



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

Accordia, Cambridge: Regional Design and Historic Environment Champion's event

Analysing successful high density housing

This scheme has won a number of Awards including Building for Life: Gold 2006 and What House Awards: 2006. It is just over two miles from the Centre of Cambridge and is uncompromisingly contemporary in style. It is fitted densely into a site, which formerly housed government offices and prefabricated WWII buildings. The surrounding neighbourhood is a conservation area containing individual villas and denser Victorian housing and provided the inspiration for the design of Accordia, although there is little connectivity between the new scheme and its neighbourhood.

Housing numbers are limited by restrictive covenants and planning requirements define distances from neighbouring roads. There are over 700 trees on site

including protected mature trees. There is also a neighbouring Grade II listed building and landscape corridor of Hobson's Brook and footpath defining the edge of the site.

The scheme design was led by Feilden Clegg Bradley Architects who involved both Maccreeanor Lavington and Alison Brooks Architects, giving a wider variety of design.

Dwellings use the entire plot depth with private garden space being created through courtyards and terraces at different levels. Thirty percent of the homes are affordable and have mono-pitch roofs and projecting windows. There is a mix of high quality materials, which helps to connect the site. A common Cambridge-style yellow brick creates coherence across the scheme with contrast from external green oak timber framed and copper clad apartment buildings. Offices have been reprovided through a new multi-storey building onsite. The development features shared communal areas and the scheme provides a greater amount of open green spaces and play spaces, than neighbouring developments.

A grid road layout is used which creates street enclosure, and a legible layout. There is a single entrance/exit to the north. Slow speed 'Home-zone' style streets provide access to garages and mews style 'live/work' rooms above garages in the plot space of the larger houses. Although a number of the mews streets look attractive with a space for planting which softens the street scene, the affordable housing layout has created some blank walls to parking courts and has no spaces provided for residents to personalise the footway outside front doors. Garage doors in mews sometimes present blank façades and railings reduce social contact but upper floor windows provide overlooking for security.

Visitor parking and public spaces are adopted by the Highway Authority and appear not to be sufficient for the number of cars regularly using the site. Secure bicycle parking has been provided for residents and visitors.

Although all of the homes are built through Modern Methods of Construction and the scheme features high SAP ratings, the sustainability agenda has moved forward rapidly since the masterplan was put in place. There are few new renewable energy technologies, however flat roofs are planted with sedum to insulate and minimise run off and high thermal mass provides cooler dwellings in summer. Other drainage measures include permeable surfaces, and reed beds to manage rainwater on site.



About the Speakers

Rob Cowan of Urban Design Skills

is the author of some of the most influential urban design guidance (including as joint author of the CABE/DCLG *By Design*) and of *The Dictionary of Urbanism*. A member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and a former special advisor to the House of Commons ODPM Committee, he is probably Britain's most experienced urban design trainer.

David Kirkland, RIBA of Kirkland, Fraser, Moor Architects

is an architect and designer focusing on finding sustainable solutions for 21st century problems, not only within products of the built environment but within communities and the wider agenda of economic, social and ecological balance. As an ex-senior member of Grimshaw practice in London was responsible for a number of high profile projects including The Eden Project and Waterloo International Terminal Roof.

We would also like to thank our expert facilitators from Cambridge City Council and East of England Planning Aid Service.

Accordia, Cambridge: Regional Design and Historic Environment Champion's event

■ 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

The Workshop

A mixed group of Members and officers from across the Eastern region considered this development.

Participants had strong reactions to the scheme. The morning was spent analysing the case study site through the use of historic maps and figure grounds. Participants then considered the information provided at the detailed planning stage of the scheme. A tour of the site then enabled Members and officers to visualise what they had been studying in theory. Please find a summary of participants views below:

General

- The experience of walking around the development was different from on plan where the scheme appeared overwhelmingly dense. On site it was comfortable to walk around although it felt like a high density scheme
- The use of materials is good and so is the detail. It was interesting to note that you could not tell the proportions of the different materials that were going to be used from the planning application information and yet this affected the final design considerably
- It is an experimental scheme, a great good practice example and very useful to see and build on the positives elsewhere in the region
- Is its character suitable for Cambridge?
- It would be good to complete a post occupancy survey to gauge the success of the development

The Design

- The site has a good relationship with the surrounding Victorian villas and it is good that there is no parking at the front of the development
- There was a lack of integration of the site with neighbouring communities and features i.e. more use could have been made of the river
- There is a lack of integration of the affordable and luxury housing. There is a difference in the quality of the materials
- The public and private zoning is confusing – front and back doors face the same street, which can create difficulty in legibility
- Participants had differing views regarding the 'friendliness' of the streets, some felt the garage door shutters and steel gates made visitors feel unwelcome, others felt that there was good natural surveillance and like the design
- Car parking is clearly an issue – on plan it did not appear sufficient and on site this was clearly the case
- The groups liked the use of gabions with viewing holes at ground floor level in the flats, which provided discrete parking
- Mews – there was a lot of debate around these innovative areas; an annex over the garage faced by a row of three storey town houses. The group's reactions ranged from considering the design as too severe, to feeling that the mix of accommodation was great and echoed the concept of a historic city
- There is a lack of privacy / overlooking in the design; some members of the group felt this was acceptable in a city environment
- Orientation – could have used the natural light better
- The design was adaptable: could be some commercial use, but there was no scope for extensions
- The group was undecided as to whether the design would attract and help to retain a real community on the site

Landscaping

- The use of mature trees was universally liked although it was felt that the scheme needed to mature/be completed to see how the shared areas/play spaces are used

Details

- The group liked the signage placed on buildings, few gutters visible, large garden balconies, chimneys adding character and suggested the development had a very European feel.



Project summary

Number of units: 382 dwellings
Density: 54 dwellings per hectare (67 in built areas)
Completed: 2006 (first phase)
Completed: end of 2009
Planning Authority: Cambridge City Council
Client: Countryside Properties Plc / Redeham Homes
Affordable Housing: Circle Anglia
Design team
Lead Architect/Masterplanner: Feilden Clegg Bradley Architects
Architect: Alison Brooks Architects
Architect: Maccreeanor Lavington
Landscape: Grant Associates
Funding body: Private plus Housing Corporation Funding

For more information:
www.accordialiving.co.uk

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 **Shape East**, tel. 01223 462 606, admin@shape-east.org.uk

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

The Building in Context TOOLKIT

