

About the TOOLKIT

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Held in Reigate and Banstead's beautifully ornate Old Council Chamber, the theme of this workshop was relevant to many places across the South East – understanding context and balancing the qualities of new and old places. It is rare for officers and, least of all, members to have an opportunity to visit an area and consider its characteristics, without an impending planning application to determine. This process is essential to fully grasp the nature of a place's origins, evolution and clues for future development.

Why design matters

Nigel Barker of English Heritage (EH), joint sponsors of the event, spoke about the clear reasons why good design matters, and not just how it relates to heritage concerns. The benefits of good design mean that the quality and character of local places is retained, and through their appeal and social attitudes, contribute to sustained economic performance.

There are many areas in the South East which exhibit this strength of character and local economy. Nigel described the importance of local distinctiveness, and good design, as it reinforces distinctiveness, promotes engagement, supports enjoyment, develops understanding and increases valuing; and this could apply to town centres, suburbs or villages.

English Heritage's position is that the historic environment is irreplaceable and so our starting point should be to keep it and work with it. This could mean adding modern and innovative ideas in order for historic places continue to be useful or have a new lease of life. Among the examples that he gave was St Antony's College in Oxford with the controversial new courtyard building by architect Zaha Hadid, which EH supported (while CABE did not) as it enabled the college to continue to operate in such a prestigious heritage location.

Procuring Priory Park Pavilion

Mark Harbottle, speaking from his perspective as Head of Building and Development Services at Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, reviewed the design and procurement process for Priory Park Pavilion, Reigate, which many delegates had visited before the workshop began. This was a lesson in cost management, design briefing and leadership.

As an historic park in the town centre, the Council had decided to replace the existing facilities with a new café, and had held a design competition attracting architects from across Europe. The cost of building the entries was also provided to allow the Council to budget for the construction works, and shortlisted schemes were the subject of a public vote to determine the winner.

About the Speakers

Annette Hards (Event Chair)
Architect in Education at Kent Architecture Centre
www.architecturecentre.org
Annette is a Chartered Architect with over 20 years experience, and has a particular interest in built environment education. As a senior member of the KAC team she has responsibility for ensuring that education, in its widest sense, is a central element within all the work undertaken at the centre.

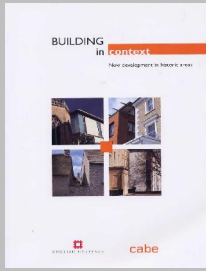
Nigel Barker BA(Hons) PhD Dip Bldng ConsAA IHBC
Historic Areas Advisor, English Heritage
www.english-heritage.org.uk
Nigel leads the Planning and Development Team and is Historic Areas Advisor for the Counties of Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Currently he is involved in English Heritage's design training programme for local authority members in collaboration with CABE and the Kent Architecture Centre, the Building in Context TOOLKIT.

Mark Harbottle
Head of Building and Development Services at Reigate and Banstead Borough Council
<http://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/>
Mark was involved in the development management of Priory Park Pavilion for Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.

Walter Menteth
Walter Menteth Architects, <http://www.waltermenteth.com/>
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 practice's works has received various architectural awards in recognition of their quality and innovation. <http://www.waltermenteth.com/>
Walter Menteth is a former member of the South East Regional Design Panel, and BiC TOOLKIT Facilitator.

BUILDING IN CONTEXT TOOLKIT

New development in historic areas



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Reigate: Regional Design and Historic Environment Champion's event

19th February 2009, The Old Council Chamber, Town Hall, Reigate, Surrey

The winning scheme was designed by French architect Dominique Perrault – his first building in the UK – and was very modern and minimalist in its detailing. This purity of design vision applied not only to the café, but to its setting and landscape design and was supported by the Council as it was refined and detailed for construction. There had not been challenges to the design's modernity by the public, but the Council had a complex task with the detailed heritage related changes to aspects of the landscape setting for car parking and to marry various areas of the park together. The eventual scheme cost considerably more than the initial competition entry suggested, and yet the Council is pleased with the outcomes, as the café is very popular and provides additional income.

Designing in Context – The designer's view

Walter Menteth described two schemes that his practice is involved with, which illustrated how valuable he sees the context as for providing strong design themes. A built scheme in London – Consort Road, Peckham – was an ingenious example of turning negative site issues into defining design features. A busy road and a first floor railway viaduct carrying Eurostar's high speed trains defined two edges of the site, with a tram depot opposite, and so the scheme needed to provide acoustic buffers, and take advantage of its orientation to create environmental protection and benefits too.

With a mixture of 4 storey flats and 3 storey town houses, the scheme includes 49 affordable homes as rental and shared ownership units, with ground floor commercial space. The railway elevation has a single-glazed common corridor to act as a shield to the flats on that side, and a buffer acoustically and thermally, also providing wide open views to the north. The south and west elevations were characterised by the winter gardens provided for each flat, which could be adopted as part of the living space as the seasons change, giving an additional 12% useable space, and creating considerable personality to the street elevations.

The internal layout also allowed the 1 and 2 bed flats to be flexible and redesigned to suit the needs of each inhabitant, with common service ducts, and sliding doors – meeting Lifetime Homes standards. The winter gardens could be used as storage, for plants, through-ventilation, etc. The town houses had a similar in-built flexibility with a continuous stair case for easy disabled access to upper floors with stair lifts (whenever fitted) and open plan spaces. As a whole the development had a gas-fired combined heat and power, and heat recovery systems, solar panels, a car club, and a green-roof garden.

A regeneration scheme in Stalybridge proposed using the heritage of the former mill buildings and their waterfront location, to repair the grid of the town and introduce a new waterfront town square, using both traditional hard urban landscapes and softer green courtyards in the design and refurbishment of new and existing buildings.

About the Workshop Facilitators

Louise Thomas,
Director of the Urban Renaissance Institute at the University of Greenwich
http://urbanrenaissanceinstitute.com/about_us.html
Louise is an experienced urban designer with wide-ranging consultancy experience for both public and private sector clients. Louise was Technical Director for Masterplanning and Urban Design at Scott Wilson and Associate Urban Designer at David Lock Associates. She has also lectured on urban design for 13 years and is joint editor of the Urban Design Group's quarterly journal, Urban Design, with Sebastian Loew, and continues to work as an independent urban designer.

Clare Wright
Planning Programme Manager, Kent Architecture Centre
www.architecturecentre.org

Clare has a local government development control and heritage background, with a particular emphasis on negotiation and liaison with property professionals and the public. Clare develops bespoke training programmes, facilitates and organises events, conferences, seminars and study tours. She is a member of the Executive Committee for the Royal Town Planning Institute South East Branch, Hon. Secretary and a member of Planning Aid and Regional Planning Award Chair. Clare led the KAC team that developed the Building in Context TOOLKIT with Nigel Barker, EH and CABE.

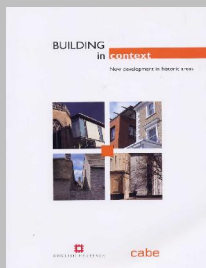
Event organisers for this Building in Context TOOLKIT workshop:
Waterloo Brown Limited, www.waterloobrown.co.uk



the sloping site lies adjacent to a main road, has a proposed tram depot opposite
& is backed by a railway viaduct.

in response, internal spaces are acoustically & thermally buffered
scale is enhanced by compositionally gathering openings together
pavements widths have been doubled

CONSORT ROAD, PECKHAM
WALTER MENTETH ARCHITECTS



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Building in Context Workshop

For this workshop, the design champions were asked in groups to consider several examples of Ordnance Survey maps of Reigate over several centuries, for what they would expect to learn from them, as well as how they compared. Delegates quickly drew a figure-ground plan of each map, showing the building footprints. As a sequence of snapshots of Reigate's history, there was discussion about what had changed, when greatest physical changes had taken place, what would have prompted them, which streets were important when, whether the conservation area was identifiable, and what the common elements were.

Each group was then asked to identify what else they needed to know about the place in relation to a particular site, that was not evident on the plans – this led to discussions about building heights, massing, materials, topography, circulation, land uses and ownerships, whether some plots had been redeveloped on historic footprints, areas of archaeological interest, underground services, and views in and across the town centre. Before going into the town centre, delegates were given either 'movement' or 'character' to think about and what the potential constraints and opportunities were likely to be for development.

The groups walked around the town centre, including Morrison's car park and the multi-storey car park adjacent to the site, and it was interesting and surprising to compare the place with the image that had been formed from the OS plans. It was unexpected to see the impact that taller buildings and topography had on the overall townscape, as well as which streets were dominated by fast-moving traffic in the gyratory system.



On return to the Old Council Chamber, the groups were asked to re-consider their ideas of constraints and opportunities for the development of the site, given what they now knew, and to report back to the chair on what was observed.

The groups also debated the merits of assembling a larger site and changes to the street network to overcome traffic dominance and the opportunity to create a range of places within the block which celebrated historic building fragments that had survived many changes.

There were also final questions to consider:

- Has your Council refused planning permission on grounds of design quality?
- Are the decisions based on a clear understanding of local heritage and its significance?
- Are design and access statements used when determining applications?
- For new housing schemes, are Building For Life and Lifetimes Homes Standards used?
- Does your highways department/ authority recognize the importance of design and heritage in creating quality streets and pavements?
- Does your procurement team understand the value of good design and heritage?



Louise Thomas

Director of the Urban Renaissance Institute at the University of Greenwich
http://urbanrenaissanceinstitute.com/about_us.html

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?

From *Building in Context*, pg 37

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, Regional programme officer, CABE, tel. 0207 020 7070 6800, or Owain Lloyd-James, Policy Advisor, Local Government and Heritage Champions, English Heritage, tel. 0207 973 3841, or Clare Wright (01634) 401166, Kent Architecture Centre

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

The Building in Context TOOLKIT

