

Cambridgeshire Quality Panel - Terms of Reference

Introduction

These Terms of Reference outline the background and purpose of the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel and explain how it is intended to work.

Origins

The Cambridgeshire Quality Panel is being established by Cambridgeshire Horizons to provide a quality review service for the major growth sites in Cambridgeshire which can give consistent and well-informed advice to the local planning authorities during each phase of the developments. The local authorities have high aspirations for the quality of the new developments that are being brought forward, as outlined in the *Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth*, and quality review can play an important role in supporting and challenging the local planning authorities in their quest for high standards.

At its meeting on September 24, 2009, the Cambridgeshire Horizons Board agreed the establishment of a Cambridgeshire Quality Panel for an initial period of up to March 2011. Funding for the Panel beyond that date will be reviewed in the autumn of 2010 and further funding will need to be agreed before the end of March 2011.

Aim, purpose and role

The Panel will be expected to give impartial advice to the local planning authorities, both supportive and challenging, in order to ensure that the best possible outcomes are achieved; and assist the planning authorities in upholding and reinforcing the high quality aspirations set out in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth and adopted planning policies. It may also support local authorities in their own procurement and development processes, for instance on the design of schools or community facilities.

Quality review does not just cover aesthetics; it should also be reflected in the wider sustainability and functionality of a project. For this reason the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel will assess schemes against all four 'C's of the Quality Charter: community, connectivity, climate and character, within the context of the adopted planning policy framework.

Within Cambridge City the Panel will only normally review sites covered by the City Fringes Joint Development Control Committee, and for the rest of the County schemes of an indicative scale of approximately 500 or more houses.

These major sites will pass through three distinct planning phases, and quality review by the Panel will be relevant to all of them:

- at outline planning stage, where quality review can play an important role in assessing the quality of the overall vision for major developments as expressed in strategic Master Plans, Parameters Plans and Design and Access Statements;
- at the Design Coding stage, where more detailed strategies for the public realm and Neighbourhood Plans are being drawn up; and
- at Reserved Matters stage, where final details of the new neighbourhoods and local centres are being designed.

In undertaking its advisory role, the Panel seeks to give guidance that is:

- independent
- expert
- objective
- constructive

- balanced
- wide ranging

Status of the Panel

The Panel will be an independent group managed and supported by Cambridgeshire Horizons, giving guidance in its own name. The local authorities in Cambridgeshire will not be held responsible for the Panel's views. However, the Panel's views may be taken into account as a material consideration by the local planning authority in determining a planning application.

Schemes will normally be submitted to the Panel on the recommendation of the relevant Planning Director. However, schemes may also be submitted on the request of individual developers or promoters.

A Steering Group will guide the forward work programme of the Panel, reporting to the Growth Partnership Board. An annual review of Panel's work will be reported to the Horizons Board.

Panel Members

The Panel will consist of a Chair, a Vice Chair and up to ten further members.

The Panel's membership will possess expertise across the full range of the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter's four 'C's:

Community – Building a sense of community by providing a greater choice of housing along with community facilities which assist active participation of people in their neighbourhoods

Connectivity – Locating new developments where they can benefit from high connectivity to jobs and services and provision of sustainable infrastructure to match the pace of the development

Climate – Tackling climate change through imaginative landscaping that treats water as a friend not an enemy and through innovative approaches to energy, transport and waste

Character - Creating places of character with distinctive neighbourhoods and public realm that encouraged people to walk and cycle

The Chair and Vice Chair will be selected from the twelve member Panel.

The Panel will be recruited through a selection process based on stated criteria in the Quality Charter this can be viewed at www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/qualitycharter

Cambridgeshire Horizons will co-ordinate the appointment of Panel members in consultation with local authority members and key officers. Panel member's fees will be paid at a rate of £400 per day plus expenses.

The Panel will be supported by a Panel Secretary, who will prepare detailed notes of the meeting and a draft response for the Chair's approval.

Panel membership will be reviewed annually and new members sought from time to time.

Appointments will be made by a selection committee comprising elected member representatives from each of the six Cambridgeshire authorities. The committee will be advised by the steering group referred to above.

Conflict of Interest

It is imperative that the Panel is open and transparent about conflicts of interest. Successful panel members will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement and conflict of interest declaration as part of the appointment process. Panel members will not be able to attend the review of schemes that either they or their firm may be involved in or linked to.

Panel meetings

Full meetings

The Panel will meet four to six times a year for a whole day. Sessions would normally include a site visit. Meetings will normally be held in Cambridge except where the scheme being reviewed is within one of the market towns, in which case the review will be held at a location in the town, particularly if a site visit is also involved.

Review of each case will entail the following steps:

- the developer gives an overview of the scheme, describing the aspiration and concept for the project and the brief;
- the developer's professional team presents the project covering the nature of the intended development and its context and moving on to a broad description of the design proposal;
- local planning authority officers will be invited to comment;
- questions and discussion of the proposal between the Panel, the developer and his team, and the representatives of the local authorities;
- others withdraw and the Panel discusses the proposals *in closed session*.
- A report of the meeting will be drafted by the Panel Secretary and agreed with the Chair.

Occasionally, a special meeting, in addition to the meetings noted above, may be held at the discretion of the Panel.

Panel meetings will not be public meetings and attendance is by invitation only. Members of relevant authorities will be informed of meeting dates and agenda items and may attend the open section of the meetings as observers but should notify the Panel Secretary in advance.

Guidance

The Panel will issue a formal response to the local planning authority, copied to the developer of the scheme in the form of a letter, detailing the views of the Panel, within two weeks of the meeting. It will focus on how well the scheme relates to the principles in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter within the context of adopted planning policies and make suggestions for improvement.

For proposals that the Panel considers before a planning application is made, the Panel's advice will not be in the public domain. Where the timing of the Panel's advice means that it will be considered as part of the local authorities formal decision-making procedure, advice will be made public through that process.