



ESSEX QUALITY REVIEW PANEL

ESSEX PLANNING OFFICERS ASSOCIATION



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LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITIES' GUIDE

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86 - 92 (evens)
William Hunter Way
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WILLIAM HUNTER WAY,
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1.0 Introduction

Introduction to the Essex Quality Review Panel

The Essex Planning Officers Association (EPOA) in partnership with Place Services has established the Essex Quality Review Panel (EQRP).

Essex is one of the UKs fastest growing regions through its close links to London as well as its well-defined infrastructure and economy, the built environment is developing fast and the requirement for high quality design has never been as important.

The EQRP will ensure delivery and promotion of high-quality new developments through the creation of good design, sustainability, and improved quality, creating better places and environments to work and live in the County.

A Quality Review Panel provides a well-established method of offering independent and impartial guidance on the design of new buildings, landscapes, and public space.



The Echoes, Grays - image courtesy of Kilian O'Sullivan

The Purpose of this Document

This EQRP document is a guidance for those working within the local authority's side of planning and development. The document details how the quality review process works, as well as incorporating suggestions on how applicants can get the best value from the EQRP.

Quality Review Panels are a well-established way of improving the quality of design outcomes in the built environment, and it is now recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as quoted below:

“138. Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. The primary means of doing so should be through the preparation and use of local design codes, in line with the National Model Design Code. For assessing proposals there is a range of tools including workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for a Healthy Life. These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes, and are particularly important for significant projects such as large-scale housing and mixed-use developments. In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.”



St Chads, Tilbury - image courtesy of Kilian O'Sullivan

Our Principles & USP

The Panels objective is to encourage high quality design, sustainability, environmental infrastructure and community coherence within Essex.

Each panel will be individually tailored to suit the projects aims and outcomes where panel members will be called upon to reflect the need and requirement of an application. The EQRP does this by not only striving to improve the quality of architecture, urban design, landscape and highway design, but also considering the wider aspects of what makes a fully cohesive community. Other elements such as heritage, health and wellbeing, sustainable energy, and public art are all incorporated. This is what separates the EQRP from more traditional Design Review Panel formats.

The panel will be available to all who would wish to use it, and is expected to be of particular aid where quality and design is at the forefront of discussions at pre-app stage or earlier.

All feedback provided by the Panel will be made in accordance with the set review principles stated within this section of the document.

For the EQRP to succeed, it must be carried out using a robust, yet transparent and collaborative process. It must also offer consistently high standards in the quality of its advice. These standards can be summarised in the key eleven principles.



Beaulieu, Chelmsford - image courtesy of Tate Hindle

Quality Review Principles:

1

Independent – it is conducted by people who are unconnected with the scheme’s promoters and decision makers, and it ensures that conflicts of interest do not arise.

2

Expert - the advice is delivered by suitably trained people who are experienced in design, who know how to criticise constructively and whose standing and expertise is widely acknowledged.

3

Multidisciplinary - the advice combines the different perspectives of architects, urban designers, town planners, landscape architects, engineers and other specialist experts to provide a complete, rounded assessment.

4

Accountable- the Quality Review Panel and its advice must be clearly seen to work for the benefit of the public. This should be ingrained within the panel’s terms of reference.

5

Impartial - the advice is informed by independent experts, people who are unconnected with the scheme’s promoters and decision makers, and it ensures that any potential conflicts of interest are managed in an open and transparent way.

6

Transparent – the panel’s remit, membership, governance processes and funding should always be in the public domain.

7

Proportionate – it is used on projects whose significance, at either a local or national level, warrants the investment needed to provide the service.

8

Timely - the advice is conveyed as early as possible in the design process, because this can avoid a great deal of wasted time. It also costs less to make changes at an early stage.

9

Advisory - the Quality Review Panel does not make decisions, but it offers impartial advice for the people who do.

10

Objective – it appraises schemes according to reasoned, objective criteria rather than the stylistic tastes of individual panel members.

11

Accessible – its findings and advice are clearly expressed in terms that design teams, decision makers and clients can all understand and use.



The Team

Place Services have created, manage and deliver the services offered through this panel.

Place Services are a leading public sector provider of integrated environmental assessment, planning, design and management services. Their combination of specialist skills and experience means that they are uniquely qualified to help public organisations meet the requirements of the planning process, create practical design solutions and deliver environmental stewardship.

Place Services' experience and skills demonstrate the drive for high quality design throughout Essex and the UK.

Contact Us

We're always interested to hear from you regarding the EQR, regardless if you want to provide us some feedback, become a panel member or just interested in finding out more surrounding the Panel, you can contact us in the following ways:

Essex Design Guide

Email: essexdesignguide@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 6840

Website: www.essexdesignguide.co.uk/qualitypanel



Panel Manager - Jason Yates

Email: jason.yates@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 7271

Mobile: 07740901097

Jason's current role involves serving as the Panel Manager of the EQR, working with multiple local authorities across the county to deliver a bespoke quality review service.



Panel Manager - Sam Williams

Email: Sam.Williams@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 3136

Mobile: N/A

Sam's current role involves serving as the Panel Manager of the EQR, working with multiple local authorities across the county to deliver a bespoke quality review service.



Panel Coordinator - Joe Feeney

Email: joseph.feeney@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 032 2838

Mobile: N/A

Joe serves as the Panel Coordinator for the EQRP working alongside the Panel Manager, maintaining the services of the EQRP on a day-to-day basis.



Panel Coordinator - Rosie Follett

Email: Rosie.follett@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 9493

Mobile: N/A

Rosie serves as the Panel Coordinator for the EQRP working alongside the Panel Manager, maintaining the services of the EQRP on a day-to-day basis.



Panel Coordinator - Neha Patil

Email: neha.patil@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 9313

Mobile: N/A

Neha serves as the Panel Coordinator for the EQRP working alongside the Panel Manager, maintaining the services of the EQRP on a day-to-day basis.



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2.0 Value of Quality Review Panels for Local Authorities

The Value of Good Design

The design quality and sustainability of our different communities, ranging from large towns and cities to the countryside, is the key to achieving many strategic objectives that are reflected across many local authorities regardless of their political connection. It is considered that there are many values of good design for local authorities in the following areas:

- Improving health and care for residents, both physically and mentally
- Enhancing educational environments
- Creating well-considered housing communities
- Promoting civic pride and cultural activity within the public realm
- Improving business and commercial opportunities
- Increasing crime prevention and awareness

Opportunity to Impartial Advice

The aim of the EQRP is to improve design quality in the built and natural environment. Its essential role is to review development proposals during the early stages of the planning application process and provide impartial advice to developers, clients and planning officers that will help to enhance the quality of the design being presented, helping them proceed through the planning process faster. The EQRP allows local authorities to use its members as an opportunity for impartial advice, from industry professionals who are able to provide their own independent and fair opinions on any designs that come forward.

Improves Speed

The use of the EQRP panel members' expertise can help to resolve potential design issues and overcome conflict, therefore saving time and helping to progress a project through the planning process.

Increases Value in Good Design

The EQRP offers a fresh perspective on designs, helping to address issues with viability and efficiency, as well as providing alternative design solutions that are yet to be explored within a scheme.

Increased Consensus Across Different Parties

The EQRP facilitates engaging collaboration amongst different parties, to reach agreements over design vision and development of project schemes.

Improves Quality

The EQRP process can ensure an improvement in design quality, identifying ways to enhance a scheme, and becoming an integral part of the development control process.

3.0 The Quality Review Process

When to Engage with the EQRP

Panels are best undertaken at an early stage of the design process. This ensures a design is flexible in responding to comments and observations through the panel process. Alternatively, a design should also be developed enough to allow a panel to comment and discuss the concept, approach and details.

From experience we have discovered that panels organised following a validated planning application are tightly restricted, or limited to any design changes, and these instances a panel process can become redundant.

Panels can be requested by the applicant or Local Authority case officer through the website- [Book a Panel](#).

Please note, not all planning applications require a Quality Review Panel - if you would like to discuss a particular planning application or project, please contact the Panel Manager. We generally recommend that panels are submitted which qualify as either strategic, major or complex schemes, as well as projects that may require input following unresolved design discussions.

The Panel management team are happy to discuss applications to assess the need and value a Quality Review Panel would bring to your scheme.



Formats of Review & Costings

Panel charges are based on a non-profiting basis which is comparable to national Panel rates. The panel recommend that fees are covered by the applicant to ensure zero cost to the Local Authority.

It will be down to the Panel Manager and Panel Chair to determine whether a site visit will be required. Site visits will be required for large / sensitive / significantly located / or other impactful applications. Managing the Quality Review Panel through Covid-19 has meant that we have become adept at running virtual Quality Reviews. We will continue to offer this approach when best suited to the review request.

Please see EQRP costings listed below, along with the table detailing what these prices include:

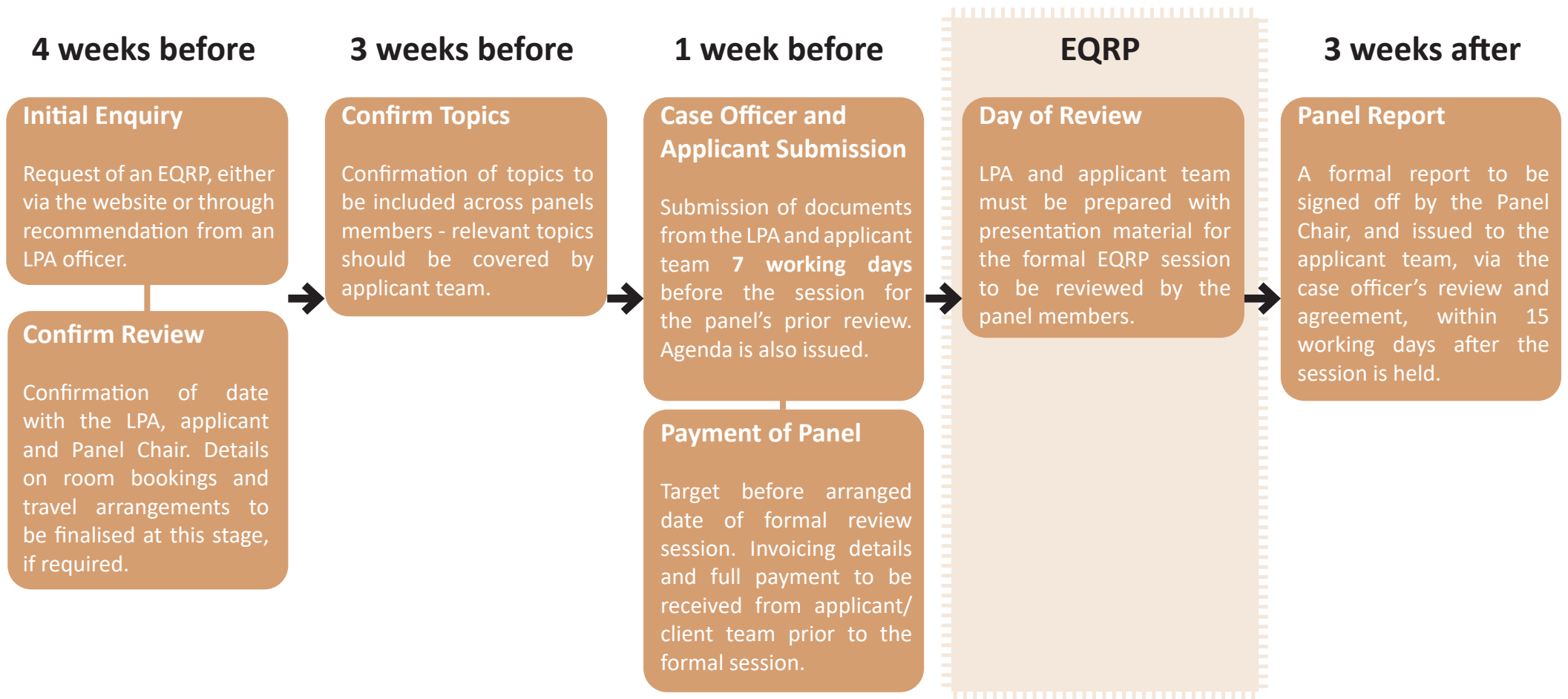
- **Online Panel** - £4,450.00 + VAT*
- **Half-day Panel**- £5,850.00 + VAT*
- **Full-day Panel**- £7,150.00 + VAT*

** Please note that panel charges are non-negotiable and subject to availability.*

Types of EQRP Review

	Online Panel (4 hours)	Half-day Panel (4-5 Hours)	Full-day Panel (7 Hours)
Full Panel (4 members, 1 Chair)	●	●	●
Site Visit		●	●
Meeting Room Hire		●	●
Projector		●	●
Wifi Connection		●	●
Refreshments (tea, coffee, water)		●	●
Lunch			●
Panel Administration	●	●	●
Panel Report	●	●	●
Microsoft Teams/Zoom Hosted	●		

Timetable of Standard EQRP Process





STANDARD AGENDA

1. SITE VISIT/REVIEW
2. CASE OFFICER BRIEFING
3. APPLICANT PRESENTATION
4. CLARIFICATIONS
5. PANEL DISCUSSION
6. CHAIR SUMMARY
7. LPA/APPLICANT FEEDBACK
8. REPORT

4.0 Requirements from the LPA

Briefing Report Guidance

When a Panel has been arranged, the case officer will be required to produce a briefing report to be issued to the panel members prior to the session being undertaken, ideally 7 working days beforehand to ensure enough time for the members to review this information.

This document allows the panel members and chair to have a clear understanding of the planning and policy context of the project proposal, and to gage any historic pre-app discussions which have been undertaken to date. It is also a good opportunity for any other LPA officers to input, for example; highways, Urban Design, flooding etc. It is also a good opportunity to highlight certain elements of the scheme for the panel members to focus on during the formal EQRP review.

A briefing report template will be issued to the case officer via the Panel Manager or Coordinator, which will contain topic headings, such as; planning context, description of project, and stage of application. These headings will guide the officer to provide the required background information to the panel members, along with continued support from the EQRP admin team.



Presentation Input

During the formal review session, the LPA case officer will be asked by the Chair to provide a short presentation to further explain the planning and policy context of the project proposal, and what they will be looking for from the review. This should take no more than approximately 20 minutes. Following on from this, there will be a short Q+A session with the panel members to address any queries or clarifications regarding the information provided within the briefing report or case officer's presentation. The panel is open in allowing additional input for other consultees from the LPA to outline specialist concerns if required.



5.0 Engaging with the EQRP

In order to gain the best value of the panel, it is recommended to consider the following methods of engaging with the quality review process, to maximise the benefits the EQRP can bring to developments within your local authority.

Integration of the EQRP with other design initiatives

The EQRP is not a stand-alone process, and local authorities are recommended to develop a range of other initiatives to make them a quality-led authority, such as; local design guidance/coding, reference to the EQRP within Local Plans, PPA's, as well as integrating the EQRP the fabric of pre-app programmes.

A programme to help deliver exemplar developments

The EQRP will help to promote the best designed sites possible for LPA's, by implementing the quality review principles across the multiple selection of developments that come under review.

Establishing a design dialogue through follow-up reviews

When an EQRP session has taken place, it is important that there is a process for analysing the panel's feedback document and making sure the applicant team respond accordingly to the provided feedback. It is recommended that the opinions of the EQRP, along with how the applicant has subsequently responded, should be reported within planning application reports and future follow-up reviews to clearly illustrate where improvements have been made.

Establishing a consistent partnership with the EQRP

The strongest and most effective way of committing to quality review is through a consistent partnership with the EQRP. The EQRP are open to providing an agreed range of complementary activities to the standard quality review package, which might include design surgeries for smaller schemes, presentations to stakeholder groups and CPD training for officers and elected members. This creates a stronger partnership between the EQRP and local authorities in the County.

6.0 FAQ's

Who should attend the review?

Officers who are working on the scheme are asked to attend the panels; these may include the case officer, and other specialist officers. If there is involvement from another agency, such as Historic England or the County Highways team, they may also be invited to attend.

Can elected members attend?

Elected members are only able to attend sessions as observers, and therefore unable to contribute to discussions held during the formal EQRP review. Any queries or issues should be sent directly to the Panel Manager outside the arranged meeting times.

When should a review take place in the planning process?

We recommend schemes to come to the EQRP as early as possible, whilst the design is still flexible and open for changes. Engaging in the quality review process at an early stage means that all parties can derive maximum benefit from the panel's advice before the designs become too advanced.

What if the EQRP does not support the views of the Local Authority?

The EQRP are not used to make the planning decision for the local authority. The panel members will make suggestions as to how it could be improved, based on whether they believe there are fundamental problems with a scheme, or whether they broadly support it. Local authorities are encouraged to enter constructive discussions with the EQRP and make best use of the advice the panel members provide.



Can we book regular slots with the EQRP?

As has been outlined within this guidance document, local authorities are encouraged to establish a consistent partnership with the EQRP. We are open to arranging regular slots with local authorities provided the standard timescales and panel formatting can be met.

What scale of developments can be reviewed?

The EQRP welcomes a wide range of schemes to be reviewed, from large scale strategic town centre masterplans, to small infill residential schemes.

Do you just review residential schemes?

The EQRP does not purely review residential schemes. A number of alternative schemes have come forward since the inception of the EQRP, including; highways infrastructure schemes, mixed-use retail schemes, town centre masterplans, and Paragraph 80 applications.

Will the EQRP cost the Local Authority anything?

The fees are set out in the guidance documentation. Cost are usually covered by the applicant, but the Local Authority can use the panel where the benefits will outweigh the cost of the panel itself.



7.0 Declarations & Conflict of Interest

Confidentiality

All information submitted to the EQRP will be treated as strictly private and confidential; only being shared with Panel members to be used for its intended purpose.

We do not publish copies of feedback documents and written feedback is only provided to the LPA and applicant teams. If the EQRP's feedback is submitted to the local authority as part of a planning application, the LPA may choose to make the feedback document public in addition to the other planning documents.

If you have a particularly sensitive project and there is need for additional measures to ensure confidentiality, then please discuss this with our Panel Manager.

Conflicts and Declaration of Interest

It is important that the panel's independence and professionalism is maintained and respected during the review process. It is essential to avoid any actual or perceived conflicts of interest in relation to any schemes that come before a panel.

All panel members are requested to identify at an early stage any possible conflicts of interests and to ensure suitable action is taken to avoid or resolve these. Information regarding the panel will be circulated in advance of the review to allow panel members to identify and declare any potential conflicts of interests before the process begins.

Where a conflict of interest is raised and declared, it will be asked that the panel member is to step down from a review. Where a declaration of interest may be sufficient it will be requested a panel member are to contact the panel manager to discuss.



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