



Place and Design Panel

Report to the Evaluation Board

Summary of revisions to Terms of Reference and Governance arrangements for the Place and Design Panel

1.0 Introduction

The Panel has been in operation for just over 1 year undertaking 12 sittings and reviewing 15 projects varying in nature, stage of development and complexity. These have included projects on our key regeneration sites, vacant sites requiring redevelopment and smaller sites which contribute to the overall quality of the Place.

In presenting this summary report to the Evaluation Board we are seeking endorsement of the proposed changes to the Governance procedures that would benefit the outcome of the design review process.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to summarise the key areas where Governance arrangements have been revised. The changes are made in order to more accurately reflect the manner in which the Place and Design Panel (the Panel) is now run and governed following the lessons learned in the first year.

3.0 Panel logo

The Panel logo, inspirational phrase and document format that accompanies all panel documents gives the Panel its own identity and means that the documents are easily recognisable. This stylised format will now be incorporated further in the presentation of the revised terms of reference on agreement with the Evaluation Board.

4.0 Brief and Core Ethos of Panel;

The Panel was set up with the advice and direction of key organisations such as the Scottish Government, Architecture and Design Scotland, The

Improvement Service, Homes for Scotland, The Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde and professionals with experience of Design Review Panels.

The core ethos of the West Dunbartonshire Place and Design Panel provides the shared vision around what the Panel aimed to achieve;

Core Ethos:

Provision of objective, professional advice to designers, developers and other council services will be the primary core purpose of the Place and Design Panel. Driving high quality design of the built environment and the urban context in which it sits is the critical consideration for all development projects coming before it. An enabler and not an obstacle maker the Panel will work collaboratively with developers, architects and contractors and assist in the design process to see that those projects contribute to a culture of quality and a high standard of design excellence; resulting in a built environment that raises aspirations, elevates levels of health and wellbeing and increases Economic vitality.

5.0 Summary of proposed operational changes

5.1 Recruitment, Panellist Numbers and diversity of skills;

An initial advertising campaign targeting a broad range of expertise, experience and skills was conducted in early 2018, supplemented by on-going recruitment to ensure diversity of skills, career stage, gender and age amongst the members.

The Panel can now draw from over 70 professionals with a wealth of skills, experience and local knowledge.

The initial Governance document indicated that no fewer than 4 panellists, and ideally 5, would be required for a Panel sitting. It was also specified that, of these, there should be at least one each from the disciplines of Urban Design, Landscape Architecture and Architecture. The updated Governance document states that the unique circumstances of each review will require a specific skill-set, tailored to that proposal. Although it acknowledges that at least 4 Panellists will usually be needed. The ability to align skills and respond to the specifics of each proposal has proven to be a key strength of the Panel.

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The high interest of volunteers keen to contribute to the Panel and the wider West Dunbartonshire agenda has enabled the overall time commitment required of Panellists in a given year to be a maximum of 2 Panels in the first year. The large number of volunteers with expertise and skills spanning more than one discipline has allowed added flexibility when arranging special or last minute Panel sittings or in the case of a Panel member being absent without prior notice being given, the Panel can still proceed with a reduced number of Panellists.

The introduction of 'new' Panellists is also better facilitated with the increased pool of Panellists. Panellists sitting for the first time on the Place and Design Panel are invited alongside those more familiar with the workshop format and the collaborative, convivial way the Place and Design Panel conduct design review.

5.2 Pre Panel Information;

The preparation of the Pre-panel information falls to the presenter to the Panel. It was initially thought this would be prepared by the Place and Design Officer however the in depth knowledge around how best to present design development sits with the presenter.

Focusing on scene setting; site analysis and context, the Pre-Panel information is prepared with the advice of the Place and Design officer, based around the stage the project is at, the discussions with Planning Officers and the reason for bringing the project to the Panel.

Presenters are encouraged to hold the 'reveal' of the proposal until the Panel session which has proven a successful way to retain a freshness in the natural conversation that is undertaken whilst preventing pre-formed views coming to the table.

5.3 Panel Process - timing;

The original Governance document sets out a formal process as to how the Panel sessions would proceed. It was expected that 2 projects would be reviewed per 2 hour session; that times would be allocated to presenters, with a set period for clarification questions and a structured approach to the review would offer the best output in terms of the key themes that the Panel discussed.

While the Panel has successfully reviewed more than one project in a sitting, this is only achievable with the alignment of suitable skills to review both projects and if the reduced time allocation does not compromise the quality/outcome of the review. It depends also on the complexity and nature

of the development. Maximising the review process, the Panel does not apply stringent timing to any aspect of the review. Dialogue between the Panel and presenter is unrestricted but is controlled by the Place and Design Officer throughout the sitting to ensure it does not become unrealistic or veer too off topic. The Governance document asks only for a concise presentation that supplements the Pre-Panel information, relates to the project stage and furnishes the Panel with a rounded understanding of the project. Additional guidance in the preparation of the presentation is offered by the Place and Design Officer.

5.4 Criteria for Review;

It was expected that after the first year of operation, the Governance document would set out in more detail, the Criteria for Review at the Panel.

The experience of the Panel has reinforced that review criteria should not become a check list or a list of questions to 'get through' and the bespoke approach to the arrangement of each Panel is key to the overall success.

The depth of the discussions undertaken at the Panel is also a testament to the calibre of professionals on the Panel and to the success of aligning the skills with the proposals. The Panellists tend to rely on their own knowledge, experiences and skills as professionals in their field to bring forth points of discussions that are relevant to the proposals guided by the Place and Design Officer.

5.5 Remit;

Experience has enabled the remit of the Panel to be more clearly specified within the Governance document. Activities that it was initially hoped the Panel might undertake, are now within the remit of the Place & Design Officer- for example, coordinating partners involved in the development strategy for Queens Quay and working with other Council Services involved in built environment projects such as Housing, Asset Management, Education and Consultancy Services.

5.6 Integration of Panel into wider Planning Processes;

The revised Governance document strengthens the integral role the Panel plays in the Development Management, Planning or other Council processes by supporting and assisting these processes and projects.

Close working relationships have been fostered between Planning Officers and the Place and Design Officer with regular dialogue throughout the life of a project.

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The sites, projects and areas of Policy that may benefit from input of the Panel are identified at an early stage by officers, recognising the benefit of the Panel and of this independent advice to achieve the shared vision for well designed places.

In advance of a Panel, the Planning and Building Standards Manager and relevant Planning or Policy Officer and other key officers with an interest in the project, meet with the Place and Design Officer to establish the key areas where the Panel input is sought on Planning specific issues. Further discussion is undertaken up to and after the submission of an application for Planning Consent to ensure the Panel themes are being addressed appropriately. It is also integrated with the Elected Member Briefing and PAN processes. This has resulted in good integration of the activities of the Panel within wider planning processes and resulted in a collective approach.

5.7 Place and Design Officer

At the Pilot sitting of the Panel where a Panel member was asked to chair, it was quickly recognised that this was a duplication of the role of Place and Design officer, who knows the most about the process, has ownership of it and understands the wider aims of the sitting. Equally, the formality of having a 'Chair' to the Panel was at odds with the collaborative workshop setting of the Panel.

Following the Pilot Panel, the Place and Design officer has continued as facilitator of the Panel sittings, co-ordinating the key areas of focus, ensuring the ambitions of the Council in achieving quality development are upheld, with involvement that spans all the Panel activities.

5.8 Reaching of consensus and summing up;

A formal process for reaching consensus, as identified in the original Governance document, while this is important to set out, this has not been undertaken during the Panel as yet.

In summing up the Panel proceedings, the Place and Design officer draws out the key themes that the Panel have focused on during the session as an opportunity for Panellists to agree/disagree that these are the key themes, or to clarify, or embellish these points further. This approach has received good feedback because the Panel and the presenters leave the session with a shared knowledge of what will be contained in the Report.

5.9 The Report;

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The report is an account of the key themes that emerge during the Panel discussion and the key document that presenters/designers are expected to respond to following a Panel session. It is a summary of the proceedings and is issued to all presenters and Panellists in draft form to allow for rectification of any factual errors.

Agreement that the Panel report is an accurate reflection of the session is sought, allowing those themes to be responded to by the presenter and to be reviewed at any future Panel sessions.

The Panel report can be referred to in Design and Access Statements and forms a material consideration in the determination of a planning application for that proposal. A section has also been added to the Governance document to strengthen the position of the Place and Design Officer and clarify that in the event of disagreement over the Panel Report, the Place and Design Officer's account of the Panel's discussion for inclusion in the report will be final.

5.10 Administration;

Initially, it was hoped that minutes of Panel sittings were to be taken by a Panel Support Officer. This has not been possible, and it is felt that structured minutes would not fit with the Panel's informal workshop format. The Report is therefore the key document to arise from Panel sittings.

The Agenda, set by the Place and Design officer is issued along with the Pre-Panel information no later than 3 days in advance of the Panel sitting while the Report aims to be issued within 2 weeks of the Panel sitting.

There is often difficulty in working to the 2 week time scale due to the emerging busy workload of the Place and Design officer and a limited resource to support the Panel activities.

In the next year the Place and Design Officer will review the way in which Reports are compiled (with consideration being given to recording the summing up at the Panel) and how and when documents pertaining to Panel sessions are made public.