

# BUILDING IN CONTEXT TOOLKIT

New development in historic areas



## About the TOOLKIT

The Building in Context toolkit has been developed by EH, C.A.B.E and the Kent Architecture Centre. It grew out of the publication 'Building in Context' published by EH and C.A.B.E 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

# DESIGNING FOR THE FUTURE IN HISTORIC PLACES

Wednesday 19 March 2008, Bedern Hall, York



## 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 C.A.B.E (Yorkshire & Humber). Both of these presentations focused on

## About the Speakers and Contributors:

### Chris Lamb, Director of arc

Chris Lamb trained as an architect at the Bartlett School, University College London. He practiced as an architect for several years, working predominantly on housing and education projects. He has an MSc in Architecture, and has spent many years in post-graduate education, most recently as a design unit master in the Diploma School at the School of Architecture, Greenwich University, specialising in Urban Design. Before becoming Executive Director of arc, he founded and managed a highly respected digital media company in London.

### Richard Watson, Chairman of the Planning Committee, City of York Council

Richard Watson is Chairman of the City of York Council Planning Committee and is a partner in one of York's oldest law firms. Richard brought a wealth of local knowledge and experience to the day.

### David Crease retired architect, Crease Strickland Parkins

David trained at Cambridge and Edinburgh, worked in Edinburgh, Hong Kong, London, Brasilia and Yorkshire. He founded York University Design Unit under Patrick Nuttgens in 1965, and has since 'spun off' into private practice, now Crease Strickland Parkins. Latterly David is devoted to grey-haired part-time practice but remains loosely connected to old firm! David has a wealth of experience in all aspects of an architect's work. He has been a prize-winning essayist and has an acknowledged ability to express the complexities of a large-scale development project in clear, simple English. David represents the practice on the RIBA Register of Architects Accredited in Building Conservation.

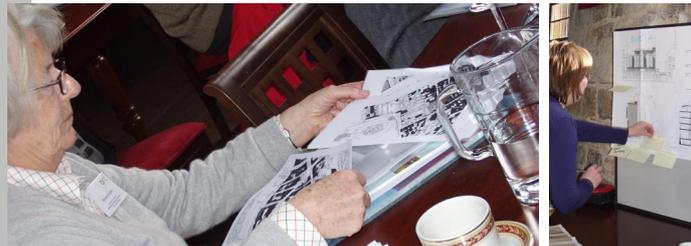


the value of 'buildings of our own age' emphasising the message that we should not 'stifle innovation' but seek intelligent, inspirational and sustainable developments.

### 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.

### Speakers and Contributors Continued:

**Kathryn Gibson BA(hons), MA, PGCertUED, MRTPI, IHBC**

Kathryn Has worked for English Heritage for just over one year, having previously worked for Local Authorities in Yorkshire and the North West and for the Garden History Society.

A key part of her role at English Heritage is the provision of specialist advice in response to statutory consultations on planning applications which affect significant historic buildings and conservation areas and involvement in pre-application discussions, with the aim of to securing sensitive and appropriate developments which respect the integrity of historic buildings and respond well to their context. She also has experience of conservation area designation and the preparation of conservation areas assessments, including urban area analysis.

**Gillian Dyson, Head of Learning, arc**

Gillian Dyson has a background in visual arts and education, studying at the Slade School, University College London, and continues to exhibit her live and media artwork. Gillian was previously Project Co-ordinator for Hull Time Based Arts, Senior Lecturer with Hull School of Art & Design, and Freelance Facilitator with Public Arts Wakefield.

**Helen Farrar, CABE Regional Representative in Yorkshire & Humber**

Helen is a strategic advisor in regeneration and design, and a CABE Regional Representative for Yorkshire and Humberside. Helen is a chartered landscape architect and regeneration professional, with skills in design advice and training, community engagement, and strategic regeneration. She has worked in the Yorkshire and Humber region for 20 years including a key role as founding Urban Renaissance Manager at Yorkshire Forward. She has a wide network of contacts across the region, particularly in the public, voluntary and academic sectors. She contributes to landscape education at Leeds Metropolitan University; is a former Trustee of 'arc' – the Humber Centre of Excellence in the Built Environment; and is a member of the CABE Space advisory panel.

**Stefanie Stead, Architect and Volunteer**

is a volunteer intern with arc. Stef is a young architect, currently working with Chetwood Associates. She has worked with the Yorkshire Forward team on the Scarborough Renaissance programme and is interested in developing her experience in communicating the value of design to non-professionals.

### Group Feedback & Thoughts – Q&A and wrap-up discussion

#### Q. Do you want more background-presentations?

- Yes – on the schemes
- Yes – some pre-session info to site visits would allow for preparation
- More time on the importance of planning
- Site analysis (mirror real planning process considerations)
- More info on the drawn scheme - there's a lot to take in!
- Just the right amount and mix of content

#### 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 ...)



**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, 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:

## The Building in Context TOOLKIT

