Borough Council

He is responsible for a wide range of development to site development is a town now adapting to changing needs and a diverse principal planner working in the approach to looking of a case study, wider design issues than 'how it looks' are explored. Each workshop consists of a presentation looking at the key issues covered in Building in Context, followed by local and regional case studies, a practical, hands-on drawing activity, and an opportunity to discuss the complex issues associated with successfully incorporating contemporary design in sensitive locations.

The Building in Context Toolkit Programme aims to:

- Enable wider understanding of the principles of developing appropriate contemporary design in historic areas to a range of professional and community groups
- Enable those involved in making decisions affecting historic areas in their attainment of a more effective, balanced and efficient service resulting in improvement of those decisions affecting the quality of the historic environment for future generations.
- Promote sustainable new and re-used development that doesn’t sacrifice what future generations will value for the sake of short-term and often illusory gains so that we use already developed areas in the most efficient way, while making them more attractive places in which to live and work and conserving our cultural heritage.

About the TOOLKIT

The Building in Context toolkit has been developed by EH, CABE and the Kent Architecture Centre. It grew out of the publication ‘Building in Context’ published by EH and CABE in 2001. The purpose of the publication was to stimulate a high standard of design when development takes place in historically sensitive contexts. The founding principle is that all successful design solutions depend on allowing time for a thorough site analysis and character appraisal of context. Building in Context TOOLKIT training aims to help those making decisions to reach effective and balanced design decisions.

It is proven to be useful in communicating issues of development in complex situations, helping convey the depth of expertise required in adopting a holistic approach to site development and reduced ‘silos mentally’. Through the analysis of a case study, wider design issues than 'how it looks' are explored.

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About the Speakers

Jerry Spencer (Lead facilitator)

Jerry is a planner and urban designer who has helped deliver regeneration of historic environments, notably in Hackney, Nottingham, Gloucester and Stoke. Jerry is a former head of design for the NWDA and is now an independent consultant specialising in public sector capacity building and training.

Adam Scott

Adam Scott is Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment at Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. He is responsible for a wide range of functions, including planning, property, regeneration and environmental front line services.

About the Architect

Capita Symonds provides a broad range of professional and technical expertise in building design, civil engineering, environment, management and transport. The company has a base in Blackburn, and runs the engineering and highways functions of Lancashire County Council. Andy Hawthorne is a member of its architectural team which carries out major public projects.

Our Facilitators

Thanks are extended to our other facilitators: Annie Atkins, Manager Places Matter! Andrew Rudge Conservation Officer Blackburn with Darwen Council Joanne Clark Heritage Officer, Design and Heritage Pennine Lancashire Darren Ratcliffe Manager design and Heritage Pennine Lancashire Chris Standish Head of Design and Development Elevate East Lancashire Nigel Banker English Heritage (observer).
The Workshop

The workshop groups explored the King Street ‘shatter zone’ west of the cathedral, and looked at opportunities for redevelopment of a street block currently occupied by a redundant retail shed. In this area, blank walled sheds compete for primacy with upstanding, well windowed and deeply modelled buildings from earlier periods of the town’s development. The groups felt that site has the potential to knit together these older fragments of a street and block layout, by re-establishing the primacy of outward looking, mixed use development. Participants felt it would be important to have active frontages opening out onto all sides, to connect with the neighbouring listed buildings and to provide much needed interest and overlooking for a recently completed public square next to St Anne’s Church to the north.

The groups thought it desirable to ensure an interesting mix of uses for the new buildings on site, as these would help to attract people in from the nearby town centre. Suggestions included some form of market, small business units, a café and a bar or other cultural activity. Most groups proposed residential accommodation for the upper floors, to ensure the street remained overlooked well into the evening. A variety of block layouts was put forward, most including a direct public access route through the development linking the Georgian courtyard to the south with the new square.

The site
• How does the proposed building relate to the site?
• How do materials relate to those of surrounding buildings?
• Are there differences, are they acceptable?

Impact on open views
• Has the impact of the building in close views been assessed?
• Is it either weak or overpowering?

Materials
• What materials are used?
• How do they relate to those of the surrounding buildings?
• Is the quality as high?
• Are there interesting comparisons or contrasts in the use of materials?

Architecture suitable to its use
• Is the architecture of the building suitable for the uses it contains?
• Is it trying to be too grand or pretending to be more modest than it really is?

Composition
• How does the architecture present itself to the viewer? Is there a strong composition in the pattern of solid to opening in the façade? Does the detailing of the materials show signs of careful thought or originality in the way the building is put together?

Public realm
• What contribution, if any, does the proposal make to the public realm? If new open space is created, is it clear that it will provide a positive benefit and have a genuine use?

Traffic and views
• In the wider setting, has the impact of the building in views and vistas been considered?
• Does it form a harmonious group or composition with existing buildings or features in the landscape?

Lost In Blackburn
by Jane Field

A beacon lights the way –
A rocket of light with changing hues
Stands to attention
Concrete forms suggest rest
Though their cold, stark forms prevent it
So I pass by.

The town opens before me now
Dominated by a once grand hall
Pretending to be lit
But shrouded in gloom
Barriers shout at me
Blocking the way
An imposing statue keeps watch
Alone and desolate

A towering block looms threateningly overhead.
Below the bright facades compete
Confusion of street clutter
Battering the senses

Turning the corner, losing my way
Blank walls glaring gloomily at me
No welcome here, unsafe
The mall has turned its back on me
Defiant and unrelenting
Imaginative steel shapes
Evolving before me
Confront my senses
I pause and wonder...

Shattered fragments of past glories
Pervade the streets
Gems lost, depersonalised
Its heart ripped out
Quality struggles to make its presence felt
New jars with old
Lost in a multitude of streets
Lost...
Searching to find a way forward.

Jane is a creative writer, and wrote ‘Lost in Blackburn’ on the training day, inspired in part by the spoken and written words of participants.

Jane is also the Senior Learning Manager for BEAM and is the Northwest and Yorkshire co-ordinator for the Building in Context Programme. Jane also assisted in facilitating the Blackburn event.

THE WORKSHOP

Lost in a muddle of streets
New jars with old

Participants studying street and block form in workshop groups.

Options for a new street block, all with some form of open space.

The Workshop

Jane also assisted in facilitating the Blackburn workshop. The workshop groups were shown pictures of a recent Housing Design Award winning building at Titchbrook Triangle, London SW1, illustrating an 8 storey building adjacent to a listed Georgian terrace. Whilst most participants felt that the new building in the King Street context should match the height of the 3 and 4 storey Georgian and Victorian listed buildings, one group proposed an 8 storey block, suggesting that a landmark was needed here in order to attract people into the area. Some group discussions concluded that perhaps a tall building could be justified to mark the gateway between one area and another, where the adjacent area was more open and had long views out and towards it. This might be appropriate for a site adjacent to the new inner relief road, where a landmark could complement the wide linear corridor of the new road.

The general consensus was that the most important role for new building on this site was to be as low and not to further challenge the orthodoxy of King Street’s fine, historic, urban grain.

Jerry Spencer 3.2.08

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From Building in Context, pg 37

www.building-in-context.org

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