

NSW State Design Review Panel

Guidelines for Project Teams

Contents

1. The NSW SDRP program
2. Criteria for private projects on private land
3. Criteria for all other projects
4. Session fees
5. Participants in design review
6. NSW protocols for good design review
7. Site visits
8. Structure of the review session
9. Design advice letter
10. Subsequent review sessions
11. Documents prepared for the review session
12. Documents prepared for the development application

The NSW State Design Review Panel Guidelines for Project Teams (the Guidelines) set out the requirements for project teams presenting to the NSW State Design Review Panel (SDRP). It should be read in conjunction with the NSW State Design Review Panel Terms of Reference (GANSW 2025).

1. The NSW SDRP program

Managed by Government Architect NSW (GANSW), the SDRP program oversees the design review of State significant projects in New South Wales. Under this program, design review is an independent design quality evaluation process in which a panel of independent built environment design experts provide advice on the design quality of projects.

Projects reviewed by the panel

The panel reviews State significant projects. For information on the types of projects reviewed, see the NSW State Design Review Panel Terms of Reference (GANSW 2025).

The Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs) or Study Requirements (as relevant) and these Guidelines establish where review is required.

2. Criteria for private projects on private land

For private projects on private land a review by the SDRP will be required where:

- a design excellence clause with a requirement for design review applies, or
- a design excellence clause with a potential bonus applies, or
- the SDRP is identified as the alternative design excellence pathway to a design competition.

Private projects that do not meet the criteria above may not be required to undertake design review by the SDRP. These projects can proceed through the planning process without SDRP input. Where a private project has not been reviewed by the SDRP, GANSW may provide design advice direct to the relevant assessment team within the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (the Department) as part of the assessment process.

Where a private project does not meet the criteria above, the applicant can request design review by the SDRP. In this instance, the request should be made as part of engagement with the Department. The Department and GANSW will consider the request on a project-by-project basis and the Department will inform the applicant.

The Department may also request review by the SDRP for a private project that does not meet the criteria above where there are likely to be significant impacts or sensitivities. In this instance, the Department will inform the applicant during the engagement process.

All private projects must demonstrate that they meet the Better Placed objectives in accordance with the SEARs or Study Requirements, and any other relevant design quality requirements.

Booking a review session

For private projects on private land, applicants should engage with the Department to confirm the requirement for review before booking a review session through the NSW Planning Portal. Bookings submitted without prior confirmation from the Department will not be accepted.

For private projects, 2 reviews per project are typically required, except where there are multiple buildings or public domain, or if the project has received a competition exemption.

The first review will be scheduled as close as possible to the requested date. Subsequent reviews will take place a minimum of 6 weeks after the previous review to allow time for applicants to address design recommendations.

3. Criteria for all other projects

For all other projects, review by the SDRP will be required in accordance with the SEARs or Study Requirements (as relevant), and with GANSW agreements where these apply.

Booking a review session

Applicants should engage with GANSW before booking a review session through the NSW Planning Portal.

2 reviews are typically recommended, however more than 2 reviews may be required depending on the scale and complexity of the project.

Reviews will be scheduled as close as possible to the requested date.

4. Session fees

Fees apply for review by the SDRP.

Fees for government agency led projects and projects on government land are paid via agency, project or program agreements.

For all other projects, a fee of \$9,500 + GST per SDRP session applies.

The fee is payable after the design review session has been held, and the design advice letter is issued.

Fees will apply for all design review sessions where the booking is made through the NSW Planning Portal from 1 July 2025. This includes new applications and returning projects requesting a subsequent review.

5. Participants in design review

Design adviser

A GANSW design adviser is appointed to each project to support the design review process. The design adviser's role includes liaising with the applicant, design team and key stakeholders. The design adviser also prepares the pre-briefing part of the review session and drafts the design advice letter.

Panel and chair

Review sessions are typically attended by 3 panel members and a chair, with a minimum of 2 panel members and a chair. For larger and more complex projects additional panel members may be recommended. The composition of the panel is at the discretion of GANSW with selection of panel members determined in response to the project type and scale.

The panel will include an independent council nominee (where there is a nominee and they are able to attend the review session) to provide advice based on a deep understanding of the local government area and awareness of council's concerns.

The chair is the NSW Government Architect, a senior GANSW staff member or a panel member nominated by GANSW.

All panel members are bound by the NSW State Design Review Panel Terms of Reference (GANSW 2025), including declaring interests and confidentiality. Panel members are asked to declare any conflicts of interest in accordance with NSW Government guidelines, and each declaration is assessed before the review takes place.

To ensure consistency, build expertise and provide progressive certainty for applicants, the same design adviser, panel and chair will be convened for first and subsequent reviews wherever possible.

Observers

Department assessment officers and council representatives are invited to attend the review session including pre-briefing and debriefing sessions. The chair may invite additional observers, such as other agency representatives or State Government Design Champions. Any observer may be asked by the chair to brief the panel on specific issues where their input will support the review. Inviting observers and asking them to brief the panel is at the discretion of the chair.

Observers may not participate in the review process other than providing briefing information when invited to by the chair.

Project team

The project team should nominate review session attendees, including:

- design lead – project architect or lead designer who will present the project
- project team – team members who may contribute to the presentation, such as landscape architect, sustainability consultant, planning consultant etc.
- applicant or client or their representatives.

All information relating to any project undertaking design review is communicated to all attendees in the strictest confidence.

6. NSW protocols for good design review

All panel sessions, panel members and participants comply with the NSW protocols for good design review. The protocols are set out in the NSW State Design Review Panel Terms of Reference (GANSW 2025).

7. Site visits

As projects are located across the state, site visits are not typically organised as part of the SDRP program. A detailed briefing on the site will be provided to the panel by the design adviser at the first review session for any new project, and panel members are welcome to visit sites in their own time if they wish. For larger and more complex projects, GANSW, in consultation with the applicant and assessment officer, may facilitate a site visit for panel members.

8. Structure of the review session

The review session is an opportunity for the design team to present the project to the panel. Most review sessions will last approximately 1.5 hours. For larger and more complex projects, such as precincts and linear infrastructure, this may be extended.

Review sessions will typically take place in person but may be online. Video conferencing facilities are available for those participants who are unable to attend in person. This is facilitated by GANSW.

As a guide, a typical review session comprises:

Pre-briefing – 20 minutes (in private)

Before the project team arrives, the design adviser briefs the panel on the project, providing an overview of the site location, planning context and project brief. The design adviser also highlights any key issues the panel may want to focus on during the review session.

The chair may invite any observers to provide briefing information where their input will support the review, including the assessment officer who can provide detail on planning issues.

Welcome – 5 minutes

When the project team arrives, the chair introduces proceedings and acknowledges Country. The project team is asked to introduce themselves.

Project introduction – 5 minutes

The applicant, client or their representative provides an overview of the project and program, including the brief and design objectives, and any milestones. For subsequent reviews, the introduction includes an update on design development and the program.

Presentation – 20 minutes

The design team presents the project. The presentation should also include input from other key consultants where appropriate, for example Country, landscape or sustainability consultants.

There is no minimum or maximum number of pages or slides, but the time constraint for presentations should be taken into account.

All drawings should be clearly legible when viewed on an LCD screen or projection.

For in-person review sessions, the presentation should be saved as a single file on a USB stick to ensure it can be transferred to the venue laptop.

If a physical model is available, it is recommended to bring it to the review session and include it as part of the presentation. Simple massing models through to detailed design models can be very useful in describing projects, supporting informed discussion and review. For online review sessions,

photographs of models can be included.

Panel questions – 15 minutes

The chair invites panel members to ask questions for clarification by the project team.

Panel review and summary – 30 minutes

Following questions, the panel reviews the project, with comments and discussion moderated by the chair. All projects are evaluated in a holistic manner with reference to:

- the following objects of the *NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*:
 - b) to facilitate ecologically sustainable development by integrating relevant economic, environmental and social considerations in decision-making about environmental planning and assessment*
 - f) to promote the sustainable management of built and cultural heritage (including Aboriginal cultural heritage)*
 - g) to promote good design and amenity of the built environment.*
- the 7 objectives for good design as defined by Better Placed – An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW (GANSW 2017)
- good practice for responding to Country in the planning, design, and delivery of built environment projects in NSW, as set out in Connecting with Country Framework (GANSW 2023)
- other design guidance relevant to the project or local government area, including but not limited to:
 - GANSW policies, frameworks and guidance (published on the [GANSW website](#))
 - Apartment Design Guide (Planning and Environment 2015)
 - local development control plans.

After inviting a response from the project team, the chair concludes the review by summarising key points of advice and providing guidance where panel feedback is ambiguous or inconsistent. The summary is intended to ensure that the project team leave with a clear understanding of the advice and next steps.

The project team then leaves the review session.

De-briefing – 10 minutes (in private)

The chair and panel confer with the design adviser, assessment officer, council representative, and other observers (if required), to ensure all comments and feedback are captured.

New matters should not arise during this closed session, however, should this occur, they will be noted as such in the design advice letter.

9. Design advice letter

The comments and feedback arising from the review inform the design advice letter. The advice letter is endorsed by the chair and represents the advice of GANSW.

The advice letter does not minute the review session, but rather makes clear which elements of the project are supported and the key design issues that should be addressed.

Before responding to a review session, project teams are encouraged to wait for the advice letter to be issued to ensure design development or changes are responding to the advice of GANSW as recorded in the letter.

The advice letter is distributed to the applicant, project team, assessment officer and panel members within 7 working days of the review session.

10. Subsequent review sessions

Subsequent review sessions provide the opportunity for further design quality improvements, supporting progressive certainty for applicants.

While the first review session is an opportunity to establish the design objectives, constraints and opportunities, key issues, and the project's response to these, subsequent review sessions focus on design development and changes made to respond to previous advice.

11. Documents prepared for the review session

Project information form

As part of the application process, the applicant is required to provide project information via the Planning Portal. This covers project and planning information, the brief and design objectives, and a detailed project description. Contact information, including the project team and review session attendees, is also required to be submitted via the Planning Portal.

Design presentation

The purpose of the design presentation is to facilitate discussion during the design review session. It forms part of the agenda pack – which also includes the agenda for the review session, the project information form, and any advice letters from previous review sessions – and is circulated to the panel to ensure they are prepared for the review session and can provide informed advice.

The final design presentation must be uploaded to the Planning Portal 5 working days before the review session. It should address all submission requirements which will be emailed to the

applicant via the Planning Portal, and include a legend, scale and north point on all drawings.

The design presentation is a work in progress. It should be prepared as part of the design process and should not require any significant additional work.

Panel presentation – first review

The first presentation to the panel should clearly articulate the story of the project from analysis to concept development. It should demonstrate how the project responds to the brief, design objectives, context and analysis, and integrates sustainability and cultural heritage. Any project options should be shown, and if there is a preferred option, a clear rationale for its selection should be demonstrated.

Where variations to planning controls are proposed, the presentation should include a comparison between a complying scheme and the proposed scheme, demonstrating benefits and impacts.

Panel presentation – subsequent reviews

Subsequent presentations to the panel should demonstrate design development based on previous advice. Key changes should be clearly identified using comparison views, plans and other appropriate graphic representations. The presentation should also include any drawings or further analysis requested by the panel.

12. Documents prepared for the development application

Design review report

A design review report, prepared by the applicant, is required to be submitted with the development application. The report should identify how the project has responded to the panel's design advice or provide a justification where it has not been able to do so.

The design review report is made publicly available on the Department Major Projects website during the assessment exhibition period.

Applicants may choose to include advice letters in full in the design review report.

For further information see NSW State Design Review Panel Terms of Reference (GANSW 2025).