How to do
design review
Creating and running
a successful panel
CABE is the government’s advisor on architecture, urban design and public space. As a public body, we encourage policymakers to create places that work for people. We help local planners apply national design policy and advise developers and architects, persuading them to put people’s needs first. We show public sector clients how to commission buildings that meet the needs of their users. And we seek to inspire the public to demand more from their buildings and spaces. Advising, influencing and inspiring, we work to create well-designed, welcoming places.

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Why do design review?

CABE believes that well-designed homes, streets, parks, workplaces, schools and hospitals have a positive impact on the quality of people’s lives; improving quality of life through good design is the main objective of our design review service. The positive effect of good design is not conjecture or blind optimism on our part; research evidence supports it. It is part of our role to motivate those responsible for providing our buildings and spaces to design and develop them well, and we can demonstrate that there is a real payback for everyone, developers and the public, from investment in excellence.

Britain is in the midst of a huge building programme and we must not miss this opportunity to ensure that investment in the built environment is of the highest quality and that we all reap the benefits. Indeed, the government has made it clear in planning policy that local planning authorities should ensure that all development conforms to sound principles of good design.

But how do planning officers and councillors measure and understand ‘good’ design? A tried and tested approach – and one that is at the core of CABE’s own work – is design review. Applied correctly, design review can objectively test the quality of schemes. Through this process, politicians and planners should be able to isolate poor schemes that should be refused planning permission. It can help them to identify the aspects of promising schemes that should improve. And, equally importantly, it underpins their support to well-designed schemes.

This guide sets out CABE’s advice on how to set up and run a design review panel. You will find it particularly useful if you work for a local planning authority or a regional development agency. It is based on CABE’s own experience of reviewing several thousand projects, including many of the most significant schemes across England, and on the experience of other agencies who have established their own design review arrangements. All our experience shows that, if you run the process well, and give clear, objective advice, it is more likely that those involved in schemes will appreciate and act on your advice and that the projects reviewed will improve. And if you start to achieve that, you will realise the real value of design review.

In June 2006, after three years’ service, I shall be stepping down as chair of CABE’s design review panel, as well as stepping down as a CABE commissioner after eight years. It has been an inspiring time and I believe that our work has made a genuine difference to the quality of new buildings and places in England.

Les Sparks OBE
CABE exists to promote high standards in architecture, urban design and landscape design. A central part of our work is providing direct advice on new development schemes. We make this advice available through:

– our design review programme, which offers advice on the quality of scheme designs
– our enabling programme, which advises clients on how to achieve well-designed projects
– CABE Space, whose remit includes advising on the design and procurement of public space.

CABE’s design review programme provides advice on up to 400 schemes a year. Of these, we see 80 or so at our monthly presentation panel meetings. We also review schemes at bi-monthly internal panel review meetings and weekly desktop review meetings, where our expert staff assess schemes with the chair of the design review panel. However, it is important to stress that design review is not an ‘emergency’ service and that it exists to offer comments on schemes, not redesign them.

Although CABE is a statutory body, we are a ‘non-statutory consultee’ within the planning process. This means that it is not a legal obligation to involve us, but the government has given us a remit to review schemes that are in some way significant. Essentially, local authorities should contact CABE with details of proposals that:

– are significant because of their size or use
– are significant because of their location
– have an importance greater than their size, use or site would suggest

Because of our specific remit, CABE sees only a minority of all the planning applications made each year in England. Of 650,000 applications made annually, only 19,000 – around three per cent – are considered ‘major’. And we see only a proportion of those, owing to our own limited resources.

However, since CABE’s foundation in 1999, the demand for our design review advice has steadily grown. Evaluation of our design review panel by the Office for Public Management in 2005 showed that the majority of those who receive our advice find it useful. And crucially, they act upon it. There is thus a clear need and demand for advice on good design.

‘it is important to stress that design review is not an ‘emergency’ service and that it exists to offer comments on schemes, not redesign them’
The benefits of design review

– it offers an objective and fresh viewpoint, identifying flaws that the designer has failed to recognise
– it can offer support and encouragement to good schemes as well as criticism of bad ones
– it can identify inappropriate or simply bad design that is masquerading as cutting edge
– it brings a breadth and depth of experience that may not be available to the project team or to the planning authority
– it can offer expert views on complex issues such as sustainability
– it can broaden discussions and draw attention to the bigger picture.

In response to increasing demand for CABE’s design review service and the recommendations of the 2005 ODPM select committee report into the role and effectiveness of CABE, a number of other agencies across England have set up design review panels, with our backing. These include regional panels funded by regional development agencies, and sector-based panels such as the NHS review panel.

How to be objective about design

‘There is an objective basis to design review and it is not just a matter of opinion’

Design is a complicated matter, with fact and opinion often difficult to separate. That said, however, there is an objective basis to design review and it is not just a matter of opinion.

The government’s overarching planning guidance, Planning policy statement 1: delivering sustainable development (PPS1), makes high-quality design a key objective of the planning system. So the question of what constitutes good design is judged to be capable of being tested through rigorous examination at public inquiry.

Important publications, including CABE’s By design* and Design review†, set out guidance on what good design means. While acknowledging that there will always be an element of subjectivity in evaluating design, they set out a largely objective set of criteria and stress the importance of avoiding undue emphasis on matters of personal taste.

Whether a proposal is good or not will depend more on underlying factors such as its relationship to its wider context than on how it looks. It is possible to applaud the clarity with which a scheme is designed whilst also finding aspects of it that are not to one’s taste.

Keys to success:
– advice is good
– advice is timely and clear
– advice is acted upon.

* By design, DETR/CABE, 2000
† Design review, CABE, 2006
How to set up a design review panel

If you have decided to form a design review panel, you must also commit resources to make it happen. This applies whether you plan to run it in-house or contract it out. You should also draw up a business plan and programme of work. Those involved in setting up the process should seek advice from CABE and other existing design review programmes. As part of the preparation, you should attend meetings of other panels and familiarise yourself with other parts of the design review process, such as site visits and preparatory meetings.

Whose design review panel is it?

It is important to be clear early on about who the panel is run for, who the advice is for and how it is provided. For example, is the advice directed at the funding or parent organisation, such as the regional development agency? Is it given to the local planning authority? Or is it for the applicants themselves? Is the panel to be constituted as an independent body from the funding agency or authority? CABE would recommend that the panel should be independent from its funders, particularly if they also fund development.

Funding the panel

Funding may come from a number of sources, and the members of your panel may or may not charge for their advice. One model is to set up the panel so that its running costs are covered for an initial period, with the aim that the service will seek a mechanism for charging its ‘customers’ in due course. In some design review panels, the chairs and other panel members are paid; in others, they are not. Many panels will not be able to afford to pay experts at full consultancy rates for their services. Experience suggests that many professionals will be happy to serve on panels in return for a nominal fee well below their commercial rate. It might be less easy to persuade them to take part without being paid at all, however.

It is important to be clear why a panel is to be set up, who it is to advise, how it does so and how it communicates that advice.
If you are going to have a design review process, you will need to ensure that you have adequate staff in place to support it. They will need to provide both administrative and professional services. Organising meetings alone involves a considerable amount of work.

On the professional side, staff need to seek out projects for review, and to liaise with the team that will be presenting the projects to the panel – potentially going on site visits, for example. Those presenting need to understand how to communicate the nature of their scheme and interact with the panel effectively.

Staff must liaise with local authority planning departments, public agencies and possibly with other bodies such as CABE or design panels. Professional staff should have, as a minimum, a good understanding both of the design process and of the planning system; it is essential that they have qualifications and practical experience in these or related fields. It requires professional judgement to know when it would be best to review a project and to manage casework and work streams and be able to brief the chair and panel members about schemes in advance. Staff should expect frequent requests for information from the wider public and you must have adequate resources to cope with additional demands like this. New legislation under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires that publicly funded bodies operate in an open and accessible way. The need to keep well-documented records of projects, processes and comment should never be underestimated. It is important also to recognise that the process is likely to create further workload as proposals previously reviewed return for further evaluation. This needs to be considered and actively managed.

Finally, given the volume of architectural drawings and other materials submitted, design review departments invariably need adequate storage space for their records and filing systems.
A good panel will be made up of a diverse range of individuals with an equally diverse range of professional skills and opinions. As well as architects, consideration should be given to recruiting members from related fields such as planning, urban design, landscape design, the historic environment, sustainability and environmental services, inclusive environments, civil and structural engineering, transport, public art and development. You may also need more specialist panel members, for instance to review schemes that demand a detailed understanding of hospital design. A panel should include members with experience of the private and the public sectors, and an understanding of the planning system, of commercial development, and of public procurement. Having knowledge of government policy is also helpful as a backdrop to much public sector development.

In general, panel members should be experts with a track record of achievement in one or more professional fields. Critical ability is also important, so experience in teaching in a professional context may be valuable. In order to have a broad understanding, the panel will benefit from being diverse in terms of gender and ethnic background, the age of its members, and in approach to the various issues it will be expected to discuss. Some panel members may be locals, but the detachment lent by an objective view is valuable.

In selecting panel members, it is a mistake to shy away from people who are seen as ‘difficult’ or opinionated. Members should be able to act as part of a group, but a panel where all the members agree with each other all the time is unlikely to be as effective.

Most panels operate a ‘pool’ system, so that members don’t need to attend all meetings. This often makes practical sense – members are very likely to be busy professionals with several commitments. It is best not to have too large a membership, as panels operate more effectively if members have the chance to get to know each other and develop mutual understanding. Typically, a panel for a meeting might consist of four to six people, chosen from a pool of 10 to 20 people. It is hard to have a coherent panel discussion that involves the active participation of more than eight people.

Before appointing a panel member, it is important to be clear that they will make themselves available for the work that will be required of them. Panel membership should be for a fixed term of years. Initially, it may be useful to appoint members for different periods to allow for a staggered rotation and renewal of membership. With some panels, members’ performance is reviewed and the strongest performing members or those with particular skills are offered a further term.

You can select panel members by invitation or through advertisement, depending on the nature of your organisation. You should base selection on clear criteria that you can explain to both applicants and those to whom the panel is offering advice.
Conflicts of interest – maintaining transparency

A conflict of interest arises where a panel member has a direct financial interest in a project, for example when they, their company, or a family member is a consultant on the project. Conflicts of interest – both actual and perceived – can damage the reputation of a design review panel and need to be carefully and transparently managed. If a panel member or chair has a conflict of interest, they must declare it at the first opportunity so that it can be registered and acted upon. Each panel must devise its own procedures as the impact of conflicts will vary, but a panel member with a conflict of interest should not attend the meeting at which the scheme in question is presented.

Typically, a panel will be publicly funded and should act in the public interest, therefore panel members and chairs should abide by the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life, which are framed in general terms:

The seven Nolan principles of public life

- **Selflessness**
  Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

- **Integrity**
  Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

- **Objectivity**
  In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

- **Accountability**
  Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

- **Openness**
  Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

- **Honesty**
  Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

- **Leadership**
  Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.
The panel chair

It is important to have an outstanding chairperson – a respected professional who will have the personal qualities to gain the respect of the other panel members, and the intellect to be able to assimilate a range of views into a coherent conclusion during each presentation.

It is not essential that the panel chair is a single individual. CABE’s national panel, for example, is chaired in rotation by a number of CABE commissioners.

A number of qualities are desirable in a panel chair: first is a track record of achievement in a relevant field, so that they have the respect of those presenting and, importantly, of other panel members. They must have strong critical and analytical abilities. They must have the ability to chair a meeting politely but authoritatively, so that those presenting schemes and those who are guests feel they are being listened to and understood. They should also be able to synthesise and summarise what at times may be disparate or conflicting views and reach a consensus. They must be able to guide and scrutinise the written account of the panel meetings.

Finally, a good chair should be able to cope with panel members or guests who express strong – and sometimes differing – opinions. Unless it is clearly too difficult, a chair must be prepared to state a consensual view at the end of the meeting. Only where a panel is clearly divided will it be necessary to reach a conclusion in private. Chairs and panel members need to be aware that the first review is the most significant, where major issues are raised and thereafter revisions are reviewed in the light of previous comments.

Inception and training

Panel members should undergo inception and training. Learning by doing, in the form of a trial review meeting, is best. This allows members to get to know each other, and for ground rules and a way of working to be established. It allows the panel members and chair to discuss, with sample projects, issues such as the standards they will use to judge projects. It also allows them to reach agreement on how the panel can be as objective as possible in its judgements and stress the importance of avoiding the issue of personal taste.
How to organise a panel meeting

You should plan your panel meetings well in advance. This is difficult to reconcile with the fluid and frequently urgent timetables of individual projects. Chairs and panel members are likely to be people with many commitments and demands on their time – arranging meeting dates in their diaries will not be easy. CABE’s national panel fixes dates and books in its panel members a year in advance. Arranging for all the necessary people – home team and visitors – to turn up in a given room at a given time can require a great deal of preparation.

It is important that meetings take place in a suitable location, in a suitable room, using suitable materials. Furthermore, the venue must be accessible for people coming from around the country. You should ensure that you greet both panel members and those presenting schemes on arrival, and provide them with refreshments as necessary. (You may consider that the panel and visitors are separate.)

The room should be the right size and shape for people to present their schemes effectively. It must be possible for the panel members to see and hear presentations properly, and to concentrate without interruption from extraneous noise. There should also be adequate heating or cooling and ventilation. This may sound trivial, but it becomes significant when panel members have been in the same place for several hours.

There should be sufficient space and means to display drawings where they can be seen easily; and consideration given to the size of scheme models, or three-dimensional fly-throughs. You should remind visitors with schemes that are confidential to provide black-out materials if they need to conceal their plans or models. In most cases, the panel will wish to stand and to walk along a set of presentation boards and around a model, but you will probably need seating for lengthy meetings.

You should also consider other accessibility issues. The venue should be able to cater for all, so consider both its physical accessibility and what other means may be necessary to ensure the meeting can include everybody – an induction loop, for example.

The most important materials needed for project presentations are scheme models and drawings. You should treat other materials as secondary. If teams want a projector to display images, it is essential that they should also make hard-copy information available at A1 size for examination by a group (make sure you know whether this can be accommodated and inform your visitors).

In making the choice between a regular or peripatetic venue, you should consider their relative merits. Both have advantages and disadvantages, and these will vary for different kinds of panel meeting. If meetings are always to take place in the same venue, then it is possible to get all of the above aspects right and not have to think them through anew on each occasion. If you choose a venue to tie in with a site visit, then you should seek a suitable one each time.

Panel members should receive agenda papers in advance to help them prepare for the meeting. This should include useful information about the projects they are to see, but it is not essential that the panel members should see scheme designs before the meeting. To ask for this may in any case impose additional work on the visitors.
case not be convenient for those presenting, who may be working on the proposal up to the last minute. This is also the opportunity for panel members to declare any conflicts of interest.

A panel may be set up to review all the projects in a particular sector – new hospitals, for example. In other cases, you will need to choose which projects to review. Questions you should consider before deciding include:

- is advice actively being sought by the applicant or planning authority?
- is advice offered likely to be taken?
- is the scheme at an early enough stage for advice to be useful? (For example, the panel may consider that the design team is not up to the task in hand, in which case it would be better to say this sooner rather than later, before too much design work has been done so that a new team can be found.)
- is the local planning authority confronting a difficult decision where design is a central issue?
- does a scheme, even though not of great significance in itself, typify design issues that recur frequently?
- is the scheme one that will be important in setting a standard for an area of redevelopment?
- is this an opportunity for lessons learned to be disseminated?

CABE has found that design panels work most effectively when they are reviewing designs and building proposals, rather than strategies. A masterplan that makes definite proposals about design, in terms of the layout of buildings and space, massing and so on, can be reviewed. But an urban design framework that does not go this far is less likely to be a suitable subject for a panel review. Increasingly, it is valuable to review documents such as those proposed by local planning authorities – particularly in the light of new planning policy that demands good design. But in our experience, other forms of review will prove more effective.

It is worth bearing in mind that a panel review may result in advice that a scheme is well designed and not in need of any significant changes. A thorough process that results in such advice is still worthwhile. For example, in cases where the proposed scheme is controversial locally, it may give planning officers or councillors the confidence and external endorsement they need to give the scheme the go-ahead. This also sets standards and helps in the collation of best-practice examples to refer to at future reviews.
Site visits

Ideally, a panel review meeting should be preceded by a site visit by all who are to take part in the review. This is not always easy or practical, but a review is likely to lack credibility if there is nobody present who knows the site. At CABE, a staff member visits the site, with a panel member or members if they are available. Other panels may do this differently. Where no one has visited the site, good information should be available at the time of the review in the form of aerial photos, other site photos and possibly video footage. The applicant or panel staff could provide this. It is also possible, of course, that panel members may be familiar with the site from previous experience or their general knowledge.

Timing and conduct at meetings

CABE's experience suggests that panels can review most projects effectively in the space of one hour, although occasionally for large or complex projects more time might be needed. It is in the promoter's interest to consider carefully the main points that they wish to get across. Where appropriate, the panel can invite the project promoter to explain the brief, aims and objectives as briefly as possible – in two to three minutes – before handing over to the architect or designer. About 15 to 25 minutes for the presentation, with the focus on the main issues of design, is more than adequate, with the remainder given to discussion where the detail of each scheme is likely to emerge.

The chair should then invite the panel members to make comments and ask for any clarification or further explanation as necessary. Those presenting should have the chance to counter any criticisms, but the chair should not allow the project team, who have already had their say, to dominate the discussion.
A design review offers the benefits of objectivity, pointing out issues that those involved have got too close to be able to recognise. Some criticism may occasionally be unwelcome to those who have committed time, effort and money to a project. Therefore the panel members and the chair should be mindful of the standpoint of the project team. However, in order for panel meetings to be effective, when necessary, panel members must have the stomach to voice fundamental criticism in front of those who have presented the scheme, as opposed to making them in private later.

It is useful for the chair to structure the meeting so that it proceeds from the general to the particular, and from points affecting the strategy for the project as a whole to more detailed aspects of the design. However, the discussion should not follow a rigorous checklist of topics.

Finally, once the chair has summarised the discussion, it is usually best for those presenting to leave the room so that the chair and panel can confirm their views in private and for the staff members drafting the advice letter to ensure all points made have been covered. However, panel members should express any fundamental points or reservations about the project before the visitors have left the room. By the time they leave the visitors should have a good idea of the panel’s views.

The chair should give clear guidance to the staff member charged with writing the final letter detailing the panel’s views. If there are major differences of opinion between panel members, they should discuss this openly and reach a resolution, again before the visitors leave the room. The question to ask is: what advice are we going to give the project team?

The principal output from a panel meeting should be a piece of written advice. Since the purpose of this advice is to be useful to those involved with the project, it should not simply take the form of a set of minutes of the meeting. Neither should views expressed be attributed to individuals. The person writing up the meeting must turn what was said into a coherent narrative that provides advice which can be acted on. This skill should not be underestimated.

The chair should play a key role in providing a clear steer as to the direction and sense of the advice that emerges, and in scrutinising, moderating and approving the draft. It is not easy to chair a meeting effectively and to take full notes at the same time, so these roles are more commonly separated.
It may be useful to think of framing the advice so that it falls into one of the following three categories:

- **green light**: the scheme is a good one, or at least fundamentally acceptable (though there may be scope for minor improvements)
- **amber light**: the scheme is in need of significant changes in order to make it acceptable, but this is not a matter of starting from scratch
- **red light**: the scheme is fundamentally flawed and a fresh start is needed

In the case of a ‘red light’ conclusion, the advice should make clear what is being questioned: whether it is the brief, the aims and objectives of the project, or the design. This is a perfectly legitimate role for a panel. For example, if the panel thinks the client has asked the architect to put too much accommodation on the site, it should say so.

**Follow up**

Whilst no design review panel will be able to offer continuous involvement with a scheme, it is important to be able to offer some follow-up advice, particularly if the scheme is one that the panel could not support. A meeting to explain the letter sent out after the review should not be required. However, staff members should be prepared to offer clarification if it is needed.

The panel should offer to review a scheme again when issues raised have been addressed and the scheme amended.

**Confidentiality and publicity**

The advice that results from the meeting should be made available to the client, the project team and the planning authority. Wherever possible, you should make the advice available to the public, either on request or via a website. However, there may well be cases where it will be appropriate to give advice on a confidential basis. This particularly applies to pre-planning schemes that are not in the public domain, where the developer may feel that publicity may damage his/her commercial interests. Advice should be given in confidence only where it has been requested by the applicant and on the condition that the applicant will advise the panel of any plans to publicise the scheme, so that it can then make its views public.

Advice is given in confidence in these cases because it encourages applicants to seek design guidance at an early stage when their plans are fluid and the panel’s views can have most impact.

All information held by public bodies is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. In the case of controversial projects, a panel’s views may be of interest to the press, or to members of the public, who may seek access to scheme information under the provisions of the FOIA. Subject to the exemptions of the Act (particularly those relating to commercial interests and information provided in confidence) you may be obliged to disclose information on request even if the panel’s advice was initially given on a confidential basis.
You should monitor and evaluate the panel’s work on a regular basis, including finding out whether those coming before design review acted on the panel’s advice, and whether those receiving it found the advice useful. Although the timescales can be extremely lengthy, this process should in due course involve evaluation of the completed project and how or whether the advice was beneficial. Fundamentally, the evaluation should focus on whether or not the advice of the panel was taken, and if the scheme was better as a result. The work of a design review panel is not just to highlight where schemes can improve, but to do so in such a way that a client or local planning authority is able to address the panel’s concerns. Therefore, to some extent, the improvements made are only as good as the quality of the advice given.

Lessons learnt from the design review process may be useful to you as well as to those receiving advice, and you should consider methods for capturing and making use of these lessons.

Design review meetings themselves can provide valuable learning opportunities, for example for staff involved in a particular scheme – although it is important not to turn design review meetings into a spectator sport.

Ultimately, the success of any design review panel will be dependent on the quality of the advice given, the efficiency of the organisation behind it, and the willingness of those receiving the advice to take it.
**South East regional design panel**

The South East regional design panel (SERDP) was established in 2002 as England’s first regional design review panel. It is run by the Kent Architecture Centre and funded by the South East England Development Agency. The SERDP reviews proposals for large and sensitive developments across the south east region for local authorities, the development industry, community groups, and built environment professionals. The panel is contracted to comment on a minimum of 70 schemes a year, of which it reviews 40 through actual panel meetings. The staff team offers advice on 30 more projects in consultation with the deputy chair.

The agencies involved appointed 40 panel members following a national advertising campaign. The selection process sought to reflect the diversity of the region and drew members from different built environment professions. The panel also includes a number of young designers from smaller regional practices and involves them in a range of regional design issues. It also includes staff from local authorities and regional public agencies. Good critics tend to listen carefully, express themselves clearly, comment constructively and be good at building a consensus. They can also come from a variety of backgrounds.

Meetings take place once or twice a month in different locations around the region. Between four and six panel members attend each meeting and spend the day reviewing three to four projects. The panel also invites the local planning authority to attend and give its view. It attempts to review schemes at an early stage in the design process when the panel’s advice can have most impact. Members are briefed on the proposals and key issues prior to each review and go on a guided site visit for most schemes. The panel aims to provide a holistic review of a project’s design merits. A written report or letter is circulated to the attending panel members for comment before being sent to those involved.

www.serdp.org.uk

www.architecturecentre.org
Ten tips for success

1 **Provide sufficient resources.** Doing design review well is not cheap. Adequate financial and staff support is essential to ensure an effective and professional operation and sufficient space.

2 **Sort out the logistics.** You need good administrative support to coordinate the review and to allow for easy delivery of presentation materials. The room should allow for a presentation that the panel can see and hear properly to gain a thorough understanding of a scheme.

3 **Write good reports.** Writing up the panel meetings is an important skill. You will waste high-calibre advice from panel members if you fail to communicate that advice clearly and effectively afterwards.

4 **Allow independence.** A panel should be independent, free to say what it thinks and not obliged to modify its views to suit someone else’s policies. It is there to advise, not to decide or to instruct. It should speak as it finds and let others decide how to act on the advice.

5 **Get your timing right.** Panels must review schemes at the right stage. This means seeing projects sooner rather than later, when designs are still being developed and designers can take on board suggestions readily. Reviewing a planning application scheme is usually too late.

6 **Ensure good panel membership.** Panel members should be experts with a diverse range of backgrounds, skills and expertise.

7 **Appoint an able chair.** The panel chair must be skilled at chairing meetings, as well as respected in their field – they must have people skills as well as professional skills.

8 **Explain the purpose of advice.** Be clear about who your advice is for, and what they are expected to do about it.

9 **Give praise as well as criticism.** Advice should be positive about good aspects as well as critical of flaws.

10 **Stay public.** Local residents, groups and the press are likely to be interested in the panel’s views. The scrutineers should be prepared to be scrutinised, so be as public in your views as you can.
CABE’s design review service provides an independent, expert assessment of significant architectural proposals, advice that is recognised as an essential part of the planning process. Design review panels – small groups of leading professionals offering detailed design advice – are at the centre of the design review process. CABE is keen to see other agencies set up their own panels. *How to do design review* is based on CABE’s own experience: it offers tips on setting up a new panel, its day-to-day operation and on how to get the very best from the expertise available to help achieve what we want, which is to improve the quality of the built environment in which we live, work and play.