



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 'silo mentality'. Through the analysis 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



This event was held on Monday 17th March 2008 at the Courtyard Theatre in Hereford, a venue designed by Glenn Howells Architects. The venue was suitable for our workshop in that we aimed to inspire our delegates through design, and the venue was also situated on the edge of our case study area the Edgar Street Grid, Hereford.

A mix of Officers and Elected Members from various sectors including highways, development control and design and historic environment champions attended from authorities across the West Midlands region, and even attracted a delegate from as far away as Somerset! In total 22 people attended representing 15 organisations. Each delegate was given an attendance certificate at the end of the day, particularly useful for providing points for Elected Members training and evidence of CPD for Officers.

Learning objectives of the day were addressed by initial informative presentations of principles, practice and case studies in the morning, leading into participative site visits, analysis and group workshops in the afternoon.

The morning commenced after the welcome / networking coffee in a small theatre room where Julie Morgan of MADE* chaired the proceedings. Matthew Dobson introduced the BiC Toolkit as a context, followed by Bill Bloxsome of Herefordshire Council with a colourful and enlightening contextual welcome to the character and historic assets that Herefordshire has to offer. With the context set, Angus Jaimieson of Jamieson Associates Architects explained how his practice had considered this local richness within the design concept of proposals for various case study buildings they had designed and delivered in Hereford. The importance of working in partnership with others was identified, and how expertise at English Heritage can play a role in the planning and design processes. Micheal Taylor of English Heritage (West Midlands), who has been consulted on many of Jamieson Associates development proposals, and Nigel Barker of English Heritage (South East) developed this theme further with examples of principles and practice.

After lunch our special guest Jonathan Bretherton, Chief Executive of the Edgar Street Grid Herefordshire Ltd gave an overview of the site and some of the key issues that they have had to deal with before the site visit and workshop session.

About the Speakers:

Bill Bloxsome, Herefordshire Council
Bill Bloxsome is Conservation Manager at Herefordshire Council and brought a wealth of local knowledge and experience to the event.

Nigel Barker, English Heritage
Nigel joined us from the South East region adding a more national flavour to the Seminar. Nigel was English Heritage national lead for Building in Context. His authority on the subject added a valuable dimension to the day. We valued his expertise and informative presentation on principles and their practical application.

Michael Taylor, English Heritage
Michael is a Design Review West Midlands Panel Member and Historic Areas Advisor for English Heritage. His valued contribution was based on local case studies he had been involved in.

Matthew Dobson, English Heritage
Matthew is Regional Policy Advisor in the West Midlands and was a key contact at English Heritage in helping to develop this Seminar.

**Jonathan Bretherton
Edgar Street Grid Herefordshire Ltd**
Jonathan is a Chartered Surveyor, having pursued his career through a variety of private companies, including time spent with Young Group plc, a property, logistics and minerals company and the Greenbelt Group where he successfully established the company in England and Wales as Managing Director. He was Deputy Chief Executive of Sunderland arc where he secured "minded to approve" planning consent for a £200M mixed use development and led a variety of teams in developing projects of approximately £500M.

WORKSHOP ANALYSIS

Pattern of streets and spaces

Has the street pattern changed much over time? Do some historical routes still exist today? Clearly show on your plans where there are currently areas of open space (you may want to colour the streets and spaces instead of the buildings) and where there may be opportunities to include more?

Building enclosure

Look at the impact on the street of *where buildings enclose the sides of the road*, and the effects of *where buildings are missing or set back from the road*. The continuity of this enclosure of street and spaces helps determine character. Sometimes landscaping can provide enclosure too – any examples?

Active frontages and public space?

Consider the building frontages a bit more. Do they relate to the street by allowing people to access the building directly with doors to the street or provide windows to the street? This makes frontages *active* and affects the perception of safety. Is it clear that all building frontages are actually fronts, and that public and private space is well defined? How is this done?

Building quality

Are there similarities in the range of building materials used in this area i.e. an identifiable *material palette*? Look at the elements in the buildings too – the windows, doors and roofing. Do the roofs pitch at similar or varied angles? Are there any chimneys and what are they like? Do the size of windows in old and new buildings vary?

Access and connectivity

Does the site have strong linkages to the town centre? Are these routes easy to find and use to visitors that don't know the area? Can you identify any *desire lines* or informal pedestrian shortcuts where people have defined their own routes between places? Are these routes in the most appropriate places?

Ease of movement

Are there many vehicular and pedestrian conflicts? Where and how have they been overcome? Is the street furniture located in sensible places or are there places you need to walk around them? Are the ground levels and surface materials easy for pushchairs to manoeuvre across? Are there any maintenance issues that need addressing to make movement easier?

Views and vistas

Are there clear views to landmark buildings that are worth noting, or vistas made up of attractive compositions of buildings or other features? Which views or vistas



The afternoon session was held in a light filled studio, with delegates sitting around tables arranged for group work, an associated workshop materials, and plans ready for the site visit. The delegates had previously been split into workshop groups at registration, and were invited to arrange themselves in these groups along with the identified group facilitators.

Site visits around part of the Edgar Street Grid site were led by the facilitators.

Groups were provided with cameras and delegates were encouraged to photograph vistas and buildings, barriers to development and other key issues that they wanted to annotate their townscape analysis maps with. Once back at the venue these photos were printed out during the refreshment break and given to the groups, helping to link the physical environment to the 2D plans on the tables and identify key issues that the groups considered to be relevant.

Historical maps were also provided, again courtesy of Herefordshire Council so that historical routes and spaces could inform how the Edgar Street Grid has evolved over time.

Feedback was provided with the aid of flipcharts to enable groups to show how the workshop questions (as set out in the column to the left) had been explored.

Our special guest Jonathan Bretherton listened to the feedback, and gave his own comments on each of the group's work that had been produced. The actual long term masterplan (consultation draft) for the Edgar Street Grid commissioned by the Edgar Street Grid Herefordshire Ltd, and produced by Urban Initiatives, was given to each group at the end. These were compared and discussed by the delegates in relation to the group work they had prepared themselves earlier.

The Seminar closed on time with delegates receiving their certificates of attendance.

About our Guest Speaker:

Architect Angus Jamieson, of Jamieson Associates

Angus Jamieson is a local Architect who has an established reputation and won several design awards for his work. Leftbank in Hereford was a case study that was used in the original *Building in Context* publication in 2001, and the problems and solutions that this development proposal experienced remain relevant today. Jamieson Associates work is also showcased in an English Heritage publication titled *'Shared Interest, Celebrating investment in the historic environment'* in 2006. This was the Hereford Cathedral School.

About the Chair:

Julie Morgan of MADE*

Julie is an award winning Planner and qualified Urban Designer with local authority and consultancy experience. She operationally set up Design Review West Midlands as a regional service within MADE* in 2007 and manages the service. She also delivers seminars and other support for Design & Historic Environment Champions in the West Midlands region.

With thanks also to all our Workshop Facilitators :

Nigel Barker, English Heritage

Michael Taylor, English Heritage

Matthew Dobson, English Heritage

David Tittle, MADE*

Building in Context: Appraising a proposal

...It is possible to arrive at opinions about design quality that are based on objective criteria. There are many ways of doing this, but any such process is likely to include asking the following questions. They encompass both the quality of the building itself and its quality as a contribution to the urban design of the neighbourhood in which it is situated:

The site

- How does the proposed building relate to the site?
- Is there a positive and imaginative response to any problems and constraints?
- Have the physical aspects of the site been considered, such as any changes in level within or beyond it?
- Are access arrangements convenient and existing routes respected?
- Can the amount of accommodation required be fitted on the site in an elegant way?

Wider setting

- How does the proposal relate to its wider setting?
- Are the street pattern and grain of the surroundings respected?
- Are there changes in height between the existing and new development and if so how are they managed?
- Will the result enhance or damage the quality of the townscape? Density
- How is the density of the proposal related to that of existing and neighbouring uses?
- If there are differences, are they acceptable?

Impact on close views

- Has the impact of the building in close views been assessed?
- Is it either weak or overpowering?
- Does it respect the scale and rhythm of its neighbours?

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?
- How will the colours work together?

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?

Vistas and views

- In the wider setting, has the impact of the building in views and vistas been considered?
- Does it make a positive or negative impact?
- Does it form a harmonious group or composition with existing buildings or features in the landscape?
- Does it distract the eye from the focus of the view and if so does it provide something better to look at?

To Design and Historic Environment champions:

Organising Your Building in Context TOOLKIT training event

We hope you enjoyed this event that showcased for Design and Historic Environment Champions the Building in Context TOOLKIT and a leading designer.

The TOOLKIT is a travelling training package that is available to authorities across England that can be tailored to meet specific local requirements. As Champion for your authority you may wish to organise one in your own workplace.

For more information on holding a BiC TOOLKIT training event please contact Rebecca Simpson, CABE, tel. 020 7070 6800, Nigel Barker, English Heritage, tel. 01483 252000, or Julie Morgan, MADE* (West Midlands ABEC), tel. 0121 633 9406.

The Table below shows how the BiC Toolkit team can put together an event tailored for your particular requirements:

The Building in Context TOOLKIT

