



About the TOOLKIT

An initiative funded by English Heritage South East Regional Capacity Building Programme, in partnership with CABI and the architecture centre to help deliver better design solutions in historic areas.

The Toolkit comprises series of workshops designed to enable key decision makers, designers and developers to explore topical issues in their area and stimulate higher standards of design.

Each workshop consists of a presentation looking at the key issues covered in Building in Context, followed by local and regional case studies and an opportunity to discuss the complex issues associated with successfully incorporating contemporary design in sensitive locations.

Through this initiative we promote better practice in developing appropriate contemporary design in historic areas. Case studies are chosen for their wide interest and where they can be used to demonstrate broader themes. The events will be published as 'The Building in Context Toolkit' and will include detailed case studies from the programme. The Toolkit will support 'Building in Context' published by English Heritage and CABI.

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

BUILDING IN CONTEXT TOOLKIT
New development in historic areas



Darlington, York
Architect: Peter Cook
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Background

Medway Council organised a Building in Context TOOLKIT workshop as part of their ongoing briefing programme.

Medway is under particular pressure for new development. It is within easy reach of the nation's capital, within the Thames Gateway regeneration initiative and has a legacy of vacant or underused large brownfield sites, from historic naval, maritime and manufacturing industries. Government support has been given to the four local authorities in the North Kent Thames Gateway to enable delivery of better quality development. This has been through the Design Excellence North Kent (DENK) programme, please refer to panel right for more details, that funded initiatives including training workshops, such as this event for Medway officers and councillors.

This event provided an introduction for members and officers on ways to assess the quality of new development in historic areas. Participants put this into practice in the second part of the session where they practiced their analytical skills to draw out an infill scheme within a High Street of a neighbouring Kent authority.

Medway has a number of vacant sites within historic road frontages. Rochester High Street, picture below, and its backland areas is a typical pressure area with a mixture of commercial and residential development: the case study used was particularly instructive for participants to take lessons forward in emerging schemes in their area.



design excellence
IN NORTH KENT

The Design Excellence North Kent (DENK) programme is about raising design quality through intervention in the development and regeneration process. Funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), DENK was launched in June 2005 by Kent's Design Champion, Piers Gough CBE. It is managed by Kent County Council.

Thames Gateway North Kent is an area of major growth and regeneration. This programme aims to support the key organisations involved in the delivery of sustainable and high quality design.

- **DENK Components**
- **Advice hub:** To promote and support the delivery of sustainable and high quality design
- **Competitions:** To encourage innovative and distinctive design in North Kent
- **Consultation:** To raise the local awareness of sustainability issues, provide a better understanding of the growth agenda and how to influence the process of change.
- **Enabling Team:** Draws on good designers to inspire excellence and to act as critical friends.
- **Training:** To allow some of the best specialists to share their knowledge and develop a robust network for longer term advice in the area.

About Walter Menteth



Walter established Walter Menteth Architects in 1985. Through his practice, he promotes an inclusive approach to architecture and urban design on the understanding that inventive and creative dialogue are key to establishing successfully integrated urban development. The practice delivers cutting edge proposals and its philosophy is: 'to work within a brief to produce a poetic spaces and lyrical buildings that provide utility and delight'. Walter Menteth Architects practices' works has received various architectural awards in recognition of their quality and innovation. <http://www.waltermenteth.com/>

Walter Menteth is a member of the South East Regional Design Panel, DENK Enabler and BIC TOOLKIT Facilitator.

Image below from the Workshop



The scheme that provoked debate



This image was the catalyst to really getting under the surface of the issue of contemporary design in a historic setting. Initial responses were that the extension had 'wrecked' the existing building.

Walter Menteth took delegates through the process of analysing, understanding and responding to context for a variety of projects: from a backland former gun factory, partial demolition and conversion with new build for community use, to a new quarter in a northern former mill town. However this particular scheme, extending the back of a Georgian building provoked the first response from delegates and subsequent debate. Here, the owners' requirements set the brief for the architect: create extra space, to light and ventilate new and existing rooms, energy efficiency, access to garden and contemporary design. The owners' decision to use Walter Menteth Architects, well-known for contemporary sustainable schemes, was also instrumental in achieving this outcome.

The discussion is recorded below using the six BiC questions that test if a scheme demonstrates the right approach to achieving a successful project:

1. Does the project/extension relate well to the geography and history of the area?

The Georgian terrace has an array of large flat roofed structures at the front. Originally intended as shops, some are now living accommodation subsumed into the houses behind. At the rear, additions are less uniform in proportion, materials, position and style. They range from early extensions in the form of single room-on-stilts for first floor bathrooms, to more recent full height extensions. The principle of the project may therefore be considered to relate well to the spirit of incremental additions that have taken place over time to the back of this terrace.

2. Does the project/extension sit happily in the pattern of existing development and routes through and around it?

The proportions and position of the extension on the building replicates that of the early room-on-stilts additions. The position was originally chosen as it would have enabled natural daylight and ventilation to ground floor rooms in the main house before electricity was available.

3. Does the project/ extension respect important views?

Small extension is unlikely to compromise significant views.

4. Does the project/extension respect scale?

Understated in size, the extension responds to the scale and position of other historic additions that are an accepted feature of this terrace.

5. Does the extension/project use materials and building methods which are as high in quality as those used in existing buildings?

There are various methods and materials used in extensions to this terrace that differ according to age and availability from brick to render to wood. Some use contrast, such as a smooth render, or matching brick in early extensions. This new extension uses Corten Steel that is designed to weather into the warm red colour shown in the photograph. It is well detailed and finished where it joins at the corners and other junctions of the building.

6. Does the extension/project create new views and juxtapositions which add to the variety and texture and setting?

Responding to the final question is over to you. Further questions are available to help you make an interrogation of the scheme, see panel left.



Typical back of terrace

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?