each bring your own professional perspective, with a shared goal to provide consistent, considered advice as a group.

Keys to this are:

- Respecting the Chair's leadership.
- Staying within your area of expertise.
- Listening to each other.
- Working together to form a holistic view of the project.
- Avoiding repetition and contradiction.

Tips on how to review well

- Allow the proponent to present their proposal without interruption.
- Take cues from the Chair and follow the approach agreed on during the pre-review.
- Listen attentively and take notes.
- Ask the proponent clarifying questions.
- Highlight positive attributes, as well as opportunities for improvement, to encourage a constructive conversation with the proponent.
- Provide fair, reasonable advice with reference to the SPP 7.0 Design Principles.
- Structure your advice from macro to micro, ensuring that comments are specific and actionable.
- Provide advice within your area of expertise.
- Ensure key issues discussed in the pre-review are covered because only what is said to the proponent team can be included in the report.



After the review

The design review report is a key part of the process. It captures the Panel's feedback, highlighting the proposal's strengths, challenges and opportunities.

The Chair leads the report's preparation, supported by Local Government Officers. In the days following the review, the Chair may ask you to share notes or provide feedback on the draft report regarding points that relate to your area of expertise.

A well-written report synthesises the comments made in the review using plain language. It helps the proponent in their understanding of the feedback and next steps, reinforcing the overall value of the review process.

All design review reports are confidential, except the final report, which is typically included as an attachment to the Responsible Authority Report along with the Planning Officer's recommendations to the decision-makers. As such, it is important to preserve confidentiality outside of the review setting and to avoid discussing the review session, proposal, or report with the proponent or anyone outside of the process.

What to avoid in review

The review process works best when the Panel and proponents engage in a respectful and consistent way.

As a Panel Member, you should avoid:

- Raising significant discussion points that were not covered in the pre-review.
- Making statements based on personal preferences or matters of taste.
- Departing from the advisory process by providing direct design instruction.
- Giving instruction on specific planning requirements.
- Engaging in unnecessary debate with the proponent team or fellow Panel Members.
- Repeating or contradicting comments by other Panel Members.
- Taking on responsibilities of the Chair, such as making overarching statements about the quality or future direction of the proposal.
- Speaking on behalf of the Panel by using 'we' when giving feedback. Only the Chair represents the Panel as a whole.

How to identify and declare conflicts of interest

When your personal interests conflict, or could be perceived to conflict, with your role in providing independent, objective advice as a Panel Member, a conflict of interest occurs. It is your responsibility to identify and declare any potential conflicts of interest early even if you are unsure.

When you are invited to participate in a design review panel, you will be given the project details, such as the applicant's name, site address and proponent team members. Use this to consider whether an actual or perceived conflict could exist.

Actual or perceived conflicts of interest can include:

- Personal or close relationships (including relatives and friendships) with members of the proponent team.
- Current or recent working relationships with members of the proponent team.
- Living in, or having financial interest in, property in the vicinity of the proposal.
- Past involvement in any other review of the proposal (if applicable).
- Board or Committee involvement (including in a volunteer capacity) that may relate to the proposal coming to review.

If in doubt, it's best to declare it.

The Local Government Officers will assess whether it is a conflict or simply something to note.

Declaring a conflict of interest does not necessarily mean that you cannot participate in a design review. It is often possible to create a management plan to record the declaration. Each local government will have its own approach to managing conflicts appropriately; if you have any questions, please refer them to the Local Government Officer coordinating your design review.

Tips for when you have concerns

- Raise any perceived, potential or actual conflicts of interest with the coordinating Local Government Officer as soon as you are aware of them.
- Do not contact the proponent directly – all communications with the proponent must remain strictly through Local Government Officers.
- If you have any serious concerns regarding the proposal or design review process, contact the Chair and/or coordinating Local Government Officer as soon as possible, to allow time for a considered response.



04/ Guidance for Panel Chairs

“As a Chair, I think the most important thing is setting the right tone. It’s really important to make proponents feel welcome, feel like they’re going to be heard, and then facilitate a process where they are heard.”

– Philip Gresley, Panel Member and Chair



Guidance for Panel Chairs

The Chair is responsible for leading the design review session, facilitating the Panel's discussion and compiling advice into the report. You are a link between all the parties in the room and the process itself.

Your role is essential in maintaining consistency across reviews, making sure that key issues are covered, the Panel's viewpoints are consolidated, and review advice is summarised in a way that is accurate, useful and easily understood by the proponent and decision-makers.

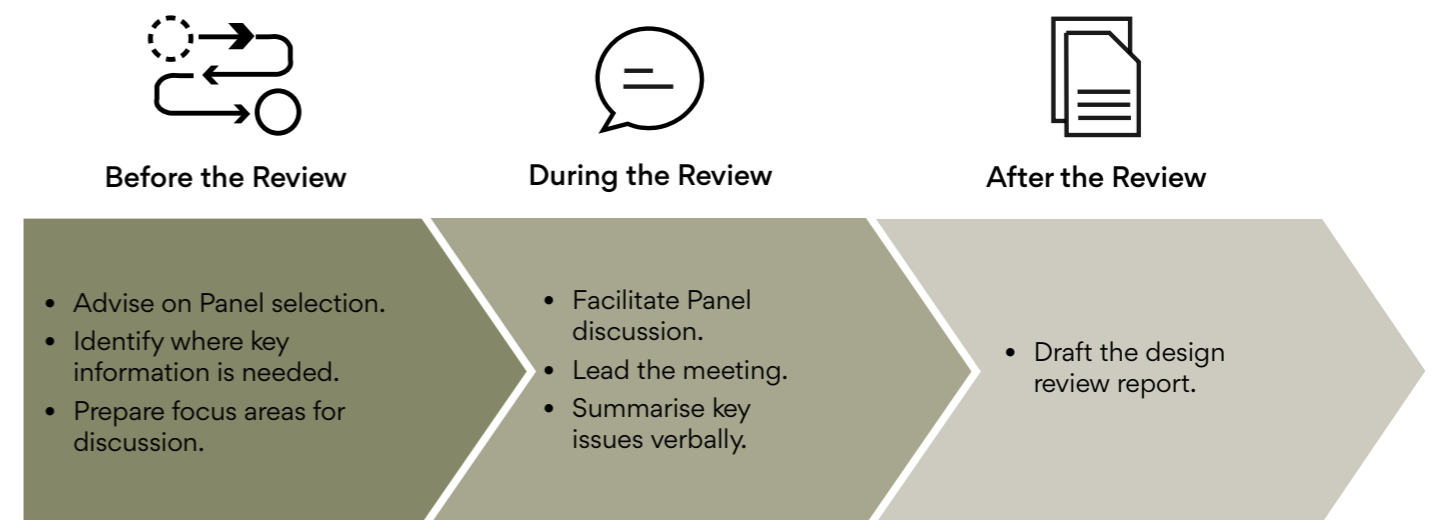
In addition to the role you play during the review session, you will be the Panel's main point of contact with Local Government Officers throughout the entire review process.

Committing your availability is particularly important as the Chair. If your availability is likely to change over the period of the design reviews, notify the coordinating Local Government Officer as soon as possible.

Your role as both Panel Member and Chair

Over the course of a design review, there will be times when you speak for yourself as a Panel Member, providing advice based on your expertise, and times when you speak for the Panel as the Chair. Recognising when each is required, and being clear in how you convey this, is a critical part of your role as Chair.

For guidance in your role as both Panel Member and Chair, please read this chapter in conjunction with the previous chapter, 'Guidance for Panel Members.'



Key roles for Panel Chairs.

Before the review

Panel composition

In preparation for the review, a Local Government Officer will contact you to consider and approve the proposed Panel composition based on likely key focus areas for the review. This involves ensuring that the Panel will represent the required expertise for the project type, scale and context.

Required information

While reviewing the proposal materials, advise the Local Government Officer if you see that additional information is needed to support the Panel's understanding of the design. This could include asking for the proponent's contextual plans, technical drawings, diagrams, consulting reports, or clarifications where design issues are complex or unclear.

Preparing for review

To lead the review session well, you must have a clear understanding of the focus areas and how they relate to Panel Members' areas of expertise.

While the Panel will determine the structure of the review discussion collaboratively during the pre-review, it is important that the Chair leads this discussion and comes to the session with a clear sense of priority and focus.

During the review

It is the Chair's role to manage the review discussion, including setting the tone for the session, keeping time and maintaining focus on key issues. This ensures a collaborative and constructive environment for all participants.

Pre-review

During the pre-review, the Chair should establish the intended review tone, focus and structure with the other Panel Members. The Chair's responsibilities during the pre-review discussion include:

- Introducing all people present at the pre-review (you will formally introduce all participants and observers at the beginning of the review session when the proponent team has joined).
- Outlining protocols, such as the importance of maintaining confidentiality and setting out the agenda.
- Inviting the Planning Officer to speak to the Panel Members about the proposal's key issues.
- Inviting Panel Members to seek clarification from the Planning Officer on planning matters and areas where advice is requested.
- Guiding the pre-review discussion, ensuring all Panel Members have an opportunity to raise key issues and discuss their observations.
- Making sure that the pre-review is used strategically to agree on a targeted and clear review discussion, with consensus on the key issues.
- Reminding Panel Members that only matters raised during the session with the proponent present can be included in the report.

Reminders from the Chair to the Panel Members

During every pre-review discussion, it is a good idea to run through some reminders for Panel Members. Making this part of your process helps to keep behaviours consistent, regardless of Panel Members' levels of experience in the role.

These might include:

- Focus on your area of expertise and avoid commenting on areas outside of your field.
- Maintain a measured and constructive tone.
- Ask questions to seek clarification.
- Acknowledge and encourage the strengths in the proposal.
- Structure feedback from macro to micro. Do not proceed to micro if there are greater strategic issues to be identified and discussed.
- Avoid direct design instructions.
- Tie comments back to the principles and objectives of SPP 7.0, not personal opinion.

Review session

Once the proponents and observers enter the room and the review session begins, the Chair's responsibilities include:

- Opening the review session with an Acknowledgment of Country and introductions.
- Verbally declaring any manageable conflicts of interests for participating Panel Members. (The Local Government Officers will also have listed these on the agenda.)
- Outlining the structure of the session and guiding it in line with the agenda, keeping the proponent team's presentation and review discussion within the set time.
- Inviting the proponent to begin their presentation.
- Inviting Panel Members to provide feedback when required, ensuring they are concise and staying within the parameters set in the pre-review discussion.
- Ensuring that discussions are respectful and courteous in tone and remain focused on the proposal, with advice relating to the SPP 7.0 Design Principles.
- Managing any dissenting views from Panel Members where they may occur, ensuring there is sound reasoning if a dissenting view is expressed.
- Taking notes during review to capture key points of discussion.
- Closing the session by providing a brief verbal summary of the key points raised during the review, once the Panel Members have completed their feedback.
- Inviting proponents to comment and seek clarification on the feedback, before inviting proponents and observers to leave.

Post-review discussion

When the proponent leaves the room, the post-review discussion is the final opportunity for the Panel to reflect and share their perspectives. Key issues can be reiterated and any wording or technical points clarified to ensure they are captured appropriately for the report.

As the Chair, you should use this time to check that the Panel is aligned on how key issues should be framed, and advise Panel Members if their contributions to the report will be required in the coming days so they can plan accordingly. This is not an opportunity to revisit issues in detail or introduce new material, but rather to focus on how to represent and consolidate what was already discussed into the report.

Tips for leading a successful design review session

- Explain the format of the review at the beginning of the session so that everyone is clear about what to expect. For example, letting the proponent know that they are not expected to speak during the Panel's discussion unless invited to clarify a point.
- Make sure that the Panel Members address the key issues raised by the Planning Officer during their panel briefing.
- Ensure Panel Members stay within their areas of expertise when providing feedback. This can mean steering topics to appropriate Panel Members.
- Encourage Panel Members to be concise, to avoid spending too long on any one issue and avoid repeating points that have been made by others.
- Remind Panel Members to provide feedback that orders issues from macro to micro and relates to the 10 Design Principles of SPP 7.0.
- Provide a clear summary at the end of the review session that reflects a consensus view of the Panel on key issues and gives the proponent a path forward. Make sure to highlight a project's strengths as well as the challenges and opportunities.

Managing dissenting views

When chairing a design review, you might sometimes need to steer the discussion away from back-and-forth debate, towards a more constructive focus.

Though uncommon when all participants interact respectfully and observe the review structure, this might occur in circumstances such as a proponent interjecting during the Panel's review discussion, or in the process of exploring different viewpoints among the Panel.

As the Chair, you should confidently guide the discussion by reminding participants of the review intent and agenda. For example, if the proponent engages with the Panel during the review session, remind them that you will invite them to respond or seek clarification at the end of the session.

Likewise, if a Panel Member has inadvertently raised issues outside the review scope, respectfully draw the discussion back to the project. This helps to maintain structure, ensuring that all Panel Members can contribute, and prevents the conversation from becoming reactive or unbalanced.

After the review

The discussion that takes place in design review can be wide-ranging, covering a large amount of information for the proponent team to absorb in a short amount of time. After each review, the Chair is responsible for writing a report that accurately communicates the advice given in the review session. The report plays a vital role in capturing and synthesising what was said on the day, making clear the key issues, and identifying strengths and opportunities for improvement in the proposal.

For the Chair, leading the report's creation involves liaising with the other Panel Members and the Planning Officer as needed. In some cases, the Chair may also be required to present a Panel advice briefing to the decision-maker.

The report must be completed and issued in the seven calendar days following the design review.

The report differs to standard meeting minutes. Instead, it clarifies the Panel's discussion and recommendations as they relate to the 10 Design Principles of SPP 70. Comments should not be captured individually nor attributed to specific Panel Members. Rather, the Panel's consensus advice should be articulated, ensuring key issues and suggestions can be understood clearly. In the unlikely occurrence that consensus cannot be reached between Panel Members on matters covered in the review process, this should be clearly outlined in the report.

Depending on the stage of the review process, the report will be named either an 'interim report' or 'final report'. It's important to consider the audience for each report because the language and tone used may vary accordingly.



Writing an interim report

Interim reports are created after every design review prior to the final review. This means that they are issued while the design is ongoing and the proponent team is their audience. They are confidential reports, written with the intent to clearly synthesise and articulate the Panel's advice to assist with the proposal's design development.

The language used in an interim report should be constructive, offering support and guidance to help the project achieve good design with relation to the 10 Design Principles of SPP 70. When writing the report, it is useful to identify each key issue with reference to the relevant design principle, specify what and where the issue is in the design and offer suggestions to help improve or resolve the issue. The Panel's advice should be a combination of observation and recommendation, never instruction. It should articulate an understanding of the many complexities of every proposal.

An interim report template is available for use. Please see the Resources list on page 49.

Writing the final report

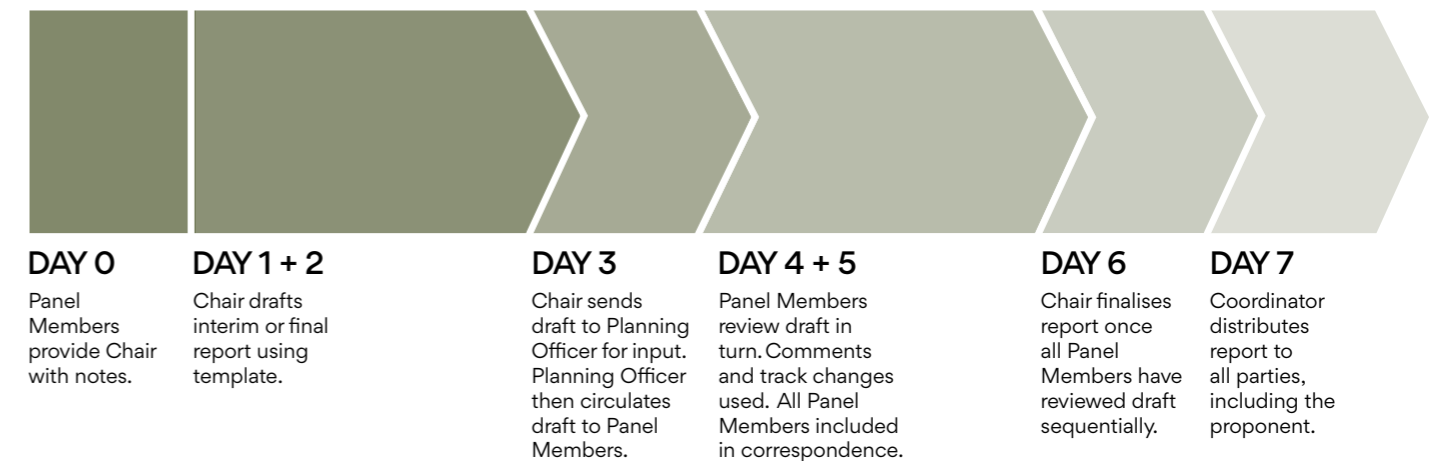
Unlike interim reports, the final report is written for the decision-maker. It uses more direct language to advise on the outcome of the design review process and design quality of the proposal.

It should indicate the Panel's level of support for the proposal and outline any outstanding areas of concern, which may be used to inform conditions.


The final report is made publicly available, so should be written in a manner that is suitable for a broad audience. It may be appropriate to include relevant content from the interim reports because it is the only design review report provided to the decision-maker.

A final report template is available for use. Please see the Resources list on page 49.

You can read more about the reporting process, such as what to do when the design review process ends early and an interim report becomes the final report, in the Manual / Part 2 / Feedback and reporting.





The design review report must be completed and issued in the seven calendar days following the review.



05/ Guidance for Local Government Officers

“Preparing for the review session is very important because you really want to set your design review panel up for success. A well-informed panel can provide robust feedback and drive the project to the best version that it can be.”

– Brandon Pang, City of Belmont





Guidance for Local Government Officers

Whether you are coordinating the design review process or providing planning assessment, your role as a Local Government Officer, at the interface between the proponent and Panel, is vital to design review.

The design review duties for Local Government Officers can be divided into two main areas:

- Coordination and support: Managing the design review process, liaising with proponents and Panel Members, and handling administration.
- Planning and assessment: Providing technical planning knowledge and input, briefing the Panel, and incorporating design review advice into planning assessments and reports.

Each local government may allocate these duties differently, and sometimes one officer may cover more than one area. No matter how your local government's team is structured, it is crucial that responsibilities are assigned in alignment with staff skills and experience.

Best practice resourcing in local governments, large and small

While it's best practice for the full complement of roles, including a coordinator and administrator, to facilitate the design review process, a simpler structure may be more practical for a small local government where the demand for review is less. In this case, the team might include one officer to manage coordination and administrative tasks and one Planning Officer undertaking the planning and assessment tasks.

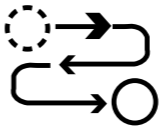
Local governments should find the resourcing approach that best suits their needs, keeping in mind that separating the coordinating and planning assessment duties is important for efficiency and clarity in the design review process.

Establishing a panel

Local governments are responsible for establishing, resourcing, and managing their Design Review Panel. The type of panel, frequency of meetings and number of members may differ to suit the local government's identified needs.

The Manual / Part 3 / Establishing and appointing a panel provides detailed guidance to Local Government Officers on how to establish a panel, its governance, funding and structure. It provides instruction and templates to assist in identifying panel expertise and inducting selected Panel Members to the design review process.

The Panel should be established as an independent body with an appropriate Terms of Reference and/or Local Planning Policy, and in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1995*. A Design Review Terms of Reference template is available for use. Please see the Resources list on page 49.



Before the Review

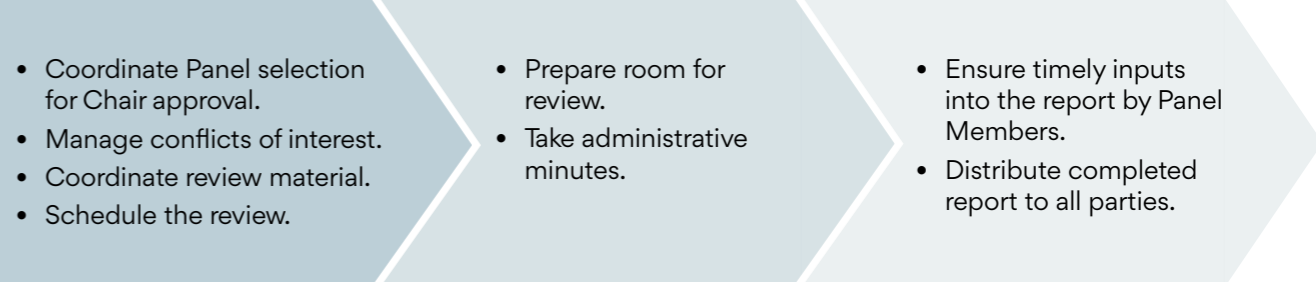


During the Review

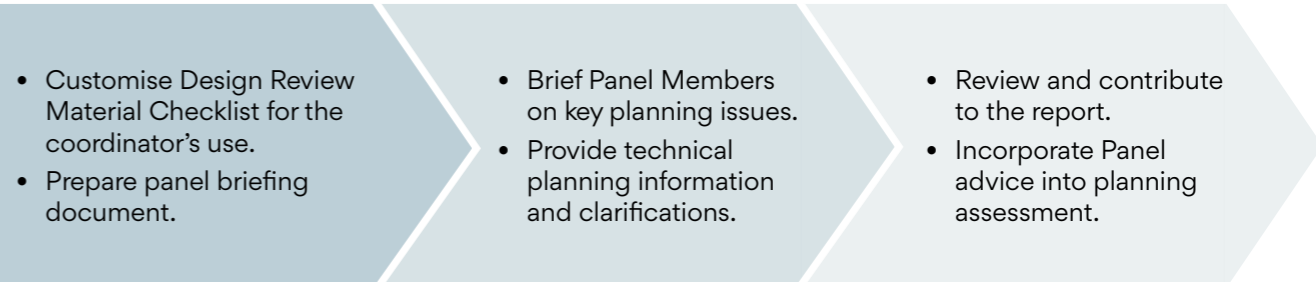


After the Review

Coordination + Support



Planning + Assessment



Key roles for Local Government Officers.

Coordination and support roles

Coordination and support tasks and responsibilities are the backbone of a well-run design review and cover everything from organising sessions and managing logistics, to guiding the review process and ensuring consistency in design review and outcomes.

Depending on the size and organisational structure of the local government, these responsibilities may sit with one officer or be shared.

As a Design Review Coordinator, you are responsible for managing your local government's design review process, overseeing monitoring and evaluation of the Panel, its processes and outputs, to ensure consistency and compliance with the Terms of Reference.

Some of the design review coordination and support tasks outlined here do not require design or planning experience and can be delegated to an administrator or general support team member.

Tips for coordination and support

In your coordination and support role, it is important to:

- Always direct technical queries from the Panel or the proponent to the Planning Officer, as relevant.
- Clearly note the Planning Officer as the contact officer for technical planning queries.
- Prepare the meeting agenda using the Agenda template (please see the Resources list on page 49) and include all conflict of interest declarations.
- Take minutes as an administrative record of attendance, apologies, meeting time and duration. Please note that minutes should not be issued in place of a design review report.

Before the review

In the lead up to the review, your coordination and support tasks help to make sure that the process is structured to add value to the proposal. This involves liaising with participants and ensuring everyone receives the information they need to prepare.

These tasks include:

- Leading preliminary discussions with proponents, advising them of the design review process requirements and likely key focus areas.
- Liaising with the proponent to ensure design review sessions can be scheduled at appropriate points in the project lifecycle and assessment process.
- Determining the anticipated number of reviews and length of the review session or sessions.
- Leading the Panel composition, including ensuring member consistency across reviews. A Session Panel Curation Matrix is available for use. Please see the Resources list on page 49.
- Considering any potential conflicts of interest raised by Panel Members.
- Reviewing the proponent's presentation package against the Design Review Material Checklist to ensure it contains adequate information for the Panel. The Planning Officer will usually prepare this checklist for your use.
- Communicating with the proponent when further material is required and conveying any queries or information requests from the Panel.
- Reviewing the Planning Officer's briefing to ensure it provides adequate technical information.
- Meeting management and administrative support *:
 - Confirming the Panel Members' availability and issuing calendar invitations to all participants.

* General support/administration tasks.

- Receiving proposal information from proponents, including the consultant team, and conveying this to the Planning Officer.
- Collating conflict of interest information from the Panel Members.
- Distributing presentation and briefing material to the Panel Members.
- Preparing and distributing the meeting agenda to participants.

The importance of the preliminary proponent discussion

The preliminary discussion between the Design Review Coordinator and proponent is a prime opportunity to communicate the value of design review in the early stages of a proposal. It also allows for informed decision-making as to whether a review is warranted and, if so, the size and composition of the Panel.

Topics you might cover in the preliminary discussion include:

- The planning context.
- The proposal development stage and any known constraints.
- Alternative modes for the provision of design advice if relevant (this is explained in the Manual / Part 1 / What is the difference between a design review and design advice?)

Composing the Panel

As the Design Review Coordinator, you will work with the Chair to compose an appropriate panel for each proposal. The Panel must have expertise that suits the proposal, including knowledge in any specialist areas required, such as sustainability or heritage. The Panel composition should avoid conflicts of interest and must meet the minimum number of Panel Members outlined in the local government's Terms of Reference.

A Session Panel Curation Matrix tool has been developed to assist with this. Please see the Resources list on page 49.

Reviewing the proposal materials

At least seven days prior to the review, you will send the Panel Members and Chair the proponent's presentation pack for the proposal, a summary of key issues prepared by the Planning Officer, and relevant technical reports.

Having the right information that communicates a proposal's response to SPP 7.0 is essential to design review being most beneficial. The Panel Chair will advise you if additional information is needed to support the Panel's understanding of the design, such as the proponent's contextual plans, diagrams, consulting reports or clarifications.

If the proponent's material is inadequate or late, and the Panel's ability to sufficiently prepare is impacted, the review should be rescheduled to ensure that it can achieve the most benefit and add value.

Last-minute updates to presentation material should be avoided. However, if minor updates are made to material close to the review session, you should obtain a list of the changes from the proponent to convey to the Panel.

During the review

During the review, your coordination and support tasks are essential to the meeting running smoothly for all participants. These include:

- Clarifying procedural points and confirming the local government's position on a particular planning matter when required.
- Setting up the room, including technology as required.*
- Taking meaningful notes in the meeting, ensuring administrative minutes are created and arranging for recording/transcription if appropriate.*

After the review

Following the review, your coordination and support tasks are vital in ensuring that timeframes are met and that the process is consistent. These include:

- Coordinating with the Chair and Planning Officer to ensure the design review report is issued on time, within seven calendar days of the review.
- Managing any follow-up queries from the proponent or Panel Members.
- Handling any complaints or conflicts raised in line with relevant procedures of the local government.
- Distributing the interim report to the proponent, the Planning Officers and Panel Members.*
- Administering payments to the Panel Members.*

* General support/administration tasks.



Conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest must be effectively managed to ensure the integrity of the design review process. Perceived conflicts can undermine the credibility of the advice being given and the design review process overall. Actual conflicts compromise independence and objectivity, which is a crucial part of design review.

The Design Review Coordinator assesses whether a real or perceived conflict exists and decides the appropriate response. When a Panel Member declares an interest, the Coordinator assesses whether the conflict is significant enough to require replacement or can be addressed through management measures, depending on its nature and level of risk.

It is important that you encourage Panel Members to report anything that they are unsure about. This will allow you to assess the conflict and decide on the best course of action.

Actual or perceived conflicts of interest can include:

- Personal or close relationships (including relatives and friendships) with members of the proponent team.
- Current or recent working relationships with members of the proponent and proposal team.
- Living in or having financial interest in property in the vicinity of the proposal.
- Past involvement in any other review of the proposal (if applicable).
- Board or Committee involvement (including in a volunteer capacity) that may relate to the proposal coming to review.

Refer to the relevant policy and supporting resources

Declared interests must be managed in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Local Government Act 1995 and the Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996. For the purposes of determining conflicts of interest, the Panel Members are considered local government employees.

The Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety's Local Government Operational Guidelines on Disclosures of Interest provides helpful information on conflict of interest categories, exceptions and the responsibilities of local government employees.

The Public Sector Commission's Conflicts of Interest Guide offers a suite of resources to help identify, declare and manage conflicts of interest.

Consider whether to replace the Panel Member

If the conflict is considered a significant risk to impartiality, the Panel Member will be replaced. This may occur if the conflict involves financial interest, such as owning property near the proposal site. It is also the preferred approach for any perceived impartiality conflict.

Manage the conflict of interest

If the conflict is deemed less significant and therefore manageable (and replacing the Panel Member isn't feasible), the Panel Member may remain involved in the review. However, a management plan will be put in place, which involves:

- Making a formal declaration to all parties involved in the review.
- Noting the declaration on the meeting agenda and in any subsequent reports to ensure transparency.
- Updating declarations accordingly if new conflicts arise between review sessions.

Planning and assessment roles

As the Planning Officer, you bring the technical and planning perspective to the design review. You are responsible for preparing preliminary assessments and briefing the Panel on both the proposal and its planning context. Planning Officers are typically responsible for preparing advice for the decision-making authority's consideration.

Your role as the Planning Officer ensures that design review advice is accurate, relevant, and embedded into the planning system. By preparing thoroughly, briefing clearly, and integrating advice into your assessment, you support good design and sound decision-making.



Before the review

In the lead up to the review, you are responsible for ensuring the proponent provides the technical material required for design review and that the Panel is adequately briefed on the proposal and its context.

These responsibilities include:

- Customising a Design Review Material Checklist for the proposal, in line with the proposal type and stage. The Design Review Coordinator will then use this to check that the proponent's presentation package contains adequate information for the Panel. A template has been developed; please see the Resources list on page 49.
- Liaising with the Design Review Coordinator and Panel Members on any queries and information requests relating to technical and planning aspects.
- Preparing a written and verbal panel briefing, including any preliminary planning assessments. The Design Review Coordinator will provide your written briefing together with the review material to the Panel one week prior to the session.

During the review

During the review, the Planning Officer's responsibilities include attending the review session as technical support, briefing the Panel on the planning context during the pre-review, and taking technical notes.

Briefing the Panel

Your panel briefing helps to guide Panel Members' understanding of the key planning considerations that relate to the proposal. It is delivered in two parts: as a written brief provided to the Panel, and a verbal briefing delivered at the start of the pre-review discussion.

A strong briefing sets the planning context, linking to the relevant policies and highlighting the planning expectations for the site and its future context. It identifies any significant departures from the planning framework in the proposal, showing where it may not align with requirements or expectations. It invites the Panel to provide advice on how the proposal might respond to the issues with reference to SPP 7.0.

After the review

In the days following the review, the Planning Officer's responsibilities include:

- Reviewing and contributing to the interim and final reports, primarily through technical planning clarifications. This involves collaborating with the Chair, who leads the report-writing process.
- Synthesising the Panel's advice from the final report into planning assessments and recommendations to decision-makers.

Tips for the pre-review panel briefing

- Keep the verbal briefing short and avoid repeating the written materials. Focus on the way the proposal has departed from the planning framework or is seeking discretion.
- Use accessible language when explaining policy requirements.
- Detail the outcomes that a planning framework seeks and what the impacts of not meeting it could be.
- Focus on providing clear planning context, not design solutions.
- Include useful examples that demonstrate the outcomes that can result from discretionary application of the requirements. This will help the Panel understand the planning issues and offer informed design advice that specifically addresses it.

A panel briefing template is available for use. Please see the Resources list on page 49.

Resources

The following templates are available for use on the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage [Local Government Design Review page](#):

- Design Review Agenda
- Design Review Material Checklist
- Design Review Eligibility Matrix
- Expression of Interest Assessment Matrix
- Design Review Panel Interim Report
- Design Review Panel Final Report
- Design Review Panel Briefing
- Session Panel Curation Matrix
- Design Review Terms of Reference

