

Case Study: [Gloucester Services](#)

Design Review backing helped a scheme win consent on a challenging site. A new service station for the M5 near Gloucester meant a huge swathe of countryside being developed in full view from the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Scheme

A new service area for the M5 motorway, north and south bound, including earthworks, picnic area and outdoor play facilities.

Unusually, this was not to be a standard service station with the expected brands but a partnership between a charity and a family business. Gloucestershire Gateway Trust, a local charity supporting social regeneration, teamed up with Westmorland Limited which had already developed the first family-run motorway services, near Penrith.

Food and produce are from Gloucestershire and its surrounding counties whenever possible. Gloucester Services has supported over 130 local producers within 30 miles of the services and a further 70 within the region.

The Site

The site was challenging, 25 ha of farmland close to the Cotswolds AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). Unsurprisingly, the planning application roused huge concern, with objections from Natural England, the Cotswold Conservation Board, three parish councils and over 2,000 individuals.

Design Review

The scheme came to the Design Review Panel twice. The applicants and their design team were well aware that the (then) forthcoming planning application would be controversial and wanted authoritative backing for the design of the buildings and the landscape design approach of the scheme.

The Panel's Recommendations

The Panel accepted the need for a further service area on this stretch of the M5 and examined the visual impact of the scheme on the surrounding countryside and particularly as seen from the nearby Cotswold escarpment.

Site planning was well analysed, the Panel found, so that parking areas and buildings are where they have least impact: *'There is considerable screening and in fact some improvement to the landscape – to an extent healing the gash the M5 originally made.'* The Panel concluded that the scheme had been skilfully designed to knit into the landscape and would not be materially harmful in views.

The Panel gave its backing to the buildings proposed, making some relatively minor suggestions, especially about the fuel station.

A Consent

The application was approved, though only just, with councillors on the planning committee voting six to four in favour. Officers had recommended approval. The Panel's clear support was put before the committee.

Even then opposition continued, and the case went to the High Court, who dismissed all challenges.

Factors that helped the development gain planning permission included the green roof on the main buildings with a seed mix to mimic the natural vegetation of the surrounding landscape; the buildings being bedded into the undulating site with low roofs and an organic form. These characteristics had been commended by the Panel.

Gloucester Services has gone on to be a remarkable success story. It has won a string of design awards, including the RIBA National Award, plus awards for 'Outstanding Contribution to Nature', 'Destination Innovation' and 'Community Benefit'.

"Thank you for your thoughtful and enthusiastic response to our architectural proposals for Gloucester Services. The design review process strengthened the integrity of the design and your careful observations aided the whole process by highlighting where the project could be improved. In particular we were struck by the Panel's understanding of the specific local conditions, which proved critical to the success and viability of the final award-winning project."

Glenn Howells Architects

client: [Gloucestershire Gateway Trust](#) and [Westmorland Limited](#)

design team: [Glenn Howells Architects](#), [Pegasus Landscape Design](#), [Pegasus Planning](#)

planning authority: Stroud District Council

scheme: north and south bound Motorway Service Area, 5,574 sq. m. of building, fuel station including forecourt, shop and parking, LGV amenities building, parking, outside picnic area with outdoor play facilities