



WATFORD  
PLACE SHAPING  
PANEL

1 AUGUST 2024 -  
31 JULY 2025

ANNUAL  
REPORT

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Frame Projects  
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# INTRODUCTION

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The Watford Place Shaping Panel was set up in 2020 by Frame Projects on behalf of Watford Borough Council. It is chaired by Peter Bishop, and includes 17 professional members in total, selected through an open recruitment process in collaboration with Watford officers.

Terms of Reference, available on the planning authority's 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 review. Officers provide a briefing on the planning context and key issues, both in writing for the meeting agenda, 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 Watford Place Shaping Panel has advised on eight schemes in the year from 1 August 2024 to 31 July 2025. Four of these schemes have been reviewed on more than one occasion. First reviews usually take place at a stage when a client and design team have decided their preferred option for the 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.

Cover image: St Mary's Church, Watford © Dave Parker  
Image: Watford Place Shaping Panel site visit © Frame Projects





# PANEL

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Authority

Watford Borough Council

Review Panel name

Watford Place Shaping Panel

Panel management

Frame Projects

Contact name for panel

Yingli Tang, Frame Projects

Contact email address

[Yingli@frame-projects.co.uk](mailto:Yingli@frame-projects.co.uk)

Image: Watford High Street © Dave Parker





## REVIEW TOTALS

Number of reviews

8

Number of site visits

4

Number of first reviews

4

Number of follow up reviews

4

Full reviews  
(chair plus four panel members)

4

Intermediate reviews  
(chair plus two panel members)

3

Chair's reviews  
(chair plus one panel member)

1

## PANEL COMPOSITION

### PANEL MEMBERS USED THIS YEAR

No. of different panel  
members used (out of 17)

12

Male panel members

50%

Female panel members

50%

Members from a diverse  
ethnic background  
(based on diversity monitoring forms)

25%

### PANEL COMPOSITION

Panel member attendance for each area of  
expertise during the reporting period  
(individual panel members may have more  
than one area of expertise)

Architecture

12

Urban design /  
town planning

5

Heritage

3

Sustainability

4

Landscape

3

Transport

2

Accessibility

2



# PROPOSALS REVIEWED

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## APPLICANT TYPE

Private developer

7

Local authority

1

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## STAGE OF PROPOSAL

Pre-application

4

Planning application  
submitted

3

Policy document

1

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## TYPE OF PROPOSAL

Residential (50+ units)

3

Mixed use

3

Policy document

1

Commercial

1



## EMERGING THEMES AND ISSUES

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Watford Borough Council and the Place Shaping Panel have a positive working relationship. Officers have been impressed by the impact of the panel's advice, and the progress made on schemes due in part to its input.

Compared to the previous annual reporting period, there has been an increase in the number of schemes coming to design review. Officers' success in encouraging applicants to return for follow up reviews should be recognised, alongside applicants' willingness to engage, particularly given the challenging economic context. There has also been a greater variety in the type of projects reviewed, with more submitted schemes and non-residential developments coming to the panel. It was particularly interesting and valuable to review the Council's draft Co-Living Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The panel was able to provide a helpful sounding board for this work, and the SPD has now been adopted. The Council has seen an increase in build-to-rent and co-living schemes, with a reduction in standard market homes in recent years. Watford's Co-Living SPD will provide clear expectations and helpful guidance for applicants.

Due to the uplift in schemes, Frame Projects was able to invite more panel members to reviews. All areas of expertise were called upon to contribute during this period, and an even gender balance was achieved. Panel members from a diverse ethnic background who commented on schemes in the past year exceeded the proportion within the panel as a whole.

Image: Watford Place Shaping Panel site visit © Frame Projects





# FORWARD LOOK

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Officers noted the likelihood that approved schemes will be revisited in the next year, including through Section 73 applications, as applicants make updates to address policy and regulatory changes, as well as viability issues. The panel should approach these reviews proactively, as they could present opportunities to improve on the design quality of approved proposals, and deliver higher quality development for Watford.

Frame Projects and Watford officers will continue to meet regularly to discuss the pipeline of schemes. The Council is keen to encourage more small and medium schemes to the panel, using the Intermediate Review and Chair's Review formats. Riverwell Hospital will be a significant project, and is likely to require input from the panel in the future, with various land parcels for development. There are also several industrial and commercial sites that may benefit from the panel's input.

It is expected that a refresh of panel membership may be needed in the coming year, to ensure that the Watford Place Shaping Panel has the appropriate skills in place, and continues to reflect Watford's increasingly diverse demographics. This could also provide an opportunity to bring in fresh perspectives and local knowledge from those living or working in Watford. This process will include an induction for the panel to provide them with insights into the local geographical and policy context, and key Council priorities.

Image: Watford High Street © Dave Parker

