

# BUILDING IN CONTEXT TOOLKIT

New development in historic areas

## AN INTRODUCTION

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Developed by  
the **architecture** centre

  
ENGLISH HERITAGE



## **CONTENTS**

Introduction

What is the BIC Toolkit?

The aims of BiC TOOLKIT training

How the programme operates

Event requirements

## Introduction

### BACKGROUND

The Building in Context toolkit has been developed by EH, CABE and the Kent Architecture Centre <http://www.building-in-context.org/>. It has evolved significantly from the original publication 'Building in Context' published by EH and CABE in 2001 with regular updates from contributors including ABECs and Jerry Spencer. The purpose of BiC is to stimulate a high standard of design when development takes place in historically sensitive contexts. The founding belief is that all successful design solutions depend on allowing time for a thorough site analysis and character appraisal of context. The Building in Context toolkit provides bespoke training based around a topical local issue or type of site, which is delivered in partnership at a local level. It aims to help those making decisions to reach effective and balanced conclusions.

**CABE** ([www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)) is the government's champion for better buildings, places and spaces. CABE believes that well designed homes, streets, parks, workplaces, schools and hospitals are the fundamental right of everyone. It is a Non-Departmental Public Body, and is funded by both the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It uses its skills and resources to work for a higher quality of life for people and communities across England and does this by researching and campaigning, through technical advice and the provision of learning programmes.

**EH** ([www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)) is funded by DCMS and is the government's advisor on all matters relating to the historic environment. It works in partnership with central government departments, local authorities, voluntary bodies and the private sector to:

- conserve and enhance the historic environment
- broaden public access to heritage
- increase people's understanding of the past.

English Heritage believes that where the historic environment is valued and cared for, social economic and environmental benefits can be generated for everyone. To this end, it works to support and encourage local authorities in their work related to the historic environment and has developed HELM (Historic Environment – Local Management) as an on line training resource, further details on this and Historic Environment Champions can be found at [www.helm.org.uk](http://www.helm.org.uk).

### Kent Architecture Centre

The Kent Architecture Centre (KAC) is part of the Architecture Centre Network created to improve the quality of design across the country. [www.architecturecentre.org](http://www.architecturecentre.org)

## What Is The Building In Context Toolkit?

The Building in Context toolkit (**BiC**) is a training programme that links policy and practice. It provides advice about managing change to our historic built environment and the decisions taken at local level on individual applications for development. It is designed to promote understanding across the board to all parties involved with urban and rural historic environments and in particular to assist decisionmakers implement planning and heritage guidance, particularly Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development and PPG 15: Planning and the Historic Environment. The core of the toolkit is a workshop or event which has been developed to provide a robust method of providing new skills, refreshing existing skills and exchanging best practice to improve decision making. It is developed to address specific needs of each individual audience and with lessons that can be transferred for other organisations to use via case studies on the website. This guidance is founded upon two elements

- **The eight BiC principles**
- **The BiC Evaluation framework for assessing development proposals**

The eight Building in Context principles are

- 1 A successful project will start with an assessment of the value of retaining what is there
- 2 A successful project will relate well to the geography and history of the place and lie of the land
- 3 A successful project will be informed by its own significance so that its character and identity will be appropriate to its use and context.
- 4 A successful project will sit happily in the pattern of existing development and the routes through and around it
- 5 A successful project will respect important views
- 6 A successful project will respect the scale of neighbouring buildings
- 7 A successful project will use materials and construction methods which are at least as high in quality as those in the existing context
- 8 A successful project might create new views and juxtapositions and add to the variety and texture of the setting

These principles are not a checklist but provide the foundation for successful and appropriate development in an historic context. A more detailed appraisal framework has been developed as a guide for assessing whether individual proposals respect these principles and the training event demonstrates how this framework can be used. The training uses case studies, and where appropriate, a site visit as core elements and ensures that delivery and pace respond to the understanding levels of the group. The training is based on sharing experience and encouraging participation to enable audiences in understanding design problems and developing possible strategies.

## The aims of BiC TOOLKIT training

Building in Context TOOLKIT training is based on the principle of 'learning by doing' and stimulating guided discovery to:

- Increase confidence and skills of delegates addressing local or regional design and historic environment issues by providing new skills or refreshing existing ones
- Use case studies to demonstrate how good designers generate a good scheme.
- Use practical activity to engage the audience
- Use recognised simple assessment tools to gain an understanding of context.
- Provide a review of skills acquired.
- Promote adoption of the principles in ongoing decision making.
- Promote consistency of decisionmaking in design and heritage related issues across an organisation

The adaptability of the BiC TOOLKIT sessions makes it useful for design training for groups including

- Local Authority staff and members with responsibilities for **all** aspects of the built environment (Planning, Heritage, Education, Transport, Environmental Health and Building Control)
- Amenity groups, e.g. Conservation Area Advisory Groups
- Town and Parish Councils, as landowners, developers and consultees for planning/ heritage applications
- Interest groups, such as land and property owners affected by proposals for regeneration or Local Development Frameworks
- Community organisations, such as residents' associations
- Planning Aid.

Every effort should be made to include other groups in the planning process to widen the influence and effect of the effort put into the event.

The training events are **not** suitable for use on a particular scheme or design that is:

- subject of a current application for Planning, Listed Building or Conservation Area Consent that is awaiting a decision;
- A scheme that is so specialised that it will not be widely replicated, for example a town by-pass.

However the *site and/ or issue* under scrutiny may be used to explore similar themes, as in the Leatherhead event, in the South East pilot programme.

See website for  
[case studies from  
 previous events](#)

### What do BiC participants gain from the event?

- To be more inquisitive
- To be more objective
- Use their observation more
- To gain more of an understanding of context
- To gain more practical skills that they can use in their profession.
- To learn that they have more latent knowledge than they realise
- Learn to extract the right information from the drawings and reports they are given
- To know what information is missing
- Gain more confidence to interrogate schemes and challenge and champion

## To facilitate a BiC event

Facilitators will:

- use robust planning and event structure
- match the events to client's issues
- be approachable and enthusiastic
- bring in inspiring speakers to discuss their schemes
- actively encourage questions and explain clearly
- provide constructive feedback and evaluation
- be able to manage conflicts or disagreements
- provide simulations of situations that may occur

Events may be delivered by ABECs, Local Authorities and other deliverers. Local Architecture and Built Environment Centres (ABECs) can be engaged to work in partnership with you to put together an event, as most ABECs will have ran one or more of these events. To locate your nearest ABEC search the Architecture Centre Network website: <http://www.architecturecentre.net/docs/network/centres/>

### Finding a facilitator

If a facilitator is not available from your organisation, word of mouth is the best way to find one. Your client/ host may suggest or provide a facilitator themselves. Seek suggestions from CABE and EH national or local reps.; Design Review Panel Chair or member, or local branches of RIBA, RTP1, LI, RICS or IHBC; some of the other ABEC's have been delighted with their facilitator and may provide or recommend someone they know. Alternatively please contact KAC.

## How The Programme Operates

1. The Facilitator will assess their hosts' needs and requirements for the event (refer to checklist on DVD).
2. An invitation and questionnaire will be sent to the participants, to be returned before the event
3. This information will be used to inform the level and content of the event
4. The event
5. The follow-up will include a feedback questionnaire for participants. The information gathered will be used to inform future BiC training sessions. The short illustrated report that pulls together strands from the workshop will be added to the case studies on the national website. These will be circulated together two weeks (max) after the event.

## Event Requirements

- Your event is developed around a site or issue in an historic area (or adjacent to)
- Your planned event has been approved by EH/CABE
- You agree to use the templates and logos provided in accordance with the guidelines provided in the facilitator pack (provided on receipt of your request to hold an event)
- You agree to reference English Heritage, CABE and KAC in publicity material and at the event
- You agree to return the feedback forms and event report in accordance with the guidelines in the facilitator pack (provided on receipt of your request to hold an event)
- You agree to provide a delegate/attendance list
- Any subsequent use of the information or resources in the pack will be by prior agreement of EH/CABE only

**If you are interested in finding out more about Building in Context**

**or**

**If you are interested in hosting/organising a Building in Context Toolkit**

**Event contact:**

**General enquires:** [Champions@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:Champions@english-heritage.org.uk)

**Historic Environment Champions (National):**

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