

REPORT TO PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Title: **RBWM DESIGN REVIEW PANEL**

Date: 6th May 2009

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Wards affected: All wards

1. SUMMARY

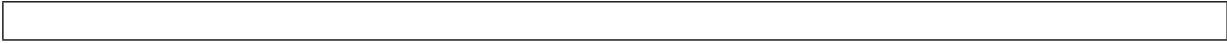
- 1.1.1 In November 2008 the Council established a Design Review Panel consisting of volunteer independent local professionals with built environment skills such as architecture. Ultimately the design review process should support and promote improvements to design quality of development within the Borough and improve the quality of new development taking place in our towns.
- 1.1.2 It is preferable for schemes to be subject of Design Review well before they are submitted as planning applications to give sufficient opportunity to influence improvements.
- 1.1.3 The Panel has so far met three times and has considered three different schemes, one of which has been reviewed twice. These are summarised below:
- A housing scheme in Windsor overlooking the Long Walk has a resolution to grant planning permission by the Council following improvements suggested by the Design Review Panel.
 - A major office development in Maidenhead town centre has been reviewed twice, leading to improvements in the form of the buildings and the quality of public spaces within the scheme. Officers are continuing to work with the developer on improvements before the application is made.
 - A major hotel development in Maidenhead town centre has been reviewed with significant design quality improvements suggested. It is expected that this scheme will be reviewed by the Panel again when the scheme has developed further.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Panel notes this report, which is provided for information

What will be different for residents as a result of this decision?

Residents can be assured that the Council is committed to creating and improving the quality of buildings and public spaces within the Borough to enhance the quality of the local environment.



3. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Why is Design Review important?

- 3.1.1 Well-designed homes, streets, parks, workplaces, schools and hospitals have a positive impact on the quality of people's lives. The Borough is subject to huge development pressures resulting from its location, the quality of the environment and the subsequent land values. Alongside this at local level the Council is committed to protecting the Green Belt from inappropriate development, enhancing the local environment, taking a leading role in encouraging sustainable design practices and rejuvenating its towns, particularly Maidenhead.
- 3.1.2 Design review objectively tests the quality of proposals by isolating poor schemes, helping to identify aspects of promising schemes that could be improved and supporting well-designed schemes. It ultimately supports and promotes improvements in the design quality of development by motivating and inspiring. Using the skills of established independent professionals provides an objective and fresh viewpoint and a breadth and depth of experience that may not otherwise be available to the Council. This adds credibility and strength of voice to the Council's position.
- 3.1.3 The RBWM Design Review Panel has two objectives:
1. To provide an objective, independent review of development proposals for the Council, applicants and potential applicants.
 2. To provide motivation and inspiration for enhancing the quality and sustainability of development within the Borough to build on its sense of place, reputation and attractiveness

3.2 How does the Design Review Panel operate?

- 3.2.1 The Development Control Manager runs the Design Review Panel, working with Planning Officers and scheme promoters to place schemes with significant potential for public realm or townscape enhancement before the Panel. It is preferable for schemes to be subject of Design Review well before they are submitted as planning applications to give sufficient opportunity to influence improvements.
- 3.2.2 In order to establish the Panel, the Development Control Manager invited four local professionals to join for the first year. Following this it is intended to invite applications for professionals to join the volunteer pool to increase its diversity and range of expertise. This will maximise the potential for the right range of skills being present for discussions, but will ensure Panel members will be able to get to know each other and have mutual understanding.
- 3.2.3 Members of the Panel are expected to have a proven track record in at least one relevant specialism such as architecture, landscape architecture, development finance or sustainable construction.
- 3.2.4 Promoters are invited to present to the Panel using any media they wish. The Panel is then able to ask about the proposals to aid their understanding, review and

assessment and those promoting have the opportunity to counter criticisms. The Panel are left to discuss the proposal in more detail before the promoters return to receive the Panel's views from the Chairman. The Panel follows up the meeting with clear written advice.

- 3.2.5 Whilst the Council hosts the Panel, it is independent of it. This is important for the Panel to operate effectively and to have the confidence of those presenting to it. The Council is advised by the advice of the Panel, but is not bound to follow it in its role as Local Planning Authority.
- 3.2.6 The process of Design Review is intended to be positive. However, where it and the Council are unsuccessful in securing necessary design quality improvements, the Council may ask a representative of the Panel to work with it to provide evidence as part of appeals.
- 3.2.7 As a publicly operated body the Panel's views are the subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Conflicts of interest – both actual and perceived – can damage the reputation of the Panel. Panel members with a conflict of interest therefore declare it at the first opportunity so that it can be registered and acted upon. As the Panel is publicly funded in the public interest Panel members should abide the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life.

4. OPTIONS AVAILABLE AND RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 Options

	Option	Comments	Financial Implications
1.	Note this report, encourage the Design Review process and make positive suggestions about future improvements	Recommended	Revenue: Officer time within current approved budget Capital: None
2.	Discourage the Design Review process	Not recommended	Revenue: Reduced use of officer time Capital: None

4.2 Risk assessment

- 4.2.1 The Design Review process not only supports improvements in the quality of the local environment but should also reduce the likelihood of appeals being made against Council decisions. Major rejuvenation is planned, particularly in Maidenhead, and the presence of the Design Review Panel as a resource to assist the Council is important to the success of these improvements. It also assists in raising the profile of sustainable construction, consistent with the Council's guidance on the subject currently in preparation.
- 4.2.2 Discouraging the Design Review process reduces the ability of the Council to improve the quality of the local environment. It would also reduce the ability of the

Council to lead in relation to the sustainable construction agenda and reduce the skills available to the Council to ensure the success of the Maidenhead rejuvenation. The Design Review Process commits minimal Officer support compared to its potential significant contribution over time.

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1.1 The following implications have been addressed where indicated below.

Financial	Legal	Human Rights Act	Planning	Sustainable Development	Diversity & Equality
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Background Papers:
