Reigate: Regional Design and Historic Environment Champion’s event
19th February 2009, The Old Council Chamber, Town Hall, Reigate, Surrey

About the TOOLKIT
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- Enable wider understanding of the principles of developing appropriate contemporary design in historic areas to a range of professional and community groups
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About the Speakers
Annette Hards (Event Chair)
Architect in Education at Kent Architecture Centre
www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk
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 Bldg 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 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.

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 due 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.

Pouring 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.
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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.

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

About the Workshop Facilitators

Louise Thomas, Director of the Urban Renaissance Institute at the University of Greenwich (http://urbrenal.com/) and is a consultant to a number of client organisations, non-governmental organisations and the public sector.

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. Clare 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 leads 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)
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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 townscapes, 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 use 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
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

1. Event build-up
   - Establish topical site, issue and audience

2. Event
   - Visual display
     - Seminar
     - Workshop
     - Walkabout/study tour

3. Post-event
   - Post event feedback questionnaire and report
   - Post event response

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