



CAMDEN DESIGN
REVIEW PANEL

1 OCTOBER 2023
-
31 SEPTEMBER 2024

ANNUAL
REPORT

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

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INTRODUCTION

The Camden Design Review Panel was set up in 2016 by Frame Projects on behalf of the London Borough of Camden. It is currently chaired by Hari Phillips, with Chloë Phelps as vice-chair, and consists of 32 professional panel members selected through an open recruitment process, in collaboration with Camden officers.

Terms of Reference, available on the planning authority's website, set out the role and remit of the panel, and the way that it supports the planning process. Schemes requiring design advice are identified by planning officers and referred to the panel for review. Officers provide a briefing on the planning context and key issues, both in writing for the meeting agenda, and in person at the review meeting. The advice given by the panel is recorded in a formal report, which can be used to assist with continuing pre-application negotiations, or to advise the Planning Committee on submitted schemes.

The Camden Design Review Panel advised on 15 separate schemes, and held 21 review meetings between October 2023 and September 2024. Six schemes were reviewed on more than one occasion. First reviews usually take place at a stage when a client and design team have decided their preferred option for the development of a site, and have developed their design proposals sufficiently for a comprehensive discussion. There will often be a second pre-application review to provide advice on more detailed design matters, before a scheme is submitted for planning.

Cover image: view from Camden Council's offices at 5 Pancras Square © Tom Bolton
Image below: Princes Circus for LDA Design © Neil Speakman



PANEL

Authority

London Borough of Camden

Review Panel name

Camden Design Review Panel

Panel management

Frame Projects

Contact name for panel

Tom Bolton, Frame Projects

Contact email address

Tom@frame-projects.co.uk

Image: The Arches © Photography by Matthew White and Izzy Scott of AVR



REVIEW TOTALS

Number of reviews

21

Number of site visits

16

Number of first reviews

15

Number of follow up reviews

6

Formal reviews
(chair plus four panel members)

19

Chair's reviews
(chair plus one panel members)

2

PANEL COMPOSITION

PANEL MEMBERS USED THIS YEAR

No. of different panel members used

27

Male panel members

37%

Female panel members

63%

Diverse ethnic background
(based on 27 diversity forms)

40%

PANEL COMPOSITION

Architecture

14

Urban design / town planning

5

Landscape / public realm

2

Sustainability

4

Heritage / conservation

1

Transport

1

PROPOSALS REVIEWED

APPLICANT TYPE

Private developer

19

Public private partnership

2

STAGE OF PROPOSAL

Pre-application

19

Planning application
submitted

1

Amendment to approved
application

1

TYPE OF PROPOSAL

Masterplan

3

Residential (1-50 units)

3

Residential (50+ units)

1

Commercial

3

Mixed use

11

REFLECTIONS

In Camden, as in many other places, 2023-24 was a challenging period for development, and for residential schemes in particular. The combination of increased construction costs and changes to fire safety regulations, requiring buildings over 18 metres high to be designed with two stair cores, have challenged viability. This has contributed to a reduction in the number of reviews carried out by the panel over this period compared to previous years.

However, the Design Review Panel continued to review a wide range of proposals, the majority from private developers, including major mixed-use schemes, landmark refurbishments, student housing schemes, office proposals and laboratory space, as the Knowledge Quarter around King's Cross, continued to attract life science-led investment. The panel also reviewed proposals for small sites in sensitive locations, for conservation architecture.

EMERGING THEMES

A key theme of the panel's review comments was the sustainability of demolishing existing buildings. Panel members repeatedly interrogated applicant teams on how to avoid or reduce the release of embodied carbon through demolition. It pressed them to retain and reuse materials, in support of Camden Council's Local Plan policies requiring action to minimise embodied carbon emissions. The question of how buildings from different eras can be refitted rather than demolished is an urgent challenge. The Design Review Panel advised on schemes involving various refurbishment approaches, from the addition of extra storeys to complete reconstruction around a retained core.

Of equal concern to the panel is the flexibility of buildings, whether new or refurbished. Panel members have frequently made the point that buildings need to last for generations, which means they must be adaptable. Business models that work now may have changed completely in 50 years' time. It is no longer acceptable to simply demolish a building that cannot serve its original purpose. Instead, buildings should be designed with the potential to live different future lives, preventing the unnecessary release of carbon in generations to come.

The panel also reviews smaller schemes when they are in particularly sensitive contexts which mean they have local significance and impact. The quality of new architecture in a conservation area setting is a continuing area of discussion for the panel. Imaginative architects with creative freedom can make valuable additions to Camden's architectural heritage, adding to a living tradition that continues to progress and evolve. The Design Review Panel continues to demand the high design quality that councillors and officers expect.

FORWARD LOOK

The panel anticipates a range of reviews in 2025, which Camden officers expect to include long-term institutional development programmes, the retrofit and refurbishment of significant sites, and the progression of masterplans.

An annual meeting was held in September 2024, providing an opportunity for panel members and Camden officers to discuss the wider themes that have emerged beyond individual review meetings, and to take a forward look at major schemes expected to come to the panel over the coming year. Another will be scheduled during 2025.

Image: Tottenham Court Road, Grimshaw © Photo by Hufton + Crow

