

Report to	Planning Committee
Date	12 July 2012
By	Director of Planning
Title of Report	South Downs National Park Design Review Panel
Purpose of Report	To inform the committee about the South Downs National Park (SDNP) Design Review Panel process

Recommendation: That the Committee agrees to the establishment of a South Downs National Park Design Review Panel and that output from the panel will be considered in development management and planning policy making within the South Downs National Park

1. Introduction

- 1.1 It has been a long term plan of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) to establish a Design Review Panel (DRP) to help raise design standards within the South Downs National Park (SDNP). This has been included in the Service Plan and is a key objective for the SDNPA Design Officer. This is supported by the statutory duty imposed by the Planning Act 2008 to have regard to the desirability of achieving good design and the more recent National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which states that: "Local planning authorities should have local design review arrangements in place to provide assessment and support to ensure high standards of design." The process of design review delivers public benefit by improving the quality of architecture and design, including the design of landscapes, streets and public spaces.

2. Background

- 2.1 The need and potential for a SDNP DRP has been researched and consulted. It has been tested both through a 'critical friend' workshop and SDNP Members Workshop. The proposed approach is based on the best practice advice produced by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment [CABE], which is now part of the Design Council. Timescales of development activities are listed below:

- 1 January 2012 Reviewed CABE best practice advice
- 26 January Consulted Hampshire Advisory Panel of Architects [HAPA]
- 7 March Consulted J Hearn, Winchester & Eastleigh DRP
- 14 March SDNPA officer group meeting
- 3 April SDNPA officer group meeting
- 27 April Planning Working Group
- 25 May Critical Friend Workshop
- 21 June Member Workshop

3. SDNP Design Review Panel Operation

- 3.1 The SDNP DRP will not be commercial and will provide free advice to applicants and the planning service on pre-application enquiries and advice on planning applications within the SDNP. It will also provide a sounding board for SDNPA design guidance and policies.

Schemes will be recommended for review by SDNPA planning officers and the officers of the delegated authorities according to their significance. Meetings will normally happen on a monthly basis although their frequency may be reduced by the panel according to demand. Output would be in the form of a report to planning officers within two working weeks of the review meeting.

- 3.2 The Design Review Panel would be most constructive in providing objective advice at an early stage in the planning process. It would also be useful in commenting on full applications, either giving support to good quality but challenging schemes or helping to resist those of lower quality.
- 3.3 The advice given will draw on professional knowledge and experience within a local and national context, offering the opportunity for comprehensive, multidisciplinary comments on development proposals.
- 3.4 Each Panel meeting will be attended by a chair, vice chair and four to eight additional panel Members. Panel Members will be drawn from a larger pool (matrix) of about 20 Members and each panel meeting will be organised to have a good mix of architects, landscape architects and urban (including rural) designers. Members with local knowledge will be mixed with those working at a national scale to benefit both from local contextual knowledge and national best practice.
- 3.5 Members will be affiliated with a relevant professional body representing their discipline, e.g. The Royal Institute of British Architects or Landscape Institute. Members will also be drawn from universities in the region. Members with a broad range of experience will be sought to ensure that they can relate to the landscape and built environment diversity of the SDNP.
- 3.6 The panel will be administered by the SDNPA Design Officer with the support of Planning Administration.
- 3.7 The SDNP DRP will consider applications at two levels of significance, depending on whether or not there are existing local design review arrangements in place. For the whole area of the SDNP it will consider a range of schemes that are significant because of size, impact, public interest, location or the setting of new standards for the future. Such schemes would normally be *called-in* for determination by the SDNPA planning authority. Where there are existing local design review arrangements in place (namely Winchester City Council, East Hampshire District Council, Mid Sussex District Council, Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council) the existing panels will continue to consider schemes of the level of significance that would not normally be called in by the SDNPA. Where there are no local design review arrangements in place (namely Chichester District Council, Horsham District Council, Arun District Council, Adur and Worthing Councils, Brighton & Hove City Council, Wealden District Council) the local planning authority will refer delegated schemes for SDNP design review according to agreed working protocols and a significance test.
- 3.8 In instances when schemes are considered by a local panel but the application is subsequently called in, representatives of the local panel will be invited to sit on the SDNP DRP to ensure continuity. Clear protocols will govern relationships between the SDNP DRP, local planning authorities and existing design review panels operating in the SDNP.
- 3.9 It is planned that meetings will take place once a month and will consider between one and five proposals at each session. The meeting dates and venues will be allocated on a yearly basis. Panel meetings will be held in locations that are accessible by rail. Meetings will not be open to the public although community representatives and SDNPA Members will be entitled to attend as observers by prior agreement.
- 3.10 A number of preparatory meetings have been held in relation to the proposed Design Review Panel and positive feedback has been received from:
 - SDNPA Members;
 - SDNPA officers;
 - Local Design Review Members (operating within the SDNP);

- local authority heads of planning;
- local authority design, conservation and landscape officers; and
- RIBA South.

Some of the proposed governance arrangements have been amended as a result of comments received.

- 3.11 Letters are currently being drafted for dissemination to the professional bodies (RIBA and the Landscape Institute), architects, local authorities, local design review panels, universities, stakeholders and other interest groups to advise them of the panel and to invite applications for membership. Recruitment of Members will be through application form and interview. Inaugural Panel Members will be chosen by a group of SDNPA officers and Members. Thereafter the recruitment and selection of Panel Members will be done by the Panel itself, in partnership with SDNPA officers and Members.
- 3.12 It is expected that the panel will be up and running by September 2012 with a review of the process, panel and comments taking place after 6 months. A subsequent report will be presented to committee once the review has been carried out to provide an update.

4. Resources

- 4.1 Design Review Panel Members will not be reimbursed for their time but only for subsistence and travel expenses. Additional costs may include room booking.
- 4.2 It is proposed for the SDNP DRP to hold an annual AGM, and for Members to attend a SDNP induction and training event.
- 4.3 There may be costs associated with advertising for and recruitment of members.
- 4.4 The upper limit of the estimated yearly cost of the SDNP DRP is £20,000. This will be funded from the existing planning budget.
- 4.5 There are resource implications to the workload of the Design Officer and Planning Administrators. Time commitments should decrease as familiarity with the process increases.

5. Risk Management

- 5.1 There are a number of risks associated with Design Review Panels. These and mitigating actions are listed below:
- Reputational risk to SDNPA – draw up clear Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct that define roles and responsibilities of Panel Members
 - Disagreement between SDNPA and DRP – induction, training and design principles should encourage Panel Members to consider schemes from the perspective of the SDNP
 - Freedom of Information Requests and Confidentiality – develop policies for dealing with these
 - Conflicts of Interest – develop policies for dealing with interests
- 5.2 The risks associated with not establishing a Design Review Panel Are:
- Negative impact on design quality in SDNP
 - Indicate lack of commitment to design and environmental quality

6. Crime and Disorder Implication

- 6.1 It is considered that the proposal does not raise any crime and disorder implications.

7. Human Rights Implications

- 7.1 This proposal has been considered in light of statute and case law and any interference with an individual's human rights is considered to be proportionate to the aims sought to be realised.

8. Equalities Act 2010

8.1 Due regard, where relevant, has been taken to the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equalities Act 2010.

9. External Consultees

9.1 None

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Appendices	None
SDNPA Consultees	Director of Planning Senior Solicitor Head of Financial Services Deputy Monitoring Officer