

Helping local people choose good design

Design review network annual report 2009/10



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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,
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CABE
1 Kemble Street London WC2B 4AN
T 020 7070 6700 F 020 7070 777
E enquiries@cabe.org.uk www.cabe.org.uk

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Foreword

The quality of the built environment affects us all. Decisions made now about proposed developments will affect local communities for generations. The distinctive identity of much-loved places can be changed forever by an intrusive scheme. But a well-considered scheme can bring lasting benefits.

Local people must decide whether proposals for buildings and public spaces should go ahead or not. But they often need advice in assessing schemes. For example, it takes a trained eye to see from technical drawings what the likely impact of a proposal will be.

Design review offers local people expert advice so that they can make the most informed and confident choices about the proposals that come their way. It is a well-tested way of discussing complex design issues objectively. It leads to improvements, and often saves money.

The network of design review panels operating across England provides local authorities and others with this advice. This report marks the end of the first year of that network – an affiliation between CABE and the eight leading design review panels across England. It looks at how the panels work and at how their involvement produced better-designed buildings and spaces. We've had excellent feedback from people who came to design review – and we report some of their views here.

It is clear to me that this network of panels can work well for all of us. The existence of the network ensures that a useful, efficient and economical service is available nationwide.

I look forward to our continuing work together.

MJ Long OBE

CABE commissioner for design review

Introduction

Design review is a service that benefits people by improving the quality of architecture, landscape architecture and urban design, including the design of streets and public spaces.

Its key features are that it:

- offers support and encouragement for good design
- is conducted by practitioners with experience in design and development, a track record of good design in their own projects and the skills to assess schemes objectively
- advises decision makers on how to improve design quality to meet the needs of their communities and customers
- can question the design brief
- identifies weak and inappropriate schemes at an early stage, when radical design changes can be made with relatively little waste of time and effort
- supports decision makers in resisting poorly designed schemes and invasive schemes from powerful national developers
- offers technical advice on schemes that will lead to their improvement; it does not redesign them
- offers technical expertise on complex issues such as sustainability
- can bring a breadth and depth of experience beyond that of the project team or planning authority
- puts individual schemes in their wider physical and economic context
- offers opportunities for continued learning, particularly on how to assess schemes for good design.

The design review network

CABE's design review panel was set up in 1999. It provides expert independent advice on the most strategic and significant schemes across England. It has conducted around 3,000 reviews to date.

The first design review panel outside of CABE was set up for the South East in 2002, funded by the South East England Development Agency. The number of panels had increased to eight by 2009.

In August 2009, the eight panels and CABE agreed to form an 'affiliated network'. This network sees the panels work together to ensure that schemes that are appropriate for design review are seen either by the CABE national panel or by one of the affiliated panels. The affiliated panels were identified by the chief planner in 2009 as a source of design advice for significant development projects in England.

In addition to the affiliated panels that make up the network a number of local and sub-regional design review panels exist. Their work is not covered by this report.

The service now delivers high-quality design advice through a well-governed peer review approach across the whole of England.

Collaboration between panels in identifying and allocating schemes for review ensures the best possible use of resources. This ensures that independent design review is available across England.

The panels review 20 per cent of the schemes they see in total through the network. The existence of the network ensures that more projects come to review earlier in the design development process. The earlier a scheme is reviewed, the greater the potential impact of the design review, and the greater the capacity to add value.

Scope of this report

This report details the activities and achievements of CABE's main design review panel. It excludes its special panels operating during 2009/10, covering schools, London 2012 and Crossrail.

The report examines figures for the whole of 2009/10, even though the affiliation arrangement was put in place in August 2009.

Eight affiliated panels and the CABE panel are covered by this report:

Name of panel or host organisation	Area of England covered
Opun	East Midlands
Inspire East	East of England
Ignite	North East
Places Matter!	North West
Kent Architecture Centre	South East
Creating Excellence	South West
MADE	West Midlands
Integreat Yorkshire	Yorkshire and Humber*
CABE	All England

* Panel established in January 2010.

The value of design review

1 Design review is independent

Design review is an independent, objective and high-quality technical service that is accessible to anyone involved in the development process. Because this advice is credible and trusted, design review can instil confidence and add credibility to those looking at schemes, whether it is a local councillor, planning officer or a developer.

2 Design review reaches 85 per cent of local authorities

In 2009/10, 204 local authorities benefited from the design review network, almost two thirds of the authorities in England. Many local authority areas do not need to face significant development every year; between 2006 and 2009 CABE reached 85 per cent of all local authorities. This gives a better sense of the reach of design review.

3 Design review is valued by its users

Design review is valued by its users: 96 per cent of local planning officers say that there are benefits from including design review in the planning system;¹ 67 per cent of these cited 'access to specialist expertise' as the main benefit. A third of reviews across the network are for returning schemes, demonstrating that design review is a continuing conversation as schemes change.

4 Design review is good value for money

In 2009/10, projects with a total construction value of £40.6 billion benefited from design review. That is roughly half the value of the £78 billion worth of large projects of over £10 million that went through planning last year. An estimated 176,800 homes were reviewed, enough to accommodate the population of Bristol. The whole design review network service cost £1.9 million – 0.005 per cent of the value of the development it reviewed.

¹ England-wide survey on the use of design review, March 2010 conducted with 277 local planning authorities.

Part 1 The impact of design review

Design review is an established and effective method for providing design advice to local authorities and the wider development community. The test of a service's success is in the difference it makes. Design review helps achieve the goals of a well-designed built environment and an enhanced quality of life.

Our research and analysis of user feedback and surveys shows that the scale and nature of design review's impact is considerable:

- design review has contributed to an increase in value of buildings and public spaces
- design review can accelerate the development management process, especially where there is a deadlock in negotiations over design issues
- design review has proved to be an extremely good value way of providing high-quality independent design advice.

Scale and nature of impact

First, consider the scale and nature of design review's impact on significant developments in England in 2009/10.

Construction value

Design review advised on schemes whose construction value totalled £40.6 billion in 2009/10. The CABE panel reviewed approximately £37 billion worth of projects while the affiliated panels reviewed schemes worth an additional £3.6 billion.

Design review had an effect on roughly half the significant development by value, as planning applications for some £78 billion of construction work were submitted in England last year for projects of £10 million or more.

Number of reviews

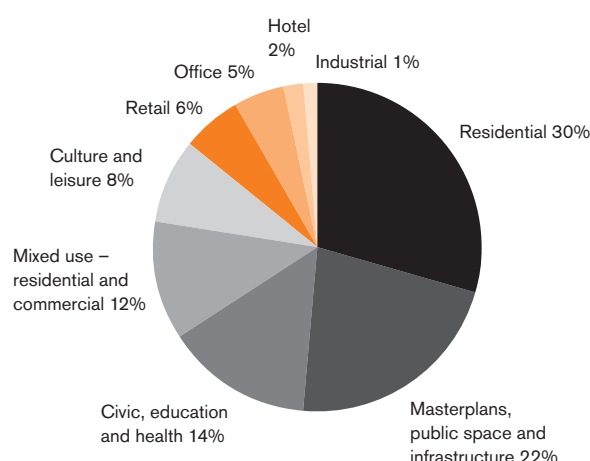
Despite a recession which has had a major impact on the construction sector, the number of schemes coming to design review remained high during 2009/10, and was consistent with previous years. Overall, the affiliated design review network carried out 676 reviews. The CABE panel conducted the equivalent of 352 reviews, in line with previous years, while the affiliated panels carried out 324.

Range of projects

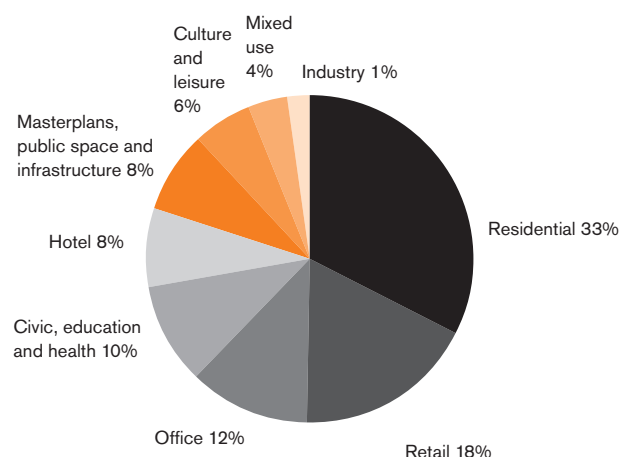
Design review has retained a focus on significant projects, but remains committed to supporting exemplary design and the opportunity to learn about new development and design typologies to make informed comments on them.

Figure 1 Types of project reviewed²

Affiliated panels



CABE panel



² Where projects have more than one use, we have separated them out.

Some 204 local and county authorities used the design review network during the past year, almost two thirds of England's local authorities. Of these, 64 worked with the CABE panel, 107 with affiliated panels, and 33 with both affiliated and CABE panels.

If we look at the three-year period covering 2006-09,³ CABE design review alone reviewed schemes from 85 per cent of all local authorities.

Figure 2 Local authorities and the volume of schemes reviewed

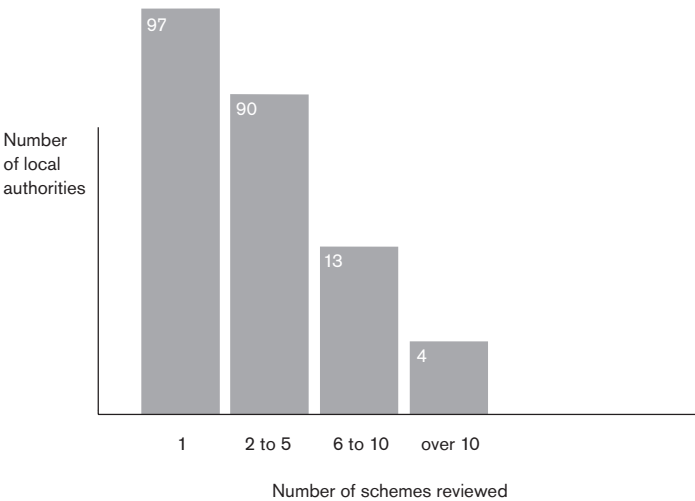
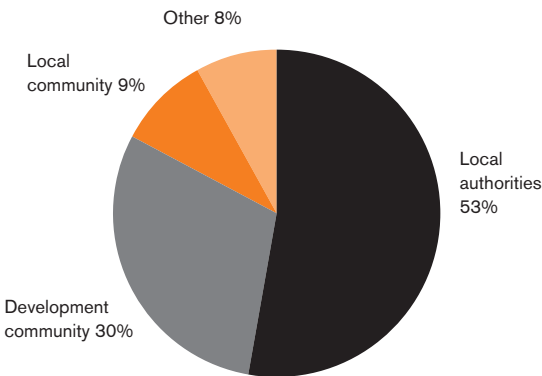


Figure 3 Proportion of requests for review from each user group

Who consults the affiliated design review panels?



Of these 204 authorities, the majority had between two and five schemes reviewed, with fewer than 20 authorities receiving reviews for six or more schemes. This last figure reflects the minor proportion of schemes that are so complex they require advice at critical points in their design development process. For example, see the Battersea Power Station case study (page 17).

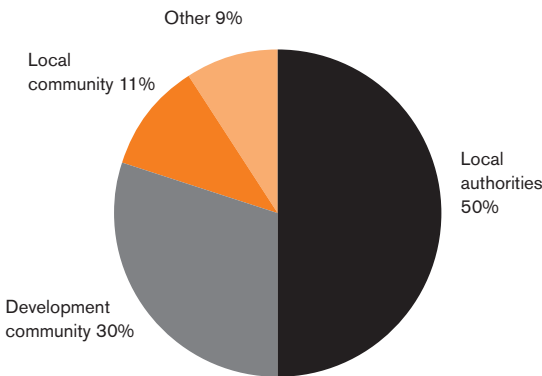
Range of users
Design review provides a service to three main groups:

Local planning authorities, seeking to improve the quality of design in their locality. Approximately 50 per cent of new requests for review in 2009/10 by the CABE panel were from local planning authorities. Of new requests received by the affiliated panels, those from local authorities accounted for 53 per cent.

Developers, architects and other consultants involved in promoting schemes for development. This group includes property developers working in the public or private sectors and members of their design team, including architects and other consultants. Both CABE and the affiliated panels received 30 per cent of their new requests from this group.

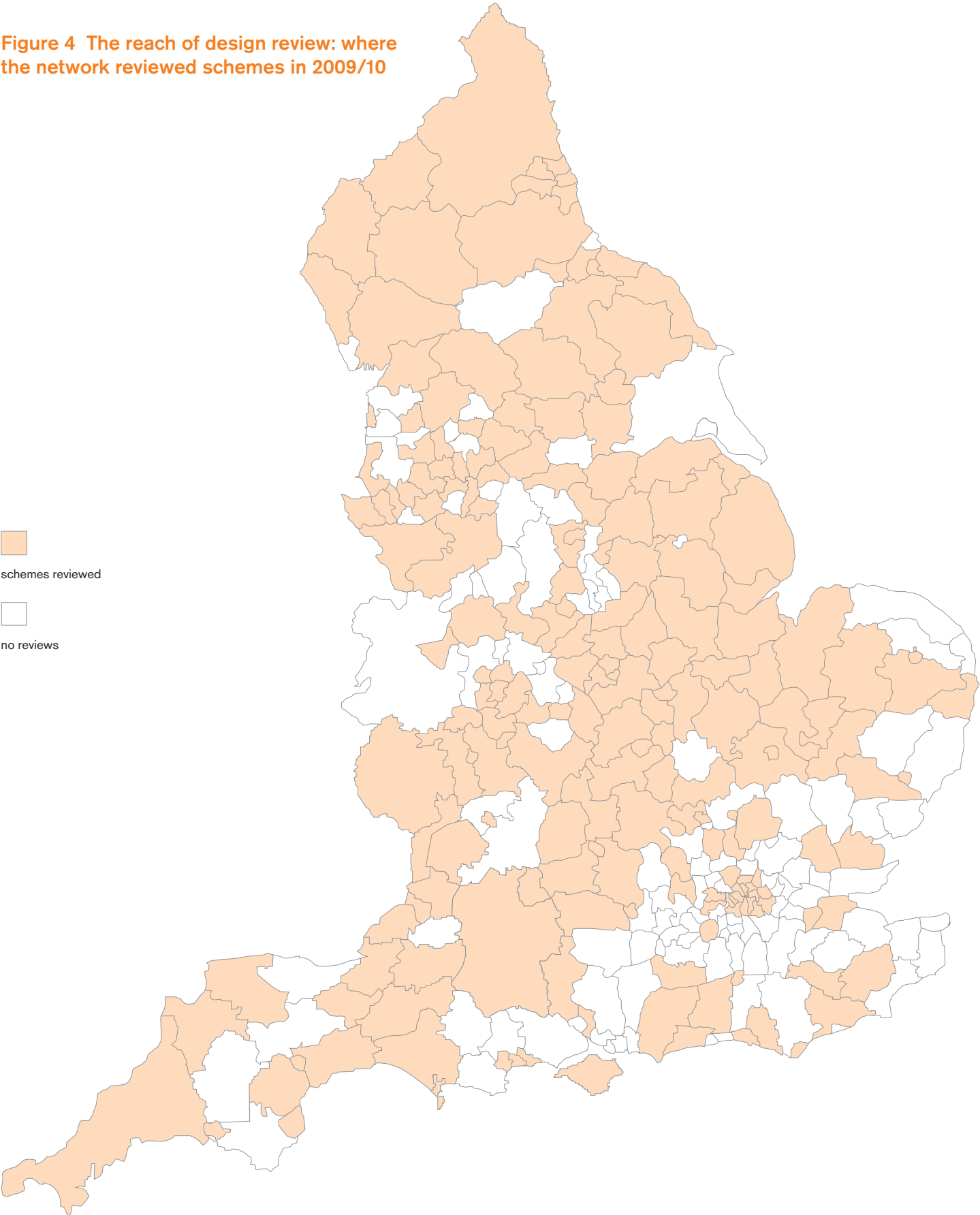
Local people or their representatives, affected by development rather than regulating or promoting it. This group accounts for 11 per cent of new requests for review received at CABE, and 9 per cent of those received at the affiliated panels.

Who consults the CABE design review panel?



3 Figures from 2006-2009.

Figure 4 The reach of design review: where the network reviewed schemes in 2009/10



The reach of design review: where the network reviewed schemes in 2009/10

Allerdale Borough Council	Erewash Borough Council	Peterborough City Council	West Berkshire Council
Amber Valley Borough Council	Exeter City Council	Plymouth City Council	West Dorset District Council
Arun District Council	Forest of Dean District Council	Poole Borough Council	West Lindsey District Council
Ashford Borough Council	Forest Heath District Council	Portsmouth City Council	Weymouth & Portland Borough Council
Aylesbury Vale District Council	Gateshead Council	Preston City Council	Wigan Council
Babergh District Council	Gloucester City Council	Reading Borough Council	Wiltshire Council
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	Gravesham Borough Council	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council	Wirral Council
Bassetlaw District Council	Greenwich Council	Redditch Borough Council	Wolverhampton City Council
Bath and North East Somerset Council	Hambleton District Council	Ribble Valley Borough Council	Worcestershire County Council
Birmingham City Council	Harborough District Council	Rochdale Borough Council	Worthing Borough Council
Blaby District Council	Harrogate Borough Council	Rochford District Council	Wychavon District Council
Blackburn Borough Council	Herefordshire Council	Rother District Council	
Blackpool Borough Council	Hertfordshire County Council	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council	
Bolsover District Council	Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council	Horsham District Council	Rugby Borough Council	
Bournemouth Borough Council	Ipswich Borough Council	Rushcliffe Borough Council	
Bradford Metropolitan District Council	Isle of Wight Council	Rutland County Council	
Breckland District Council	King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council	Ryedale District Council	
Brighton and Hove City Council		Salford City Council	
Bristol City Council	Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council	
Broadland District Council	Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council	Scarborough Borough Council	
Bromsgrove Council	Lake District National Park Authority	Sedgemoor District Council	
Burnley Borough Council	Lancaster City Council	Sefton Council	
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council	Leeds City Council	Selby District Council	
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council	Leicester City Council	Sevenoaks District Council	
Cambridge City Council	Leicestershire County Council	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	
Cambridgeshire County Council	Lincoln City Council	South Bucks District Council	
Camden Council	Lincolnshire County Council	South Derbyshire District Council	
Carlisle City Council	Liverpool City Council	South Gloucestershire Council	
Central Bedfordshire Council	London Borough of Barnet	South Holland District Council	
Chelmsford Borough Council	London Borough of Hackney	South Kesteven District Council	
Cheltenham Borough Council	London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham	South Lakeland District Council	
Cheshire East Council		South Norfolk Council	
Cheshire West & Chester Council (2)	London Borough of Haringey	South Oxfordshire District Council	
Chesterfield Borough Council	London Borough of Hounslow	South Somerset District Council	
Chichester District Council	London Borough of Islington	South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council	
Chiltern District Council	London Borough of Lambeth		
Chorley Borough Council	London Borough of Lewisham		
City of London Corporation	London Borough of Newham		
City of York Council	London Borough of Southwark		
Copeland Borough Council	London Borough of Tower Hamlets		
Corby Borough Council	London Borough of Waltham Forest		
Cornwall Council	Luton Borough Council		
Coventry City Council	Maldon District Council		
Craven District Council	Malvern Hills District Council		
Crawley Borough Council	Manchester City Council		
Croydon Council	Mansfield District Council		
Cumbria County Council	Medway Council		
Dacorum Borough Council	Melton Borough Council		
Darlington Borough Council	Mendip District Council		
Dartford Borough Council	Middlesbrough Council		
Derby City Council	Milton Keynes Council		
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council	Newark and Sherwood District Council		
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	Newcastle upon Tyne City Council		
Durham Council	North Devon Council		
Ealing Borough Council	North Somerset District Council		
East Cambridgeshire District Council	North Tyneside Council		
East Devon District Council	North West Leicestershire District Council		
East Hampshire District Council	North York Moors National Parks Authority		
East Hertfordshire District Council	North Yorkshire County Council		
East Lindsey District Council	Northampton Borough Council		
East Staffordshire Borough Council	Northumberland Council		
Eastbourne District Council	Norwich City Council		
Eastleigh Borough Council	Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council		
Eden District Council	Oxford City Council		
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council	Oxfordshire County Council		

Improvement in design

Design review has demonstrably raised the quality of design. In 2009/10, the CABE panel reported that seven out of 10 schemes that returned for review came back with improved designs.⁴

Attributable improvements

The experience of users of design review illustrates that the process contributes to better design. Importantly, users are able to attribute many of the improvements directly to design review. For instance, over 70 per cent of respondents to a survey conducted by the North East design review panel said that they would change an aspect of their design as a result of the review. Furthermore, nearly half reported that they would change aspects of their future practice as a result of the review process.

What people say about design review

‘These changes wouldn’t have happened without the panel. We wouldn’t have had the strategy, and without the strategy we couldn’t have had the changed brief.’

Local authority officer after scheme was reviewed by the South West panel

‘Without the panel’s involvement it would not have gained permission...the scheme was amended significantly.’

Local authority officer after scheme was reviewed by the South West panel

‘Design has improved as a direct result of the review.’

Trevor Castle, MACE project manager, after East of England panel review

Influence on planning decision making

Importantly, the design advice offered has proved relevant for influencing planning decision making, which is reflected in feedback received from users.

‘The scheme was recommended for approval with a unanimous committee decision from all councillors,’ says Dominic Chapman, partner at John Thompson & Partners, architect of the Nash Mills mixed-use development in Hemel Hempstead. The scheme had been brought to the East of England design review panel and revisions made that reflected the panel’s advice. As a result, the scheme has now been put forward as a ‘template for designing large schemes within communities’ and as a scheme of ‘design excellence’, Chapman adds.

‘The comments from the design review were very influential [when application was presented to planning committee] and have helped...to produce a much improved proposal.’

Richard Pitt, Wolverhampton Council, following West Midlands panel review

‘The contribution of MADE was significant in helping us achieve planning [permission]. While the first review was not negative, good points were raised, which we took on board completely. We reworked the scheme prior to the second review, which was very positive. The final scheme improved as a result of the panel’s comments and the final MADE report helped convince the local authority this was an exemplar scheme. Both review panels were excellent.’

Steve Spencer, Glenn Howells Architects

⁴ Joint target for CABE reporting to Communities and Local Government (Target C1) and Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Target 1A).

Disability Essex: East of England design review panel

Design review helps boost energy efficiency by a third

Development can be daunting for a first-time client. Yet despite the challenge of commissioning a new Centre for Disability Studies, charity Disability Essex still recognised the need to make its building an exemplar of sustainable construction for voluntary organisations. Bringing the scheme to design review has helped the charity to achieve its aspirations.

Disability Essex wanted the design not only to minimise energy use, but also to satisfy the stringent *PassivHaus* construction standard for energy efficiency. Furthermore, it hoped to generate income by subletting part of the building, as well as selling surplus electricity generated by the building's solar panels and wind turbine to the national grid. But with no experience as a developer, it was not certain whether these aspirations were achievable or not.

Disability Essex took the project to Inspire East for design review in 2007 and received comprehensive advice, ranging from changing the location of the

building in relation to an adjacent adult education centre to ways of making the roof look more elegant. The panel also advocated an increase in the size of the south wing – the proposed space for letting – to make it more flexible and attractive to potential tenants.

'The appraisal process with the six specialists was productive, constructive and sympathetic,' says Disability Essex chief executive Richard Boyd. 'We adopted all their suggestions and resubmitted a full planning application which was passed by the planning committee in March 2008. There is no doubt in our minds that the architectural merit and independent endorsement of our proposal swung the vote.'

The resulting building, completed in 2010, is the first non-domestic *PassivHaus* construction to be completed in England and has already won awards. While the changes that the panel suggested added only about 1 per cent to the cost of the building, the commercial office space in the completed building has been let at a rate that is a third higher than for comparable buildings in the Rochford locality. Boyd says he has learnt from this experience that the earlier a project is taken to design review, the greater the potential benefits.



Disability Essex, Rochford © Disability Essex

Users have been able to provide insight into how design review has helped to improve design. Ben Brinicombe is property regeneration manager for the Derwent and Solway Housing Association, developer of the Derwent Close housing scheme in Keswick. He explains: 'I believe that the tougher stance has proved useful in this case as it ensured our architects worked extremely hard to turn around the scheme from being "fair" to "very good".'

Design review affects not only the design of schemes itself, but also the process of designing. Sometimes advice can lead to a change in the design team. A letter from the West Midlands panel about a major housing site brought to review in May 2009 noted that the progress made 'since the last design review...[was] brought about by the client's decision to augment their team with a masterplanner.'

Finally, design review can also improve design quality by changing or reaffirming attitudes towards design. 'It's valuable to have one's belief in the importance and value of design refreshed and reinforced,' says an officer from North Devon District Council. Another planning officer noted that the panel's involvement in a scheme that resulted in planning permission being granted 'has encouraged other innovative designs to come forward...representing a major shift in aspirations from five years ago'.

Increase in property values

Design review has led to changes in design that result in an increase in the value of property. Ultimately, this attracts further investment in the locality.

In one example, involving a hotel in a sensitive location, the design review panel was able to identify that the facilities were capable of substantial expansion by some 4,815 square metres with minimal impact on the site and its surrounding area. This was possible only because of the panel's skills in assessing what is possible in a tight location.

The original scheme that was brought to review proposed the construction of 20 bedroom suites to be added to a 46-bedroom hotel, but design review's insight enabled the addition of a further 12, bringing the total number of new rooms to 32. The hotel owner estimated that the additional 12 suites would generate between £360,000 and £480,000 in additional income per year. Together with improvements to the function and leisure suite – design review did not enable this element but suggested an improved layout – the hotelier estimated that the benefits equated to an additional £1.5 million to £2 million revenue, or 20 per cent of the hotel's annual turnover.

Derwent Close housing: North West design review panel

Changes push up scheme values in a static market

Places Matter! has often found itself in the position of having to demonstrate that good design is not necessarily more costly, or that any extra expenditure more than pays for itself. This is illustrated by the Derwent Close project in Keswick, which came to the North West design review panel in 2009. Since 2007, Derwent & Solway Housing Association – part of the Harvest Housing Group – has been working with Allerdale Borough Council to provide 26 social rental homes in the centre of the Lake District town.

The project was originally estimated to cost £2.5 million. The revisions to the scheme based on design review advice did not add to the capital cost, as there was no change in massing, building heights or roof design. Before the intervention of design review, the proposed scheme was estimated to have a market value of £4,680,000. The estimated market value of the revised scheme is £5,445,000. This represents a 16 per cent increase, and is notable as house prices were static over the corresponding period.

Ben Brinicombe, property regeneration manager for the housing association, attributes at least part of this increase to advice from design review on the layout of flats and the treatment of the façades. He says that he found the review process very useful and that Places Matter! had a positive impact. He says that the panel's comments demonstrated their understanding of the development process, and that meant they could provide strong proposals for improving the scheme.

This case study also shows that, design review can speed up the process of development. This can save money and allow developers to start receiving a return on their investment more quickly. The developer for this project drew up the original proposals for Derwent Close in June 2007, with design revisions and accompanying discussions continuing throughout 2008. Unfortunately, these discussions did not result in a scheme that the National Park Authority was willing to recommend for approval. The authority suggested that the developer referred the scheme to design review to get an objective opinion that took into account the views of objectors to the original proposal. The review proved instrumental in moving to a revised scheme that has now received full planning permission.

Acceleration of the development management process

A design review can help to break the stalemate that sometimes halts the development process. Schemes such as Derwent Close housing and Fairmile Hospital development – featured as case studies in this report – demonstrate how this can be achieved. Progress can be made when a panel suggests solutions not previously considered, or the discussion during a review makes compromise possible by reframing the problems. One developer comments that 'if you are in a rut, then a third party can bring authority...I found the panel very timely and approachable.'

Value for money

The cost of design review was on average £2,872 per review and 676 reviews were carried out by the network panels, costing a total of £1.9 million (excluding VAT). This paid for reviews covering more than £40.6 billion worth of development.

Fairmile Hospital development: South East design review panel

Design review accelerates the development process

Sometimes design review can help to untangle a project that is dangerously close to reaching stalemate. This was the case with the redevelopment of the former Fairmile mental hospital in Oxfordshire. The local authority, developer, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and the architect were struggling to find a solution that was satisfactory to all.

The project came to the South East design review twice and each time the panel was able to inject clarity of thinking that put the troubled project back on track. The constraints on the site were such that revisions in one area would affect others and made it difficult to resolve all issues. 'Getting the design right for Fairmile hospital was so important, but was proving difficult to achieve,' says Judith Smallman, HCA project manager. 'We had looked at many options and quite rightly no one wanted to compromise any aspect of the development. The design review process was incredibly useful and allowed us to find a common solution that will achieve everyone's goals.'

South Oxfordshire District Council was keen to protect the Grade II-listed former asylum, along with its associated landscape and buildings. But for conversion of the older asylum building into 130 flats to be financially viable there had to be considerable further development within the grounds: 223 new homes and associated buildings.

In May 2009 the design review panel examined the much-altered masterplan by architect John Thompson & Partners. The panel recognised that the clarity of the original concepts had been lost through the design process and that a balance would have to be struck between the retention of buildings and the amount of development the site could accommodate. It also acknowledged that viability was a major problem that needed to be addressed. The panel pinpointed that it would not be possible to retain all the buildings the council wanted to keep.

'The review made us all re-address what was important about the whole site,' says council conservation officer Sarah Oborn. 'Some fundamental design issues had been lost along the way.'

Four months later a new masterplan was brought back to the same panel and it is substantially this design that the council has now approved. 'The calibre of the people on the panel is very high and it was reassuring to have their views,' Oborn adds.



Development of the Fairmile Hospital site, Oxfordshire by John Thompson and Partners © John Thompson and Partners

Part 2 The value of design review to users

Local authorities, the development community and local communities find design review helpful in supporting the case for good design, and ultimately in improving design quality and adding value to development. A survey of design review use⁵ in 2010 conducted by CABI found that 96 per cent of all local planning authorities feel there are benefits to including design review panels in the development control process. Other sources corroborate this message of just how helpful design review can be. For example, 95 per cent of respondents to a survey by the North East design review panel considered the process had been useful in advancing the design of their scheme.

The benefits that design review can offer have not been lost on developers or their design teams either. In a letter to the manager of the West Midlands panel, Clare Wright of Wright and Wright Architects says: 'My experience working with MADE has been extremely positive and responsive; you were very familiar with all the issues arising; and we found the panel members' affirmation of our ideas combined with their suggestions for improvement very helpful.' What's more, 85 per cent of respondents to the North East panel's survey said that they would recommend the service to a contact, client or fellow colleagues.

Looking in more detail at how and why design review is valued by users, the themes that emerge include:

- users return to design review, either with the same scheme or different schemes, indicating that the service provided is satisfactory
- design review provides technical design advice which is independent, objective and high quality, and is trusted and relevant
- design review is empowering, enabling users to make arguments for good design, and against poor design.

Repeat custom

Returning schemes

The repeat use of a service is a good indicator of service quality. Of the reviews carried out in 2009/10, 245 – approximately one third – were returning projects. At the CABI panel more than half of the reviews were for returning projects, and at the affiliated panels this figure was a quarter.

"My experience working with MADE has been extremely positive and responsive; you were very familiar with all the issues arising; and we found the panel members' affirmation of our ideas combined with their suggestions for improvement very helpful."

Clare Wright, Wright and Wright Architects, about the West Midlands panel

⁵ England-wide survey on the use of design review, March 2010, conducted with 277 local planning authorities

Figure 5 Numbers of new or returning projects

	Affiliated panels	CABE panel	Whole network
Number of reviews conducted for returning schemes	78	167	245
As % of all reviews at that panel	24%	47%	36%

These figures demonstrate two things. Firstly, that design review is committed to offering continued support throughout the design development process and encourages users to return for further advice where this is felt to add value.

Secondly, the fact that users take up this offer suggests that their previous experience of design review was positive and useful enough for the promoters or planning authorities to return to design review.

Returning users

Another aspect of 'repeat custom' is the fact that those with previous experience of the process choose to bring new schemes for design review. Of the local authorities who initiated a scheme to be brought to CABE's design review during the past year, nearly two thirds subsequently sought advice for additional schemes.

Nature of design review advice

Objective advice

Design review provides a balanced range of views that emerge from a discussion among panellists and those presenting the scheme, appraising projects in the round according to reasoned criteria. A major explanation of why design review is seen to have a real impact on design quality is its perceived objectivity. Half⁶ of the respondents to the England-wide survey of panel use carried out in 2010 cited the fact that a design review panel can 'stand back and take an objective view' as being a benefit.

The peer review method helps to achieve this objectivity and lends the advice significant weight.

Independent advice

'Independence' means that the panel is funded and staffed by people who are separate from the scheme promoter and decision maker. This protects against conflicts of interest in the highly charged context of bringing a development forward and getting buildings constructed, where substantial financial, political and business interests are involved.

In particular, local authority officers have grasped the importance of this separation of decision making from expert advice that can be achieved by using the network operated by CABE and its affiliated panels.

What people say about design review

'It was helpful professionally and, as an authority, we would certainly consider using the service again, from an earlier stage.'

Rachel Almond, Forest Heath District Council, speaking about the East of England service

'We all found the experience very worthwhile and I shall certainly consider inviting the panel to comment on other schemes in future.'

Planning consultant at the South West panel

'We will certainly recommend to developers that we use this service again, ideally at an early stage in the plan's formulation.'

Jill Elliott, planning officer at Allerdale Council, about the North West panel

'I will certainly encourage the developer to submit their scheme for design review again when they are developing their detailed design for reserved matters.'

Design and developments project manager, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council, about the North West panel

'To architects and developers, [the panel's] recommendations carry more weight and kudos than those of a single officer.'

Jackie Whelan, Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council

⁶ Calculation from the England-wide survey on the use of design review, March 2010, conducted with 277 local planning authorities

Battersea Power Station: CABE design review panel

Developers and local authorities welcome changes to a large and complex schemes

The long-running story of the future use of Battersea Power Station in south London reached a new phase in 2009 with a Rafael Viñoly mixed-use masterplan. Submitted to the local authority in autumn 2009, this masterplan was due to go before Wandsworth's planning committee in September 2010. The complexity of the scheme meant that, by 31 March, CABE's design review panel had seen the scheme no less than six times.

'Working with CABE has been a hugely constructive experience,' says Rob Tincknell of the developer Treasury Holdings, development manager for Real Estate Opportunities, which bought the former power station in 2006.

The panel understood the detail of the scheme and our aspirations, and we learned about the significance of their advice. It was a great opportunity for all stakeholders to voice their opinions in one room together.'

The process produced several key moments of change, for example in the design of a new 2.5-hectare public park sitting between the power station

and the river. 'The panel asked for the design to be simplified,' recalls Tincknell. 'Changes were made a couple of times and the results are much improved. There were also suggestions about the ways that new buildings would frame the power station and about increasing permeability of the site. All were useful and were taken on board.'

The project director is John Drew of Rafael Viñoly Architects. 'The fact that the project was reviewed six times is a reflection of its enormous complexity,' he says. 'CABE likes to be involved in any project as early as possible, but it is a matter of judgement when you take the design to them. In this case our dialogue with CABE began after work with the local authority had reached a point where we had made enough progress to have a useful conversation at a design review.'

In addition to helping with advice on the design, Drew believes that the review panels are helpful in giving all parties the confidence to make progress. 'The process helps the architect in refining the design, and helps the local authority to have confidence that everything is on the right track. Because the panels address the big headline issues, particularly with public realm and sustainability, the process genuinely helps with focus. For me one of the greatest contributions here was that the panel encouraged us to think more broadly about the wider area, to make sure our scheme reaches out to connect with adjacent sites and with the rest of London.'



Battersea Power Station, London by Rafael Viñoly Architects © Treasury Holdings

Richmond Gardens, Bournemouth: South West design review panel

Objectivity of design review advice influences planning decisions

An ambitious and complex scheme in the centre of Bournemouth received a unanimous go-ahead from the council's planning board, thanks in large part to the work of the South West design review panel. Designed by CZWG for developer Grosvenor, the scheme involved placing a hotel, housing and other elements around an existing multi-storey car park. 'The review by the SWDRP was more than just a box ticking exercise for the scheme,' says Grosvenor project director Edward Skeates. 'The project had some quite challenging architectural issues to resolve and the panel gave us some very helpful guidance on how we might address these. This gave us all, including the planners, comfort on the direction to go and must be held as a contributing factor to the unanimous decision at committee to grant [planning permission].'

Among its recommendations, the design review suggested a further treatment to the roof of the car park, so that hotel residents would not be looking out over an expanse of tarmac, and suggested that the

same façade materials should be used on both the social and private housing elements. Steve Davies, the team leader for the project at the council, added: 'When you have a project that will be very prominent, it is useful to have the comfort of a panel to give advice. There were certain elements that we had some reservations about, and we have a better scheme.'

Anthony Ramsden of Planning Solutions, the planning consultant for the project, says that the design review addressed the council's concerns, and also made sensible suggestions which the design team took on board. But in an ideal world, he would have seen the project go to design review at pre-application stage.

John Beesley, the chair of the council's planning committee, says the project was submitted at a time before the council did much pre-application work. 'With design review you get the feeling that there has been a more objective process. There is a degree of subjectivity by members and officers. I and my colleagues were satisfied.'



Richmond Gardens, Bournemouth by CZWG © CZWG

Birmingham New Street: CABE design review panel

Independence of design review advice ensures its credibility to project stakeholders

As one of the UK's last remaining major UK railway hub transformations, the Birmingham Gateway project to rebuild the city's New Street Station, was always going to be high profile. The new station has been designed by Foreign Office Architects and is due for completion in 2015.

'CABE's design review panel has helped us draw together a holistic scheme where it is possible to deliver a great experience from the minute passengers step off the train,' says Nigel Edmondson, city centre design manager at Birmingham City Council. 'We regularly work with CABE on major initiatives and the panels are invaluable for providing fresh eyes on a scheme. Their views can be quirky too, but are always interesting and helpful in this sort of complex scheme with multiple stakeholders.'

'CABE's great strength is its independence,' says Carol Stitchman, head of design at Network Rail. 'When you are really close to a project, it gets difficult to be objective and we value an independent third party opinion.' She says the panel's strongest contribution at the Gateway project has been to provide unity between the new building design by Foreign Office Architects and the public realm design. 'With the help of the panel it has been possible to make seamless connections and now it's a fantastic scheme.'

She adds that it has not been possible to take on all panel suggestions because of operational considerations, but the review experience has been invaluable.

For Alejandro Zaera Polo of Foreign Office Architects, the key contribution of the panel has been to ensure that the central design ideas were taken through to delivery. 'I've been involved with panels before, they are excellent forums for discussion and probably the only way to ensure quality is delivered, especially in large-scale urban projects. The panels are formed of distinguished individuals and they understand the impact of such major interventions as the Gateway project and the way the city is shaped for the future.'



Birmingham New Street by Foreign Office Architects © Foreign Office Architects

Relevant advice

Developers are sometimes surprised by the way in which panels can offer relevant advice that can be feasibly applied. As one developer explains: 'My fear was that it could be too academic, but they had a good grasp of commercial reality.'

The format of design review that entails skilled chairing of the discussion is also seen to be crucial to the credibility of the advice offered. According to one participant: 'The presence of a chairman respected by the developers gave the comments additional weight in the architects' minds.'

The England-wide survey of panel use found that 64 per cent⁷ of respondents cited the ability of the panel to provide 'diverse and specialist expertise' as the reason for using design review. This was the most popular explanation.

The range of expertise across the network is broad and includes:

- architecture
- urban design and masterplanning
- transport planning
- landscape architecture
- spatial planning
- sustainability, sustainable building and green energy
- civil and structural engineering
- property
- conservation and historic environment
- surveying
- public art
- regeneration and local government
- service and capital development.

See Appendix 2 for further details.

The CABE and affiliated panels are able to attract panellists with the widest range of expertise, and do so through a competitive recruitment process. The resulting breadth and quality of expertise is very important for design review users.

What people say about design review

'The review is a very valuable resource for our planning authority, providing us with the breadth and quality of advice we could not hope to provide locally...I cannot emphasise too much how important it is to have such a valuable resource.'

Dorset County Council planning officer, about the South West panel

'The panel has assisted the council a great deal in providing very detailed design advice and policy interpretation, particularly in relation to planning policy statements, of which the council had little knowledge or experience.'

Wiltshire Council officer, about the South West panel

'The comments from the panel reflected many of the concerns that we had about the design, so it was excellent to get some independent justification for our views.'

Kevin Richards, Planner, Lake District National Park Authority, about the North West panel

'The early input of the design review panel has helped raise the design quality of a number of schemes in Stockport. The panel consists of expert professionals from a wide range of design-related fields, so the value of the advice and guidance received is that it is both rounded and independent.'

Officer from Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, about the North West panel

⁷ Calculation from the England-wide survey on the use of design review, March 2010, conducted with 277 local planning authorities

Alveston Court – Extra Care housing for King Edward VI school: West Midlands design review panel

Range of professional expertise helps ensure design review advice is taken on board

A project proposed for a sensitive site in Stratford-on-Avon has changed out of all recognition, thanks largely to the work of MADE, the organisation responsible for design review in the West Midlands.

MADE supported the local authority's concerns about a poor-quality scheme that was proposed for the site, which helped the client to determine the direction it wanted to follow. The panel then reviewed the entirely new scheme that resulted. 'MADE was a great help to us,' says Ronnie Mulryne, chair of the board of governors at King Edward VI school. 'They helped in the formulation of design and in allowing the planning department to move towards a recommendation.'

The project was always going to be contentious. The school wants to sell a portion of its playing fields for development as housing for the elderly, to raise money to improve the remaining playing fields for school and local community use. It also wants to start restoration work on the early 15th-century Guildhall, as well as build a new library. This will allow the school to cease using an existing building on its site as a library and open it to the public, which is highly desirable since this is where Shakespeare went to school.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council had a presumption against development, unless the project could be shown to be of exceptional quality and the benefits

of any scheme could be balanced against the loss of part of the playing fields.

The school had started working with a developer specialising in retirement homes. 'We were concerned about the scale of the development,' recalls Charlotte Gallagher, urban design officer at the council. 'It was felt that the design advice wasn't being sufficiently taken on board. As a way forward she suggested that the application went to design review, which it did in September 2008.

MADE's panel was highly critical, but the developer decided to submit the planning application anyway. This was turned down. A further session with MADE contributed to the client's decision to work with a new developer, also specialising in retirement homes. This new developer wished to build a smaller number of higher-value units. The school suggested to the developer that it might work with the architect Wright & Wright, which was already designing the new library, and the developer agreed.

The new scheme subsequently went back to design review, which 'generally considered the building design to be exemplary', although it had some suggestions about the landscaping. 'It had been made clear that this time we would carry out a design review at the pre-application stage,' says Gallagher. As the sole urban designer within the council she found the whole process valuable. 'It provides the opportunity to discuss schemes with other built environment professionals and is a forum for the encouragement and generation of ideas that lead to higher quality design of development,' she says.



Accessible advice

While the advice offered in a design review can deal with complex technical issues, design review advice reports are written for a general audience with accessibility in mind.

CABE has over 1,000 design review reports on its website. In 2009/10, these reports were viewed 85,507 times. Each month, the most interesting reports are highlighted in CABE's monthly email newsletter and site visitors can subscribe to an RSS feed for new reports.

Some affiliated panels publish their reports on the web, and others are moving towards this objective. All reports that are not subject to commercial confidentiality are made publicly available if requested.

Giving users confidence

The objectivity, independence, relevance and accessibility of design review results in advice that is trusted and carries significant weight in design-based negotiations between local authorities, developers and local communities. Design review is able to provide accessible evidence to strengthen the argument for better design, or against poor design. This is especially beneficial when those involved in a scheme do not feel that they have sufficient specialist knowledge to engage in a design-centred consultation. The Sowerby case study illustrates this point, and a great deal of other feedback suggests that design review advice is empowering.

What people say about design review

'It provided much needed external comment particularly with regards to architecture, in which I am not trained, but which is a major component of the scheme. Considerable weight was given to the design review letter by the planning authority.'
Project director, Golden Valley Project, about the East Midlands panel

'It enabled the architect for the applicants to go back to his clients' board and gain concessions on matters they had previously indicated a lack of willingness to move on.'
Officer, North Devon District Council, about the South West panel

'Comments gave additional weight to views already expressed by the local planning authority and I think the councillors and the applicant would have been reluctant to insist on these changes without the panel's support.'
Urban design officer, Bournemouth Borough Council, about the South West panel

'[It gave] the council the confidence to challenge those schemes which do not deliver on quality, but also to recognise those developments that show promise.'
Officer from Bolsover District Council discussing the East Midlands panel

'I have no doubt that the expert opinion of the South West panel in support of the project gave the local planning authority a great deal of confidence to back up their own officers' opinion in support of the project...helping officers wander off slightly left field with confidence is a really important role for design panels, and it seemed to work very well in this case.'
Martin Harradine, planning director, AZ Urban Studio, about the South West panel

Sowerby Gateway: Yorkshire and Humber design review panel

Expert advice gives the local authority confidence on design issues

The combined experience of design review panel members can be particularly helpful when a local authority is faced with a project of unprecedented scale. This was the experience of Tim Wood, development manager at Hambleton District Council in North Yorkshire, when examining the massive Sowerby Gateway project.

The scheme, an urban extension to Sowerby town, includes 920 houses plus a range of other community facilities across a 33-hectare site. 'It's bigger than anything the district council had done before in terms of a single application,' Wood explains. 'The benefit of design review for us is being able to consult with a range of disciplines that have experience of schemes of this scale.'

The proposals were presented to the design review panel in March 2010 by Broadacres Housing Association and developer Castlevale. 'They were fairly critical, which was great, but also supportive,' says Broadacres development manager Fiona Coleman.

In particular, the panel supported the decision to locate the community and retail facilities on the main road through the site that connects it to the existing village. 'We want the new settlement to be a natural extension of the market town,' explains Coleman. 'The panel backed that way of thinking. They gave us confidence that our way was the right way.'

The main criticism levelled by the panel was that while the first planned area of housing within the scheme had been designed in considerable detail there had not been enough consideration given to the overall masterplan. 'There was a danger that the detailed development of one part didn't allow for movement through the whole site,' says Wood. 'We have to ensure that in making a sustainable place to live people can walk from A to B.'

Castlevale is drawing up a new masterplan and was due to bring it to a second design review in July 2010. 'As planning officers we have not dealt with a scheme of this magnitude before,' adds Wood. 'The panel gave us confidence that we were thinking in the right way.'

Think town centre



Part 3 The design review network

Recognition of the advantages of a network of design review panels, to ensure an independent yet high-quality service for local authorities, led in August 2009 to the formal affiliation of CABA's design review panel and eight panels across England.

Affiliation provides consistency of standards, efficiency in process and a clearer offer to local planning authorities and the development community. Through affiliation, the CABA and affiliated panels have clear lines of communication with each other to ensure schemes are reviewed at the most appropriate level. Duplication of time and effort is avoided and the possibility of contradictory advice that would undermine the design review process is removed.

In its first six months of operation, the network already proved to be efficient and responsive in delivering design review across England. Affiliation has:

- made independent design review available across every geographical area in England, in a flexible and efficient way
- provided all networked panels with different sources of schemes, and therefore a greater choice of schemes.
- resulted in the CABA panel receiving more schemes at an early stage, which is when design review can add most value
- increased the responsiveness of the design review service – two levels of panel builds flexibility into the scheme allocation process, reducing the number of schemes that might have otherwise been turned away.

Overview of network activity in 2009/10

It is important to consider the distinct strengths that each panel brings to the symbiotic relationship set up by affiliation, and how the network links the valuable local insights of the affiliated panels with the world-class expertise and long experience of CABA's panel.

CABA contribution

About the CABA panel

CABA's design review service is recognised internationally as a leader in providing impartial and high-quality design advice. In 2009/10 alone CABA hosted delegations and advised representatives from Finland, Libya, Japan, Sweden and Ireland. CABA also meets regularly with parallel organisations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Quality assurance and mechanism for knowledge sharing and dissemination

The key contributions of CABA are the quality assurance it brings and its operation of the weekly joint scheme allocation and exchange process.

Consistent demand for reviews

Despite the recession, demand for CABA design reviews has remained high. To accommodate the demand for reviews where the promoters of schemes present directly to the panel (known as presentation panel reviews), these now occur at an increased frequency of twice a month. The opportunity they offer for the client, design team, local planning authorities and statutory bodies to attend the review is valued and creates an effective occasion to share the design discussion. Returning schemes or those with tight deadlines in the planning process are seen at an internal review, which is run weekly.

Flexibility to innovate

CABA has tested new formats of review to meet the requirements of specific cases. The panel and processes can be tailored to give the most effective advice for the nature of the scheme. For example, giving advice on the preliminary proposals for eco towns has called for a range of expertise not usually represented on panels, including ecology, transport planning and green infrastructure. We have also run multiple reviews for competitive bidding teams working on local authority waste plants, where commercial confidentiality needs to be observed.

Direct influence on good design in specific sectors

Schemes submitted for design review over the course of a year give an unrivalled overview of the types of development being brought forward and the features of their design. During the past year, CABA has brought together a series of workshops on schemes of the same type including large-scale waste facilities, mixed-use housing and supermarket developments, as well as masterplans for urban extensions.

Affiliated panels' contribution

About the affiliated panels

The affiliated panels are funded, hosted and managed in a variety of ways by independent organisations. This means that they have developed unique ways of working that are attuned to local needs. For example, the frequency of panel meetings ranges from fortnightly to bimonthly, and there is a varying mix of meetings with the full complement of panel members (what CABA calls presentation panel review) and those with only the chair or a panel member supported by a staff member (what CABA calls desktop review). Furthermore, affiliated panels may be involved in delivering design advice in ways that may be a variation on design review: for example, some affiliated panels have a mentoring process that follows on from a design review.

Relationship with ABECs

and the Architecture Centre Network

Four of the panels are hosted by architecture centres and this draws upon the added value of the Architecture Centre Network. Architecture and built environment centres (ABECs) play a crucial role in explaining design to a wider audience and fostering the demand for good design in local communities. In giving grants to the ABECs during 2009/10, CABA looked for specific projects that would support the design review panels, such as work to evaluate the effectiveness of design review or creating new outreach projects to extend the panels' contacts.

Relationships cultivated by affiliated panels with local authorities

The relationships between the affiliated panels and local authorities make a major positive and valuable contribution to the design review network.

The affiliated panels have a record of building relationships with local planning authorities. These relationships are the foundation of a more effective, efficient and far-reaching design review service. They help develop new relationships. In 2009/10 the network as a whole reviewed schemes from 22 planning authorities from whom they had not received any schemes in the previous three years. Of these 22 new or renewed relationships, 15 were through the affiliated panels.

Furthermore, a stronger relationship between the panel and potential design review user – such as a local authority, designer or developer – means that a scheme is likely to be brought to review at an earlier stage. In this case, the panel is seen as a 'critical friend' who can help, rather than act as a hurdle that has to be surmounted.

The affiliated panels are familiar with the needs for design review of many of the local authorities within their area, so are well placed. 'In particular we were struck by the panel's understanding of the specific local conditions that are critical to the success of this project,' says Glenn Howells of Glenn Howells Architects, in a letter to the South West panel.

What people say about design review

'We are delighted that we are now affiliated with CABA. The new network will allow us all to share information on a regular basis and decide in partnership which panel should review what schemes. We are independent from CABA and take a regional perspective but share the same remit in that we use design review to improve the quality of the built environment.'

Peter Clegg, chair of the South West design review panel

'It's great to be part of the CABA family. Everyone using the South West panel sees the CABA network logo and so knows they'll get a good-quality design review. I also welcome the systematic co-ordination of casework between us and CABA.'

Timothy Cantell, manager, South West design review panel

'Inspire East has always looked to share good practice within the East of England and with organisations in other parts of the country. The CABA affiliation helps us to be part of a national community that is looking to raise standards and communicate the value of good design. Affiliation gives us assurance that we are working to a common set of standards and that our highly valued service is both professional and independent.'

Dan Durrant, manager, East of England design review panel

Redcar Seafront: North East design review panel

Design review panel proves worth as critical friend

The North East design review panel has worked successfully as a 'critical friend' of Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, to help take an ambitious scheme to improve Redcar's seafront, from competition-winning concept through to readiness for planning submission.

The project, by landscape architect Smeeden Foreman working with Seven Architecture, won an RIBA open competition to design a mile of public realm that would complement new sea wall engineering works.

North East design review first looked at the competition-winning proposals back in September 2009 and made initial suggestions which were adopted by the design team in the process of turning the initial concept into a more detailed proposal. 'We found the experience to be positive, friendly and useful,' says Kate Curtis of Smeeden Foreman.

The design team brought its amended proposals back to design review in December, including drawings to illustrate the potential of full or partial pedestrianisation of the seafront. Encouraging remarks by the panel about the proposed 'light-wave' – an undulating lighting strip incorporated in the canopies of new seafront structures – led the design team to look at ways to make this element work. Tony Wyatt, a member of the design review panel, says: 'It was evident that both the client and design team had sought to raise their game after the initial review and this clearly came through at the second panel presentation.'

The council is eager to deliver major improvements to its seafront, moving successfully from a competition-winning scheme to something that is both practical and deliverable. 'Redcar and Cleveland have found it beneficial to be able to have an impartial discussion with an expert sounding board,' says council chief executive Amanda Skelton. 'The design review has added value to the schemes and provided a fresh perspective for the team to reflect on.'

Key elements of the project were due to be submitted for planning permission during the summer of 2010.



Redcar Seafront by Smeeden Foreman and Seven Architecture © Smithsons Architectural Visualization

Achieving design quality at local level

The affiliated design review panels support local decision makers to make informed choices, helping them to avoid design proposals that might pay no attention to their local identity. The panels can also support isolated local decision makers in promoting good-quality schemes that will stand the test of time.

The affiliated panels bring high-calibre, free-of-charge, professional advice to local communities, and deliver this in a way that is attuned to local needs. For example, many affiliated panel meetings are held at a location close to the scheme they are reviewing, and almost all reviews entail a site visit by panel staff and/or panel members. They ensure that their expertise, which is beyond the resources of most local planning authorities, can be called upon to give an independent assessment of the design of schemes. They can develop a long-term relationship with a scheme, working over repeated reviews to achieve improvements.

Mutual support across the network

CABE has run a clearing house for schemes being submitted for design review, which means that schemes are reviewed in the right place for their significance as well as in the most timely way. Some 20 per cent of schemes received by CABE have been forwarded to affiliated panels.

CABE shares lessons learnt from design reviews, suggesting ways of approaching particular building types while sharing expertise in design review between panels. This supports the quality of all reviews.

Relationship of affiliated and local panels

The capacity and expertise of local (non-affiliated) panels varies considerably. To strengthen them, CABE collaborated with the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Landscape Institute in preparing *Design review: principles and practice*, in 2009. The publication sets out ways to maintain standards of independence, avoid conflicts of interest and find ways of communicating a panel's views.

Affiliated panels can play an important role in strengthening the local panels within their area. Some use their reviews as training sessions while others share panel members. All are keen to help maintain high standards in the way design quality is judged to enable local decision makers to make informed choices about the quality of their built environment.

Acting together

All the affiliated panels are committed to a range of activities and principles, which are set out in the affiliation terms of agreement. This section demonstrates how these were fulfilled in 2009/10.

- The panel management group met four times during the 2009/10 financial year: April 2009, August 2009, November 2009 and February 2010.
- A meeting of directors of organisations managing design review was convened to discuss affiliation. It coincided with the affiliated design review conference on 9 June 2009.
- CABE staff visited four of the eight affiliated panels during the financial year 2009/10, observing reviews and meeting panel members.
- All affiliated panel websites can be accessed from CABE's web page on affiliated design review.
- Network events such as the commencement of the joint scheme allocation process in October 2009 were announced jointly, with co-operation between the communications staff across the panel organisations.
- The network has produced this joint annual report. The development of a common reporting strategy is in progress, and has been informed by the production of the present document.
- CABE and the affiliated panels have begun to share learning. A design review conference was held in June 2009. The theme of this conference was 'Design review: facing the future' which explored the way forward for the design review network.
- CABE's learning themes have, in the past year, been waste management, retail-led mixed use developments and large-scale urban extensions. While these are CABE themes, some exchange of what has been learnt has taken place within the network, while the development of a more formal learning strategy is planned for the following year.
- The process of joint scheme allocation began in October 2009. In its first six months of operation, all networked panels saw a 20 per cent rise in new schemes coming for review through the joint scheme

allocation process. Through communicating on a weekly basis, the affiliated panels and CAGE are working together towards delivering a more responsive service. This will mean that schemes to be reviewed are efficiently allocated to the most appropriate panel.

- A joint electronic form for submitting projects to the design review service for review has been demonstrated and discussed between all network panels.
- The sharing of scheme information between the network and other public sector organisations involved in delivering development is important to ensure consistent advice to service users. This now occurs as part of the weekly scheme allocation process. If schemes where any of these organisations are involved are presented for design review, network members work to ensure a clear picture of previous and current involvement of all relevant agencies is shared. For example, this has happened with several major schemes where the Homes and Communities Agency has been involved in bringing them forward for development.
- Affiliation provided CAGE and the affiliated design review panels with a common identity as an affiliated design review network, and this has been strengthened by using the design review network strap line and CAGE logo on marketing information relevant to design review.

Impact of affiliation

The creation of the network has enhanced the operation of design review, making it a more efficient service.

Availability across the country

The affiliated design review network provides independent and flexible design review coverage for the whole of England. By their very coverage, the CAGE and affiliated panels have a flexible reach, and can work efficiently across local authority boundaries. This means that even locations where there is not a constant stream of significant projects can benefit from design review. Some of these areas may be sparsely populated and significant developments may not happen very often, but when they do, these developments will have a major impact on the community. In these cases, setting up a local panel is unlikely to be economical. Affiliated panels

are well equipped to provide a service that is attuned to local conditions and yet retains a healthy independence, as the following case study demonstrates.

Choice of schemes for review

With the joint scheme allocation process and information exchange, CAGE and the affiliated panels have seen a rise in the choice of schemes seeking a review that cross their desks. Each panel now comes into contact with a wider range of schemes, from sources that are new to them, than if they were operating in isolation. The relationships cultivated by the affiliated panels have become an important channel through which significant schemes can be brought to the attention of the national panel. Meanwhile, the affiliated panels are informed of every request for review in their area received by the CAGE panel.

In 2009/10, CAGE referred 126 schemes that it received to the eight affiliated panels, of which the affiliated panels took on approximately two fifths.⁸ Accordingly, CAGE is the source of 20 per cent of the new schemes coming to the affiliated panels for review in 2009/10.⁹

In the six months to 31 March 2010 since affiliation, the CAGE panel reviewed 16 projects that first came to the attention of the network via the affiliated panels. As a pro-rata percentage of all the new schemes coming to CAGE for review, schemes received from affiliated panels also account for 20 per cent.¹⁰

8 Two of the panels only started operations within the year, so this number would be higher if they had been operational throughout the entire year. Where an affiliated panel operates, CAGE no longer turns away any schemes, but refers them to the affiliated panels.

9 This figure reflects the contribution of CAGE to the input of schemes into the affiliated panel reviews. Affiliated panels reviewed 246 new schemes in 2009/10; of these, 48 came from CAGE referrals to them.

10 This figure reflects the contribution of the affiliated panels to the input of schemes into CAGE reviews. The CAGE panel reviewed 163 new schemes in 2009/10; of these, a pro-rata of 32 came from referrals from the affiliated panels.

Design review in Skegness: East Midlands design review panel

Network ensures that design review is available in all areas of England

Most affiliated design review panel meetings ‘float’ around their area of coverage. This makes the service more accessible for those smaller local authorities far away from other sources of design advice, and complements the service offered by CABE’s design review panel. So when East Midlands design review chose to visit Skegness for the day, East Lindsey District Council welcomed the decision. ‘We want to be seen to be engaging all our constituents,’ says East Midlands design review manager James Carpenter.

The panel looked at four projects, two each in Skegness and Mablethorpe. It also met with four different members of the council’s team. Paul Thompson, senior planning officer with responsibility for one of the Skegness projects, says that if the review had taken place elsewhere ‘we would probably have sent just one person to save on travel expenses’.

One of the Skegness projects was too far advanced for the council to adopt the panel’s feedback. ‘The next scheme I take to the panel will be at a much earlier

stage of the planning process,’ Thompson says.

But when it came to the other scheme, in a key location on the resort’s Grand Parade, the panel gave valuable advice that both the council and developer could follow. With the proposed building set closer to the street than its neighbours, one elevation will be visible across its neighbour’s frontage. As a result of this unusual condition, they discussed the importance of maintaining lively façades on such an important street. Thompson says: ‘The advice they gave was very interesting and very helpful.’

In contrast to the urban nature of the Skegness schemes, the panel addressed rural issues on the two Mablethorpe schemes, including the positioning of a tourist car park.

This was the first time that East Lindsey had participated in design review. Now that it has acquired an appreciation for the process, it will return. ‘Where local authorities engage with design review they are keen to come back,’ says Carpenter. ‘The ability of our panel to be hosted around the region has added great value in terms of helping to spread the positive message of design review, and to secure effective engagement and the ongoing use of the service.’

Increased pre-application reviews

Good relationships with local authorities are also the basis for increasing the number of schemes that are brought to design review at an earlier stage in the design process. Of the requests made for design review received by the affiliated panels, 58 per cent were made at a pre-planning stage.

Some of the schemes that affiliated panels brought into the system have been at a very early stage, as local authorities begin to see the network as a critical friend. ‘We are a relatively small authority with limited access to design advice of this standard, and the process of bringing stakeholders together, listening to their presentations and having a question and answer session was invaluable in raising awareness of design issues and generating the appropriate dialogue about good design,’ is a typical comment.

The earlier a scheme is reviewed, the more likely it is for design review to have a bigger impact. This is because it takes the least amount of time and costs less to make changes suggested by the review. Therefore, the earlier design issues are addressed, the more likely they are to be satisfactorily resolved.

Responsiveness of service

A major difficulty faced by all panels is matching the availability of time slots to demand for a review, especially if there is a limited period within which advice is required, for example during a planning consultation process.

A network arrangement enables a more responsive service than a single panel operating in isolation, reducing the number of schemes that miss out on a review owing to a lack of review slots or staff capacity. With affiliation, any scheme requiring a review could potentially be accommodated by a greater choice of review slots.

Design review in Rochdale and Lake District National Park: North West design review panel

Network enables more schemes to be reviewed earlier in the process

One approach to design review that proves valuable is where panellists travel to sites, to gain an overall understanding of the development challenges. North West design review recently did this in two very different areas – urban Rochdale, and the idyllic setting of Lake Windermere. It allowed panel members to examine projects at a very early stage, sometimes before the appointment of an architect.

In Rochdale, the panel looked at a draft masterplan for the town centre, and at proposals for a bus interchange, new municipal offices and the refurbishment and extension of the police station. Mark Robinson, development control manager at Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, says: 'Having seen the masterplan as the first scheme, the comments the panel made on the other schemes were informed by their knowledge of the masterplan. All the schemes have been and are being amended in the light of the comments that were made. We have raised the bar in terms of design in the authority.'

At Windermere the panel saw three projects at a very early stage of development, all on the shores of the lake. 'We tied all the three schemes together and said they needed an overarching approach to transport,' says Charlotte Myhrum, design review manager of Places Matter! 'That was a really good joined-up early intervention for us.'

One project was a boat museum, which is to be redeveloped. The panel suggested that the project should look at visitors' sense of arrival. 'I found the feedback really interesting, recalls Frances Snowden, development manager of the Lakeland Arts Trust. 'It challenged our thinking about the site.'

The other two projects were for the Lake District National Park, which is proposing a new visitor centre at the Glebe and looking at redevelopment on the Brockhole peninsula. 'The interesting thing about the design review day was how the panel approached the idea of what should go where and how it should be developed, claims David McGowan, head of development management. 'It was really useful that they came and had a look round.'



Rochdale transport interchange by Arada Architects © Arada Architects Ltd

Appendices

Appendix 1 Information on panels in the network

Area of England covered	East Midlands	East of England	North East	North West	South East	South West	West Midlands	Yorkshire and Humber	CABE panel
Host organisation	Opun	Inspire East	Ignite	Places Matter!	Kent Architecture Centre	Creating Excellence	MADE	Intergreat Yorkshire	CABE
Inception date	2005	2006	2009	2007	2002	2005	2007	2010	1999, Royal Fine Arts Commission since 1929
Funding sources	East Midlands Development Agency	East of England Development Agency	ONE North East	RIBA North West, North West Development Agency, CABE and English Heritage	South East of England Development Agency	South West of England Development Agency	Advantage West Midlands	Regional Centre of, Excellence (Integreat Yorkshire), HCA	CLG and DCMS
Staff numbers	4	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	12
Schemes reviewed	27	25	30	76	30	45	46	10	243
Reviews conducted	30	28	34	87	40	50	45	10	352
Reviews conducted at pre-planning application stage	28	16	27	73	22	28	26	3	53
Reviews of returning schemes	4	6	4	25	15	14	10	0	147
Panel members and chairs	40	32	24	41	18	33	24	46	41

Appendix 2 Panel expertise

Area of England covered	East Midlands	East of England	North East	North West	South East	South West	West Midlands	Yorkshire and Humber	CABE panel
Architecture	22	4	11	23	13	15	9	24	27
Urban design / masterplanning	7	3	5	8	12	10	2	2	6
Transport planning	1	2	0	1	1	1	2	1	0
Landscape architecture	4	0	6	4	2	3	3	6	7
Spatial planning	6	3	5	0	3	5	7	7	4
Sustainability / sustainable building / green energy	0	0	4	1	0	6	4	1	3
Civil or structural engineering	0	0	1	3	0	3	6	2	1
Property	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	1	2
Other	Conservation (2) Surveyor (2) Public art (1)	Regeneration and local government consultant (1) Chartered surveyor (1) Service and capital development (1)	0	Arts consultant (1) Housing regeneration consultant (1)	3	Public art (1) Community engagement (1)	Public art (1) Historic environment (3) Traffic engineer (1)	2	Regeneration specialist (1)

Note: This table shows the number of panel members in each area of expertise. Some panel members may be experts in more than one area

Appendix 3 Ten principles of good design review

1. **Independent** It is conducted by people who are separate from the scheme promoter and decision maker, and it protects against conflicts of interest.
2. **Accountable** It records and explains its advice and is transparent about potential conflicts of interest.
3. **Expert** It is conducted by suitably trained people who are experienced in design and know how to criticise constructively. Review is usually most respected where it is carried out by professional peers of the project designers, as their standing and expertise will be acknowledged.
4. **Advisory** It does not make decisions. It acts as a source of impartial advice for decision makers.
5. **Accessible** Its findings are clearly expressed in terms that decision makers can understand and use.
6. **Proportionate** It is used on projects whose significance warrants the public investment of providing design review. Other methods of appraising design quality should be used for less significant projects.
7. **Timely** It takes place as early as possible in the life of a design this saves most time and changes can be made at the least cost. If a planning application has already been made, it happens within the timeframe for considering this, and is repeated when a further opinion is required.
8. **Objective** It appraises schemes in the round according to reasoned, objective criteria rather than the stylistic tastes of individual panel members.
9. **Focused** on outcomes for people. It asks how a building or place can better meet the needs of the people using it, and of the public at large who are affected by it.
10. **Focused** on improving quality. It constructively seeks to improve the quality of architecture, urban design, landscape, highway design and town planning.

Appendix 4 Contact details

East Midlands design review panel

Opun

De Montfort University
Fletcher Building
The Gateway
Leicester
LE1 9BH
e designreview@opun.org.uk
t 07939 482 781
www.opun.org.uk

East of England design review panel

Inspire East

Level 5
Breckland House
St Nicholas Street
Thetford
Norfolk
IP24 1BT
t 01223 484644
e DesignAndEnabling@inspire-east.org.uk
www.inspire-east.org.uk/designreviewservice.aspx

North East design review panel

IGNITE

Stella House
Newburn Riverside
Newcastle upon tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE15 8NY
t 0191 238 7540
e designreview@ignite-ne.com

North West design review panel

Places Matter!

The Tea Factory
82 Wood Street
Liverpool
L1 4DQ
t 0151 703 0135
e charlotte.myhrum@placesmatter.co.uk
www.placesmatter.co.uk/design-review

South East design review panel

Kent Architecture Centre

Admiral's Offices
Historic Dockyard
Chatham
Kent
ME4 4TZ
t 01634 401 166
e sarah.brown@kentarchitecture.co.uk
www.architecturecentre.org

South West design review panel

Creating Excellence

Ground Floor
East Reach House
East Reach, Taunton
Somerset TA1 3EN
t 01823 250801

West Midlands design review panel

MADE

122 Fazeley Street
Birmingham
B5 5RS
t 0121 6339333
e info@made.org.uk
www.made.org.uk/services/design-review.html

Yorkshire and Humber design review panel

Integreat Yorkshire

Victoria House
2 Victoria Place
Leeds
LS11 5AE
t 0113 39 45745
e kate.fewson@yorkshire-forward.com

CABE design review panel

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

1 Kemble Street
London WC2B 4AN
t 020 7070 6700
e info@cabe.org.uk
www.cabe.org.uk/design-review

The network of design review panels operating across England provides local authorities and others with independent expert design advice. This report marks the end of the first year of an affiliation between CABE and the eight leading design review panels in England. It looks at how the panels work and offers case studies that show how design review works to help local people to choose good design.

1 Kemble Street
London WC2B 4AN
T 020 7070 6700
F 020 7070 6777
E enquiries@cabe.org.uk
www.cabe.org.uk

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and the Built Environment

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