

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



Wigan is perhaps best known these days for its Pier: an assemblage of huge mills, based loosely around a canal basin just to the west of the town's main shopping streets. Yet on his recent visit there as president of the CPRE, author Bill Bryson wrote: 'Such is Wigan's perennially poor reputation that I was astounded to find it has a handsome and well maintained town centre.'

Jason Kennedy outlined the very rapid and concentrated growth of the town during the Victorian period, its equally rapid post industrial decline and its planned re emergence as a pivotal location within the Northwest. Here as elsewhere, much recent regeneration has comprised out of centre retail, leisure and office developments of no particular townscape merit; its location, design and arrangement being dictated by the desire for easy accessibility by car. The large new central shopping mall also displays a number of indifferent facades towards the public realm.

However, Jason showed proposals for a number of innovative residential and office proposals that testify to a confidence in place making last seen in the design of the town's first open street shopping centre and market place in the 1980's. Proposals are at an advanced stage for bespoke town centre flats and offices, and for the huge task of re-vitalising the massive mills near Wigan Pier. Our event was held in a business centre set amongst these canal side heritage attractions. Participants walked the relatively short distance from here through the busy town centre to the case study site, passing through a strip of retail sheds and barrier railed roads on the way. Some of the group put forward the view that this small stretch of poor quality development seemed to discourage further exploration on foot from either direction, and kept the town's two magnets of attraction for casual visitors somewhat isolated from each other.

Wigan's Director of Regeneration, Martin Kember, a keen advocate of good design, feels confident that some of the sheds may be swept aside, as economic confidence demands higher returns and better quality development on this now valuable land.



Key to illustrations

1. Town centre, with recently completed (2002) shopping centre main entrance on right.
2. 1980's open market and campanile
3. A traditional arcade in the town centre.
4. Another approach to the 2002 shopping centre.
5. Wigan Pier.
6. One of the proposed landmark developments for the town centre.

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.

Graeme Ives

Graeme works in the English Heritage North West Regional Planning and Development Department. He is the team leader for the Cheshire and Merseyside Team and is also Historic Areas Advisor for Cumbria and Liverpool.

Jason Kennedy

Jason joined Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council in 2006 as Conservation and Design officer. Jason is a member of the IHBC, with wide experience in the regeneration of historic buildings and areas from around the Northwest.

About The Architects

Stuart Hodgkinson

Stuart is director of design and conservation for Derek Latham and company limited. He is responsible for the creative re use of buildings in the commercial and cultural sectors. He is currently leading the regeneration of Eckersley's Mills in Wigan and another mill conversion in Ancoats, Manchester. Stuart has a special interest in the integration of art into the building process, and gained an RSA Award for Art in Architecture for work on the Oxford Clarendon Centre refurbishment proposals. He is a Churchill Fellow and a member of SPAB.

Our Facilitators

Thanks are extended to Graeme and Jason for assisting in facilitating, to our other facilitator:

Annie Atkins, Manager Places Matter! and to her colleagues, particularly **Michael Sullivan** for administration for the Northwest events.

BUILDING IN CONTEXT TOOLKIT

New development in historic areas

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



Looking back to the town centre from the open part of the site next to the bypass.



Library Street

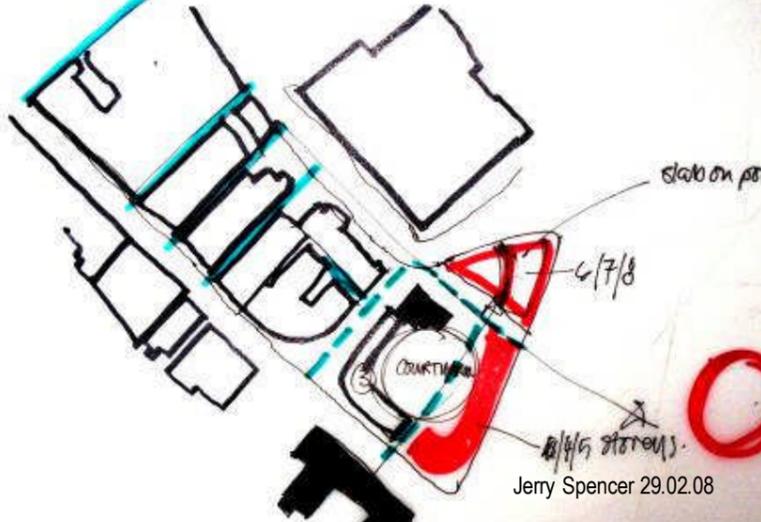


Old Town Hall

The workshop groups assessed the potential of the former town hall and adjacent site to help revitalise an area on the southeast edge of the town centre that has become disconnected from the riverside residential areas by the inner bypass. The site is close to two attractive parallel streets which link back into the town centre: Library Street (pictured), which houses municipal functions, and King Street to the south, which is home to many clubs and bars. Their natural desire lines appear to run through the site, but it is not currently crossed by any routes, and this may explain why the only pedestrian crossing of the by pass is located some distance to the north east. Some groups decided to divide the development potential of the site into distinct blocks, to allow for the creation of a new pedestrian route, leading to a relocated crossing.

The remaining facades of the old town hall on the western side of the site were considered worthy of retention, however some groups felt that the site's potential as a hub between the centre and the area beyond the by pass was so important that the new development behind the facades should itself be divided into two separate buildings to allow for the creation of an open courtyard on the new pedestrian route from King Street, accessed via the original front entrance of the building.

Guidance on the massing of new buildings behind the town hall was felt to be a complex and difficult design balance between the desire to respect the Victorian legacy of the adjoining streets and to create a landmark that would stand out in long views along the by pass and from the town centre. All groups opted for a broken massing, subdividing proposed new buildings into related parts of different heights and shapes, to help integrate the development into the finer grain of the older streets. Those who had divided the site by the inclusion of a new route across it chose a relatively lower building form adjacent to the town hall, with a signature feature of greater height on the north eastern corner, to take advantage of the opportunity here to positively terminate views down Library Street from the town centre. One group combined the desire to create better permeability with a recognition of an earlier pattern of covered alleyways that ran transversely at intervals between adjacent historic streets (pictured).



The Case Study

Eckersley's Mill



Stuart Hodgkinson outlined proposals for the huge complex of mills designed by Stott and Sons architects near to the Leeds Liverpool canal. The process had begun with a heritage assessment of the buildings and spaces of the site, with key buildings identified for new uses. A set of principles was established to guide the project from the start, including the following:

- To recognise a preference for revealing the character of Stott's work rather than simply retaining all fabric on the site, e.g. the removal of detrimental additions such as the plastic covered shafts on the south elevation of Mill 3; and the consideration of the removal of 50's addition to the water tower.
- To phase the development to give priority to the refurbishment of buildings most at risk.
- New buildings should have a contextual relevance to the site and the setting of the existing fabric, such that they can be seen as a good 'fit' rather than simply contemporary. They should have regard for the mass and scale of the retained listed buildings.
- New squares and spaces should be designed to enhance the retained buildings and provide space for their new uses and for new buildings.

The huge space overlooked by the mills and the proximity to the canal, suggested the idea of creating a marina here. Surface parking will be minimised by adapting one of the warehouses into a multi storey car park. The other mills will be converted for offices, a hotel and apartments. Smaller scale new buildings will give definition to the shape of the marina, and a larger tower will become a focal point in one of the long axial views across the site. An element of publicly accessible historic interpretation will be incorporated into the landscape scheme. The proposals are currently under consideration by the planning authority.