

 design:midlands

Prospectus



2025



D:M manages the Midlands Design Review Panel – a unique group of experts in the built and natural environment.

As an independent charity, we advise on how to achieve the highest quality of design and place making. The objectives of Design:Midlands are to enable high standards of design and architecture in the built and living environment; deliver education and training to all involved in such creative activities; support other charitable projects and initiatives for community benefit in the Midlands.

Securing well-designed places (NPPF para 11, the presumption in favour of sustainable development) is now central to decision making. The design tools that Design:Midlands offers (NPPF para 139) has most benefit early in design evolution and for significant projects.

As part of the Design Network, we work alongside our regional colleagues in supporting national ambitions on design and planning reform. Being a voice with local knowledge, we are a go-to for Councils, Communities and Businesses in the adaption, creation and protection of places and spaces across the Midlands. We are establishing Local Panels, as we believe working closely with Local Planning Authorities is the best way to help meet the national requirements of the NPPF, National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code. This prospectus sets out our programme for 2025, and describes our services.

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D:M is the charity that manages the recruitment and appointment of independent placemaking panelists that bring support and guidance to the delivery of development schemes within the planning system – planning applications, plan making, enabling and community engagement.

With over 90 experts, the **Design:Midlands Panel** comes from a range of built environment specialists that includes:

- Architecture
- Connectivity & Street Design
- Construction & Viability
- Ecology & Biodiversity
- Heritage & Conservation
- Hydrology
- Landscape Architecture
- Planning
- Sustainability & Energy
- Urban Design
- Neighbourhood Planning

Panel members are selected to suit the task and the scheme's characteristics, and we always undertake a site visit.



Design Review

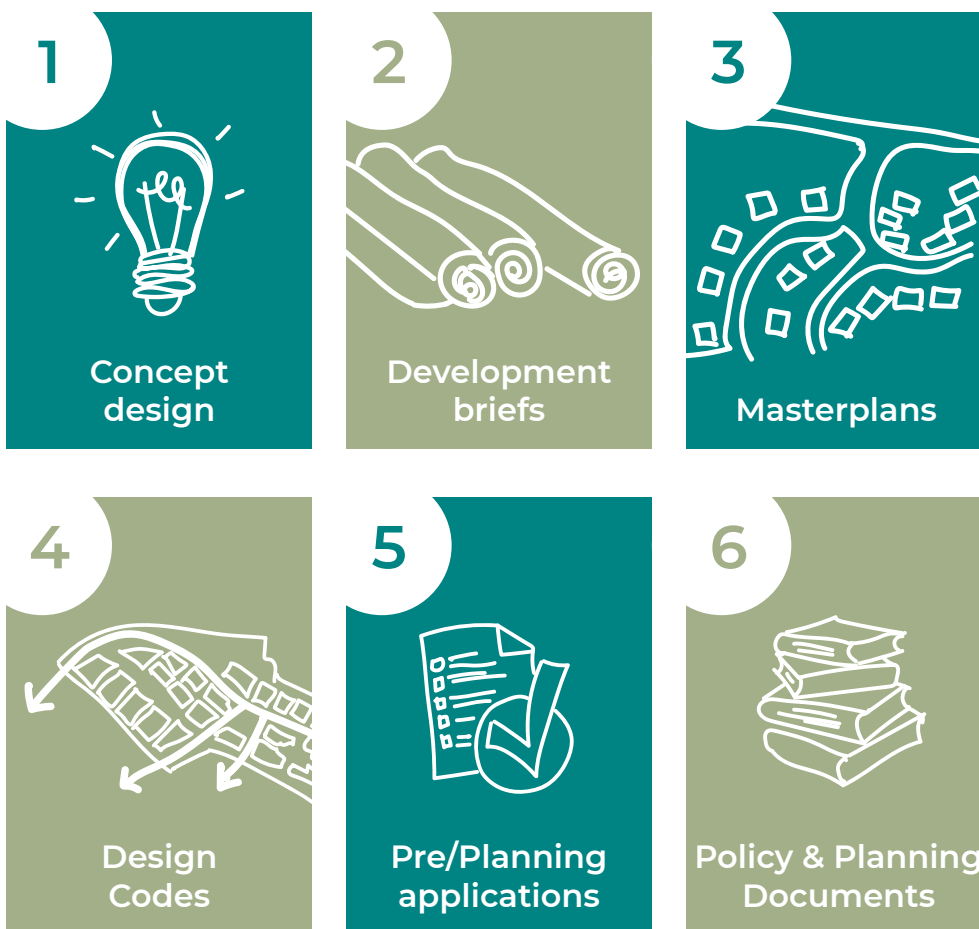
Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) – often LPAs will approach D:M when a pre-planning application request is made for a large, complex or sensitive scheme. The LPA will advise developers to contact D:M to discuss design review / enabling suited to the scheme. D:M can help support LPAs in achieving high quality buildings, streets and spaces. D:M can provide disciplines not available to the LPA, highlight and recognise best practice, provide a practical/pragmatic approach to how that can be achieved and highlight outstanding and/or innovative design. LA Officers are welcome to observe DRP sessions. When design thresholds are high (such as para 84e) or reviewing Green Belt (NPPF chapter 13) or when there is no relevant development plan policy and development is being considered against NPPF policies (para 11d), a design review process can move a scheme towards securing high quality outcomes.

Developers and their design teams – landowners and applicants can support their architects and design teams by appointing D:M to support evolution of a scheme's design. As a 'critical friend' to provide a fresh perspective, highlight opportunities that may have been missed, and offer support. A design review can form part of a Planning Performance Agreement. We would ensure consistency between different stages if we were to be involved more than once, and ensure confidentiality is observed. Design review enhances dialogue with stakeholders including the LPA, Highways Authority, Historic England etc. who are encouraged to participate. Seeking support on maximising land use efficiency, promoting higher density development and innovative design (NPPF para 130).

Community – seeking an independent view from D:M can be extremely useful to a community when engaging with their LPA or with developers. Support can be offered through a design review setting, through the preparation of evidence, or discussing evidence in setting a brief for a development site. Design Coding takes local characteristics and context into account, D:M can facilitate conversations to ensure consensus can be achieved in presenting community opinions and expectations. We will often present design in diagrammatic form, or by referring to examples from elsewhere – useful in plan preparation in particular.

Policy & Planning Documents

Design:Midlands can help raise standards in the built environment by providing advice at different stages.








We highly recommend the services of Design:Midlands. Their review of our new settlement plans has proved invaluable for final stages of our local plan preparation. The Panel are very knowledgeable and adopt a strong collaborative approach.

Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils



Types of design review

MAJOR	Large and complex schemes Large scale / complex schemes when a full day is needed such as a garden village, an urban extension, major regeneration development etc. £6,000.00 + VAT	
MEDIUM	Mixed use or 30 homes + Mixed use, regeneration, town/city centre, public buildings, housing developments 30+ dwellings. £4,000.00 + VAT	
SMALL	Single dwellings & up to 30 homes Individual buildings, including isolated homes in the open countryside / para. 80e NPPF, in ill and less than 30 dwellings £3,500.00 + VAT	
WALK AND TALK	Initial design development stage On site appraisal or to address a specific issue £2,000.00 +VAT	
TABLETOP	Sign off Returning scheme seeking final views or clarifications £1,500.00+VAT	

D:M will advise on what level of support is proportionate to help achieve Design Review outcomes.

Building for a Healthy Life (BHL)

Design:Midlands is the registered assessor for BHL in the Midlands. The BHL framework is both a negotiation tool and a functional measure of how a housing scheme performs to 12 considerations relating to neighbourhoods, character and distinctiveness, green and blue infrastructure, and streets. As well as supporting Homes England, D:M also supports house builders in this sector.

SITE ASSESSMENT

To offer advice on the BHL potential of your housing development

Provided at concept or masterplanning stages, we can visit the site with you and provide a report to outline the scheme's potential to achieve the 12 considerations

£1,500 - £2,500 + VAT



BHL ASSESSMENT

BHL assessment pre submission of a planning application

Provided at pre-submission, a desktop review will advise on how the scheme delivers against the 12 considerations. This gives the opportunity for any final amendments to your design.

£750 - £1,500 + VAT



POST COMPLETION

Post completion of a housing scheme to test against BHL

Provided when a housing scheme has been built, we can visit the site with you to advise on what your scheme has achieved against the 12 considerations.

£750 - £1,500 + VAT



TRAINING

In-house training to support your team to deliver BHL considerations into their design activity

Different methods of training can be provided to suit your team – whether local authority, planning agent, architect's office or housebuilder. We can do on-site and desk based exercises, or bring the training online if circumstances require.

£1,500 – £2,000 +VAT



D:M will advise on what level of support is proportionate to help achieve the BHL standard, using design review, workshops or tabletop approaches.

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Arranging the Design Review Panel was straightforward and quick with a date arranged within a week of first contact. The site visit was a great way of showing the site constraints and opportunities. The Panel were great as a second pair of eyes in terms of how to use the landscape as a driver and make best use of the existing and proposed connections to the wider area.

Tom Dillarstone
William Davis Homes

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Design Coding & Enabling

The National Model Design Code is the primary tool for LPAs to prepare and use local design codes (NPPF para 138). We can assist in engaging with the community and offer expert advice on how a design code can be prepared and better understood by all concerned.

FRAMEWORK GUIDANCE

Area-based activity to provide evidence

Suited to perhaps a neighbourhood plan or regeneration area that needs an evidence base before the design code is prepared. This area-based assessment can be at different scales and each project will require a unique approach.

From £6,000 + VAT



DESIGN CODE REVIEW

Reviewing a draft Design Code

With a draft Design Code, we can bring a Panel of experts together to review and advise on the emerging design code. Community representatives can be invited to contribute to this.

£4,000 + VAT

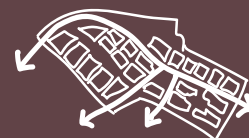


DESIGN CODE WORKSHOP

Design Code development

We can bring a Panel of experts together to advise on design code preparation and understanding of emerging Code. Community representatives can be invited to contribute to this.

£3,250 - £4,000 + VAT

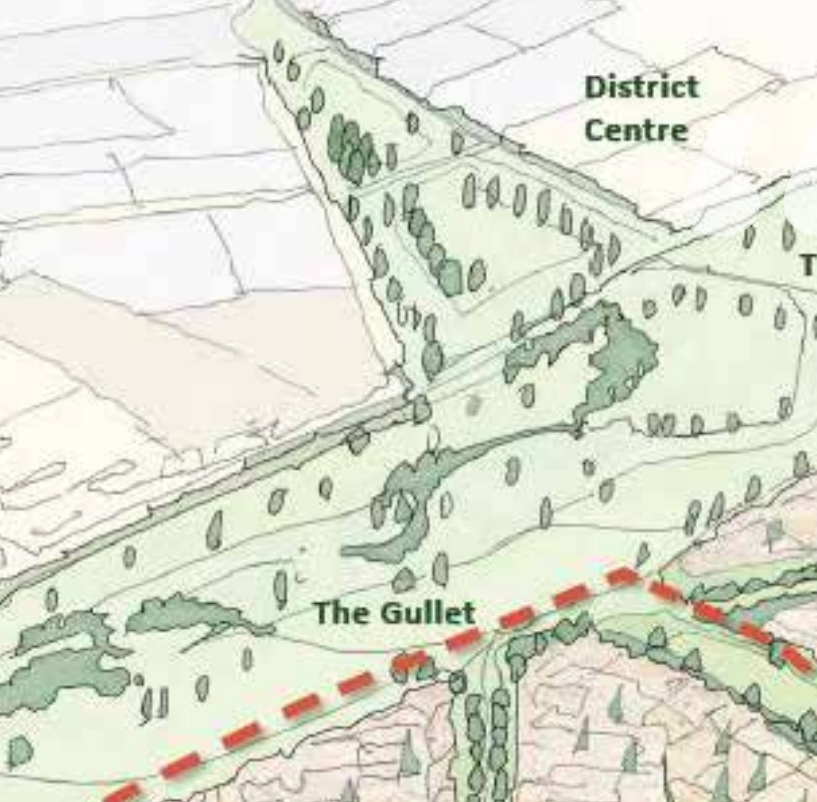


ENABLING

DM Panel brings design expertise into a stakeholder setting to unlock potential and help towards effective design and development. Enabling activities ensure that the evidence, context, and activities needed are in place and are in alignment with project expectations to lead to more sustainable, functional and user-friendly places.

From £600 per day per Panel member + VAT





Priors Hall has been the subject of a series of Design:Midlands design reviews 2015/16 following Urban & Civic's purchase of the site. Recent reviews considered the revised Zone 2 and 3 for 3,500 homes and the first Key Phase Design Codes. The same Panel ensured consistency of advice.

The reviews have been constructive and resulted in positive feedback and suggestions that have informed the subsequent applications. For example, suggestions relating to the rationalisation of a clearer vision within the Codes, and the use of a range of primary street typologies to create differing character throughout the development, were all incorporated into the final submissions.

David Lock Associates



Shaping Streets

Promoting sustainable transport is a national priority (NPPF para 109) in plan making and in development proposals. Our Shaping Streets support helps ensure transport considerations are integral to the design of schemes and lead to high quality places. D:M has a range of Panel experts who can assist in the promotion of sustainable transport and how that translates into the streets and spaces we want to live in. Deciphering the jargon and appreciating the regulations that keep our streets safe, does not mean that opportunities should be missed to reclaim our streets and adopt a people-first approach to their design. Engaging with the local planning and highways authority will be part of our remit to ensure the best

TOWN CENTRE

Reclaiming the High Street

Used when a full day is needed to consider the design parameters to establish in the re-imagining of your High Street or town centre. This can also include car parking and interchanges.

From £6,000 + VAT



NEW DEVELOPMENT

Consider streets appropriate to your site

Used for new housing developments to promote the best outcome for internal streets, car parking, active travel networks and access arrangements from the road network

£4,000 + VAT



VILLAGES

Consider design appropriate to your setting

Appraisal to consider any impact of change to a village character or setting that could result from a bypass, new housing, railway development etc.

£3,250 - £4,000 + VAT



WALK AND TALK

Brief development development

On site appraisal to provide advice on how a project could be approached.

£2,000.00 +VAT



D:M will advise on what level of support is proportionate to help deliver street based solutions



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Design Surgeries

Design:Midlands arranges bespoke Design Surgeries for Local Planning Authorities seeking expert design advice on planning applications. The most common Panel expertise requested relates to landscape, ecology, architecture, transport, heritage, and design coding. These skills complement existing in-house LPA expertise and are also particularly beneficial when exploring appropriate design methods and approaches. The surgeries can be held as online meetings or in-person.

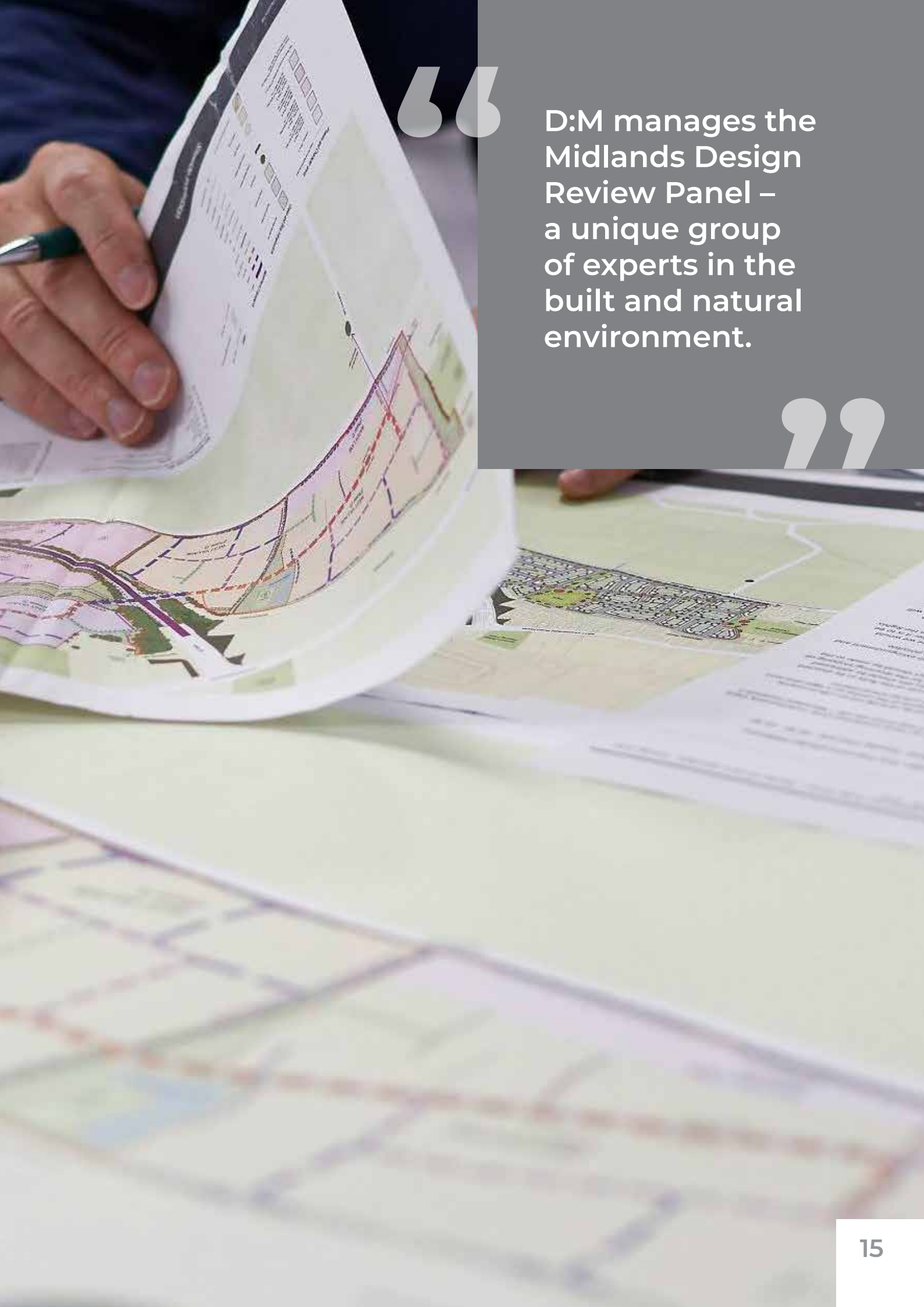
DESIGN SURGERIES

In person or online meetings with Panel members and Planning Officers to provide impartial advice and support on planning applications..

From £600 per day per panel member + VAT



D:M will advise on what level of engagement is needed to support you.



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Hill House, Epperstone

We approached Design:Midlands to review a proposal for a new house of outstanding design in Green Belt and in a Conservation Area. Given the sensitive nature of the issues, the Panel had expertise in architectural, landscape and heritage fields and these disciplines proved hugely beneficial to the scheme that evolved. We would like to thank D:M and the Panel for their assistance, attention to detail and ultimate endorsement of our project, which subsequently secured permission, with Officers' giving weight to the Panel's comments and findings.

Rob Hughes
Hughes Planning
For Jonathan and Jane Mould

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admin@designmidlands.org | 07967 638 786 | www.designmidlands.org

South Annex, Pera Business Park, Nottingham Road, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire LE13 0PB
Company Registration No: 04456338 Registered Charity : 1143920