

# State Design Review Panel Manual

June 2025



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### Acknowledgement of Country

The Western Australian Planning Commission acknowledges the Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of Western Australia.

We pay our respects to the Ancestors and Elders, both past and present, and the ongoing connection between people, land, waters and community. We acknowledge those who continue to share knowledge, their traditions and culture to support our journey for reconciliation. In particular, we recognise land and cultural heritage as places that hold great significance for Aboriginal people.

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# About this Manual

› Application

Design review is a measure supporting the implementation of State Planning Policy 7.0 Design of the Built Environment (SPP 7.0).

The State Design Review Panel Manual (the Manual) provides guidance on the design review processes of the State Design Review Panel (SDRP).

Other established design review panels such as those run by local government and State Government delivery agencies may have different processes and procedures from those outlined in this Manual.

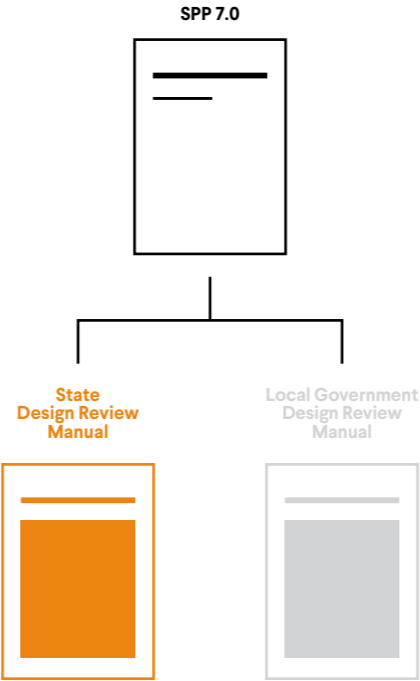


Figure 1 Policy Context

› Parts and structure

This manual provides a detailed overview of design review, its benefits and the role of design review in the Western Australian planning system.

This includes:

- An overview of design review.
- Benefits of design review.
- The role of design review in the Western Australian planning system.

# Design Review



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# Overview

› What is design review?

Design review is the process of independently evaluating the design quality of development proposals and built form planning instruments. It is carried out by a panel of appropriately trained, multi-disciplinary built environment professionals.

Design review in Western Australia supports the implementation of State Planning Policy 7.0 Design of the Built Environment and other related policies that deal with built environment design quality.

Design review benefits development proposals by providing informed opinion and guidance on the interpretation and application of design elements and principles, which can be particularly helpful for unique or complex development proposals. Design review assists proponents in exploring alternative design approaches to achieve an optimum outcome and supports decision makers weighing the merits of proposals and making informed determinations.

Typically, two to three design review sessions per project are recommended to ensure the maximum value of advice received. Early engagement is encouraged to maximise the opportunity for the proposal to respond to the issues identified.

DESIGN REVIEW IS NOT:

- Design advice provided by a single individual.
- A peer review (either by individuals or a group) engaged by the client.
- Advice from a City or Estate Architect.
- A compliance check carried out at building permit stage.

› What is the difference between design review and design advice?

There may be cases where a design review panel (DRP) process is not warranted or practical, but where design advice is still sought by the relevant determining body. This may be most appropriate for the development of design guidelines, planning policies, standard structure plans, proposals subject to statutory timeframes which cannot accommodate design review, or where discrete aspects of a proposal require specific expertise inputs.

Design advice may be provided by an individual with subject matter expertise or, where available, by a City or Estate architect.

The benefits of this approach include the provision of timely advice on matters that may not otherwise be appropriate in a full design review process.

In accordance with the *Design Review Protocols* established in this Manual, this activity is not considered a *design review* and instead constitutes *design advice*.

› Design Review Protocols

All panels should be established and operated in line with these protocols to promote consistent outcomes and set an appropriate standard of conduct from members:

Independent

It is conducted by people who are not connected with the proposal’s promoters or decision makers and in a manner that ensures that conflicts of interest are either avoided or managed appropriately.

Expert

It is carried out by suitably qualified people who are experts in design and know how to critique constructively. Review is usually most respected when it is carried out by professional peers of the project design team, because their standing and expertise will be understood and accepted.

Multi-disciplinary

It combines the different perspectives of architects, urban designers, planners, landscape architects and other specialist design experts to provide a complete, rounded design evaluation.

Accountable

The panel, and the advice that it provides, must be clearly seen to work for the benefit of the public.

Transparent

The panel’s remit, membership, governance processes and funding are in the public domain.

Proportionate

It is used on projects whose significance warrants the investment needed to provide the service.

Timely

It takes place early in the design process, to offer the best time and cost benefits for proponents.

Advisory

The panel does not make decisions, rather it offers impartial expert advice on design considerations to inform recommendations to the people who do.

Objective

It appraises proposals according to reasoned and objective measures, rather than the individual taste and subjective preferences of panel members. It considers proposals in relation to the broadly understood criteria of SPP 7.0.

Accessible

The advice arising from design review is clearly expressed in terms that design teams, decision makers and the public can all understand and use.

Consistent

The advice received across subsequent design review panel sessions is consistent. Panel members remain the same across sessions or are well-briefed and respectful of previous advice.

➤ **Benefits of design review**

Engaging in design review improves the design quality of proposals and supports planning and decision making processes, helping to ensure the delivery of high-quality buildings and places that benefit occupants, neighbours and the broader community.

**Benefits for proponents  
(clients, developers, design teams)**

- Early recommendations for change, before detailed design has occurred, when the impacts on time and costs are less.
- Improved value for money outcomes.
- Constructive, independent and multi-disciplinary design advice.
- Support for good design and the flexibility needed to pursue innovative design solutions.
- Early confirmation of foundational design approaches before project variables are set.
- Improved project risk management.

**Benefits for referring bodies/responsible authorities**

- Independent advice on design quality to facilitate informed decision making.
- Increased certainty in assessing design quality against SPP 7.0.
- Access to a multidisciplinary panel of experts where internal organisational expertise is lacking.

**Benefits for decision makers**

- Expert, independent advice on the design quality of a proposal to facilitate informed decision making.
- Assists in the exercise of discretion in decision making.

**Benefits for communities**

- Improved contribution to the public realm and responsiveness to adjacent development and surrounding context.
- Assurance that an independent panel of design experts has provided advice on a proposal.
- Improved social, economic, and environmental benefits from development.

# Design and the planning system

Performance-based planning controls offer greater flexibility than a compliance approach and promote positive development outcomes. Flexible controls need to be applied with rigour and consistency to determine where standards could be appropriately varied or should be enforced. Well-managed design review processes can support this evaluation process to inform statutory planning.

➤ Status of advice

Design review panels are advisory only and do not have a decision making function. The panel advises on the design quality of proposals against the Design Principles in SPP 7.0 and supporting State Planning Policies, with reference to relevant local planning scheme and policy provisions. Design review is not a planning assessment, nor is it a technical or compliance assessment against the Australian Standards or National Construction Codes.

Decision makers should give due regard to the design review advice and recommendations in their deliberations within the context of the statutory decision framework.

➤ SPP 7.0

SPP 7.0 outlines a set of Design Principles that establish a definition of what is meant by 'good design'. The full policy is available [online](#).  
  
These principles form the basis for design review discussions. Individual principles may not apply equally to all projects at every stage, due to their location or type.

- 1. **Context and character**  
Good design responds to and enhances the distinctive characteristics of a local area, contributing to a sense of place.
- 2. **Landscape quality**  
Good design recognises that together, landscape and buildings operate as an integrated and sustainable system, within a broader ecological context.
- 3. **Built form and scale**  
Good design ensures that the massing and height of development is appropriate to its setting and successfully negotiates between existing built form and the intended future character of the local area.
- 4. **Functionality and build quality**  
Good design meets the needs of users efficiently and effectively, balancing functional requirements to perform well and deliver optimum benefit over the full life-cycle.
- 5. **Sustainability**  
Good design optimises the sustainability of the built environment, delivering positive environmental, social and economic outcomes.

- 6. **Amenity**  
Good design provides successful places that offer a variety of uses and activities while optimising internal and external amenity for occupants, visitors and neighbours, providing environments that are comfortable, productive and healthy.
- 7. **Legibility**  
Good design results in buildings and places that are legible, with clear connections and easily identifiable elements to help people find their way around.
- 8. **Safety**  
Good design optimises safety and security, minimising the risk of personal harm and supporting safe behaviour and use.
- 9. **Community**  
Good design responds to local community needs as well as the wider social context, providing environments that support a diverse range of people and facilitate social interaction.
- 10. **Aesthetics**  
Good design is the product of a skilled, judicious design process that results in attractive and inviting buildings and places that engage the senses.

# State Design Review Panel



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# Overview

► Role of the SDRP

The State Design Review Panel (SDRP) is a committee of the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC). It comprises a multi-disciplinary pool of highly experienced built environment professionals from industry and government that provide independent advice on the design quality of major development proposals. This advice enables informed decision making and supports the delivery of good design outcomes that provide social, environmental and economic benefits to all Western Australians. This panel exclusively deals with projects referred under SDRP pathways and is independent of a Design Review Common Pool or other design review panels.

Chaired by the Government Architect, the SDRP provides constructive advice to government agencies, proponents and decision makers, including the WAPC.

The SDRP is supported by a dedicated Design Review Team within the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage (the Department). The Terms of Reference is available [online](#).

► Projects eligible for SDRP consideration

Projects eligible for SDRP review include significant or strategic public works, infrastructure projects and other major government proposals or as identified in planning legislation. Upon referral from a government authority or statutory decision makers, significant private sector projects may also be considered by the SDRP.

The SDRP may also advise on any other design matters as required by the WAPC.

The WAPC Chair on the advice of the Government Architect will determine which projects are accepted for review.

Consideration will be given to the following factors when determining whether a referral to the SDRP is approved:

- **State or regional significance:** the project is of significance to the State or a particular region.
- **Location:** the project is situated in an area that has particular importance and/or sensitivity, whether this is historic, environmental or relating to a particular character or use.
- **Prominence:** the project is situated on a prominent site, with high levels of public visibility and/or political sensitivity.
- **Complexity:** there are complex challenges to overcome that require a sophisticated design response.
- **Precedence:** the project establishes a precedent for a type of development within an area.

Other considerations such as the capacity of the WAPC and the prospects for an improved design outcome may also be taken into account.

If a proposal has already undergone design review at local government level, it is preferable that the SDRP does not provide further advice. The opinion of a properly constituted local government design review panel constitutes expert opinion in its own right; however, the advice of the statutory decision maker should be sought before deciding which panel (if any) should be utilised.

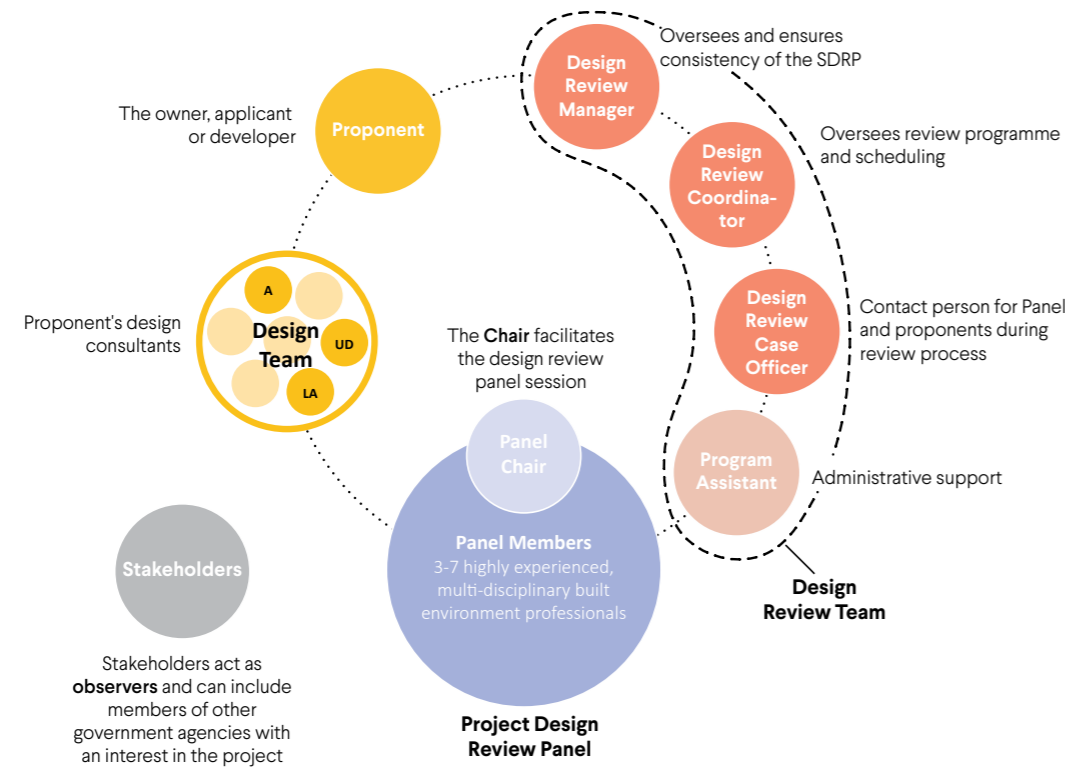


Figure 2 Organisation chart of SDRP participants

► Pathways

SDRP review can be accessed through multiple pathways. Projects utilising the below pathways are eligible for review by SDRP through a defined mechanism, and specific processes and procedures have been developed to facilitate design review, which may differ slightly than those outlined within this Manual. These processes may include additional meetings or engagement with specific stakeholders, change to timeframes, or specific reporting criteria in addition to the 10 Design Principles.

These pathways include:

- Where the WAPC requests advice to inform its decision making on significant private works that will be determined by the WAPC (i.e. applications lodged under Part 11B and Part 17 of the *Planning and Development Act 2005*).
- Significant private works requiring referral under a provision of the relevant local planning scheme.

For further information on Part 11B or Part 17 processes, please consult the relevant application guides or contact the Department.

Other proposals seeking SDRP review will broadly follow the processes and procedures outlined within this Manual.

► Review timing

The number of reviews required will depend on the complexity of the proposal, and responsiveness to SDRP advice. However, it is generally recommended two to three design review sessions to be undertaken. This will promote active participation and increase the likelihood of addressing any identified design issues. Research indicates that initiating the design review later in the design process results in fewer project benefits<sup>1</sup>.

The first design review should ideally be undertaken after context analysis during the concept design stage. This allows proponents to benefit from timely advice while the design is still flexible enough to accommodate changes.

Subsequent reviews should occur at key points as the design progresses. In most scenarios it will likely be appropriate to complete the final review after Development Application (DA) lodgement, however this should be discussed with the referring authority and the Department staff who support the SDRP.

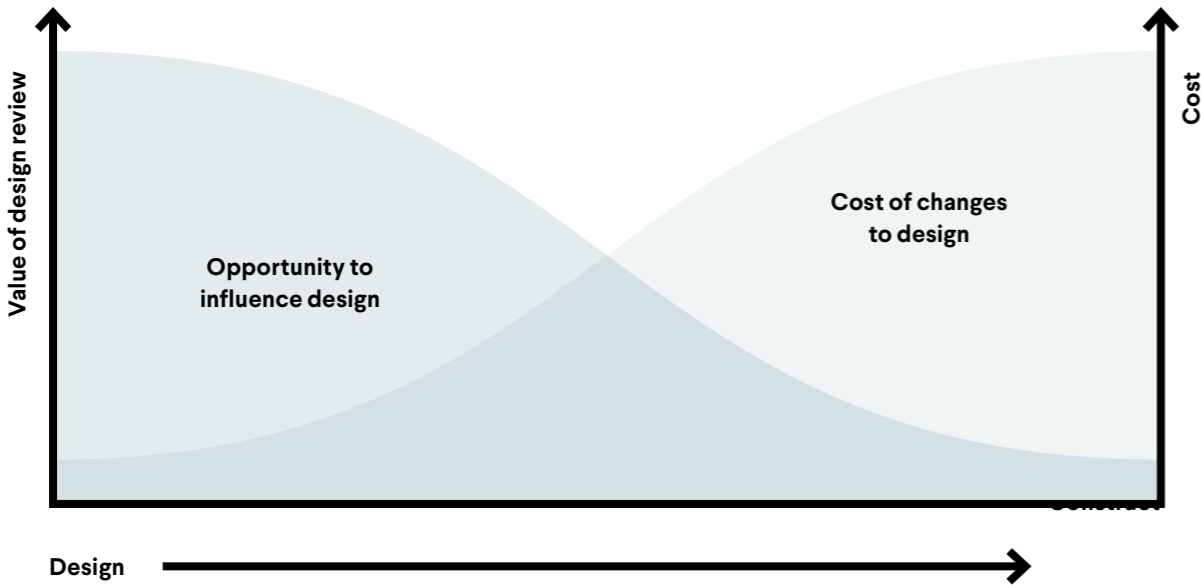


Figure 3 Design review timing

<sup>1</sup> SGS Economics and Planning Pty Ltd, 2021, "The Value and Benefits of the OVGA: 2021 Refresh."

► Review process summary

A typical review process has been outlined below, however, it is expected that steps will be altered to suit specific projects coming to SDRP.

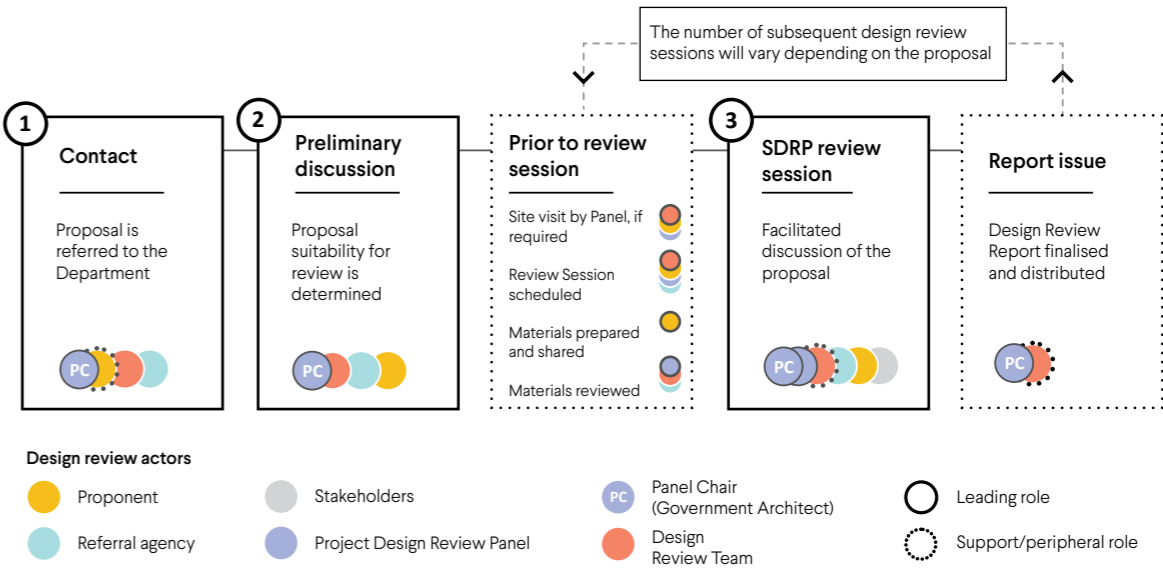


Figure 4 Overview of the design review process.

Contact

The referring authority will initiate contact with the Department via the Design Review Request Form on the SDRP website or by emailing [sdrp@dplh.wa.gov.au](mailto:sdrp@dplh.wa.gov.au).

Preliminary discussion

This discussion is arranged with the Department and the Government Architect (or its representative) and usually includes representatives from the intended referring authority (i.e. local government officers), client and design team. Where relevant, this meeting may also include a representative from the statutory decision maker.

The intent of this discussion is to determine whether referral to SDRP is appropriate. Topics usually covered include:

- Planning context.
- Timing and project constraints.
- Stage of project.

For a standard referral, where review through SDRP is agreed, a formal referral should be made by completing the [Design Review Request Form](#). For other scenarios where design review is integrated into the application process, for example Part 11B, a Design Review Request Form may not be required.

After acceptance and prior to the review

Once a project has been accepted for review, a review session will be scheduled by the Department's Design Review Team (Design Review Team) in consultation with the proponent and referring authority.

SDRP review sessions are usually held at the Department's offices, with online attendance available, particularly for regional projects.

In the lead up to a review session, the Design Review Team will request that the proponent upload material for the SDRP to consider and for the referring authority to provide comments.

Project Design Review Panel selection

A Project Design Review Panel (the Panel) will be selected from the SDRP membership pool for each project. The Project Design Review Panel must suit the proposal and avoid or manage conflicts of interest. The Panel typically consists of three to four members including the Chair; however it depends on the complexity of the project and any required specialist expertise. The selected Panel is approved by the Government Architect.

Site visits (if required)

A site visit may be undertaken prior to review sessions where it is considered important for the success of the review process. Site visits require additional organisation and time commitment from all involved. As such, they will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

When a site visit is organised, it will include the Project Design Review Panel members and the Design Review Team.

Referring authority representatives and/or the proponent (including design team) may also be invited to attend.

Review session

An indicative review session structure is illustrated in Figure 5: Overview of the design review session.

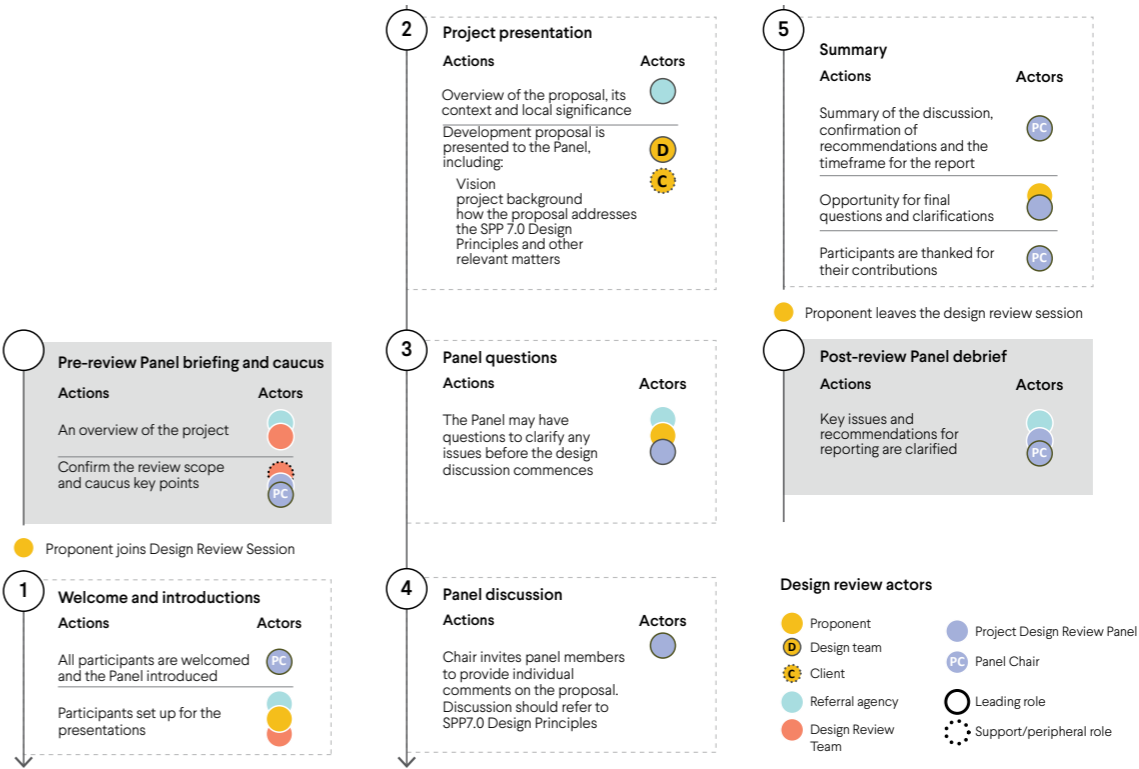


Figure 5 Overview of the design review session

Design review reports

After the design review session, the report will be issued within 10 days or as required to facilitate statutory processing times, unless otherwise agreed by the SDRP Chair. The proponent should continue working on their proposal and consider when a follow up review will be of most benefit. This will depend on the project; it's timeframes and time required to address the advice of the Panel. It is recommended that timing is discussed with the Department's Design Review Team in advance to optimise the Panel's availability within the SDRP review schedule.

The option to return for further design review depends on demonstration that sufficient progress has been made against previous advice of the Panel.

An SDRP report will be either 'Interim Advice' or 'Final Report'. These outputs are structured against the SPP 7.0 Design Principles. SDRP Reports will only cover matters discussed in the review session in front of the proponent

Interim Advice

These reports are the outputs of any review session prior to the final design review session.

The purpose is to provide design advice to the referring authority and proponent while the proposal is evolving. Referring authorities and proponents are reminded that the information in Interim Advice reports are not intended to be made public or shared with elected members or other external parties.

These reports should not be included in any publicly available documentation, including development applications, public consultation packages and public meeting agendas.

Final Report

This report is the output of the final design review. It may reflect on the entire design review process where it is considered helpful for the decision maker. It will clearly outline if there has been any dissent between Panel members on matters covered in the review process.

The purpose of this report is to inform the determining authority of the design quality of the project.

Final reports may be used for the purpose of writing responsible authority reports and briefing Commissioners, local government elected members and/or other decision makers. It is important that any dissemination of a Final Report is accompanied by an unabridged copy of the report as an attachment.

➤ Conflict of interest

Prudent management of conflict of interest is critical for ensuring the independence of the SDRP process. As a committee of the WAPC, conflict of interest is managed in accordance with the WAPC's Governance Manual.

The general approach involves the provision of project details to prospective Panel members to ascertain whether they may have a conflict of interest. Prospective Panel members should consider and advise of the following:

- Personal or close relationships (including friendships) with members of the proponent and project team.
- Current or recent working relationships with members of the proponent and project team.
- Living in, or having financial interest in, property in the vicinity of the project or suburb boundary.
- Past involvement in Local Government Design Review Panel review of the project (if applicable).
- Board or Committee involvement (including in a volunteer capacity) that may relate to the project coming to review.

Any declared interests are managed in accordance with WAPC protocols and the SDRP Probity Plan.

➤ Confidentiality

Confidentiality of design review information and material encourages open dialogue and the exploration of ideas. As such, all information and material shared throughout a review process, including preliminary material, is confidential and **should not** be shared beyond the invited participants unless written permission is provided. The WAPC reserves the right to provide its reports, advice and documents relating to SDRP sessions to other parties, including State Government Ministers, responsible authorities, or decision makers as it sees fit.

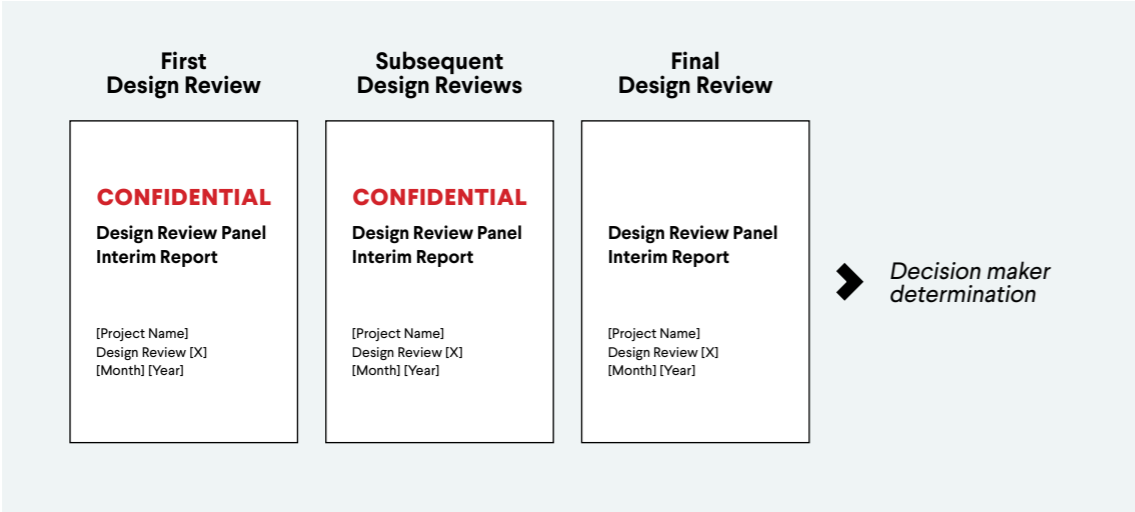


Figure 6 LGDRP reporting formats

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# Abbreviations and terms used

Design Review Team	The Department's Design Review Team
DR1	Design Review 1
DR2	Design Review 2
DR3	Design Review 3
LGDRP	Local Government Design Review Panel
Panel	Project Design Review Panel
SDRP	State Design Review Panel
SPP 7.0	State Planning Policy 7.0 Design of the Built Environment
The Department	The Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage
WAPC	Western Australian Planning Commission