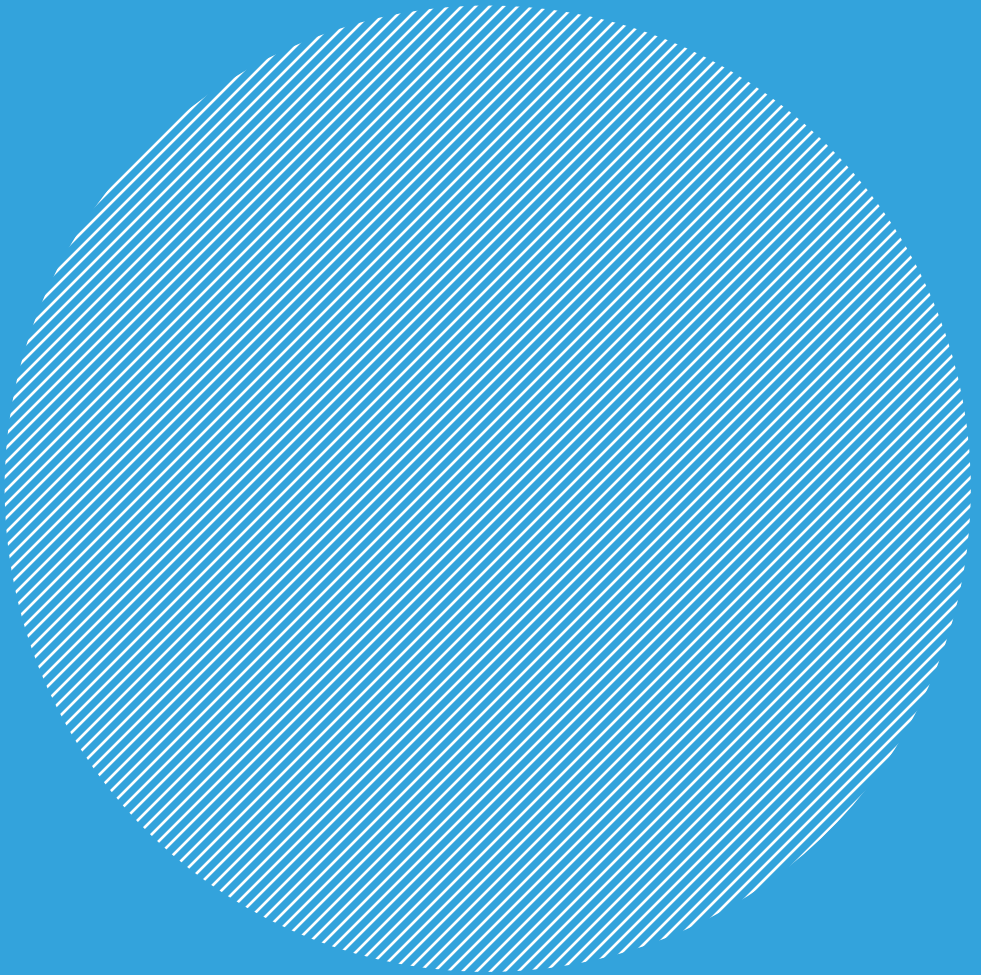


# Design Review in South Australia





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# Introduction

This Guide describes the role and value of Design Review in South Australia, providing practical advice to those involved or interested in Design Review and the Development Assessment pre-lodgement process in South Australia.

The Design Review program was formed in 2011 under a licensing agreement with Design Council Cabi UK and has since become a reliable method of promoting good design in South Australia. It is an efficient and cost effective way to improve the quality of design outcomes in the built environment.

The Design Review Program is led by the South Australian Government Architect and Associate Government Architect, with support by staff from the Office for Design and Architecture SA (ODASA), within the Department for Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (DPTI).

# What is Design Review?

Design Review is an independent evaluation process in which a panel of built environment experts reviews the design quality of development proposals. It's a free and confidential service available to certain projects, as described in *The Role of Design Review*.

Design Review involves the presentation of a proposal to a panel of built environment experts. This presentation is supported by A1 panels that visually illustrate the scheme and may also include a physical model of the project in its context. Further information regarding presentation material can be found in the publication *Preparing for Design Review*.

The panel then reviews, discusses and expresses its views on the proposal. At the conclusion of the review, the Chair summarises the panel discussion, which then informs the Government Architect, Associate Government Architect or

nominated Chair's recommendations letter to the nominated proponent representative. Where concerns have been raised in the recommendations letter, further Design Review sessions are advised. Importantly, the role of Design Review is not to redesign proposals, but offer suggestions for alternative design approaches where potential for improved outcomes is identified.

Design Review is guided by the Principles of Good Design which focus on how buildings and places can meet the needs of the people who use them. These overarching principles inform the design quality evaluation.

*The Planning, Development and Infrastructure Act 2016* contains principles of high-quality design relating to urban renewal, activation and liveability, sustainability, investment and integrated delivery.







# Principles of Good Design

The ODASA Principles of Good Design are:

### **Context**

Good design is **contextual** because it responds to the surrounding environment, and contributes to the existing quality and future character of a place.

### **Inclusive**

Good design is **inclusive** and universal because it creates places for everyone to use and enjoy, by optimising social opportunity and equitable access.

### **Durable**

Good design is **durable** because it creates buildings and places that are fit-for-purpose, adaptable and long-lasting.

### **Value**

Good design adds **value** by creating desirable places that promote community and local investment, as well as enhancing social and cultural value.

### **Performance**

Good design **performs** well because it realises the project potential for the benefit of all users and the broader community.

### **Sustainable**

Good design is **sustainable** because it is environmentally responsible and supports long-term economic productivity, health and wellbeing.

# The Role of Design Review

## **Pre-lodgement Service**

Design Review is an integral part of the voluntary, confidential and free pre-lodgement service offered by the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (DPTI). The pre-lodgement service is a collaborative process in which proponents and key decision-makers (including statutory referral agencies) work closely to achieve the best possible design, planning and development outcomes.

The pre-lodgement service is available for developments that meet the following criteria:

- Adelaide City - \$10 million or more in value within the City of Adelaide
- Inner Metropolitan Adelaide - Five storeys or more in height within the 'Urban Corridor Zone' as described in the Council Development Plans of:
  - Burnside
  - Norwood Payneham & St Peters (including the 'District Centre Zone' in Norwood)
  - Prospect
  - Unley
  - West Torrens
  - Holdfast Bay (within the 'Glenelg District Centre (Jetty Road) Zone' and 'Residential High Density Zone')

- Port Adelaide Enfield - \$3 million or more in value within the 'Port Adelaide Regional Centre Zone'
- Any project at the discretion of the State Coordinator General.
- While the pre-lodgement service is available at any stage of a proposal's evolution, the greatest benefit is achieved through early engagement with relevant stakeholders.

## **Statutory Referrals**

Design advice is an important part of the planning approvals process in South Australia. Changes to the planning system in 2012 included the introduction of a statutory referral to the Government Architect (Chair) for certain development applications assessed by the State Commission Assessment Panel (SCAP). Design Review and the subsequent recommendations letters inform the referral provided to the SCAP by the Chair. The SCAP places significant weight on this advice in helping to raise the standard of design in the State.

## **Projects of State Significance**

Design Review and guidance is provided to assist the State Coordinator General with projects deemed to be of economic significance to the State. This also applies to proposals declared as a *Major Developments* or *Projects* by the Minister. In both cases, this is non-statutory advice.







# **The Benefits of Design Review**



Design Review encourages high quality developments that help create better places for communities. It can also provide useful guidance on community consultation processes and insights into how a design might impact on community life.

Proponents benefit from access to a panel of built environment experts with multidisciplinary experience. Where an opportunity for innovation exists, individual schemes can also benefit from peer review to ensure an optimum design outcome is achieved.

Design Review supports and instils confidence in decision-makers in delivering high quality, inspiring developments and public spaces that

meet the needs of all stakeholders. It demonstrates how good design can be achieved and where design innovations may appropriately challenge planning parameters.

Design Review can save time, money and effort by identifying issues at an early stage of the design process, reducing the risks and costs associated with planning process delays.

It offers participants and observers opportunities for continued learning, particularly in design quality assessment.

Ultimately, Design Review helps to enrich the design industry with fresh perspectives and advice arising from the professional examination of projects.

# **A Panel Member's Perspective**



**Susan Phillips**  
Architect and  
Design Review  
Panel Member

The Office of Design & Architecture SA (ODASA) and the role of Government Architect has had a major impact on the urban design quality of Adelaide. The revitalisation of Adelaide's laneways is just one example of the innovative thinking promoted by ODASA and its predecessor, the Integrated Design Commission. This initiative has seen a transformation of the CBD, with new cafes, bars and restaurants revitalising the city, promoting a vibrant night time economy and contributing to Adelaide becoming a highly desirable tourism destination.

Design Review has been another key achievement of ODASA, with increasing influence across metropolitan Adelaide. Initially Design Review was restricted to projects within the City of Adelaide but now covers participating inner rim council areas such as Unley and Norwood Payneham St Peters. Design Review is also contributing to the built outcomes at Tonsley and Port Adelaide.

Design Review was initially viewed with some concern by the development community, the perception being that it may increase the complexity of obtaining Development Plan Consent. Many developers now recognise the value of Design Review in facilitating approvals and enhancing the amenity and urban design quality of proposals, which ultimately contributes to the marketability of their developments.

Developers and their design teams have the benefit of some of Australia's leading architects contributing to their proposals. Design Review has raised expectations of design quality, with tangible benefits for both the occupants of built proposals and the wider public.

Design Review panels typically consist of experienced designers, as well as younger emerging designers, to provide a range of perspectives. The inclusion of interstate panel members prevents an insular assessment of proposals and exposes the local panel members and proponents to lessons learnt from projects around Australia. Design Review has created a culture of professional development for both panel members and proponents, including their design teams.

# **Principles of Design Review**

Design Review is focused on outcomes for people. It explores how a building or place can successfully meet the needs of the people who will use and interact with it. For Design Review to succeed, it must be carried out using a robust and independent process. It must also offer consistently high standards in the quality of its advice.

The Design Review program is guided by a series of overarching principles that form the basis of the panel's discussion:

### **Independent**

Design Review is conducted by people who are not connected with the scheme's promoters and decision-makers, ensuring that no conflicts of interest arise.

### **Expert**

Design Review is carried out by suitably trained design experts who are experienced in delivering constructive feedback. Design Review is most respected when carried out by the professional peers of project designers, because their standing and expertise will be acknowledged.

### **Multidisciplinary**

Design Review combines the perspectives of architects, urban designers, urban and rural planners, landscape architects, engineers and other specialist experts to provide a complete and rounded assessment.

### **Accountable**

The Design Review panel and its advice informing the Chair's recommendations, must be clearly seen to be working in the public's interest.

### **Transparent**

Information about Design Review's remit, panel membership, funding and governance should always be available to the public and accessible on the ODASA website.

### **Timely**

Design Review takes place as early in the design process as possible, to affect positive change during design development and to avoid reworking or regression.

### **Advisory**

The Design Review panel does not make decisions or give direction; it offers impartial advice and recommendations to the Chair.

### **Objective**

Design Review appraises schemes according to reasoned and objective principles, rather than stylistic tastes or subjective opinion.

### **Accessible**

The recommendations arising from Design Review are expressed in terms that design teams, decision-makers and clients can clearly understand and utilise.





# **Delivering the Principles of Design Review**



## **The Panel**

### **Panel Composition**

Design Review panel members are selected from a pool of built environment experts recruited for their skills, expertise and record of achievement in one or more professional fields. The panel is composed to achieve a balanced representation of skills and experience. An average of four panel members attend each Design Review session, with additional panel membership sought by the Chair, based on the scope of a project.

### **Mix of Skills**

As well as architects, landscape architects and urban designers, Design Review also seeks advice from fields such as planning, heritage, education, sustainability and environmental services, universal design, civil and structural engineering and transport.

Reviews that require specific expertise are assigned panel members with relevant skill sets.

### **Interstate Experience**

Design Review benefits from intimate knowledge of the local context however, experience has shown that the wider perspective afforded by interstate built environment experts is also highly valuable.

### **Diversity**

It is vital that the panel represents a diverse range of views and backgrounds.

### **Terms of Office**

New panel members are appointed every three years to maintain a balance of new and experienced members.

### **Training and Guidance**

Prior to joining a panel, all new members attend induction and training sessions covering procedures and frameworks that support the delivery of Design Review. This includes observation of Design Review sessions in progress. Additional training sessions, addressing specific topics, are provided where necessary.

All panel members and professional staff must have an understanding of local planning issues and priorities, commercial viability and government policy.

## Continuity

ODASA strives to achieve panel member continuity between each Design Review session, with a minimum of two members retained, for consistency of advice.

To ensure advice is independent, the makeup of panel is not disclosed to the proponent and project team prior to a Design Review session.

## The Chair

It is important to have a highly-regarded Chair who can effectively consider a range of views and draw a coherent conclusion from each Design Review session.

The Chair must have:

- A record of professional achievement that supports the delivery of Design Review
- Strong critical and analytical thinking abilities
- Skills to communicate in a respectful manner
- The ability to deal with panel members or clients who express strong or conflicting opinions
- The ability to synthesise and summarise disparate or conflicting views and to summarise the panel discussion in a clear and concise manner.

## Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest arises if there is any suggestion that a panel member, individually or as a member of a group or organisation, might have a financial, commercial, professional or personal interest in a project, its client or its site.

All interests, real or perceived, are formally managed and recorded in advance of each meeting.

In cases where ODASA determine a panel member conflict, the member will not be permitted to participate in any Design Review session relating to that scheme.

The *Design Review Conflicts of Interest Policy* can be downloaded from the ODASA website.

## Special Panels

Special Panels may be convened to support local authorities or other state agencies with significant projects. The advantage of special panels is the capacity to adjust the Design Review process to accommodate the specific requirements of a project. Examples of special panels include master planning projects and reviews of project guidelines for Major Projects.

## **Delivering Design Review**

Design Review works best when a proponent engages in the early conceptual stages of design. Experience has shown that Design Review can assist in identifying aspects of a proposal requiring improvement and the resolution of fundamental issues prior to a proposal being lodged.

The advice given by the Design Review panel and Chair is independent from approval agencies and the interests of a proponent. Advice is given without fear or favour and stands clear and robust.

The Design Review panel reports on the positive aspects of a scheme while remaining objectively critical of areas requiring improvement. The advice is based on professional judgment and the Principles of Good Design.

Design Review is focused on a project's contextual response and resulting impacts on the surrounding landscape

and local community. While aesthetic considerations are relevant, Design Review avoids prejudices of style or taste.

The Design Review environment encourages a thorough understanding and interrogation of a project's brief to ensure the best possible design outcomes have been identified and enabled. Where possible, site visits are arranged prior to a project's first session.

All schemes submitted to Design Review are treated in the strictest of confidence. All attendees, including representatives from local councils and the State Government, are subject to confidentiality agreements.

Following Design Review discussions, proponents are given the opportunity to respond to or clarify any of the points discussed. This dialogue can assist the proponent in understanding the Chair's final recommendations and in progressing positively through Design Review.

## **The Recommendations Letter**

Design Review recommendation letters and related correspondence are directed to the nominated proponent representative and relevant DPTI Planning Officer. Typically, permission must be sought prior to any further distribution, noting exceptions under the *Freedom of Information Act 1991* and the *Public Sector (Data Sharing) Bill 2016*.

The nominated proponent representative will receive the Chair's recommendations within ten (10) working days following the Design Review session. The recommendations letter is not a minute of the panel discussion, rather it expresses the view of the Chair as informed by the Design Review panel's deliberation.

If a recommendations letter is found to contain an error it may be withdrawn, corrected and re-issued. The document will retain its original date however, will be clearly marked and accompanied by a re-issue explanation.

## **Pre-lodgement Agreements**

Section 37AA of the Act allows agreements to be reached between development applicants and referral agencies prior to lodgement. This process eliminates the need for referrals to be undertaken during the formal assessment process, thereby significantly reducing

assessment timelines and potential delays for the development application.

The PLA letter is addressed to the SCAP and includes advisory notes detailing how the project has progressed through Design Review. The PLA letter clearly outlines whether the proposal is supported by the Chair, or whether there are unresolved design issues that may provide grounds for conditions to be placed on any development approval by SCAP.

A PLA includes the stamped, initialled and dated drawings subject to the agreement and must be lodged with the SCAP Development Application within three months of being signed.

## **Freedom of Information**

The *Freedom of Information Act 1991 (FOI Act)* provides the public, media, companies, and Members of Parliament with a legally enforceable right of access (subject to certain restrictions) to documents held by government. Requests for information may come to ODASA at any time. As a condition of their contract, Design Review panel members are not permitted to discuss development proposals or disclose any information received, before or after the review. Should there be any obligation to disclose information under the Act, full records of all projects, procedures and comments are maintained by ODASA.

# Additional Design Review Resources

The following documents provide additional information about Design Review.

They can be downloaded from the ODASA website [odasa.sa.gov.au](https://odasa.sa.gov.au).

- Design Review in South Australia
- Principles of Good Design
- Design Review Checklists
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Project Information Form
- Observer Confidentiality Form
- Conflicts of Interest
- Terms of Reference

## **DPTI Planning Resources**

### **DPTI Pre-lodgement Service**

[dpti.sa.gov.au/planning/prelodgementservice](https://dpti.sa.gov.au/planning/prelodgementservice)

### **SA Planning Portal**

[saplanningportal.sa.gov.au](https://saplanningportal.sa.gov.au)



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