DESIGNING FOR THE FUTURE IN HISTORIC PLACES

The workshop was held on Wednesday 19th March 2008 at Bedern Hall in York. Bedern Hall dates from the 14th century, and is situated in the heart of York city centre. As a medieval building equipped with modern facilities to cater for today’s needs, Bedern Hall proved a very fitting setting for the day.

The delegates represented a mix of Officers, Elected Members and Design and Historic Environment Champions from across the region. The objective of the day was to introduce delegates to the key themes in the development of contemporary design in heritage contexts. These themes were explored by working through a local case study. The chosen case study was an old dispensary building located on Clifford Street within the city centre. The building, a single storey, Victorian building is currently facing development.

Welcome and Introduction to York

Chris Lamb (Director of arc) chaired the proceedings and gave a brief welcome to the delegates before handing over to Richard Watson, Chairman of the City of York Council planning committee, who gave an overview of the city encompassing the wealth of history that is York, and the issues and challenges that the planning committee face when considering new development in the historic city. In particular Mr Watson pointed out that one third of the council sit on the planning committee, demonstrating both the importance of the committee and the degree of consensus of the local authority afforded to new developments within the city.

With the background set, Mr Watson went on to emphasise the importance of empathetic architects and the need for dynamism in new build projects. In defence of this view he pointed out how the medieval and Georgian buildings of York seem ‘natural’ neighbours despite being several centuries apart.

Richard Watson’s presentation was followed by presentations from Kathryn Gibson of English Heritage (Yorkshire) and Helen Farrar of CABE (Yorkshire & Humber). Both of these presentations focused on
the value of ‘buildings of our own age’ emphasising the message that we should not ‘stifle innovation’ but seek intelligent, inspirational and sustainable developments.

Figure-ground Exercise
With the morning presentations out of the way it was time to introduce the delegates to the case study. David Crease led the figure-ground drawing exercise that was used as a tool to analyse the context of the Clifford street site. Delegates had a total of five maps from 1822 (pre Clifford street), 1892, 1937, 1963 and current day. This simple exercise allowed the delegates to explore the changing footprint of the site, pre, past and present. This exercise set the scene for the site visit and city walkabout.

York City Walkabout and Visual Survey of Clifford Street
Delegates set off from Bedern Hall in two groups, led by David Crease and Stefanie Stead, and spent an hour and a half viewing housing and commercial, good and bad, projects around York city centre. The tour included a visual survey of Clifford Street and the dispensary building.

Clifford Street Site Evaluation and Vote
After lunch delegates reflected on the mornings visual survey of Clifford street by discussing the ‘tools’ that could be used to assess the site; materials, scale, mass, context etc. Other considerations, such as demolition verses retention and the impact on other buildings within the street, were also discussed. Next David Crease revealed three different schemes for the Clifford street site designed by three different architects. The three schemes were assessed by the delegates with the guidance of David Crease and Chris Lamb and led to lively debate on the floor. This session was concluded with a ‘vote’ to identify which of the projects the delegates would favour.

Conclusions and Feedback
The afternoon was concluded with a round-up session led by David Crease and Chris Lamb. As part of this summery session, the delegates commented on how useful they had found the day. Comments from the delegates are shown in the column to the left.

Q. Did the seminar meet your expectations?
• Yes – a good demonstration of how to share knowledge
• to Address & criticise
• Objective principals very useful
• Demonstrated the right way to make a structured argument
• How to read and broaden knowledge

Q. Is it more worthwhile to tailor the site to ‘your place’ next time – or is a ‘neutral site’ useful?
• York – high quality context was a useful case study, but a more local course eg Hull, would be good for Hull planners, etc.
• But general training using generic sites are relevant – should work through the process with local teams.
• Suggest looking at problem sites with a mixed team (developers, planners, constructors …)

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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 Gillian Dyson, arc tel. 01482 327675

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

### 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.

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### The Building in Context TOOLKIT

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

#### 2. Event
- Develop event, background, establish no-go areas
- Designer’s case study matched to site, issues, audience and availability
- Invite other speakers where required, audience, pre-event questionnaire, venue and catering

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

**EVENT**
- Visual display
  - Seminar
  - Workshop
  - Walkabout/study tour

**FEEDBACK**
- Typical materials provided in facilitator pack to tailor to suit the event

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