



FOLKESTONE &
HYTHE PLACE
PANEL

1 JULY 2023 -
30 JUNE 2024

ANNUAL
REPORT

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

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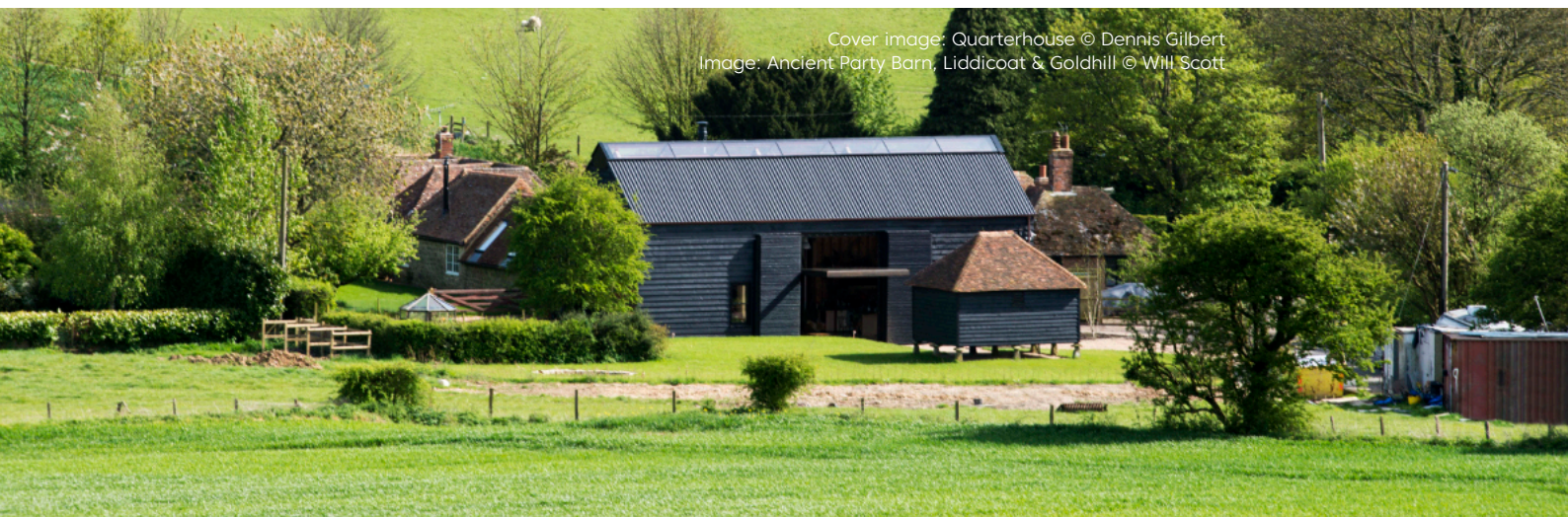
INTRODUCTION

The Folkestone & Hythe Place Panel was set up in 2021 by Frame Projects on behalf of the Folkestone & Hythe District Council. It is chaired by Joanne Cave and includes 27 professional experts selected through a recruitment process in collaboration with Folkestone & Hythe officers.

Terms of reference, available on the Folkestone & Hythe District Council website, set out the role and remit of the panel, and the way in which it supports the planning process. Schemes requiring design advice are identified by planning officers and referred to the panel for a review. Officers provide a briefing on the planning context and key issues, both in writing for the meeting agendas, and in person at the panel meeting. Advice given by the panel is recorded in a report to assist with continuing pre-application negotiations, or to advise the planning committee on submitted schemes.

The Folkestone & Hythe Place Panel held a total of eight review meetings in the year from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, and advised on seven different schemes. One of these schemes was reviewed twice during the reporting period. Another had its third review during the reporting period (its first and second reviews were during the previous year).

First reviews usually take place at a stage when a client and design team have decided their preferred option for development of a site, and have sufficient drawings and models for a comprehensive discussion. There will often be a second pre-application review to provide advice on more detailed design matters before planning submission, and further reviews may take place, often for larger or more complex schemes.



Cover image: Quarterhouse © Dennis Gilbert
Image: Ancient Party Barn, Liddicoat & Goldhill © Will Scott

PANEL

Authority

Folkestone & Hythe District Council

Review Panel name

Folkestone & Hythe Place Panel

Panel management

Frame Projects

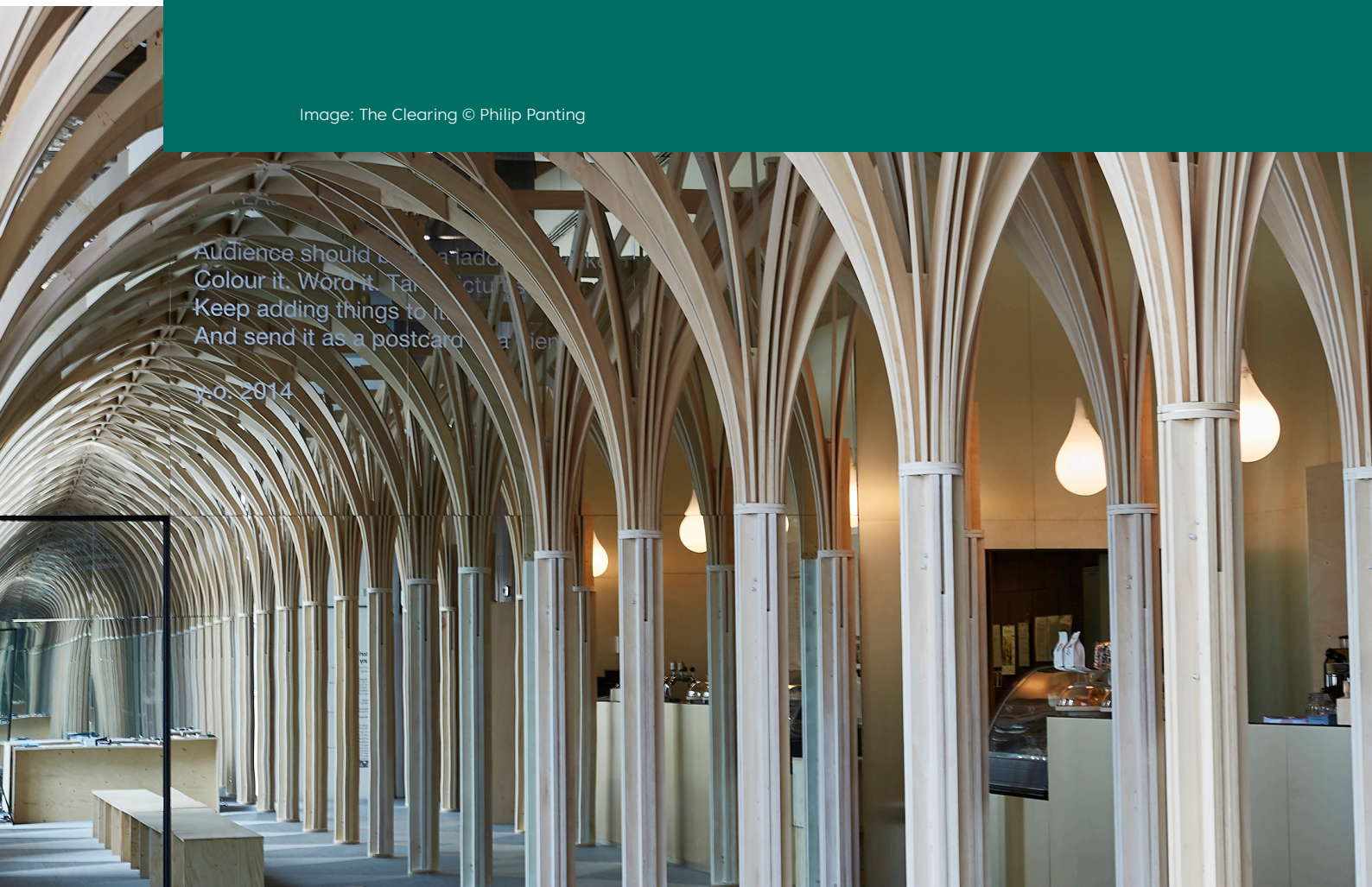
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Image: The Clearing © Philip Panting



REVIEW TOTALS

Number of reviews

8

Number of site visits

6

Number of first reviews

6

Number of follow up reviews

2

Formal reviews
(chair plus four panel members)

4

Smaller Scheme reviews
(chair plus two panel members)

3

Bespoke reviews

1

PANEL COMPOSITION

PANEL MEMBERS USED THIS YEAR

No. of different panel members used

17

Male panel members

52%

Female panel members

48%

Diverse ethnic background

4%

PANEL COMPOSITION

Architecture

9

Urban design / town planning

6

Landscape / public realm

5

Housing typologies

2

Heritage / conservation

1

Sustainability

4

Inclusive design

1

Community

4

PROPOSALS REVIEWED

APPLICANT TYPE

Private developer

7

Local authority

0

Public private partnership

0

STAGE OF PROPOSAL

Pre-application

7

Planning application
submitted

1

Amendment to approved
application

0

TYPE OF PROPOSAL

Residential (private dwelling)

2

Mixed use

2

Residential (1-50 units)

1

Residential (50+ units)

1

Healthcare

1

EMERGING THEMES AND ISSUES

Over the past year, a broad range of schemes have come through the Folkestone & Hythe Place Panel. The panel has had the opportunity to advise on designs from large scale masterplans to single dwellings, as well as those in between. A broad range of scheme types was also reviewed, including a care home, holiday homes with leisure facilities, private residential development, and mixed-use residential-led development with new public realm.

Across the spectrum of schemes there were a number of recurring themes in panel discussions, as follows:

- Establishing the placemaking vision from the outset
- Embedding sustainability and low carbon design
- Delivering public benefits
- Addressing sensitive landscape and heritage contexts
- Community engagement and impact on neighbours
- Connectivity to local amenities
- Parking and highways strategies
- Public realm, landscaping and play space
- Biodiversity and ecology
- Site layout and servicing
- Materials and architectural character
- Internal layout and liveability
- Inclusive design and safety

It was noted that the panel's input on internal layouts, interrogating the quality of spaces people will occupy, was particularly helpful to the council, as planners do not often have the opportunity to delve into this level of detail with applicant teams during pre-application meetings.

Review format

The Smaller Scheme Review format has been well-used during this reporting period. It has proven helpful for the review of single dwellings seeking planning permission under Paragraph 84(e) of the National Planning Policy Framework, allowing panel members from three areas of expertise to comment on small but locally sensitive schemes.

The Chair's Review format (chair plus one member) was not used, but Folkestone & Hythe District Council and Frame Projects will continue to encourage applicants to make use of this option, which is often useful for follow-up reviews focusing on specific themes or design revisions.

The Formal Review format (chair plus four panel members) has continued to prove useful, bringing multidisciplinary scrutiny to developments as required.

Frame Projects and the council have discussed how they can help developers to engage positively with the design review process and bring schemes forward. Frame Projects has suggested speaking at forthcoming developer forums about the value of design review to applicants in enabling a positive, constructive relationship with the planning process. Applicants will also be informed that the design review reports are appended to planning submissions, and can therefore show how a project team has worked collaboratively, and how design has improved, in support of their submission.

Panel representation

Of the panel members used during the reporting period, only 4% identify as being from ethnic minority backgrounds. While this is low compared to other design review panels, the panel as a whole has 7% members from ethnic minority background, a proportion representative of Folkestone & Hythe's demographics, according to Office for National Statistics 2021 Census data. The statistics are also a result of panel member availability.

However, the council and Frame Projects will refresh panel membership at the earliest opportunity, to ensure the Place Panel remains a voice for diversity and inclusion.

Observers

Folkestone & Hythe District Council are keen to invite councillors to observe design review meetings. This has proved constructive over the past year, helping to provide councillors with insights into the planning team's recommendations, and to break down some of the barriers to talking about design.

It has also been positive to have graduate planners and new planning team members at the council observing design reviews. This supplements their training, and helps less experienced members of staff to use the language of design with more confidence.

The council will continue to encourage both councillors and new team members to attend design reviews. Frame Projects will ensure that they are well briefed in advance. Frame can also present at committee meetings to inform councillors of the role that the panel can play in delivering well designed places, and in improving the confidence of stakeholders, especially decision makers.

FORWARD LOOK

At the time of writing, a new Labour government has recently taken office, and mandatory targets have been announced for the delivery of manifesto commitments to housebuilding.

Folkestone & Hythe District Council expects that the change in central government may lead to more speculative housebuilding applications on non-designated sites outside settlement boundaries, especially considering the district's land supply challenges. The council is keen to consult the Place Panel on these potentially controversial sites to ensure that housebuilding is encouraged, but in the right locations and with proper scrutiny on design quality.

The council is soon to begin work on an East Kent Design Code, in collaboration with four other nearby district councils, and on local plan site designations. It hopes to bring drafts of these policy and guidance documents to the Place Panel for expert review in due course.

Image: Folkestone Harbour Link © Macfarlane + Associates

