

MAYOR OF LONDON

**EMBEDDING
DESIGN QUALITY
IN GRANT
AGREEMENTS**

PROCESS NOTE

GOOD GROWTH BY DESIGN



CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Principles	8
Practice	24
Resources	34

AUTHORED BY THE GLA
REGENERATION TEAM

INTRODUCTION

The Mayor is committed to ensuring design excellence in the built environment across London and believes that good design is key to creating safe public spaces, lively commercial areas, better green infrastructure and high-quality affordable homes. Good design is not simply about the look or aesthetic of a place, but is also about function, performance, and innovation. Design, in its broadest definition and delivered at the highest quality, can ensure that projects make the best use of money to address issues and challenges by providing individual and place-specific responses that meet the needs of the local context and community.

An important part of how the GLA secures good design is a set of Design Dialogue Arrangements – protocols which are embedded into grant agreements to establish from the offset how delivery partners will work with the GLA to embed design throughout the procurement process, construction, and to completion and post-occupancy. The GLA Regeneration team have developed and tested these mechanisms since 2017 through the Good Growth Fund, and they are

now a key part of the toolkit that the GLA uses to ensure that Mayoral investment can, through design, help to shape a safer, fairer, greener and more prosperous city for all Londoners.

Building on learnings from implementing this set of design management protocols, this process note set a series of simple principles which guides their use, and a template that can be used by commissioning authorities and clients to agree and embed a suitable design management process into grant agreements for their own projects. These arrangements, which should be tailored for specific projects, set out how the delivery partner will communicate and share information. They also provide detail on how the commissioning team can continue to be involved in the quality management of projects – whether through providing design advice or other forms of support during scoping, procurement, concept and detail design development through to delivery. The template places importance on communication, ensuring that everyone on the project team knows what is expected throughout the project development process, and can help

teams to work out the best way for stakeholders to collaborate and steer the project to desired outcomes.

Our experience shows that design management arrangements work best if they are embedded in the objectives and activities of the project right at the beginning, as part of the project description, and clearly stated as a milestone included in the project schedule. At the GLA, successful completion of the 'design-to-delivery' milestone is required to trigger release of delivery funding. Projects are most successful when design management takes a long view of the project and encompasses all elements that will affect the end result – this includes the business case for the project, operation arrangements and on-going management, as well as the relationship and input of the users and wider community. The schedule included in the Resources section of this process note begin at the inception of a project – project scoping – and run all the way to completion and evaluation.

PRINCIPLES

1. Embed collaborative working and partnerships in grant funding agreements

Effective collaborative partnerships are key to ensuring successful projects through grant funding. Contracts are a useful tool for capturing expectations of joint working across all parties and should set out these relationships clearly.

2. Ensure design management protocols are developed and agreed jointly

Securing buy-in and a shared understanding across funding partners is best achieved when schedules are developed with involvement from all parties and agreed early on.

3. Prescribe metrics and milestones

Design quality is difficult to quantify or measure – a grant agreement can make explicit what should happen and when, giving as many tangible metrics and milestones as possible.

4. Set out the requirements for design management arrangements at the earliest stage

Ideally these types of protocols should be included in the grant prospectus so bidding parties can understand what will be expected when they are applying. This prevents any surprises further down the line, particularly when more detailed design management arrangements are a requirement.

5. Consider embedding design quality management requirements into the awarding criteria for grants

It can be beneficial to require organisations that are applying for funding to begin to set out how they would approach design management protocols as part of the bidding process. This can be done in a high-level way that is minimally onerous but can enable the arrangements to be agreed more efficiently once the grant is awarded.

PRACTICE

Case Study 001 - Lea Bridge Library

Key facts:

- Who: LB Waltham Forest
- Funding: £413,000 GGF R1, £853,000 total (50% LB Waltham Forest)
- Partners: Sebastian Cox (Furniture & Carpentry), Studio Weave (Architecture/Landscape), Timberwright (Structure), NPS London (MEP, QS)
- Project: Lea Bridge Library

Actions:

1. Shaping the project collaboratively

The Grant Agreement was used to set out project scoping and brief writing requirements – ensuring that the funding partner was able to collaborate fully with Waltham Forest on shaping the project from the outset. This included getting agreement on:

- the key elements of the building,
- its functionality and performance,
- a programme with timescales,
- an Evaluation Strategy,
- the project brief and design process.

2. Setting out a procurement strategy

Procurement requirements were set out in the Grant Agreement, allowing the commissioners to input on all aspects of the procurement strategy in advance. This included:

- Conferring on the procurement strategy for design and other consultancy services, contractors, and workspace management/operators.
- Agreeing on an appropriate framework selection, e-tendering portals, timescales, scoring criteria, evaluation methodology and feedback.
- Inviting a representative from the funding partner to participate in the selection and interview process.

3. Monitoring design quality

Design development and design review requirements were set out in the Grant Agreement. This ensured the commissioners could monitor design quality as the project developed through the RIBA stages.

Requirements included:

- Regular design meetings with all partners, including facilitated workshops and charrettes to involve the broader design and officer team.
- Presentation to the Waltham Forest Design Review Panel, to which the funding partner was invited.
- Stakeholder sign-off reviews agreed at key project milestones, aligning with the end of RIBA Stages 2 and 3, as well as a RIBA Stage 4 report and final construction package sign off.

4. Communicating and managing effectively

Clear guidelines on communication and project management were set out in detail in the grant agreement. This included the following:

- The project was managed, monitored and tracked using shared project management tools, detailed project schedules and quality control methods, in addition to the agreed construction information. This also included a Risk Register.
- All communications between the funding partner and any appointed consultants or contractor were undertaken through the delivery partner project lead.
- Fortnightly site meetings to inspect design quality, which the funding partner was able to attend if required. Monthly project team meetings including all partners to review construction issues requiring design decisions.

Outcomes and Insights:

1. The procurement requirements ensured the selection of a high-quality architecture practice from a shortlist of minority-led practices. The evaluation scoring of 70%(quality) - 25%(cost) - 3%(EDI) secured quality as a clear priority. The procurement ITT was also clear on information to be submitted and included interviews as

part of procurement best practice. The winning submission not only proposed an intelligent design that made full use of the site, but also embedded social value as part of the design methodology, demonstrating meaningful ways to bring local people into the development, delivery and legacy stages of the project.

2. Embedding detailed requirements at the scoping and briefing stage meant that both the opportunities and the challenges of the project were comprehensively captured. There was a shared approach to the design process and the project objectives were refined collaboratively. This also allowed community engagement to be embedded from the start, and for a strong business case for the café and its operation to be part of the brief early on. The result was a robust and well-considered design proposal at an earlier stage. Ensuring all the requirements were fixed from the start also avoided additional fees being applied later and a more flexible and efficient use of the design fees. This flexibility was essential in responding challenges as they unfolded on-site. For example, the project team and budget were resilient enough to accommodate major issues relating to root protection zones for mature trees and an existing basement.
3. The project achieved a high quality result, reflected in a number of awards including the [Civic Trust Award 2023](#) and [RIBA London Award 2023](#). Approaches to sustainability were drawn out and became more ambitious as the project developed. For example, a furniture maker who works with felled trees in Waltham Forest and adjacent boroughs in a circular economy approach was brought in for the interiors. The design dialogue arrangements within the procurement and briefing process were fundamental in allowing this architectural ambition to flourish.



Image credit Jim Stephenson Photography



Image credit Jim Stephenson Photography

RESOURCES

A. Design Management Arrangements Schedule – Template

The following principles follow the structure of design dialogue arrangements within a contract and should be modified to suit individual projects. The arrangements can take the form of an Appendix which goes into contracts and contain a range of topics which grant partners are expected to provide some detail under.

1. Project Scoping

Define and refine the project scope, ensuring priorities are balanced against each other. Considerations may include:

- When a broad scope/project definition exists already, this should be checked against the wider context and projects being developed or delivered by others.
- Opportunities to make efficiencies should be sought to make the best out of the total investment, whether projects have been developed or not.
- Scoping should encompass all elements of the project, for example:
 - the business case for the project,
 - operation arrangements and on-going management,
 - input of the wider community and end-user,
 - programmatic elements including function, performance and innovation,
- High-level programme and timescales should be agreed.
- A project Risk Register should be established.

2. Brief Writing

Write a project brief or specification that captures the opportunities and challenges identified during scoping.

- A good, detailed brief pays off as the project progresses and is a useful document in terms of generating confidence and trust between the various stakeholders.
- The commissioner should define and agree an approach to the design process as well as the involvement of the community.

3. Procurement

Develop a procurement strategy at the outset, including the procurement of design and other consultancy services, contractors, and workspace management/operators.

- The procurement process should be open, competitive, and well executed so that the best talent available is used to deliver excellent projects.
- Some projects package up design services with wider procurement (such as construction). In these cases, particular attention should be paid to maintaining the design quality through to construction and delivery.
- The tender process should be agreed with project partners to include key stages in the procurement timetable such as interviews and feedback to bidders.
- The scoring criteria will allow for an appropriate split between financial (cost) and technical (quality). The GLA recommends a split of 70% quality and 30% cost.
- In addition, when procuring any services, the GLA encourage delivery partners to take account of the suppliers (consultant) equality and diversity policies and their social value approach for the project they are commissioned to. This should be built into the scoring criteria for tender evaluation. This percentage can range from 5-10%.

4. Design Development and Design Review

Enable rigorous design development at every stage and set out a clear structure for dialogue.

- Design development is a critical phase of the project, where opportunities and challenges come to light. Key decisions will need to be made, and it is important that the usual pressures on a project, such as timetable and budget, do not negate opportunities for good design or limit the exploration of options, whether at a strategic or detailed scale.
- Frequent meetings and reviews – the structured part of any dialogue - are crucial to keeping the project on track and ensuring excellence. They need to be well organised with clear guidelines and expectations agreed in advance as part of the design dialogue arrangements. The nature and frequency of these meetings should be embedded in the project description and reflected in the project milestones.
- In addition to the day-to-day programme management type meetings, these meetings and reviews should be focused on the project content. They may include informal project reviews, design workshops and charrettes. They are a chance to develop an understanding of the place and to consider the relationships between neighbouring projects and programmes, as well as examining the finer detail, in the round.

5. Development to Delivery Milestone

Define clear milestones at the outset of a project and embed them in ways that require processes of review, feedback, and sign-off.

Considerations may include.

- For GLA funded projects, a development-to-delivery milestone needs to be included in Schedule 2a, and will trigger the release of delivery funding, signalling that the GLA is confident in the project. The milestone is tied to a satisfactory review and projects will be required to address issues raised at review before progressing through the milestone.
- The GLA regeneration team also administer the London Review Panel, which is made up of independent experts who can be drawn on to formally review projects in development. These reviews look at a project 'in the round' and aim to provide a critical friend to the project.
- For large projects, where multiple sub-elements are to be delivered at different speeds, a single milestone should be defined at a point where a review of the overall project can usefully be carried out.
- Successful completion of this milestone, which would normally take the form of a presentation and/or review, is a prerequisite for the release of delivery funding for GLA projects

6. Delivery

Maintain clear lines of communication and dialogue during the delivery phase.

- The delivery phase, which will vary in length and nature from project to project, is necessarily the time when urgent decisions that affect the physical make-up of a project are made, as new challenges emerge.
- Whether the project is for a website, shop front, park or building, it's important to maintain an ongoing design dialogue throughout the delivery phases so that emerging issues are picked up and resolved by the wider team, and to ensure that pragmatic constraints do not have an adverse effect on quality.
- The project should be managed, monitored and tracked using shared project management tools, detailed project schedules, and quality control methods, in addition to the agreed construction information.

7. Completion and Evaluation

Evaluate projects following completion and ensure learning is captured.

- Evaluation is important as it helps the whole team learn from the project and is the first step in the wider communication of best practice across funding programmes and related programmes.
- Timeframes should be agreed for completion of Evaluation Strategy

ABOUT GOOD GROWTH BY DESIGN

The Mayor's Good Growth by Design programme seeks to enhance the design of the built environment to create a city that works for all Londoners. This means development and growth should benefit everyone who lives here. As such, it should be sensitive to the local context, environmentally sustainable and physically accessible.

The programme calls on all involved in London's growing architectural, design and built environment professions to help realise the Mayor's vision.

Good Growth by Design uses the skills of both the Mayor's Design Advocates and the wider sector. This includes teams here at City Hall, the London Boroughs and other public bodies.

The programme covers six pillars of activity:

SETTING STANDARDS & INFORMING DELIVERY

Undertaking design research and identifying best practice in architecture, urban design and place-shaping, to support the development of clear policies and standards, and improve the quality of London's built environment.

ENSURING QUALITY

Ensuring effective design review across London, including through the London Review Panel.

BUILDING CAPACITY

Enhancing the GLA Group's and borough's ability to shape new development that will deliver good growth.

SUPPORTING DIVERSITY

Working towards a more representative sector and striving for best practice while designing for diversity.

COMMISSIONING QUALITY

Ensuring excellence in how the Mayor and other public sector clients appoint and manage architects and other built environment professionals.

CHAMPIONING & LEARNING

Advocating for the sector and for best practice and evaluating the programme's impact.

THE MAYOR'S DESIGN ADVOCATES

The Mayor's Design Advocates are 42 built environment professionals. They were chosen for their skill and experience to help the Mayor support London's growth through the Good Growth by Design programme. They are independent and impartial, and provide support, advice, critique and expertise on London's built environment. The group includes practitioners, academics, policy makers and those from community-led schemes.

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