

Planning Committee

2.00pm, Wednesday, 26 February 2020

Edinburgh Urban Design Panel Annual Report

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Routine All
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Committee is asked to:
 - 1.1.1 note the findings of the Edinburgh Urban Design Panel's annual review;
 - 1.1.2 record its appreciation of the voluntary contributions made by Panel members to the design review process; and
 - 1.1.3 agree that Scottish Natural Heritage is invited to become part of the core membership of the Panel.

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

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Report

Edinburgh Urban Design Panel Annual Review

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Edinburgh Urban Design Panel's annual review is provided to Committee to note. This contributes to the aim of raising the quality of new development in the city.
- 2.2 The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings from the annual review of the Edinburgh Urban Design Panel's work. A series of recommendations and actions are proposed for Committee's approval.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Edinburgh Urban Design Panel was set up by Planning Committee as one of the recommendations from the then City Design Initiative. Its main aim is to provide constructive design advice at an early stage in the preparation of development proposals. The Panel's discussion with a developer's design team is summarised in a written report which is then used by both the planning authority and the applicant to guide the finalisation of proposals for submission as a planning application.
- 3.2 The Panel is made up of voluntary representatives from a range of member organisations agreed by Planning Committee. These are noted in Appendix 1. The wide range of skills and experience of the Panel members brings significant benefits in terms of the insight that can be offered on major and complex projects where a range of design issues will be raised. The discussion at Panel meetings benefits from cross-disciplinary contributions and often provokes a developer's design team to reconsider aspects of their early proposals in a broader context. The presentation of proposals at the pre-application stage offers the greatest opportunity to influence design quality and to highlight issues likely to be raised by consultees to the future planning application.
- 3.3 Planning Committee established the Panel as an independent source of advice but wanted the process to be embedded within the development management process in order to have greatest impact. For that reason, the Panel's meetings have always been chaired by a senior planning service manager, acting in a facilitating role and serviced by planning officers with design skills.

- 3.4 The Panel first met in March 2009 and has reviewed almost 210 development proposals over the past 11 years. There is a requirement that an annual review of effectiveness is reported to the Planning Committee.
- 3.5 In March 2019, a workshop was held with Panel members and stakeholders to reflect on the Panel's first 10 years and consider added value and opportunities for improvement.
- 3.6 The Council's Planning Improvement Plan 2018/21 includes action to improve design quality under the key theme of Performance and Continuous Improvement. On [15 May 2019](#), this Committee noted progress on implementing the improvement plan, including action to share lessons learnt from the Panel with case officers and introduce changes to strengthen the approach to raising design quality

4. Main report

- 4.1 The Panel's tenth anniversary workshop took place on Wednesday 13 March 2019. An invited audience attended which included membership organisations, Architecture and Design Scotland, Scottish Government Planning and Architecture Division and the development community. The Planning Convener and Vice Convener also attended. The main focus of the workshop was to look at how the Panel's advice had added to the development process. To assist with this, three developer teams were asked to present. These presentations were generally very positive, and the suggestions and outcomes used to inform discussion at the Panel's recent annual review.
- 4.2 The programme for the workshop also included discussion on how collaboration delivers good development. Findings from this exercise was subsequently shared with other planning authorities at the Heads of Planning Scotland Conference in June 2019.
- 4.3 The annual review of the Panel's work programme and operations was carried out in December 2019. The report of meeting details is in Appendix 2.
- 4.4 This year's review concentrated on aspects of feedback from the Panel's tenth anniversary workshop, case studies and surveys to test the value added by the advice given by the Panel.
- 4.5 Feedback from developers' design teams and planning case officers was positive about the experience of engaging with the Panel and using the Panel's report to inform the design process. Case officers highlighted the benefit of receiving design advice specifically focussed on planning issues and planning policy. However, the Panel emphasised its independence and agreed that its advice should not be constrained by current policies in order to promote innovative urban design solutions.
- 4.6 Panel composition is discussed at every annual review. Given the context of the City of Edinburgh Council's target to deliver a carbon neutral Capital by 2030, the global 'climate emergency', and landscape context of the city, it was agreed that

further expertise in these areas should be sought. Scottish Natural Heritage has indicated in principal that it could offer this expertise and it is proposed they become part of the core membership of the Panel.

- 4.7 During 2019, the Panel carried out 20 reviews of emerging development proposals. In addition, the Panel contributes advice to the review of the City Centre Transformation Project, George Street and the West Cycle Route. The Panel considered that the range of development proposals, was representative of the development activity across the city. Panellists requested that they be kept briefed on emerging development plan issues and design guidance both at city and national level.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The operational improvements and additional membership of the Panel will be implemented following Committee approval.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 There are no financial impacts arising from this report.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 In the preparation of this report, Panel members were consulted.
- 7.2 Various development interests were consulted about their experience of participating in the Panel, to inform the Panel's annual review.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 www.edinburgh.gov.uk/planning-building/edinburgh-urban-design-panel/1

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 – List of Edinburgh Urban Design Panel Member Organisations (2019).
- 9.2 Appendix 2 – Edinburgh Urban Design Panel.

Appendix 1 - List of Edinburgh Urban Design Panel member organisations (2019)

Core membership

- Cockburn Association;
- Edinburgh Architectural Association;
- Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, University of Edinburgh;
- Landscape Institute Scotland;
- Historic Environment Scotland;
- Police Scotland;
- Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland;
- School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society, Heriot Watt University; and
- Transport Research Institute, Edinburgh Napier University

As required (for development proposals in the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site)

- Edinburgh World Heritage.

Appendix 2 – Edinburgh Urban Design Panel

EDINBURGH URBAN DESIGN PANEL		Draft REPORT	
2019 Panel Annual Review		of meeting held at the City Chambers on 11 December 2019	
List of attendees:			
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Panel members:			
David Leslie	Chair (Part Time) – City of Edinburgh Council	Julie Wilson	EAA
Terry Levinthal	The Cockburn Association	Ken Lochrie	EAA
Emily Peel Yates	Landscape Institute Scotland	Michael Good	EAA
Mike Scott	Historic Environment Scotland	Harry Smith	Heriot Watt University
Pat Langdon	Napier University		
Susan Horner	City of Edinburgh Council	Una Lee	City of Edinburgh Council
Apologies:			
ESALA		Police Scotland	
RTPi			

Summary

This report summarises the discussion, recommendations and actions from the Edinburgh Urban Design Panel's Annual Review of 2019. The Panel has continued to carry out reviews as defined within the remit of the Panel across the city.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Edinburgh Urban Design Panel was constituted by the Council's Planning Committee with a remit, functions, roles, and principles of conduct. The Panel met for the first time in March 2009 to undertake design reviews of major development proposals and planning policies of urban design significance to the City at pre-application stage.
- 1.2 It is part of the Panel's role to undertake a review of its effectiveness each year. Progress reports have been made to Planning Committee yearly since 2010. At its annual review, the Panel reflects on its work programme, organisational changes and opportunity for improvements.
- 1.3 The 2019 yearly review which this report summarises concentrated on the value added by the Panel to Development Management.
- 1.4 The base information used in the 2019 annual review was structured as follows:

Case Studies:

Two case studies, Alnwickhill housing and Market Street Hotel, were presented to the Panel. The case studies looked at how the proposals had developed in relation to the advice given by the Panel. The Alnwickhill development had also formed part of the 2019 Planning Committee Tour, in which some Panel members participated.

Feedback from the 10 year review:

A summary of the feedback was presented to the Panel. Primarily this feedback was from the presenting teams on how the Panel can add more value.

Survey feedback from case officers and presenters:

A summary of feedback from two recent surveys was discussed by the Panel. The surveys had invited comments from developers and case officers with experience of presenting cases to the Panel.

2 Confidentiality

The Chair stated that he had been made aware of a breach of confidentiality from a Panel member.

Recommendation and actions:

The Chair will write to each organisation to reinforce the remit, functions, roles and principles of conduct of the Panel with particular reference to confidentiality.

3 Panel's Report/Advice

The importance of Panel members commenting on the draft reports was noted. This is to ensure that all advice stated at the meeting has been recorded and fully endorsed in the Panel's report.

It was agreed that applicants should be encouraged to demonstrate how the advice has been taken on board as part of the supporting information in their planning application.

The Panel also noted that relating advice directly to planning policy is of benefit to council case officers. However, it was agreed that the Panel report should not be constrained by this and that the Panel's report should remain independent advice.

In the Panel's view, the two case studies illustrated where advice has and has not been taken on board and added value to the overall development and planning process.

Recommendation and actions:

Panel members to ensure that they comment on draft reports.

Planning Officials to continue to work with applicants to incorporate the Panel's advice into developing proposals.

4 Panel Composition

The members of the Panel are drawn from a range of organisations with particular expertise.

In general, the Panel were of the view that the wide range of organisations represented could provide appropriate/specialist advice for most of the developments. However, it was recognised that in some cases a 'guest panellist' offering specialist advice could assist. Where possible it was agreed the organisations could assist with this, but it was also recognised the difficulties given the timing of the agendas.

Given the context of the City of Edinburgh Council's target to deliver a carbon neutral Capital by 2030, the global 'climate emergency' and landscape context of the City. It was agreed that further expertise in these areas should be sought. Initial discussions have taken place with Scottish Natural Heritage to scope availability.

Recommendation and actions:

Planning Officials to recommend to Planning Committee that Scottish Natural Heritage be include as a core member of the Panel.

5 Format of the Meeting

In general, the Panel concluded that no change to the current format is required.

Recommendations and actions: none

6 Work Programme:

During 2019 the Panel carried out 20 reviews of development proposals within the city. All of these reviews were for developments that have resulted or are expected to result in planning applications. In addition, the Panel contributed advice to the City Centre Transformation Project, George Street Project and West Cycle Route.

The Panel considered that the range of development proposals was representative of the development activity across the city.

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to review policies, guidance and strategies with a view to influencing wider policy issues within the city, focussed on placemaking and wellbeing. They requested that they be briefed as City Plan 2030 evolves and in particular on how future housing sites are identified.

From reflection on reviews undertaken in the year, the Panel noted their concerns regarding the design approach to most of the allocated housing sites, particularly on the edge of settlement. It was suggested that this topic should be recommended to Architecture and Design Scotland as part of their annual support/networking meeting for local design panels.

In general, it was agreed that proposals should only come to the Panel once and that all major developments in the city should be considered for review by the Panel.

Recommendations and actions:

Planning officials to arrange briefing meetings on City Plan 2030 and housing sites and discuss with Architecture and Design Scotland the suggestion of looking at the design of major areas of housing as part of their annual local panel meeting.

7 Support and Administration

Meeting agendas to be sent to the organisations as soon as possible to assist with the selection of panellists.

Regarding the information provided by the applicant the Panel advocated an approach of material issued in advance of the meeting being more detailed than the presented information which should be clear and concise. This could reduce time spent responding to points of clarification at the review.

Recommendations and actions:

Planning officials to action the above organisational arrangements.