Canterbury City Council’s motivation for redeveloping Horsebridge and Brownings Yard in Whitstable, Kent, was to achieve economic regeneration of the area. The development includes a community centre, a restaurant, shops and residential units.

Canterbury City Council initiated a design competition for the redevelopment of the Horsebridge site in 1999. Community involvement and consultation at various stages informed the design brief for the competition. From a final shortlist of 5 design teams, Canterbury based Clague Architects won the competition.

The redevelopment of the Council owned site enabled redevelopment of partially derelict buildings and updated community space to accommodate a growing arts community need. The profit from development of the site enabled the community facilities to be provided at no financial cost to the Council.

The scheme captures the unique atmosphere of the town – with its narrow, winding alleys and wood-boarded houses and combines historic architectural references with modern design. The centre of the scheme is the public art gallery and performing arts space, with its striking copper upturned boat roof, and the public square with its restaurant and 5 shops.

Two artists – one with an international reputation and one well-known locally – were specially commissioned to provide innovative designs, which are environmentally friendly, for intrinsic elements in both the public and residential areas of the scheme.

An extensive public art programme was an essential element of the redevelopment with the support of a major award from Arts and Business. The building of a website www.horsebridge.org.uk, now offline, was the first of ten projects to be launched. It included information on all aspects of the redevelopment including architecture, archaeology, a forum and announcements, as well as information on the public art programme.

Two public art projects were completed:

**History Wall by Andrew Sabin, Richard Bradbury, Stefan Shankland and Doug Brown** Horsebridge, Whitstable, Kent. 2002

The History Wall was a steel mesh housing filled with carefully layered and tightly packed materials which had been rescued for a short while from the demolition crew. For three months from July to September 2002, it formed part of the perimeter wall of the construction site.

**RGB Screens by Stefan Shankland with Andrew Sabin**

This temporary onsite construction was an intervention in the hoardings around the site and continued until the construction phase ended. It aimed to encourage interest in the building process by opening up a set of strategic views of the development site. Hard-wearing Perspex windows in green, red and blue, protected by steel mesh, turn the day to day view of the site into a spectacle, and were lit behind so that at night they appeared as coloured windows hanging in space through which the site could be seen. Information reproduced from www.publicartonline.org.uk/archive/reports/horsebridge.html

Horsebridge context

Whitstable is a name that conjures up oysters, fishing boats, wide beaches and all the amenities of a traditional English seaside town and yet is only 59 miles from London, 7 miles from the historic city of Canterbury and 20 miles from the Euro-Tunnel link at Ashford.

Oysters have been fished in Whitstable’s waters since Roman times and the Royal Native Oyster Stores at the Horsebridge, now a well-known restaurant, is a reminder of the industry’s heyday.

Whitstable today offers many attractions associated with the sea and has become an international yachting and water-skiing centre. For walkers, there are historic woods – the remains of the ancient Forest of Blean – to be explored, as well as the Saxon Shore Way along the coast.

The Horsebridge was originally a track over the old sea defences and was the focal point of the town where the old oyster industry was centred. Even today the Horsebridge slopes gently down to the sea where in bygone days at low tide Thames barges, Smacks and other small boats would unload their cargoes, including oysters, into horse-drawn carts to be hauled over the Horsebridge and into the town.
Developing a scheme that successfully bridges the relationship between existing context and new development depends on an intelligent response to local conditions.

This pullout illustrates the quality of detail necessary in a planning application for a site with complex issues. The aspects of the scheme shown demonstrate a thorough approach to designing for a town centre site and assisted the local planning authority in approving an ambitious high density scheme in a sensitive environment.

The workshops described in this publication were used to explore local issues. We encountered more difficulties in schemes where insufficient contextual information had been submitted. In the cases where sufficient information had been submitted, there was a significant gap between analysis and eventual design.

We concluded that most problems for both applicants and decision makers arise from a lack of basic information, that in turn lead to time consuming delays and unsatisfactory decisions.

The planning system has a key role to play in delivering better design. When a planning application is made, the design quality of the proposals is amongst the matters assessed by the local authority. Yet the level and quality of detail submitted can be scanty and often indicates lack of thought in how the scheme will fit within its surroundings. However the creation of successful places depends on the skills of designers and the vision and commitment of those who employ them. Good design always arises from a thorough and caring understanding of place and context that should be clearly shown in detailed logical planning proposals.

PPS1 urges planning authorities to reject poor design, and to proactively push for quality. To assist this aim 'By Design' the companion guide to PPS1 provides guidance on how to evaluate these design issues in practice and supplies a checklist of information that should be submitted in a planning application. More specific advice is given relating to larger ‘notifiable development’ that requires English Heritage to be notified in conservation areas. Both guidances are included in the appendix to this publication.