

Urban Designer interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for Urban Designer roles usually combine a portfolio review, technical questions and behavioural or scenario-based discussion. Employers want to see how you think about places, how you use design tools and how you work with others to deliver outcomes.

- **Portfolio and project walkthrough:** You'll present a project, explaining your design process, constraints and outcomes.
- **Technical and software:** Questions on CAD, 3D modelling, GIS and how you use these tools in daily work.
- **Process and method:** How you approach site analysis, masterplanning, development assessment and policy advice.
- **Scenario and judgement:** A hypothetical site or planning issue, testing how you balance competing demands.
- **Behavioural and stakeholder:** Past examples of working with councils, developers or community groups, often using STAR.

A typical interview may start with a portfolio presentation, followed by technical questions, then a scenario or behavioural segment. Some employers include a short written exercise or a site visit. You may meet with a panel of planners, designers and a manager.

1. Walk us through a recent urban design project from concept to completion.

Why they ask

To see your design process, technical skills and how you communicate your work.

How to structure your answer

Portfolio walkthrough: start with the brief and site context, explain your analysis and concept, describe how you coordinated with others, and finish with the outcome and what you learned.

Example answer

"In a recent project, I prepared a structure plan for a 10-hectare mixed-use precinct. I began with a site analysis looking at movement networks, topography and surrounding land uses. I then developed three concept options using SketchUp and AutoCAD, which I tested with the client and council. After a stakeholder workshop, we refined the preferred option to improve pedestrian connections and public open space. I coordinated with engineers on drainage and traffic, and with landscape architects on planting and seating. The final plan was adopted by council, and it is now guiding development applications in the area. I learned the value of early engagement and clear visual communication."

2. How do you assess a development application against design guidelines?

Why they ask

To test your understanding of planning policy and your ability to apply design principles consistently.

How to structure your answer

Process explanation: outline the steps you take, from reading the application and relevant planning scheme, to assessing built form, amenity and public realm impacts, to writing clear advice.

Example answer

"I start by reviewing the application against the relevant planning scheme and local design guidelines. I check built form, setbacks, height, overshadowing, and how the proposal addresses the street and

public spaces. I also consider internal amenity, like daylight and privacy. I then prepare a written assessment with clear recommendations, noting any areas where the design could be improved. If needed, I request further information or suggest conditions. I aim to be consistent and transparent so applicants understand the decision."

3. Tell me about a time you had to manage conflicting views from stakeholders on a design project.

Why they ask

To see how you handle stakeholder management and whether you can find practical compromises.

How to structure your answer

STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result): describe the conflicting views, your role, the steps you took to facilitate discussion, and the outcome.

Example answer

"In a town centre revitalisation, some residents wanted more parking while the council wanted to reduce car dependence and improve pedestrian space. I organised a workshop where we mapped out how different groups used the area. I presented data on pedestrian counts and showed visual simulations of the proposed changes. I then facilitated a discussion to find common ground, which led to a compromise: a smaller parking area with better lighting and a new pedestrian plaza. The plan was supported by both groups, and the project moved forward without delays."

4. You're given a site with a steep slope and a heritage building. How would you approach the design?

Why they ask

To assess your judgement under pressure and how you balance heritage, access and environmental constraints.

How to structure your answer

Scenario response: clarify constraints, outline a systematic approach, and explain how you would balance heritage, access and environmental outcomes.

Example answer

"First, I would gather information: heritage significance, slope stability, drainage and access requirements. I would then consider how to position new built form to respect the heritage building, maybe using terraced levels on the slope. I would explore options with a heritage consultant and engineer. I would also think about public access, maybe a path that reveals the heritage asset. I would test concepts in 3D to show the impact. My goal would be a design that enhances the heritage and works with the topography, not against it."

5. Which software do you use for urban design, and how do you integrate them into your workflow?

Why they ask

To confirm your technical proficiency and how you combine tools to produce design outcomes.

How to structure your answer

Technical overview: name the tools, explain what you use them for, and give an example of a project where you combined them.

Example answer

"I use AutoCAD for technical drawings, SketchUp for massing and concept models, and Rhino for more complex geometry. I use ArcGIS for spatial analysis, like mapping constraints or demographics. I use Adobe Creative Suite, especially Illustrator and InDesign, for presentation boards and reports. In a recent masterplan, I used ArcGIS to map site constraints, then SketchUp to test building envelopes, and finally InDesign to produce a consultation document. I also make sure my files are organised so

others can pick them up.”

6. How do you ensure community consultation is meaningful and inclusive?

Why they ask

To see how you engage with the public and whether you can translate feedback into design decisions.

How to structure your answer

Values-based response: describe your approach to engagement, give an example of a technique you have used, and explain how you close the loop with the community.

Example answer

“I start by understanding who the community is and what barriers they might face. I use a mix of methods: drop-in sessions, online surveys and workshops at different times. I make sure materials are clear and jargon-free. In one project, I ran a pop-up stall at a local market to reach people who would not come to a formal meeting. I also translated key materials into community languages. After feedback, I showed how it influenced the design, which builds trust. I think closing the loop is crucial so people feel heard.”